Take a byte of computer time

Rentals spring up for those who don't have the cash to invest

By Michelle Vranizan
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When inspiration strikes, Chet Chessher heads to the Huntington Beach Public Library — but not for the books.

There, Chessher discovered a bank of self-service computers that patrons can rent for as long as they want for a modest sum.

He is using an Apple Macintosh at the library to write his second screenplay. The 31-year-old writer-actor drafts scripts in longhand, but the computer chops months off the time it takes for revisions and polishing. And he didn't have to buy a thing.

"I can use a $10,000 computer at someone else's expense," he said.

Public libraries and quick-print shops that rent computers and printers by the hour cater to people such as Chessher who need the equipment but can't afford to buy it or who don't need to use it every day.

Proprietors say their customers come from every walk of life: college students writing term papers, job seekers updating resumes, small-business owners printing brochures or fliers and traveling executives cramming in a couple hours work between appointments.

"If once in a while you need to use a color printer or scanner, why should you have to pay $800 to buy one when you could come down here and have what you need for $20 an hour?" said Shellie Stricklin-Bean, co-owner of Computer Work Center in Newport Beach.

Not all establishments that rent computers are equal.

At the bottom of the scale are the libraries. Chances are if the one nearest you has public equipment, it consists of a donated Apple IIe, a dot matrix printer and little or no software. Most libraries don't accept reservations, and users are expected to bring their own software and paper.

The biggest advantage of library computers is the cost — they're free.

The Huntington Beach library is the exception. Because its equipment is newer and more extensive than most, the library charges $3 or $4 an hour for computers and 75 cents a page for laser printouts.

At the other end of the spectrum are print shops, which are quickly turning into full-service graphics centers. Standard equipment at stores such as Kinko Copies and AlphaGraphics Printshops includes Macintosh computers, commonly used software programs and counter help trained to answer simple questions.

Renting equipment at these outfits ranges from $8 to $20 an hour. Most charge extra for laser printer work.

Possibly the creme de la creme of self-service operations is Computer Work Center, a year-old business in Newport Beach adjacent to the John Wayne Airport business area.

Computer Work Center features the latest generation Macintosh and IBM compatible computers, laser printers, color printers, scanners, 83 popular software programs and a public-domain software library containing more than 1,000 titles.
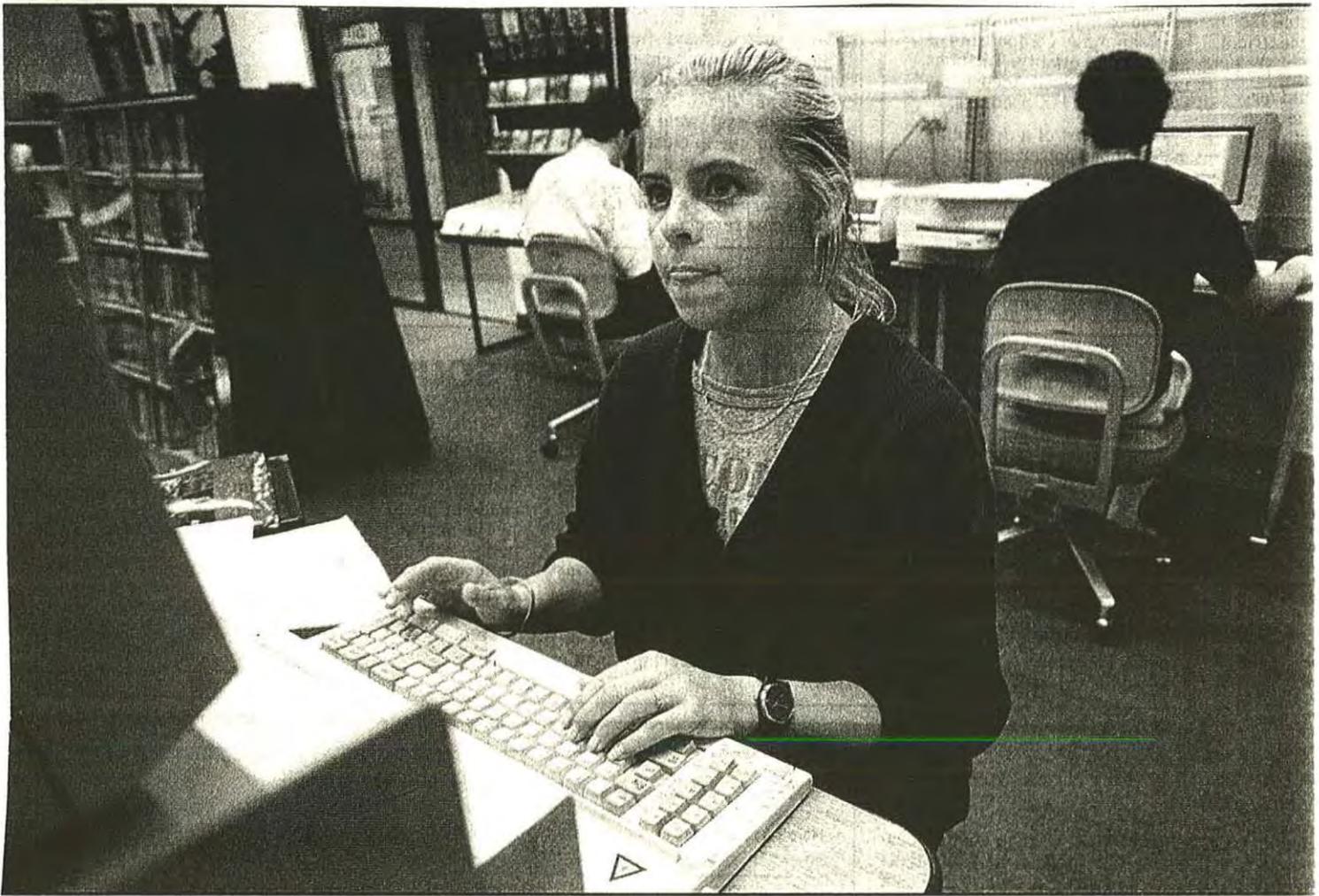
Renters work in what Stricklin-Bean calls a relaxing, "high-tech" office atmosphere, complete with piped-in classical music. Advice is free, but if someone gets stuck on a project and wants to dump the entire thing in her lap, Stricklin-Bean will take over — for $30 an hour.

Stricklin-Bean expects that with the economy slowing down and people putting off major purchases, her computer rental business will pick up.

Kinko Copies self-service computer program has been so successful that the chain has put machines in

Ellen Glass, 23, of Huntington Beach works on her resume on a borrowed computer at the Huntington Beach Public Library.

RENT

each of its 12 Orange County locations. The biggest, at 17th Street and Newport Boulevard in Costa Mesa, has six Macintoshes and several laser printers. Like the other Kinkos, it is open 24 hours a day.

"Sometimes you can come in here at 2 a.m. and all six computers are being used, especially if it's around tax time or semester's end," said James Huff, Kinko's desktop publishing coordinator.

This week, Kinko expects to announce a deal with Apple Computer to replace the equipment in all its Orange County locations with the Mac Classic. The black-and-white display machine, which Apple unveiled two weeks ago, is meant to supplant the Macintosh SE and Mac Plus and is the company's lowest-cost computer.

Huntington Beach's library started its computer-rental service four years ago, after a coin-operated game computer proved wildly popular with children and other visitors.

"We said, why not set up our own?" said Gary Shippey, the library's media-services coordinator.

Over the years, the library has acquired a 386 personal computer, three IBM XT compatibles, a Mac IIcx, an Apple IIe and various printers, all for less than $20,000.

Shippey estimates that 150 people used the computers last month, up about 114 percent from a year ago. The reason, he said, is experience.

"We've attained a feeling for the programs people need," he said.

Jeff Stecher contributed to this report.

Where to rent computers by the hour

Here's a sampling of Orange County copy shops and computer centers that rent computers, printers and software by the hour

	Hours	Equipment	Cost	Notes
AlphaGraphics 18007 Skypark Circle Irvine 261-5544	Mon-Fri, 8 a.m.- 6 p.m.; Sat, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.	Includes three Macintosh work stations, laser printer. Software includes Pagemaker 3.0, Microsoft Word(?), McDraw II, McWrite. Staff help on software is available.	$12 an hour, $2 per page, 50 cents a page for proofs.	Reservations not required but call ahead. Virus checks available.
Computer Works Center 3901 MacArthur Blvd. Newport Beach 752-0877	Mon-Fri, 8 a.m.- 7 p.m.; Sat, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Other times by appointment.	Includes two Macintosh SE030, one Mac SE, one Mac IIci, one AST 386, one AGI 386 and one Packard-Bell 286; two laser printers, one color printer and one dot matrix printer; scanner. Eighty-three software packages include popular word processing, spreadsheet and desktop publishing software programs. Also has 1,000 public-domain software titles.	$20 an hour or $30 an hour if staff does all work; 10 cents per page.	Reservations accepted but mornings are best time. Virus detection on all systems.
Craig A. Jones & Associates 22961 Trinton Way Laguna Hills 859-8986	By appointment only with half-day notice.	IBM AT compatible; laser and dot matrix printers. Software includes Lotus 1-2-3, Wordperfect. Staff assistance available.	$10 an hour including laser printer output. Long-term rates negotiable.	Reservations required. Ca use own software, but bring documentation as proof against viruses.
Kinko's Copies 12 county stores including 741 N. Placentia Ave. Fullerton 528-2430	Open 24 hours a day.	Varies by location, but most have Macintosh SE, laser printers. Software includes popular Mac word processing, desktop publishing and drawing programs.	$8 an hour, paid in 10-minute increments, $1 minimum. Printer is $1 for first five pages, then 50 cents a page.	Reservations not required and no time limit. Late evenings and early mornings best. Virus check on all stations and free disinfectant program available.

OC libraries with self-service computers

Only a handful of the 45 city and county library branches in Orange County have personal ccomputers and printers for patrons. All but one of the computer-equipped facilities are free. Most use some type of sign-up ɔ sheet or reservation system.

Library	Hours	Equipment and supplies	Notes
Huntington Beach City Library 7111 Talbert Ave. Huntington Beach 842-8863	Mon-Thurs, 1 to 9 p.m.; Fri-Sat, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Computers include Apple IIe, Macintosh IIcx, one 386 and three 8088 IBM compatibles. Printers include two H-P LaserJet II, Apple LaserWriter IINT, two letter-quality daisy wheel and two dot matrix. 200 software titles available. You supply paper or buy it from library.	Cost is: $4/hour for Mac, $3/hour for all others; 75 cents a page for laser printout, dot matrix is free. Weekday afternoons are least busy.
OC Public Library, Crown Valley Branch 3041 Crown Valley Parkway Laguna Niguel 249-5252	Mon-Wed, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Thurs, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Fri-Sat, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.	IBM compatible with MS-DOS 3.3, hard drive. Two dot matrix printers. No software so bring your own.	No advance reservations but has sign-up sheet. Two-hour limit.
OC Public Library, Dana Niguel Branch 33841 Niguel Road Laguna Niguel 496-5517	Mon-Wed, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Thurs, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Fri-Sat, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Apple IIe with compatible dot matrix printer. Bring your own software, although library developing its own collection. Bring your own paper.	Same day reservations requested.
OC Public Library, El Toro Branch 24672 Raymond Way El Toro 855-8173	Mon-Wed, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Thurs, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Fri-Sat, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.	Dart (IBM compatible) with laser and dot matrix printers. Software includes WordPerfect 5.0, Microsoft Word 4.0, Wordstar 2000, Lotus 1-2-3, Q&A, Printshop and Autosketch.	Free but donations requested to cover paper costs. Reservations required and can be made by phone starting Saturday for the following week. No staff instruction.
OC Public Library, Heritage Park Regional Branch 14361 Yale Ave. Irvine 551-7151	Mon-Sat, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Macintosh with dot matrix printer. Paper is supplied, but bring your own software	First come, first serve. Not heavily used because of lack of software.
OC Public Library, Seal Beach-Mary Wilson Branch 707 Electric Ave. Seal Beach 840-6759 or (213) 431-3584	Mon-Thurs, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Fri-Sat, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Apple IIe with Epson dot matrix printer. 50 software programs available and paper supplied.	No advance reservations but has sign-up sheet. Educational programs and games available for children.
OC Public Library, San Juan Capistrano Regional Branch 31495 El Camino Real San Juan Capistrano 493-3984	Mon-Thurs, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Fri-Sat, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Apple IIe with dot matrix printer. Limited software programs, best to call first. Paper supplied.	No advance reservations but has sign-up sheet. Games available for children.
OC Public Library, University Park Branch 4512 Sanburg Way Irvine 786-4001	Wed, 10:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.; Thurs, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Fri-Sat, 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Apple IIe, dot matrix printer and AppleWorks software. Paper supplied.	Bring any other software you need. Reservations required, preferably one week in advance.
City of Orange Public Library 101 N. Center St. Orange 532-0355	Mon-Fri, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sat, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.	Apple IIe, dot matrix printer, paper supplied. No software supplied.	First come, first served. Early in the day is best.

Source: Libraries listed

BULLETIN BOARD

Information is supplied by bulletin board operators and is subject to change without notice. Some may charge fees.

The Anastasia Syndrome: Message bases, games, file distribution. 24 hours. 300/1200/2400. 8-N-1. 545-6256.

AST On-line: AST Research product information, press releases, software upgrades, etc. 300-2400. 8-N-1. 727-4723.

The Belching Dragon: Role-playing games, debates, message areas. 24 hours. 300/1200. 8-N-1. 994-5867.

Cash Cow: Internal Audit, Lotus, business applications. 24 hours. 1200/2400. 962-1857.

Dirty Dan's: Graphics, message base, games, utilities. 24 hours. 300-14,400. 8-N-1. 897-3398.

The End of the Line: Software, 50 on-line games. 1200/2400. 8-N-1. 645-6581.

Gremlins: Public-domain games, utilities and message bases. 24 hours. 300-2400. 8-N-1. 670-7548.

Happy Trails: Software, game playing, conversation. 24 hours. 2400/9600. 547-0719.

The Hotline: Socializing, 10 chat lines, matchmaking, software, e-mail. 24 hours. 300/1200/2400. 8-N-1. Irvine, 857-0233; Santa Ana, 285-0858; Orange, 639-5707; Fullerton, 871-8326; Mission Viejo, 586-8749.

The Land of the Freaks: Twenty-two games on-line. 5 a.m. to midnight. 300/1200/2400. 962-0460.

To have your bulletin board listed, write BBS listings, Accent, The Orange County Register, PO Box 11626, Santa Ana 92711.