

AUSINET — A NEW DEAL

THE NEW YEAR will bring a new deal for users of AUSINET, the Australian Information Network. The name will remain the same but there will be new management, new databases, new fees, new hours of operation and, it is confidently expected, new users.

Since 1977 AUSINET has provided online access to a wide range of Australian and overseas databases, using the computer and network facilities of ACI Computer Services (ACICS). It has been overseen by a committee representing users and database suppliers, but from January 1981 ACI will assume 'proprietor' status.

Ian McCallum, ACICS Product Manager for AUSINET and related services, is quick to point out that 'proprietor' status won't mean a take it or leave it attitude towards AUSINET users, currently running at 123 institutions in Australia and New Zealand. The users, mainly from the library community, will largely govern the 'flavour of the offering' in the future.

Ring out the old

ACICS has already established the offering as from 1 January 1981. All of the overseas databases currently offered will be dropped, except for ERIC (Educational Resources Information Centre) and IRRD (International Road Research Documentation).

The other overseas databases currently on AUSINET simply have not paid their way in the past. In the future if you need online access to them you will need to use one of the overseas vendors, such as the DIALOG Information Retrieval Service, the SDC Search Service (ORBIT) or Bibliographic Retrieval Services (BRS).

Ring in the new

On the plus side, ACICS will mount some new databases: *Zinc, Lead and Cadmium Abstracts*, the CSIRO's *Australian Renewable Energy Resources Index*, the Australian component of the agricultural database AGRIS, and ATLAS, a transport index produced by the Bureau of Transport Economics.

And for a three-month trial AUSINET operating hours will be extended by two hours in the evening, mainly to accommodate late searchers in the western states. If the trial is successful hours may be extended permanently.

'Missing' books

PUZZLED OFFICIALS at the National Library of Australia have ordered a top-level investigation to trace more than 120,000 valuable books which may have been stolen.

The works have tentatively been placed on the 'missing' list pending the probe.

A senior librarian said after checking the rolling stock, at least four percent of the three million books in the library could not be accounted for.

The librarian stressed the situation was 'normal', because all major libraries have high loss rates, and said officials were confident most of the books had been placed on the wrong shelves.

But he said some of the valuable works may have been taken by thieves.

From *The Australian* 31/10/80

Exponential growth

The past year or so has seen the ranks of AUSINET users grow from 15 (December 1978) to 32 (December 1979) and to the dizzy figure of 123 late this year. ACICS confidently expects there will be over 200 users by this time next year. McCallum has hopes that public libraries may be among these new users.

To date the only public library to be an AUSINET user has been the Central Highlands Regional Library Service in Victoria. They recently completed a successful trial of AUSINET and their continued use of the system has now been confirmed. Of course many public libraries have used AUSINET indirectly, for example through their state libraries.

New customers for ACICS private database facilities are also expected and a big marketing push for this service is planned for 1981.

Historic diary sold

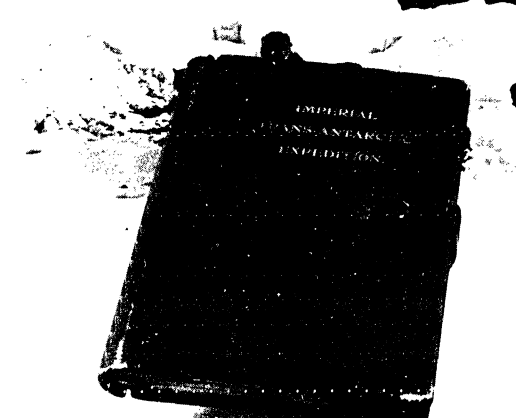
THE NATIONAL Library of Australia has decided to sell an historic diary which it bought at a recent Sotheby's auction in London.

The diary was kept by the Rev Arnold P. Spencer-Smith, chaplain of Sir Ernest Shackleton's second Antarctic expedition of 1914-17.

The diary is to be sold to the Scott Polar Research Institute of Cambridge, England, because it is believed that 'the institute is the most appropriate place for the diary to be held'.

The Library bought the diary for \$3936 and it is to be sold to the Institute for that amount.

A National Library spokesman said it was extremely unusual for the Library to sell any item it collected, although it was empowered to do so under the National Library Act. 'As far as we can say, this is the first time in its history that the Library has sold any of its unique material', he said.



The diary against a photograph of the Shackleton expedition ship 'Endeavour' which was crushed by ice.

Many databases which have started out as private ones have gone public and have become generally available to all AUSINET users.

Going into ORBIT

In a separate development, ACICS is currently negotiating to become the Australian and New Zealand agent for the California based System Development Corporation (SDC) Search Service, whose ORBIT system is used by many Australian libraries and information services. It is expected that the ORBIT agreement will run from January 1981.

Other changes

AUSINET costs will also be adjusted from 1 January 1981. At the time of writing not all the details of the new charges are known.

Some changes to hourly charges have been announced, and we can expect the introduction of royalties to more of the databases. But massive increases in monthly bills shouldn't result.

In other changes, ACICS will assume responsibility for producing documentation about AUSINET and will also gradually take over AUSINET training from the National Library of Australia.

Time of hope

The changes which 1981 will bring for AUSINET are substantial. A heavy burden of responsibility for maintaining, developing and promoting AUSINET rests upon ACICS a commercial organisation which, to date, has shown a good deal of commitment to and support for the system and its users.

It would perhaps have been nice had an independent user co-operative emerged to run AUSINET, but that didn't happen and perhaps it was too much to hope for. So now AUSINET has a commercial proprietor, and all its users, actual and potential, should now look for and demand continued responsive and dynamic service.

At stake is not just a commercial operation but the future of a major slice of Australian bibliographical information. And that's a good deal.

David J. Jones

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