That Highway Again

Television, which was designed for interactivity, actually produces passivity and computers, which were designed for use by one person, could actually encourage interactivity through games and networking.

Ian McFadyen, Director of Media Arts, and prime mover in programs like the *Comedy Company*, put this view at a recent Melbourne conference on interactive multimedia (IMM).

McFadyen said that while television encourages passive watching, multimedia creates activity - albeit virtual activity.

He said writers need to move away from linear narratives in a multimedia environment, and write stories with the flexibility to change according to the preferences of the user. Traditional themes of love, death, tragedy and comedy need to be woven into the world of multimedia.

Robin Williams of ABC Radio National's *Science Show* opened the forum by pointing out that as yet the multimedia bandwagon is not fully constructed. While many are jumping, there is very little to jump on, and only those prepared to participate actively should take such a perilous leap, he warned.

The widely held view that movies on demand would be the 'killer application' that would support other multimedia services was strongly disputed by another participant at the conference. Yale Brown, Vice President of Emerging Technologies Consulting Group at Oracle, argued that no single element would fill this role; rather, movies on demand integrated with education, health care, home shopping, games, travel, music, basic cable and personalised advertising would sustain the information superhighway by providing information on demand.

The Victorian Department of Business and Employment convened the IMM forum, entitled CONNECT, which offered an interesting mixture of the multimedia technology available now, and what will be available in the future, with a good deal of hard selling and hardware selling thrown in.

Bill Clarke, a public sector consulting specialist from IBM Canada presented a practical demonstration of the use of IMM to provide motor registration and other driver services. An ATM-type system which he called a 'self-service kiosk' allows drivers to register vehicles, pay fines, change addresses, and check vehicle and driver records in 27 languages, with full video motion and credit card payment.

Ian Large, Managing Director of Impresse Australia, put the view that the CD ROM was a bridging technology rather than a format for the long term. He pointed out that currently 50 per cent of CD ROMs are business databases and only three per cent are multimedia titles.

Copyright: A Crucial Issue

Bridget Godwin, a solicitor at the ABC and former co-ordinator of the Copyright Convergence Group, discussed copyright in the multimedia environment and said that copyright in multimedia is a package of rights. While at present the Copyright Act is inconsistent in its treatment of technologies, it will be amended to create neutrality across the technologies.

Rights to different segments of multimedia product may be held by a number of collecting societies and individual creators, and producers of multimedia need to identify owners and seek permission to use the material. Godwin said that while many publishers assume they hold electronic publishing rights to their published material, this is often not the case.

Rights clearances will be a major issue in multimedia: if a multimedia product contains 500 segments of other people's work, it will require the producer to identify the owners and obtain 500 permissions and copyright clearances. International practice is moving away from statutory licensing, and there is unlikely to be a statutory body set up in Australia to co-ordinate these matters. Instead, co-ordination of rights is likely to be based on the existing copyright collecting societies.

Copyright owners in the new environment, where digital technology extends potential uses, will expect producers to specify the particular uses they wish to make of the material and will no longer give blanket rights. Rights granted may be exclusive for substantial use and non-exclusive for fragments, with territorial market rights also needing to be negotiated. The term of rights granted should relate to the economic life of the product, with options available for extension.

There are no standard industry practices yet established in multimedia as to payments to copyright owners. Godwin believed that lump sum payments may overtake royalty payments because the latter may prove harder to track and quantify. Rights given to distributors need to be in accordance with rights cleared by the copyright owners to allow for full flexibility in the marketplace. In the multimedia environment, issues such as payment for advertising, marketing expenses and profit participation all raise question marks.

It is important to note that a multimedia product using other people's copyright material has no inherent copyright; the producer must ensure that they are given leave by the various copyright owners to defend those rights on their behalf. ❑

Bruce Shearer