



Bits and Bytes

Barred access

CU has come face to face with a new Telecom pricing policy which excludes new customers without recent telephone accounts from accessing STD and ISD calls for up to two years. A *CU* correspondent made this rude discovery on her return from a six-month overseas trip. On having a new telephone service connected she discovered her access to STD and ISD services was barred. Telecom told her she would have to pay a \$500 bond as assurance or wait two years before her long distance call access would be restored. Telecom spokesperson Don Bruce told *CU* that the new policy had been in place since late 1994 and that it only applied to a 'certain class of customer'. He said the bond could be over-riden at the discretion of the customer service representative but he failed to mention that this fact is not made known to that 'certain class of customer'. □

So many phones, so few people

Australians are among the world's most communicative people. According to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, there are over 8.85 million telephone subscribers and more than 30 million phone calls made each day. The industry is estimated to be worth about \$15 billion a year and the telecommunications service industry is growing at a rate of more than 5 per cent a year. Not bad for a population of a mere 17 million. □

Kobe on the Internet

Looking for loved ones after a natural disaster like Japan's Kobe earthquake of 17 January may never be the same again. According to a report from the Japanese telecommunications union, the whereabouts of residents of the Kobe area were made available on the World Wide Web via the computer communications services of six different companies. The report admitted that the list relied on 'self notification by the residents'. Not likely to be this correspondent's first priority after a cataclysmic earthquake. □

Kiwi journalists exposed

More than 93 per cent of New Zealand's journalists are of European or 'pakeha' descent compared to just 4.1 per cent of Maori descent. According to a survey by the New Zealand journalists training organisation, the majority of the country's journalists are male although there is evidence of a growing number of women entering the profession and reaching senior positions. Despite the fact that Maoris and Pacific islanders make up x per cent of the population, only 28 journalists out of the surveyed 1,214 regarded their work as being directed primarily at a Maori audience. A significant 22 per cent reported barriers in their career, primarily in the form of sexual or age discrimination. □

Net porn crack down

Internet surfers caught in the possession of computer images depicting child pornography could be jailed for 12 months or fined up to \$10,000 if new legislation introduced into the NSW parliament this month is passed. NSW Premier Bob Carr said the new legislation fulfilled an election promise to crack down on child pornography. The Crimes (Child Pornography) Amendment Bill contains a provision which will allow police to arrest on possession grounds rather than intent to publish, which is the current requirement. An adviser to the Premier told *CU* that downloading a pornographic image onto a computer screen will be regarded as possession. □

Women media moguls only

The US Federal Communications Commission is looking into ways to increase female ownership of mass media facilities. The FCC is discussing an 'incubator' program which would provide substantial financial assistance, technical and management advice, and training programs for women 'and minorities' attempting to move into the male domain of media ownership. Among the ideas the FCC is floating to bring greater gender balance to the industry are tax credits for investors in female controlled entities and expanding the tax certificate policy to encourage presumably male owners to sell their mass media holdings to minorities and women. *CU* would be interested to hear of similar initiatives in Australia! □