

## Australia ripe for videodisc but rotten at marketing!

'It seems so obvious a blunder,' says Mr Ian Large, Managing Director of Digital Imaging Australia, 'yet most Australian companies involved in videodisc have until now been fooled into marketing the technology for technology's sake, rather than for the many benefits it may bring the user. As a result, videodisc has not been accepted to anything like the same extent it has in Europe. In Australia companies like Philips, who invented the technology, have given up and have almost withdrawn from the videodisc market. This, at the same time as its parent company in Holland is busy breaking new ground in interactive videodisc technology.'

A unique application of the technology by DIA meant that it was able to capture still images for archival videodiscs six times faster than anyone else in the world, without loss of quality. This facility recently won DIA two large contracts — putting a collection of historical photographs belonging to the New South Wales Government Printing Office onto disc (a report on the project appeared in *InCite* no 13 1987), and the other producing a

shopper's guide for the Hooker Corporation. The company now has its eye on the European archiving and mapping market.

Interactive videodiscs, according to Mr Large, are very popular in Europe, and are being seen and used as a training, teaching and general information medium with great success.

The key to the technology's success is its ability to interact with the user. This makes the medium extremely flexible, time/cost effective and readily acceptable. One of the major UK banks, for instance, recently produced on laserdisc an interactive video program to teach staff about credit card fraud. Because of the systems' ability to interact with each member of the staff at their own pace, the training medium became readily accepted and within a short period of time the program has saved the bank several million pounds in fraud.

Similarly, British Telecom, the UK's largest employer, has just bought several thousand laserdisc players for branch offices and work sites. These machines will be utilised both for staff training and for public information systems.

High levels of usage mean that the unit

costs of videodiscs are not only considerably less, but videodisc is also far more durable than any videotape. Australia, meanwhile, has been bogged down with a technology seemingly shrouded in mysticism, where many of those with knowledge of videodisc production keep it to themselves as if it were proprietary information.

This same technology is seen as a shining light in Europe and the USA and is considered to be so important in the UK that the Department of Trade and Industry, manufacturers and producers have established the National Interactive Video Centre. This organisation is an impartial agency that acts as a catalyst for all those interested in the development of the medium.

At its London headquarters, potential users can examine and use the technology, the hardware and the world's largest collection of interactive videodisc programs. The centre also runs courses in the implementation and application of the medium.

'In Australia', says Mr Large, 'DIA will be taking on an education role to help explode the myths and the mystique of videodisc and to teach the market not about the technology, but about the medium's potential benefits'.

## REVIEW

Electronic Encyclopedia. Danbury CT. Grolier Electric Publishing. 1986. CD-ROM A\$330

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The Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia which in its printed form is known as the Academic American Encyclopedia consists of one CD ROM, one 5.25" MS/PC-DOS floppy disk containing the software to access the CD ROM and a slim users manual. The compact disk requires an IBM compatible computer with a minimum of 256K RAM, two floppy disk drives and CD disk drive.

The software to access the encyclopedia is extremely user friendly and could be used by a novice with no computer experience within 10 or 15 minutes. The ten function keys (F1 to F10) are used extensively to access the data on the CD ROM, single key strokes allow the user to select a type of search eg article title, or word search and once material is retrieved it is easy to see the article outline or other articles containing the same words. In the word

search mode it is possible to search article titles, bibliographies, fact boxes, tables or article text and the option is given to set up relationships with other words. Words can be negated (the Boolean 'not.' function), words can be searched for in exact order or strung together (the Boolean 'or.' function.)

The speed of access is impressive particularly when it is remembered that it is a 20 volume encyclopedia which is being searched. Results of searches are usually on the screen within ten seconds of input, often quicker. A number of sample searches were carried out to test the CD. Kanga\* (\* = truncation symbol) retrieved Death Valley which contained a reference to kangaroo rats, 9 references to kangaroos, and 1 reference to Kanga (A.A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh), among others. A search on infant in the fact box mode gives infant mortality rates for all the countries of the world listed in alphabetical order.

This is an American product levelled at high school students studying in the USA and as such leaves a lot to be desired from the point of view of actual content within an Australian context. Nevertheless it is very up to date, for example Burkino Faso is mentioned (formerly

Upper Volta). African countries notorious for changing their names often take some time to reach the pages of standard encyclopedias.

As an example of a format the Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia is excellent, as an encyclopedia it is adequate. If you are considering other CD-ROM purchases for an existing IBM Computer with a CD disk drive this product is worth investigating, however, problems could arise with physical security of the CD and its software in a public area.

The potential for communication was evident in discussions and demonstrations with ILL and Reference staff. In response to a reference enquiry for example a staff member would search the CD, locate the information and transmit this information back to the enquirer via a network such as Keylink in a matter of minutes. If you have yet to see a CD drive operating try to see one soon, I am sure you will be impressed. The potential for this product is immeasurable.

The Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia is available from Grolier, PO Box 410, Crows Nest 2065 and costs \$330.

Alan Ventress  
State Library of NSW

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