

Tomorrow's information...today

West Trade Centre

WHILE TECHNIQUES for storing and retrieving information have raced ahead at government and 'big business' levels, the application of these techniques to normal commercial and consumer requirements has followed more slowly.

A dramatic advance in this area has just taken place in Perth, with the opening of West Trade Centre, Australia's first operating member of the world trade centre organisation.

Heart of West Trade Centre is a highly sophisticated information service, operated through a latest generation Prime (550) computer.

The system works like this: companies subscribing to the service can place detailed information about their goods or services in the computer. This covers 'contact' information — the 'who' and 'where' details — descriptions of the company's goods or services, with the facility to go into fine detail — and background or 'corporate' information in which the company can provide confidence-building back-up data such as references, client lists, company history, number of employees and so on.

A well-structured entry becomes, in effect, an electronic brochure.

The subscriber pays a fee to put information on file. But it is available, free of charge, to anyone who wants it. Enquiries are accepted not only from business sources, but from members of the public. And the service is also available to callers from interstate or



international companies.

Enquiries are processed selectively. A caller asking about architectural services, for example, is not simply given a list of all architects on file. A member of the Centre's staff will attempt to narrow the field by asking questions aimed at eliminating any companies listed who would not be appropriate — perhaps by virtue of capacity or specialisation.

The enquirer is given detailed information on the selected 'short list' companies, including the names of specific people to contact.

One important benefit of the service is that neither the enquirer nor the subscriber should be involved in time-wasting calls of the kind encountered when using conventional directories.

Mr Hans Zeitlin, executive director of West Trade Centre, sees his service as the logical development of the printed directory. 'We call the information service "the directory that talks back"', he says. 'We aim to take the guess-work out of shopping by directory by defining the caller's specific needs and directing him only to those subscribers who can meet them'.

Mr Zeitlin cites two other big advantages over printed directories. 'The main one is the

speed with which our subscribers' entries can be updated. Frequently, entries in printed directories are out of date even before the book is published. Our subscribers can telephone through amendments or additions and they will be processed straight away, ensuring that the entry is always right up to date', he explains. Mr Zeitlin also points out that conventional directories are not always easily accessible, especially to the public. 'West Trade Centre is never more than a phone call away', he says.

Information from the Centre is supplied verbally, with a hard copy printout being given on request. International and interstate enquiries are handled by post or, if urgent, by telex.

Mr Zeitlin forecasts that, in the not-too-distant future, major business organisations, government departments and the media will have their own VDUs linked to the Centre. 'The interest taken in our software by national and international organisations is clear evidence that we are on the brink of an exciting information revolution', he says.

The Centre can be contacted by phoning (09) 325 6844 or by writing to them at 95 William Street, Perth.

Top: VDUs form the basis of the Centre's information service; Below: The Centre is housed in the refurbished central railway station.

