

an interview with Michael Crisp

Michael Crisp is a man who likes to keep things simple—and over the last five years he's parlayed that taste into a business that this year will see more than \$5 million in sales.

Crisp publishes a series known as the "Fifty Minute™ books"—more than 100 titles dealing with a range of management-related subjects. Each book is a mix of clearly stated information and self-paced exercises, all tightly focused, easily understandable, and able to be completed in about an hour. The series is widely acclaimed by executives and management development professionals across the country.

Until 1985, Mike Crisp was a Chicago-based IBM vice president, in charge of IBM's Science Research Associates publishing subsidiary. The business was thriving, but Crisp wasn't: "I wanted to get out of the corporate world and back to California, where I'd lived for many years," he says. "And my best ticket back was to start my own company."

FROM A GAP TO A NICHE

For some time, he recalls, he'd seen a gap in the training materials world—a need for concise, cost-effective books emphasizing a practical, applied, interactive approach rather than high-flown

"We knew we'd arrived as an American business when we realized our customers included Harvard, Disneyland, and Coca-Cola."

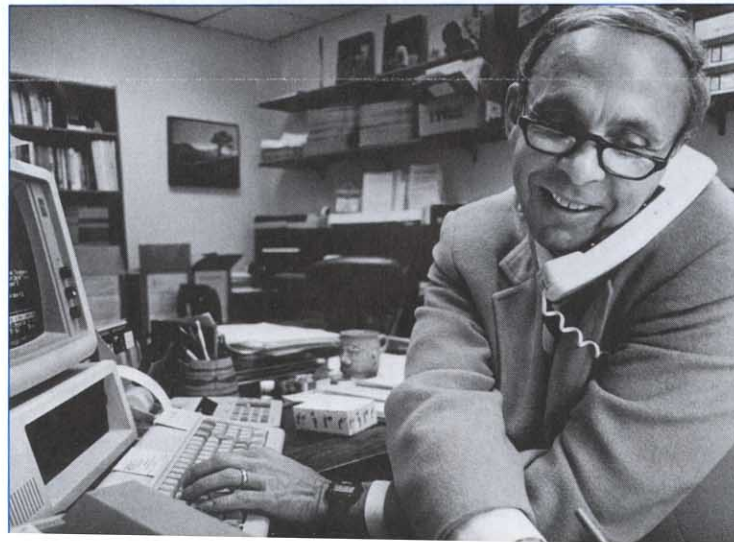
MICHAEL CRISP

theory. In fact, Crisp's name became an acronym for the product he envisioned: Concise, Reasonably priced, Involving, Self-study, Publications.

With two partners, he began Crisp Publications, Inc.—but the Company's debut wasn't promising. Mike Crisp is wry as he recalls his first run at the market: "We published about 10 titles and had a terrible response—people liked the idea but not



body else wouldn't either, so I'd ask the author to rework it. I tried to keep the writing clear and the exercises involving and interactive." Today Mike Crisp still has the final say on whether a manuscript is ready to publish; he's the company's quality control.



Kaufmann list of about 40 books dealing with art, architecture, and creativity.

VIDEO TIES IN

How does the new ECI "people skills" video series, featuring five authors from the Crisp list, fit in with all this? "Beautifully," says Mike Crisp. "I became acquainted with ECI's work last year when they produced a video about humor in the workplace—it featured Terry Paulson, who wrote a book for us called 'Making Humor Work'. I was impressed with the quality of the production; ECI has clearly been able to use television to capture and expand on the messages in the book."

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That video was also ECI's introduction to the work of Mike Crisp. "We liked Terry Paulson's book enough to want to know more about Mike's list, and we liked what we saw there," recalls ECI's President and CEO, Bill Fueller. "Our viewers were telling us they wanted 'how-to' video programs and series about people skills, and we realized that the Crisp books and authors were already zeroed in on the topic."

Bill and Mike talked, and Bill sent along a list of possible video topics compiled from ECI viewer feedback. Mike matched topics and authors, and contacted the authors about adapting their work for a new medium. "When we talked about the video series and the quality ECI brings to bear, there was no hesitation," Crisp recalls. "The five authors I asked—Paul Timm, Robert Maddux, Bert Decker, Carol Kinsey Goman, and Herbert Kaufmann—are all excellent platform speakers, and