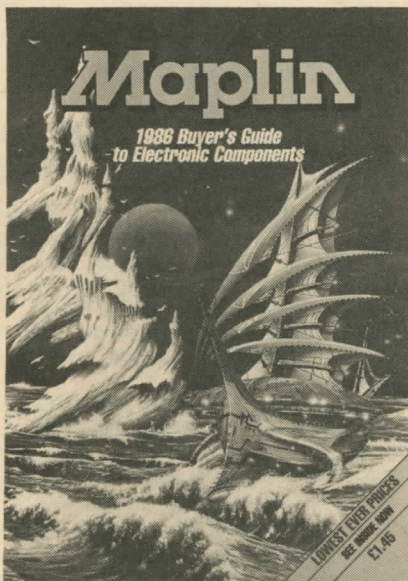


SHOP TALK



BY RICHARD BARRON

OVER the years, for numerous and various reasons, many suppliers of electronic components have become household names to the hobbyist. Some have gained a reputation for speed or value, others for reliability and quality. Many have grown from small part-time businesses to thriving multi-million pound industries, one such company being **Maplin Electronics**.



Humble beginnings

Maplin Electronic Supplies Ltd. are now one of the largest and probably the best known supplier to the hobbyist. The company was founded by, and is still run by Roger Allen, his wife Sandra and Doug Simmons. Back in 1972, during the peak of the amateur constructor boom, Roger and Doug saw the need for a reliable and speedy mail order service. Hobbyists themselves, they had experienced long delays when ordering components and so decided that they could provide a better service.

Convinced that they had the right strategy, low prices and a promise of delivery by return of post, they placed an advert in *Practical Electronics* (our sister publication). Both Roger and Doug were working so Sandra was to stay at home to answer the phone and process mail orders; at this time they were wondering whether to have extra phone lines installed to cope with expected demand.

Unfortunately they were to be disappointed. Orders came in slowly and their investment was not paying off yet, despite this, their enthusiasm never diminished. Continuing with their policy of providing a reliable, first-class service, they struggled on.

After further investment, more debts and advice from the accountant to give up, the business slowly pulled through. Both Roger and Doug gave up their jobs and they acquired some small business premises above a launderette. Several problems and set-backs later, the first Maplin shop was opened in 1974, in Southend-on-Sea.

There are now five Maplin shops situated in: Birmingham, London, Manchester, Southampton and Southend-on-Sea. At all times, every effort is made to ensure that the shops are fully stocked with the complete Maplin range so, if you're in the area, a visit should be well worth while. If you know exactly what you want, a quick phone call is all that is required to confirm availability but should an item be out of stock, it will be ordered immediately.

Catalogue

A comprehensive catalogue is produced every year by Maplin and is available from branches of W.H. Smith or by mail order. It is crammed with useful information, pin-outs, specifications, application notes, projects, kits and circuit ideas, as well as the usual stock lists and prices. The new 1986 catalogue will be available soon and, as usual, will depict a futuristic scene with an electronics theme; an idea which has become something of a hallmark for Maplin. Also, a calendar with all the 'Maplin Scenes' may be available in the future.

To avoid confusion and standardize prices, components bought mail order will be exactly the same price as those in the shops. There will be a standard charge of 50p for mail order and a small handling charge for orders under £5. To keep customers up to date Maplin's produce a quarterly magazine which includes price changes, new projects and products.

Around 150,000 Maplin catalogues are sold each year, so as you may imagine their distribution centre must be well organised. It is. They have just extended their 'factory' premises in Southend and now employ around 100 staff.

As orders arrive or are phoned in, they are entered into a computer together with a unique customer reference number. At all times the main computer knows the exact stock level of all components and can therefore give an immediate indication of availability. A printer prints out a customer address label and the order is put together and packed by efficient staff. The Post Office collect the packages for delivery each day so same-day dispatch is usually achieved.

Policy

As far as the hobbyist is concerned, Maplin's policies have changed little over

the years. Reliability and low prices have always been a major objective. However, in the 1986 catalogue, low prices will be stressed even more. Roger Allen says that for some reason,

"many people believe Maplin's prices are a little high,"

so he would challenge anyone to compare prices. In the new catalogue there will be the "lowest ever" prices on a range of products as well as many new items.

To highlight the slight changes in policy, there will be some subtle changes to the Maplin image such as a new design for the Maplin logo.

'Tap into the Maplin Computer'

Maplin's services can be used in a variety of ways. You can place orders by phone or by post and payments may be made by cash, cheque, postal order, credit card or the special Maplin credit facility. Also available to computer users, with an RS232 compatible port and modem, is the CASH-TEL service (Computer Aided SHopping by TELEphone). With this service, you can get access to the Maplin computer to place orders, make comments about the service or check stock levels and prices. For further information contact:

Maplin Electronic Supplies Ltd., PO Box 3, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8LR.
☎ (0702) 554155. ☎ (Sales only) (0702) 552911.

Five Six Seven Eight Nine Ten

Apart from their wide variety of components, telephone accessories, project kits and ancillary equipment, **TK Electronics** are perhaps best remembered by their telephone number, (01) 5-6-7-8-9-10.

TK Electronics provide a wide range of project kits designed to cater for the absolute beginner through to the experienced hobbyist. Their beginner's kit includes a solderless breadboard and sufficient components to build ten simple projects. At the other end of the range are microprocessor timers and mains wiring remote control units.

For full details of all TK Electronics projects and products, a comprehensive catalogue is available free of charge. The catalogue is designed for easy reading, each section being clearly marked and all components shown together with the current price. To ensure up to date information and prices, the catalogue is updated every few months.

Security

TK Electronics, as well as the general components range, also supply a number of telephone accessories and security products. These include: master and extension sockets for phones, line chords with four-way plugs and spade terminals, door and window security contacts, pressure mats and ultrasonic burglar alarms.

For a free catalogue, send a stamped addressed envelope to: **TK Electronics, 11 Boston Road, London W7 3SJ.** ☎01-567 8910.

For technical enquiries, these are dealt with on Tuesdays and Thursdays after 3pm. For general enquiries ☎01-579 9794 and for technical enquiries ☎01-579 2842.