

Technological nirvana?

Reporting on publishing developments from ALIA National Office



Ivan Trundle

Manager,
systems and publishing

Technology never stands still. Developments in the computer, information and communications industries push existing equipment to their limits, whilst new hardware and software is forever offering us a solution to present-day problems. This relentless drive to a technological nirvana propels many a small business/library into financial woes, or into more-complicated systems that are difficult to manage. It is therefore entirely unsurprising to me, even with my background in computing and my role in the Association, that there are those who resist change or 'improvement' to their computer and network systems. I am a firm believer in the principle of using the right tool for the right job, and tend to take many hardware and software vendor's claims with a pinch of salt. The extra bells and whistles afforded by the latest hardware and software are not always the answer to current problems. However, if the whole world moves ahead two steps, it is most difficult to avoid being dragged at least one step in the same direction.

Our network and computer systems policy in ALIA National Office, by and large, reflects this philosophy. To ensure that we take into account a broader picture, we regularly review all aspects of the nature and scope of our service delivery to members to ensure that we have systems that are appropriate for our needs, and that we are using the tools that maintain maximum efficiency and enhance productivity without swallowing up limited funds.

New membership cards

Apart from making necessary changes to hardware and software in preparation for the year 2000 (this process is well in hand, and will be complete in the first quarter of 1999), we shall be taking delivery of a new membership printer (also in the first quarter of 1999) that will allow us to print and issue a better-quality ALIA membership card. We have conducted comprehensive and exhaustive testing with a number of special-purpose, laser, and ink-jet technology printers, and a variety of cards (plastic-coated, paper-based, credit-card style, and other derivatives) to find the most cost-effective method of producing functional, smart, and durable mem-

bership cards. The outcome of our testing was successful, and following delivery and installation of the vital components over the next month or so, we expect to be in a position to issue the new-look membership cards to new and renewing members by February 1999.

Software with personality?

As reported in last month's *inCite*, a new e-mail broadcast service, *aliaNEWS*, is now in operation. All new and renewing ALIA members with e-mail addresses will be automatically added to this electronic list in 1999, and unless a request is received to be removed from this list, communications via e-mail from the ALIA National Office will arrive at regular intervals. We will also place archived copies of *aliaNEWS* missives on ALIANet for reference. The URL has not been identified at the moment of writing, but rest-assured that it will appear in all of the obvious places. *aliaNEWS* will become the biggest e-list that ALIANet has had to manage to date, and I have every confidence that our once-recalcitrant, stubborn and sullen list-serving software will rise to the occasion. Never before have I come across software with personality, but after battling for over two years with ListProc (our list-serving software), I was convinced that we gave birth to a monster that is only just now beginning to show signs of maturity and civic responsibility. Those in the inner circle will know how relieved I was when ListProc finally began to respect my authority. Child-rearing is child's play by comparison.

Like all other e-lists, subscribers to *aliaNEWS* will be in full control of the flow of information. It is possible to unsubscribe and resubscribe at any time, and the list itself is open to all those interested in ALIA activities. To find out more about how to manage the information flow, and to get the most out of your list subscriptions, take a look at the e-list user-manual on ALIANet at <http://www.alia.org.au/e-lists/list-user.html> — it is a very useful manual (I use it *all* of the time). And for the plethora of list owners out there wondering how to control their own lists, take a look at the list-owner manual in the same location. Now if only they had written a manual for list managers... ■

However, if the whole world moves ahead two steps, it is most difficult to avoid being dragged at least one step in the same direction.