

Pictorial Management Systems

Ian Walker is helping them to go Digital

Archivists and information managers alike have long been concerned about how to provide public access to the vast libraries of photographic material. How can access be provided to items within a collection without damage to those items? What is the value of a photographic collection which can never be viewed by researchers, designers or the public?

For several years Search Tech has been providing pictorial management systems with the pictures stored on a laser video disc: up to 54 000 pictures on each side of the disc, with the discs optionally chained together so that up to 864 000 pictures can be stored in one database. A PC database containing a pictorial description of each picture is used to control the laser disc player and display the pictures within a second.

The laser disc has many advantages for storing pictures—portability, speed and archival quality—but its adoption has been slow. Now all that is changing.

Recent advances in technology now allow digitally based pictorial management systems to outperform video disc based systems. For example, the State Library of Victoria has recently installed a fully-digitised system containing 107 000 pictures.

Until recent times such a digital system would have required excessive disc space for each picture, transmission of pictures across a data network was impractical because of the large volumes

of data for each image and the time taken to display an image was too long, trying the users' patience.

International standards for video and still image compression set in March 1993 have now largely solved these problems and new software and hardware can provide the improved performance. One megabyte images can now be compressed to 30-50 kilobytes with little if any loss in quality, so that 12 000 pictures can be stored on a CD-ROM or 20 000 pictures on a 1 gigabyte hard disc. At the same time the problem of transmitting these smaller picture files across a network has been resolved.

And finally, thanks to the new technology and efficient program-

ming it is now possible to decompress and display pictures on a standard 486SX in approximately two seconds—less than the generally-considered user-tolerance level of three seconds.

These changes mean that we can give access to the picture collection to all the PC users on a LAN. Also, it is now feasible and economic to provide subsets of the collection, with thirty to forty pictures copied onto a 1.4 megabyte floppy disc. And collections can be added to without the cost of having to master and replicate a new videodisc.

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Awards at UTS



The School of Information Studies, University of Technology, Sydney, presented its 1994 ALIA Award for professional involvement to Nola Archer, a graduate from the Graduate Diploma in Information Studies. The Margaret Trask Medal was won by Mary-Anne Rose (seen here with Margaret Trask), a graduate from the Bachelor of Applied Science in Information Studies. Mary-Anne earned the medal for her interpersonal skills, general intellectual capacity and leadership ability, together with her professional involvement and an overall B grade average in course studies.