



Communications Roundup

Access to that Highway

Personal computers rather than interactive use of television sets will be the conduit for services into the home such as home shopping, a leading US expert believes.

Phillip Dodds, executive director of the American Interactive Multi-media Association, made this prediction at the Australian Telecommunications Networks and Applications Conference held late last year in Melbourne. He said that the massive expansion in the number of home PCs and their significant data processing capacity by comparison with TV sets makes this trend inevitable.

Dodds said that home television sets would continue to be used primarily for entertainment, though interactive technology would give people more control over their viewing in terms of both timing and program choice.

He said that while technology for the multi-media information superhighway is well on the way to being available and affordable, user preferences, rather than technology itself, would determine demand for and use of technology.

Looking further into his crystal ball, Dodds predicted that the industry would be deregulated globally and that Internet would be redesigned and rebuilt. □

Co-Operation Not Deregulation

Regulatory co-operation between nations, rather than global deregulation, was the scenario predicted by Peter Webb, deputy ABA chair, speaking at a recent seminar in Jakarta.

Webb said that television delivery is now ubiquitous, effortlessly crossing national boundaries, and regulation can no longer be merely a domestic preoccupation. It is the responsibility of regulators everywhere to co-operate with others, he said.

Co-operation is already occurring in the form of information exchange, training, agency arrangements and secondments, Webb said, and the ABA expects to conclude formal memorandums of understanding this year with its counterparts in the USA, Canada and the UK, with others to follow.

The ABA has a strategy for informing would-be satellite operators and broadcasters about Australian laws in the lead-up to the 'open skies' policy on satellite broadcasting on Australia which will prevail after 1997.

Webb noted with approval the approach taken by Hong Kong, which has passed legislation requiring satellite broadcasters uplinking from the colony to respect the program regulations and sensibilities of the countries they broadcast into. □

New Database Set Up

A project which is designed to break down traditional animosity between the technical and social sciences has been initiated at the University of Adelaide.

The Social Science and Telecommunications Project will compile a data base of social science research on telecommunications issues - a potentially valuable resource in a field where knowledge of current and past research tends to be fragmented. The Project will involve collaboration between the Centre and the University's history department.

The initiative comes from the Centre for Telecommunications Information Networking (CTIN), established in 1993 with the primary aim of tackling the many issues posed by new and evolving communications technologies. Currently, the centre is concentrating on Personal Communications Services including wireless/mobile access, network issues and customer interface technologies.

Director of the CTIN, Professor Reg Coutts, said he believed that the two fields must collaborate more and combine resources so that R&D investment is properly directed. 'As well as researching engineering and mathematics aspects of telecommunication technology, we need information about economics, marketing, culture, law and other related areas', Professor Coutts said.

'At present the research is undertaken across a range of subject areas by people often working in isolation. By compiling a data base of current research and researchers we will establish a network for collaboration.'

Professor Coutts may be contacted on (08) 303 3222. □

