

Inventors can see success on Horizon

The making of a tv documentary about the plight of British inventors has made two of them successful.

On Monday, Mike Anstey and Dave Brown, cofounders of the Coconut Computer Company, will appear on the nation's more discerning tv screens in an Horizon programme on inventors.

Called EUREKAaargh!, the programme compares the lot of British inventors with that of their German counterparts. Nothing remarkable in that, but for the two inventors, the arrival of a BBC documentary crew on their doorstep led to an upturn in their fortunes.

They had just spent three months doing the rounds of the High Street banks and venture capital organisations trying in vain to raise £40,000 to back

the development of their latest invention, an interactive advertising unit.

The Department of Trade and Industry had already promised them a £11,000 grant under the MAP scheme but it was conditional on them raising £40,000 themselves.

"We appeared to be too big for the banks and too small for venture capital," explained Anstey. "The banks said they were interested but they wanted to see some equity capital as well, and the venture capital organisations wanted to invest at least £100,000."

They were close to giving up when Bob Bootle, an Horizon producer, approached them last November having been given their address by the Institute of Patentees and Inventors.

When he heard about their

by Mary Wilkinson

financial plight, he recommended an agency that specialised in computer matching of inventors with potential backers and people with manufacturing capabilities.

The Centre of Innovation and Resources (CIR), based in London, produced several names on its computer, and within two weeks they came to an agreement with one of them, Hugh Cookson, who could meet the requirements for DTI finance.

Cookson has now joined the team as a codirector of a new company, Advanced Display Systems (Ads), which was set up specifically to develop and market the advertising units.

Although Ads will probably

be Anstey and Brown's biggest form of income for the time being, the advertising units are only a part of their repertoire.

They have also invented a dual line battery support unit for volatile diode devices, such as memories, and a device, called the Chip Rack, which could revolutionise interconnection of vlsi chips. Work on a software generated keyboard has also begun.

The two met at Northampton College, where they were both lecturers in computing, and began 'inventing' on a part time basis during college holidays.

Their first project, the power back up module for dips was put together during 1979/80 and patent applications filed.

A year later, Anstey and Brown, managed to interest Racial Microelectronics in the

project. The company agreed to take it on and continue the patenting process but, although a US patent was granted straight away, the UK patent suffered a series of delays and will only be granted next week.

Their most interesting invention is the Chip Rack, but because it relies on a complete change of thinking within the interconnection and pcb industry, it will face an uphill struggle to be accepted.

Dowty Electronic Interconnect, however, had sufficient faith in the device to acquire the manufacturing and development rights and has invested £250,000 in the project.

"The idea behind it is that changes in the nature of electronics components, away from discrete components to vlsi devices, means that the whole method of connections using pcbs can be rethought," said Anstey.

He and Brown came up with a system that allows three dimensional interconnection of integrated circuitry mounted in

anything done unless one of us worked full time," he said.

Within two months he had got three parties, including Dowty, interested in the project. "We chose Dowty because they wanted us to stay in close contact," said Brown.

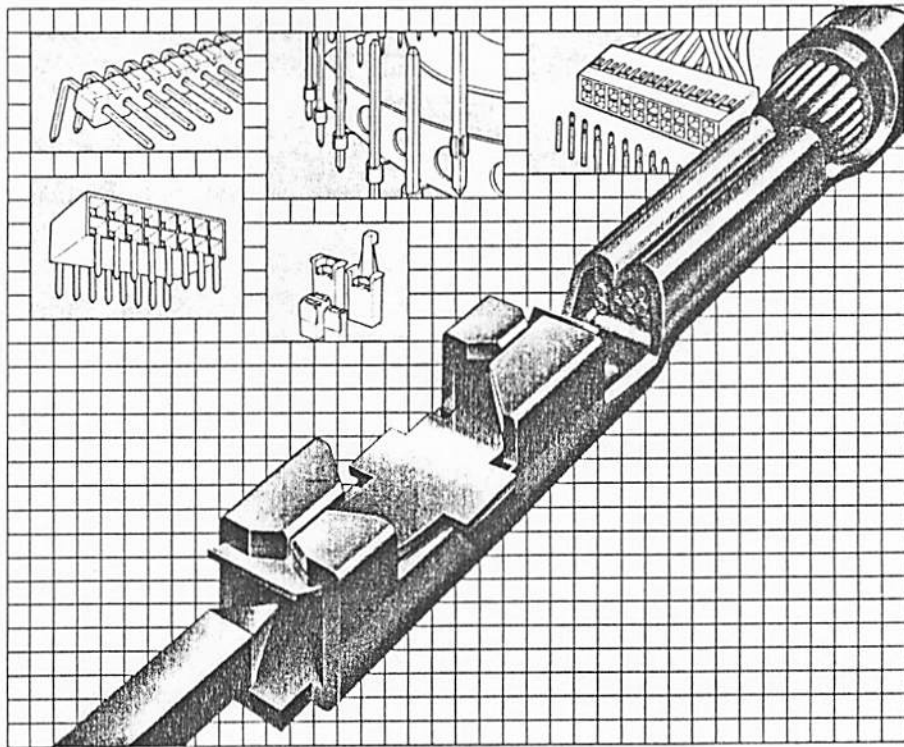
"Besides, some of the other people interested had a large investment in the pcb industry and we weren't quite sure of our intentions."

Brown then joined Anstey full time and the Coconut Computer Company was formed, operating from the basement of a disused church hall in Mytchett, Surrey.

The only problem was money. Both their projects had been snapped up but the money would only start rolling in as royalties when the products were actually manufactured.

So, living off their savings and money earned from teaching computer programming, they embarked on the interactive advertising units.

"We wanted something that wouldn't have a long lead time



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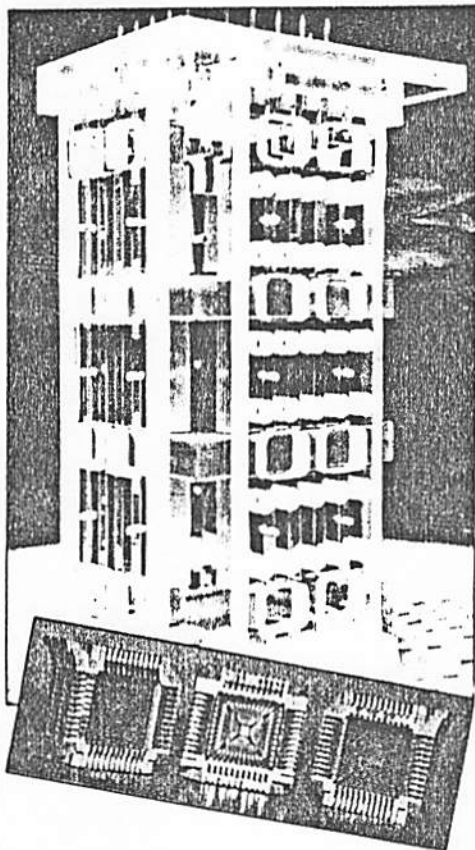
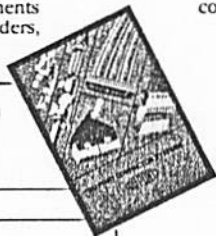
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Dowty's model (top) of the Chip Rack structure. The double sided carriers (above) allow three dimensional interconnection of the packages.

leadless chip carrier packages. The chip carriers are double sided so that a signal can enter at a point on one surface and emerge from a different point on the other side. The chip carriers can then be interconnected in a racking structure in series or in parallel to form a honeycomb structure.

All this work was carried out during 1981/82 and in April 1983, Anstey gave up his teaching post to take the Chip Rack out on the road.

"It was a bit of a gamble but we realised we wouldn't get

and that we could develop totally on our own," said Brown.

They came up with a computer controlled graphics and text display which can detect the presence of an observer and react to the observer's requests.

Now that a contract for distribution and installation of the units has been signed with a company called GMS (Recordings), the inventors are hoping for a regular income while they carry on with their next project.