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SPECTRUM

FOR THE EMPLOYEES OF GE INFORMATION SERVICES COMPANY

cover story

THE MAGIC OF GENIE™



page 7

1987 COMPENSATION PLANNING

page 9

MARK 3000 UPDATE

page 14

EAST-TEK

CONTENTS

GEnie	1
Compensation	7
State of the Business	7
Amstelveen Anniversary	8
MARK 3000 Update	9
Quality Quotes	10
ISMP Graduates	10
Field Security	11
Good News	12
Industry Briefs	13
Fast Fax	14
Fast Fax Pricing Report	17
Photographers	17
New and Revised Documentation	18
Communications Survey	18
Medical Fees	19
Milestones	19
Worth Noting	20
S&SP	21
Bottom Line	21
Vampire Ad	21

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SPECTRUM Editor: Sallie Birket Chafer
Managing Editor: Spencer Carter
QUIK-COMM: SALLIE; DIAL COMM: 8*273-4476

Fast-Fax Editor: Jim Doyle
QUIK-COMM: FAST; DIAL COMM: 8*273-6517



General Electric Information Services Company, U.S.A.

THE MAGIC OF GENIE

[At the West Coast ComputerFaire in San Francisco last April, the 50,000 personal computer enthusiasts touring the exhibits kept stopping in the aisles in front of the large monitor at the General Electric Information Services Company booth. On the screen, the public domain VCO and Studio Session Player (SSP) softwares available through GENie were demonstrated alternately. The VCO screen showed a conference table surrounded by faces (sketched to resemble participants); when a speaker addressed the group, that face became more prominent, and the lips moved. The SSP program emulated a cassette player, producing jazz music whose tracks could be turned off or adjusted (similar to an equalizer). And if the trade show participants wanted to talk to the authors, they were right there. GENie was out of the bottle.]

On August 9, ten months after its introduction, GENie—the GE Network for Information Exchange, GE Information Services' first venture into the mass consumer market—signed up subscriber number 20,000 roughly five months ahead of the original schedule. By the end of 1986, GENie should have 33,000 subscribers.

The GENie service offers personal computer users in more than 500 cities affordable computing time during evenings, weekends, and holidays, increasing MARK III[®] Service traffic during what otherwise would be off-peak and therefore excess-capacity network hours.

Trade press and subscriber reactions to GENie have been very positive (see illustrative comments on page 2). There is a consensus that GENie is priced right, easy to use, and very subscriber-responsive.

The GENie Network

The GENie network has "one enormous advantage over everyone else, which gives us staying power and will help us to win the market," Vaughn Rockney (Product Manager, Mass Market Applications) explains. "In my opinion, GENie uses the best mainframe and network system in the world, and because it's already in place, all we have to do is write applications."

"GENie is priced at \$5 per off-peak hour," Jean Wackes (Senior Communications Specialist, Advertising and Sales Promotion) says. "That rate is up to 60 percent better than our competitors at 1200 baud.

"Moreover, charging the same rate for 1200 baud as for 300 baud allows users to spend less time on line and save money," notes Wackes. "And the modem manufacturers love it—they think it will drive the



Willard Convention Photo

The GENie staff took their show on the road to the ComputerFaire in San Francisco, and interested users visited the booth in droves.



Bill Loudon, GENIE GM, came to GENIE with a strong track record in the consumer on-line services industry.

sale of 1200 baud modems." GENIE also offers 2400 baud service in over 60 cities at a \$10 per hour surcharge.

GENIE went commercial on October 1, 1985, and—measured by subscribers—has become the third largest service in less than a year, one of the fastest growth rates in the industry. (CompuServe claims 250,000 people have subscribed at some time, and The Source has around 60,000 subscribers.) Total GENIE revenues topped \$1 million on July 12, and target 1986 revenues have been raised from \$2.6 million to \$3.1 million.

"GENIE is well on the way to exceeding its original 1986 revenue target," reports Ruann Pengov (VP & GM, Sales & Marketing Services Operation). "Revenue currently exceeds one-quarter million dollars a month, and we will exit the year at a monthly pace of over one-half million dollars per month. GENIE's revenue target for 1987 is \$10 million."

The GENIE staff and the outstanding volunteer support from employees throughout the company are largely responsible for the success of the service. Bill Colbert (Product Manager, Mass Market Technical Support) notes, "We literally could not have accomplished our objectives without a tremendous influx of volunteer help."

Rockney emphasizes, "Many employees helped us design, alpha test, and work the bugs out of GENIE, especially the folks in Network Operations, Amstelveen, and Brook Park.

"And we wouldn't be anywhere without the help of MARK III Engineering. We're very proud of the new MARK III products we're using. GENIE is the first major user of XMODEM, TP Relogon, C language, multi-stream C language (on EAASY SABRE), and the 'MARK III as an Asynchronous Device' capability."

USER AND PRESS REACTIONS TO GENIE

GENIE users—many of them former customers of more expensive competing services—have volunteered both suggestions and positive reactions to the system. The trade press has reviewed GENIE quite favorably, a process encouraged by the Press Relations editorial program (described in the story).

The following quotations give a feel for user and press reactions to GENIE.

Users

"In short, good-bye CompuServe and big Source and hello GENIE. You are great, just don't forget about novices in the future. We need a good network just like you."

"You've definitely proved that you care! Gotta go turn in my resignation to CompuServe."

"I had CompuServe, gave them up. They had a lot more topics than you, too many in fact, [but] they were just too impersonal and didn't care about customer relations...Some day you will be big, too, but make it a point to always care about customers. They are important, but too many businesses forget this...Keep up the good work..."

Press

"GENIE's electronic mail...RoundTables...and real-time computer conferencing...are a little better than most, and the user manual is one of the best around...When you enter command mode, GENIE's solid design becomes apparent...GENIE also uses plain English commands to access many services...GENIE's RoundTable command mode is particularly powerful...GE Information Services has built a solid foundation upon which GENIE can grow, and it appears to be doing so by leaps and bounds." —PC WORLD, July 1986

"According to legend, freeing a genie from a bottle entitles you to three wishes. Telecommunications enthusiasts would wish for unlimited information, ease of use, and low cost. Companies wish for low initial investment, fanatic customer loyalty, and big profits. Although apparently a contradiction in supernatural terms, a new service from GE Information Services, called GENIE, is well on its way to granting all wishes...at \$5 per hour...and with a company of GE's stature in for the duration, GENIE represents an incredible bargain and promises a bright future." —A+ MAGAZINE, June 1986

Genesis of GENIE

Originally called GENESIS in-house, GENIE is the brainchild of Mike Chamberlain (VP & GM, Applications Marketing Operation), who in 1984 first articulated the opportunity to use MARK III during off-peak hours to make money and test the mass

