

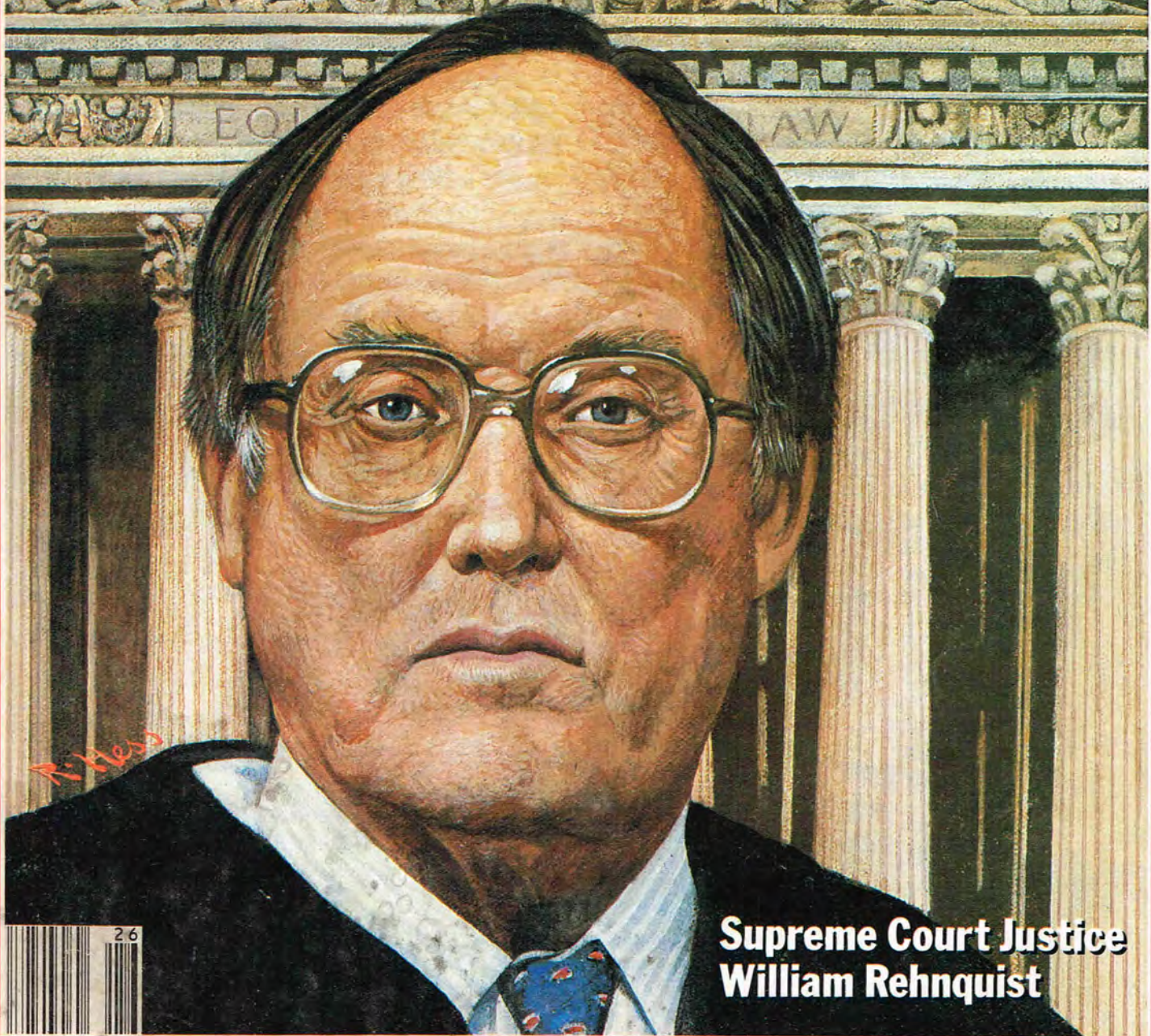
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Computers

Revolution on a Desktop

Laser printers and Macintoshes transform small-time publishing

After a dispute with the publisher of the Hull-Nantasket (Mass.) *Times* early this year, Susan Ovans quit her job as a reporter and decided to put out a competing newspaper of her own. She raised \$14,000, bought three Macintosh computers and a \$6,000 laser printer and began using them to produce the Hull *Newsweek*. Three months in business, she has already matched the 4,000 circulation of the 57-year-old *Times*, and claims that her publication is even better looking than its rival.

In Sacramento, Tom Hamilton, a former stockbroker whose avocation is hot-air-balloon racing, decided that the several thousand people around the world who share his enthusiasm needed a new magazine to chronicle their sport. He launched his computer-produced *Balloon Life* last January and has watched its circulation climb to 1,700 readers. Robert Jacobson, a guitar instructor in Fairbanks, put out the first issue of the *Fairbanks Music & Entertainment* magazine in October. Last month he sold 19,000 copies of the 50¢ tabloid. "I didn't know the difference between a pica and a point," says Jacobson. "There's no way I could have done it without the new technology."

That technology has enabled Jacobson, as well as Ovans, Hamilton and hundreds of other people of modest means, to become "desktop publishers," able to produce books, magazines and newsletters of near typeset quality at a fraction of the usual cost. In the two years since small, high-quality laser printers became widely available, desktop-publishing operations have sprung up around the country, making existing periodicals more profitable and new ones easier to launch. The innovative technology has also generated much needed sales for the slumping personal-computer industry and pumped new life into Apple Computer, whose easy-to-use Macintosh model has emerged as the desktop publishing computer of choice.

Conventional publishing requires either a huge typesetting machine that assembles pieces of metal type into columns, which are printed on paper as galley proofs, or a bulky photocompositor that



Tom Hamilton shows off the latest issues of *Balloon Life* Making publishing economically feasible for Everyman.

projects type characters onto photosensitive film or paper. The columns are cut to size and pasted, with accompanying artwork, on cardboard layout sheets called mechanicals, which are sent to the printer to be reproduced photographically.

Now this process can be accomplished electronically with equipment that easily fits on top of a desk. The text for each page is typed onto a high-resolution computer screen in any of a wide variety of type styles and sizes, then arranged into columns and decorated with rules and other embellishments with the aid of a handheld "mouse" or other pointing device. When the screen image is complete, it is fed into a laser printer that creates camera-ready copy that a printshop can use to make multiple copies.



Using a Macintosh and an Apple Laser-Writer, Hamilton was able to prepare *Balloon Life* for 60¢ a page; a professional typesetter would have charged from \$4 to \$8 a page.

Desktop publishing also cuts the time spent waiting for jobs to be picked up and delivered. "Most businesses can justify the cost of the equipment in six months," claims Paul Brainerd of Aldus Corp., which publishes a software composition program called PageMaker. Says Richard Gibson, editor of *Hawaii* and *Western Horse* magazines: "The technology lets one man do the work of three."

Today specialty magazines and newsletters of every kind are being produced by desktop publishers, from the Rev. William McBride's *Good News-Letter* (circ. 300) in Hayward, Wis., to Scott Anderson's *Professional Locksmithing* (circ. 15,000) in Gilbert, Ariz. "It's changed my life," says Ford Heacock of

Lakeland, Fla., who prepares his 4,500-circulation *Vintage Motorsport* magazine on a Macintosh. "I still find it hard to believe that a little personal computer can do all this."

Not every desktop publication is a hit. Barry Bayer lost a bundle on the *Visible Calculator*, a newsletter for users of electronic spread-sheet programs. Like many novice designers, Bayer went overboard with his new computer tools. "I wanted to display all the different type sizes and styles on the same page," he says. "Instead of a work of art, what I got was a mess."

The desktop-publishing movement has generated understandable resentment among owners of typesetting shops, whose livelihood could be threatened. "The technology has been greatly oversold and overhyped," says Betty Handly, president of the Typographers International Association. Handly points out that many of Apple's magazine ads extolling Laser-Writer printing were actually produced on a phototypesetting machine.

Still, it is clear that the novel technology has given new life to struggling periodicals and made publishing economically feasible for Everyman. Richard Mitchell, whose quirky *Underground Grammarian* reports on declining standards of English usage, credits desktop publishing with saving his ten-year-old newsletter. "The great promise of this technology," he says, "is that it will make possible freedom of the press as it was conceived by Thomas Jefferson. Maybe we'll even find another Thomas Paine." —By Philip Elmer-DeWitt. Reported by Cristina Garcia/San Francisco and Thomas McCarroll/New York