NLA/TELECOM/INSEARCH

Videotex research project

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY of Australia, Telecom Australia, and Insearch Ltd have joined forces to conduct a research project to assess and evaluate the usefulness of an interactive videotex service in the Australian context.

As previously indicated, Telecom has been studying the videotex systems under development elsewhere in the world (eg UK Prestel); France (Antiope); Canada (Telidon); Japan (Captains); West Germany Bildschrimtext — a version of Prestel), etc).

For the purposes of this study both the Prestel International system (see *Incite* no 11, 4 July) and the British Prestel system will be used since these are the only operational systems.

Active investigation

Using direct queries of the system and group interviews in discussion/demonstration sessions data and opinion will be collected from libraries and information services and from librarians and business persons. The relevance of the content of the databases will be tested against a range of queries identified at a variety of collection points. An attempt will be made to cost the use of Prestel as a quick reference' tool.

The study will also look at the role of libraries as information providers as well as the possible applications of videotex for a library network as a closed user group. Scott Sanderson, Manager, Videotex Marketing, for Telecom points out that this study should provide valuable input for their active investigation of the Australian market potential.

Libraries' needs

The interest of the National Library in the study is explained by Brian Yates, Assistant Director General, Science and Technology, who says that 'The National Library is joining with Telecom in funding the Insearch research project so that the usefulness to libraries of a videotex service can be evaluated in the light of hard information rather than just impressions or hypotheses and so that Telecom are aware of the needs of libraries and take that need into account in their planning processes.

'In funding the project the Library believes that the results of the study will be of value to the whole of the Australian library community,' he said.

Marge Broward, Manager for Development, Insearch Information Services, will supervise the study. Project leaders will be Ms Sue Nielsen, lecturer in the School of Library and Information Studies at Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education, and Dr Ellen Baker, lecturer in psychology in the Communications program at the New South Wales Institute of Technology. Mrs Julie Hunt will be Research Assistant.

Participating organisations include the following public and academic libraries: State Library of NSW, Waverley, North Ryde and Bankstown Municipal Libraries, University of Sydney, Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education, and the New South Wales Institute of Technology, plus the information services of the Australian Institute of Management, the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, the Sydney office of the Small Business Agency, and Insearch.

Potential

In commenting on the need for this type of study Brian Yates further stated that 'The National Library believes the library community must evaluate the usefulness of those new methods of information transfer which could be of assistance in helping libraries to

Marge Broward . . . supervising the study

meet the information needs of the community as a whole or of various sections of that community. Mr Yates added that 'We see videotex systems as having the potential to bring library-based information directly into the home or workplace.

'If that potential can be realised in a practical manner then libraries would have another mechanism to link themselves to the community they are trying to serve — an active mechanism which takes the service to the user,' he said.

Market push

Marge Broward noted that it was unfortunate that a lack of terminals precluded the measurement of system response, costs, and attitudes in a real-time setting in each of the libraries as in a recent study by ASLIB.

From a review of the literature on videotex systems and from the experiences of the National Library and Insearch as participants in the Prestel International Market Trial, it seems evident that most databases have been developed by market push. A major objective of this study will be to ascertain how well systems being tested meet the needs of the Australian end user.

Broward believes that working with business persons who are already known to be information conscious and with librarians and information specialists who are perceptive of information needs and knowledgeable about other existing information resources will yield interesting results.

The project is estimated to cost about $10,000 including telecommunication costs. A report of the findings is expected to be completed in January 1981.

Library services on Seventext

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales are co-operatively producing a magazine of pages (frames) on library services for Channel 7's Teletext.

Jo McIntyre, Assistant State Librarian Information Services) and Brian Yates, Assistant Director-General, Science and Technology, are designing the frames, the size of which require that messages be short and clear.

'The Seventext audience,' Jo says, 'is at the moment mainly business, and this has to be taken into account. It's also necessary to work out which National Library and State Library services can be jointly publicised and the best way of doing this.

'Our Magazine,' she said, 'will shortly be on Seventext. It's called *Living Library* and the underlying theme is: if you need information you need libraries.'

There will be more about *Living Library* in a future edition of this newsletter.

Brian Yates . . . 'will be of value to the whole library community'