THE FOUR LETTER WORD

The first day of the Amsterdam Computer Show is over. Back in the hotel the pleasures of the coming night are moving closer - a *rijsttafel*, a club, a disco, most of it on expenses. Around the bar are some of my stand staff, but I'm not joining them. There's nothing to say, except to myself. I know I did a good job even if I didn't use the four-letter word.

I'd never organised an exhibition stand before and had just one month to prepare the launch of our new computer.

This involved getting the stand designed, sourcing equipment, and persuading third party software suppliers to demo their applications on our machines. I had to find and train English, French, German and Dutch speaking staff. And I had to produce new brochures and press releases in several languages. All within a tight budget.

Well, I did it. After many panics our stand was completed at 11pm last night. Every multilingual message on the stand checked and rechecked with native speakers, faultlessly signalling our message:

Working Better Together

Travaillons Mieux Ensemble,

Besser Zusammen Werken,

Across the exhibition hall, this Monday morning, competitive company banners jostled for attention, yet ours rose triumphantly above the throng. We waited for the arrival of our Director and our final motivation.

He came early but I was ready, waiting by reception to smooth his path - make sure he was expected, that his name was spelt correctly on his badge and then guide him to the stand.

He grunted at my greeting and, seemingly ignoring my pleasantries, marched off in the direction I'd indicated. Without breaking step he circled our stand and then came back to me.

"Who's the project manager?" He shouted.

"I am." I said with pride.

"Well it's a f***ing cock-up."

I was stunned, I didn't understand.

"You haven't used the f***ing four letter word."

I couldn't speak.

"Where does it say f***ing UNIX? We are supposed to be launching a UNIX machine."

He was right, of course.

This new computer was our first running the UNIX operating system. It was a standard that allowed us to work with third parties. All the software we were showing worked on UNIX, all our brochures spelt it out but we didn't have the word UNIX on our stand - *Working Better Together* but not *Working with UNIX*.

It wasn't a big problem to fix. I found the overworked exhibition signwriters, and got their attention with a crate of Grolsch. They sold me their last Xs, and three copies of UNIX, in 128 point Arial, were letrasetted to appropriate areas before the show opened.

Our stand was crowded with visitors all day and we took more than 50 sales leads. The Director stayed until 4pm but never spoke to me again.

I'll suppose he felt embarrassed about his outburst after the success of the day. So I'm having another lager and I'll think about my future, but starting with tonight.