

After a few difficult years, things are finally looking up for CTX after its rescue by a Chinese benefactor. In order to remain one of the top monitor manufacturers, CTX is moving into cutting-edge LCD screens and away from CRTs. Is this the way forward for ailing monitor manufacturers

CTX hasn't had the easiest of rides in the past couple of years. The company diversified unsuccessfully into desktop PCs and notebook computers only to find itself retreating into the safer waters of its traditional mainstay: monitors. However, since February this year, members of staff at CTX's UK headquarters in Watford started to feel rather more positive.

The reason for the company's new-found optimism is the arrival of a rich uncle – well, metaphorically anyway – which reputedly has big plans for the veteran Taiwanese monitor manufacturer. Takeovers and mergers are not unusual in Taiwan. Indeed, as the anticipated shakeout among the country's hardware manufacturers accelerates, it's unlikely many will survive without looking at strategic partnerships – witness motherboard manufacturer ECS hoovering up Alpha-Top in order to buy in some notebook expertise.

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Benefit of the doubt What makes CTX's benefactor so unusual is that it comes from across the Chinese strait. It's a sign of the times that companies on the Chinese mainland are snapping up Taiwanese manufacturers as the tide begins to turn in favour of the People's Republic of China.

Shrouded in secrecy, the deal with the Chinese company took over a year to hammer out amid a growing sense of unease among leading Taiwanese political and business lobbies that economically rapacious China could eclipse the island's post-war miracle. Eventually, 'i's were dotted and 't's finally crossed at the end of February. Such is the relationship between the two states that not even CTX staff members know the name of the company. But the money's now there, says an increasingly confident CTX, and the mother of all Taiwanese monitor manufacturers is focused more than ever on making a big splash in Europe.

Plan of action

CTX marketing manager Ben Levinson concedes that marketing is not one of Taiwan's strong points. However, CTX's message is an extremely straightforward proposition. The company has been making decent monitors for 21 years – indeed, CTX products appear regularly in *PC Advisor's* Monitor charts. The CTX PR960F, for example, has remained the Best Buy 19in CRT (cathode ray tube) monitor for an impressive seven

CTX'S STAR PRODUCTS

AVAILABLE NOW

- **LCDs (liquid crystal displays)** CTX is expanding its LCD range with the 17in PV700, which follows on from the PV720A. The PV700 combines all the necessary features of a 17in LCD with a highly competitive price point – its RRP is a mere £499. The PV700 also offers pivot screen functionality, allowing the user to rotate the screen from landscape to portrait.
- **CRT (cathode ray tube) monitors** The CTX PR960F is the company's 19in CRT offering and is an impressive device which offers a pixel-perfect 0.24mm dot pitch and USB (universal serial bus) support. It's equally adept at displaying both graphics and text, and the value-for-money £283 price tag adds to its appeal.



COMING SOON

- **Flat-panel displays** Expect to see plenty of high-spec offerings. The £599 PV720AIU, which should be available in October 02, is a 17in TFT (thin film transistor) LCD with DVI (digital visual interface). CTX's pricier high-spec display, the £739 18in M830, is set for release in December and offers users DVI, USB and S-Video. It also features a built-in camera and a 500:1 contrast ratio.

months. Quality CRT products, says Levinson, will remain the company's core business for the next three years.

Having proved itself in traditional CRT devices, CTX is fast playing catch up on LCD (liquid crystal display) monitors. October will witness the arrival of the company's first flat-panel with DVI (digital visual interface) – the PV720AIU. CTX will be pushing aggressively into the LCD arena, with a total of 15 separate products joining its current four-strong line-up by the end of the year. Four new projectors will also see the light of day.

With established premium CRT and LCD brands in place, the monitor manufacturer will then branch out into new areas. Power supplies are an initial possibility, and a return to the notebook arena isn't ruled out. CTX is also looking to team up with graphics card manufacturer Matrox to move into 22in LCD flat-panels. Towards the end of the year the company is also hoping to have plasma

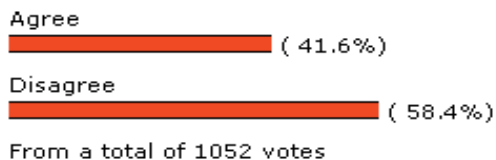
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displays as part of its arsenal, using Fujitsu panels; even internet fridges feature on the CTX radar. Like our other profiled supplier, Benq (see page 68), CTX cites the Samsung success story as its dream five-year plan.

In short, CTX is looking to take advantage of its cash cow on the Chinese mainland, pushing beyond its perception as display specialist. As such, it is revamping its reseller program – CTXellence – with improved point-of-sale, demonstrations and training days for channel partners.

PC Advisor poll

CRT is dead. Long live flat panel displays.



THE WORLD WILL SOON BE FLAT

The LCD (liquid crystal display) market has experienced enormous growth over the last year, especially in the 17in category. Current research suggests that this growth will continue throughout 2002 and onwards. Figures from German market research company GfK indicate a year-on-year growth of 148 percent in the LCD market and 368 percent year-on-year in the 17in category (2001-02.)

PC Advisor's recent online poll certainly paints the picture that CRTs (cathode ray tubes) are on borrowed time, with LCDs poised for world domination. The results of the poll (shown above) are representative of a worldwide change in monitor purchases. Attracting more than 1,000 votes in little more than a week, the online survey showed a surprisingly large proportion (41.6 percent) of respondents thought the race was already over. *PC Advisor* reader Gordon Smith is ready to take the plunge, but only when the vendors cut out the bells and whistles. "Once the LCD manufacturers realise that the ideal screen is just that – a screen – and cut out the stereo speakers and microphones, which are but poor substitutes, then I will probably buy," he says.

"The death of the CRT must only be a matter of time," says reader Simon Ghent. "When digital LCD flat-panels – combined with the enhanced text definition facility on Windows XP – finally arrive in the budget sector, the CRT's current saving grace of picture quality will no longer hold true," he predicts.

Reader Steve Hagues, who helped to develop the humble transistor in the 50s, isn't quite so sure. "It's going to be a long time before the basic CRT and its improvements give way to LCD screens," he reckons. "The technology is simply not there to drop the price of LCD screens. I know we would all love one, but it's the price that will keep them off the consumer's desk." ■

CTX AT A GLANCE

CTX supplies UK PC assemblers Systemax and CCL and product shipments comprise a 60:40 ratio in favour of standalone to PC assembler supplies. Between 10 and 15 percent of the company's business is through the UK, and manufacturing takes place in California, Taiwan and Thailand. It employs 55 staff in Europe (18 in the UK), mainly in sales and marketing, and 2,000 worldwide. It has European offices in Watford, Eindhoven (Netherlands), Neuss (Germany) and a sales office in Italy.

CTX is sprinting as fast as it can towards the burgeoning LCD (liquid-crystal display) flat-panel market, but CRT (cathode ray tube) screens will remain the core product range for the next three years. Initial ambitions are to get 'up there' with Samsung and Philips and then diversify into other product lines, including power supplies and notebooks.

1981 CTX founded as Taiwan's first colour monitor manufacturer.

1987 Successfully registered CTX trademark.

1989 Ranked second fastest growing company in top 1,000 in Taiwan, achieving an average growth rate of 86 percent in four consecutive years.

1994 Entered the world's top 10 monitor brands.

1995 Shipping quantity reached 1.5 million units and the company ranked seventh in Dataquest's top 10 monitor manufacturers report.

1999 Shipping quantity estimated at three million units.

2001 CTX consistently in the UK top three brands according to analyst Bryan Norris Associates.

2002 CTX bought by company from the People's Republic of China.