Tales from the Cyberhood

The biggest news on the Internet is that Visa International and Mastercard International announced on 5 February 1996 a technical standard for securing transacations over the Internet. The standard is based on RSA encryption technology, is called SET (Secure Electronic Transactions) and will be published on the Web during February. The Internet Society in the US has welcomed the move, which they say will greatly stimulate commerce over the Internet.

According to a recent survey of 320 senior managers at major UK companies conducted by the International Visual Communications Association for Sony Corporation, only 35% consider the Internet an effective business tool: see Australian Financial Review ("AFR") 1 February 1996 page 27. Does this mean that UK managers are more perceptive or less imaginative than managers elsewhere?

For example, in Australia business seems to be embracing the Internet. In January 1996 Strategic Innovation Group released a survey of 109 of Australia's 120 Internet access providers. The survey reveals that there were 200,000 commercial users of the Internet at December 1995 compared to 330,000 academic users, but commercial usage is rising at 8.5% per month: see AFR 30.1.96 page 26.

There are also a number of groups springing up to co-ordinate research and information about the Internet. In Australia, for information on the recently-founded Internet Commerce Association (ICA), contact Phil McCrea at Philip.McCrea@dit.csiro.au and to subscribe to the ICA mailing list send a message to ica-request@syd.dit.csiro.au and type the single word "subscribe". Also, Australian Business Limited (the former Chamber of Manufactures of NSW) has launched ChamberNet, a network to link some of the major industry associations, which will collect, package and publish information about members: see AFR 30.1.96 page 21.

In North America the interest of business in the Internet has become increasingly organised. CommerceNet, a Menlo Park, California consortium of more than 130 companies and organisations, has a charter to increase the use of the Internet for electronic commerce applications. Consortium members are leaders in the electronics, computing, financial services and information services industries. CommerceNet has established 9 active working groups with 18 pilot projects, including on EDI, security, payment mechanisms and smart catalogues. In October 1995 CommerceNet announced the formation of CommerceNet Japan and in November 1995 CommerceNet Canada was founded with 17 members.

Even in the UK, though, cyberthings are happening. The government has established CCTA, a research centre for information systems, which has set up a number of Internet action groups and Collarborative Open Groups. They include the Legal and Regulatory Action Group (contact n.croft@ccta.gov.uk), the Licence and Permits Action Group (contact n.croft@ccta.gov.uk) and the Electronic Commerce Action Group (contact n.hopkins@ccta.gov.uk). Information about the COGs is accessible at www.open.gov.uk.

Hyper Links

The mother of all legal sites has to be AustlII's Foundation Law, the initative of the Law Foundation of New South Wales. It is certainly the largest law-related Web resource. It is located at http://www.fl.asn.au

The Editors hope to include a feature article on AustlII and Foundation Law in the next (May) issue of the Journal. The article may include a roadtest of Foundation Law so that readers can become familiar with its features and benefits. We hope to also include an article describing the process of designing and running a tender process for the provision of services from an Internet Service Provider, drawing on the experience of the Law Foundation and AustlII.

For a commercial focus, companies interested in bidding for contracts in Asia will appreciate a site developed by the Asian Development cousin to the World Bank, containing details of requests for tenders on regional development jobs, at http://www.sfe.com.au/

Law journals in electronic form seem like an idea whose time has come. The Editors hope that the Journal may be available on-line sometime this year. In the meantime, other electronic versions of various law journals can be located at http://www.dpie.gov.au/ which is a site run by the International Public Affairs branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. You can also catch the Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law at http://wwwlib.murdoch.edu.au/

For a good time, though, call in at the Web site of the famous American magazine, the Utne Reader, at the Cafe Utne at http://www.utne.com/cafe/cafe.html. This site runs conferences on themes including the repercussions of the information age, which has topics such as censorship and the pros and cons of virtual communities.