The Thanksgiving to Christmas sales nationwide of the VIS could be tabulated in an unsigned char

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One of my colleagues who is into retrocomputing will occasionally show off his still-working Tandy Video Information System (VIS), also known as the Memorex VIS, since Tandy/Radio Shack owned the Memorex brand. It was a disastrously ill-fated attempt by Tandy to enter the console gaming market.

Frank Durda IV, former Tandy TRS-80 engineer, provided some history of the VIS. I encourage you to read the whole thing. Highlights:

> There were 50 or so titles before the system died, and about five or six were respectable.

> Tandy lost somewhere between $50 and $75 million on the development, inventory and failed marketing of VIS. It was *the* product that caused them to get out of the computer business. The lousy sales of DCC that Christmas also helped make Tandy want to get out of the R&D business.

> Let's just say that the Thanksgiving to Christmas sales **nationwide** of VIS could be tabulated in an unsigned char. You would need an unsigned short to tabulate the number of VIS systems that were built before someone yelled STOP! and halted production. And you would need a *signed* char to track the VIS unit sales for January 1993.

> According [to] the marketing brains, $699 was a "magic" price number, and $549, $599 or even $499 (briefly considered) were not "magic", and the "consumers would not buy at those prices". Huh?

Frank sadly passed away in 2018.

The VIS was co-developed with Microsoft and runs a version of Windows 3.0 called *Modular Windows*, running directly off of the CD. Modular Windows was a stripped-down version of Windows 3.0 with Multimedia Extensions, with enhancements like support for 320×240 TV output.

Unfortunately, there was no memory on the VIS for a disk cache, and it turns out that if you don't have a disk cache, everything is ridiculously slow. On a normal system, you can open a file, read a line, then close it; and then open the file again, read another line, and close it. The initial open and read operations hit the disk, but the second open and read operations are cache hits. However, without a disk cache, all of the operations hit the disk, and in the case of the VIS, the disk wasn't even a slow hard drive: It was an even slower CD, and the slowest possible CD at that, running at 1x speed.

My colleague used to jokingly call the VIS the *Xbox Zero*, but "we kind of messed up the numbering system on Xbox", so he now jokingly calls it the *Xbox Negative One*.

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