

INSIDERS

BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

Poindexter putting finger on PC bugs

Comdex attracts interesting people from all over the world, but none more enigmatic than Admiral John Poindexter.

The national security adviser to former president Ronald Reagan is the highest-ranking government official convicted in the Iran-contra affair. His conviction for conspiring to mislead Congress — overturned on appeal — awaits review by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In a chance meeting outside the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Thomas and Mack Center, where a Comdex-sponsored rock concert was being held, Poindexter said he is keeping busy — debugging personal-computer software.

A retired Navy rear admiral, the quiet, pipe-smoking Poindexter rarely talks to the media. These days, he is letting people know he's vice president of TP Systems, based in Long Beach, Calif., and Rockville, Md.

Its mission: ridding PC software of flaws that can cause PCs to slow down or crash.

Poindexter is quite the computer whiz. In 1981, he designed the White House's first computer messaging system. Ironically, one of the messages Poindexter sent a colleague about the secret plan to sell arms to Iran was left on the system's backup tape. It helped investigators uncover the Iran-contra scandal.

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

FROM THE COMPUTER DEALERS EXPOSITION IN LAS VEGAS

By JOHN SCHNEIDAWIND

Big Blue unveiling: IBM's "personal communicator," shown for the first time at Comdex, is only a prototype. But the product — resembling an early model cellular phone with a liquid crystal display — was at least something attendees could get their hands on.

The device can send faxes, electronic messages and transmit computer files, all by pressing appropriate symbols on an LCD screen. IBM plans to begin selling it next year.

Contrast IBM's seemingly flawless Comdex demo with Apple's much ballyhooed Newton device. Despite intense customer interest at Comdex in Newton, Apple locked Newton in a glass box. Apple once said Newton would be ready in early 1993. Now Apple says it will ship sometime in the first six months of 1993. AT&T, Tandy and Hewlett-Packard plan to introduce similar devices next year.

GRiD's Convertible: GRiD Systems has what looks like a smash product in its Convertible, a \$3,400 notebook PC. When closed, the PC has a screen you can write on using



By Bob Galbraith, AP

FIRST LOOK: IBM's personal communicator was a hands-on display.

an electronic stylus. When opened, it functions as a notebook PC with keyboard. But be careful, just as conventional pens can leak ink, the convertible leaks electronic ink into its screen if you hold the pen a half-inch above the surface.

Deadline disruption: Reporters struggling to meet deadlines in the crowded Comdex press room were rudely interrupted Monday. You really couldn't blame them. A John Belushi impersonator walked in, shouted there was an important news conference next door and dropped at least \$50 in one-dollar bills. What followed wasn't a pretty sight. "It strikes me as a computer industry PR guy, operating in what he thinks is a clever way," says Comdex spokesman Peter Young.

This year's fall Comdex — one of the largest conferences in the U.S. each year — set records for attendance. Nearly 150,000 attended last year.