
CueMaster Acorn Powered Prompt

One of the unexpected interest generators at the recent Dutch Show (reported in Eureka 27) was a large plate of dark glass, on the end of a metal pole, at a rather rakish 45 degree angle.

The company behind the project, X-Ample Technology, told us the history behind the project, developed initially for Dutch television.

NOP (the Dutch equivalent of the

Toby Smith finds out at the Big Ben Show how Acorns have taken over from Amigas on cue to prompt Dutch presentations and TV shows.

On closer inspection this turned out to be an autoprompt screen. The carefully positioned reflective glass allows a speaker or TV presenter to read their script from a concealed, upward facing, TV screen snug in a box at the bottom of the pole, while still looking at their audience or camera.

Dutch television

This is not new or novel technology. Readers will have seen, if not used, many similar set ups at conferences of any reasonable size, and at least the effects of the autocue on television programs. What makes this system different is that it is powered by an Acorn.

BBC) had been happily using a cue system based on the Amiga computer for many years. With the problems at Amiga a few years back, which eventually led to the demise of the computer, they needed a new system.

Acorn based

In stepped X-AT with an Acorn based system that beat all the competition. Many of the features we Acorn types are used to really help an Autocue system. Anti-aliased smooth fonts at any size are a real bonus, the ability to read almost any floppy disc (PC, Atari, Amiga, Mac etc) is unmatched. The *TV Centric* technology of Acorn makes this kind of system very simple. In fact the entire package is

based around software, with a hardware card being added later in the development to provide extra PAL and RGB TV outputs and input switches, that has now become standard.

The text for a script is typed in, or imported from disc from plain text or from many other common autocue systems. It then scrolls past the display at a rate selected by one of many input devices, including the normal mouse, special foot pedals, hand switches and so on.

Extra views

The system provides for a monitor for the autocue controller, a monitor on the camera autocue or glass screen, and some extra views for the control room. The additions to the package are what have made it become the *de-facto* standard in Holland, with the



X-Ample Technology

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NOP refusing to work with anything else. Text can obviously be displayed in any font at any size and these preferences can be saved as specific for particular presenters and, given a simple network, such preferences can be applied to all the systems in the studios.

Font sizing can also be changed dynamically during the playback of the script, allowing bigger text to be used with the press of a function key should the camera move further from the presenter.

CueMaster also includes a special ‘popup’ bar at the bottom of the script screen, allowing special messages to be passed direct to the presenters, such as the latest news or answers to quiz questions, or showing a live clock.

Mystery guests

The display text can also be coloured. The standard display is white on black, as the monitors used on autocue systems are usually black and white only, so such coloured information is hidden from the presenters but visible to the control room, so allowing cues for video sections to be included.

X-AT also mentioned one example where colour had been used to hide the names of 'mystery' guests from the audience. The surprise would have been spoiled if the names had been spotted on the autocue of cameras pointed at the audience before the guests were announced.

LCD screens

X-AT seem very keen to add any features that their customers want; a classic example being a special mode for LCD autocues. Portable cameras often use LCD screens for the autocue, as hanging a normal monitor off the front as with normal mounted cameras is a little impracticable. Such LCD screens are much smaller, having fewer lines to display (usually due to being made in the USA to the smaller NTSC standard).

Previous systems had to be hand-tested by obscuring some of the screen with card to check that the script was viable on a reduced screen but CueMaster can be switched into LCD display and it automatically reduces its visible area.

Ultimate portability

X-AT supply varying forms of the package, from software and card for addition to an existing machine up to packages with various different types of Acorns pre-fitted.

For ultimate portability, they even supply an A7000, shock mounted in a special case with space for the keyboard and other bits, that can be easily transported around.

CueMaster

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