# With A Computer

The use of computers in business has been fairly common for the past 10 years, but only recently have a few large newspapers made the leap to computers in their own operations. Observer Newspapers recognized in 1970 that effective use of computers was important to its development, and a general purpose computer was installed on a trial basis during the spring of that year.

The experiment proved successful, and a separate computer room was designed for the new building. Separated from the rest of the business office by tinted glass panels and with its own individual air conditioning system for proper temperature and humidity control, the computer room includes a central processing unit, two disk drives, two card punches, a card sorter and a line printer. A raised floor with removable panels allows instant access to electronic connections.

CURRENTLY, Observer Newspapers uses its computer for billing and sales reports, although other uses are under development.

In the case of billing, each customer is assigned a number and a rate per inch of advertising. This information is stored in the memory disk of the computer.

When a customer places an ad in the newspaper, information on the size of the ad, date of publication, and any other pertinent details are written by the salesman on an insertion order. The information on this order is then punched onto computer cards, which are then fed into the computer.

Automatically, the computer searches its memory disk to find the proper customer, calculates the size of the ad, and computes the proper amount to be billed.

The computer then prints out through the line printer on continuous roll forms the customer's name and proper billing address, the type and classification of the ad, the size of the ad and the date of publication, and the correct charge. Sales reports are then generated, often within minutes after billing.

BILLING by computer gets bills into the hands of Observer customers more quickly than possible by hand methods, as well as avoiding human error in the computations.

A special time-sharing program (called SWAPR) was written by the Observer staff, to allow the computer to interrupt a billing program at virtually any point in order to set a "take" of type and then to resume the billing function.

For, at the Observer, the computer has a central part to play, not only in billing and accounting, but also in setting type through space-age computerized phototypesetting processes.