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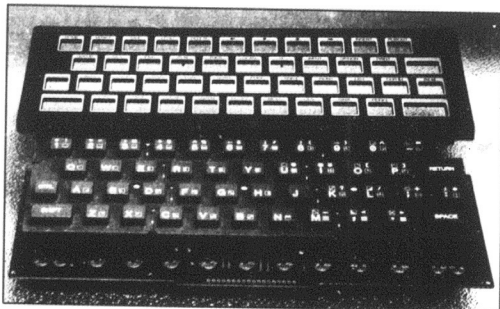
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COMPONENTS

Alphanumeric keypads come in rubber dome form



Shin Etsu is now offering full-size alphanumeric keyboards that use conductive silicone rubber dome-pad switches, eliminating all the drawbacks of conventional keyboards, and for less, too.

Most alphanumeric keyboards for computer data entry employ metal contacts and mechanical movements. This type of construction lends itself to failure from debris getting between contacts. Also, it is expensive, because the contacts are gold-plated to extend life and to prevent corrosion, and because it requires a costly manufacturing process.

The new keyboards use conductive rubber instead of metal for key contacts and silicone-rubber dome membranes rather than mechanical switches. The dome membrane replaces the plunger, used to force the movable contact onto the stationary contact; the spring, used to keep the plunger from making contact in an unkeyed condition; and the switch housing surrounding the plunger.

Until now, most of these dome-membrane, conductive-rubber switches have been applied in numeric keypads and similarly small special-purpose keyboards. They are favored in severe environments, where they provide the added benefit of sealing the printed-circuit board with which they are used from the outside environment.

Besides being impervious to harsh environments, the dome membrane is highly reliable. A typical keyboard is normally required to provide more than 5 million cycles of actuation force. Shin Etsu claims that its dome-membrane devices will survive twice that number easily.

Prices for blank keypads range from 5 to 8 cents per switch; and for imprinted keypads, from 7 to 10 cents per switch. Imprinted units, typically a custom order, generally take 10 to 12 weeks for delivery.

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CIRCLE 308

Jonah McLeod

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