

## New information systems 00.03

# VIEWDATA/TELETEXT

**T**ELEVISION BUFFS will be aware that the Channel 7 Network has entered the 'information game' with the introduction of its teletext service – **Seventext**.

But are you aware that libraries in cities such as London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Liverpool, to name but a few, are operating a viewdata system called Prestel?

In case some readers are wondering what is meant by teletext and viewdata (I'm still wearing my 'L' plates!), the basic difference is that teletext is broadcast with the television picture signal, whereas the viewdata signal is, at present, carried over normal telephone lines. The equipment necessary for you to obtain teletext is a television set and a decoder; with viewdata you require a terminal or a specially adjusted TV set, a modem and a telephone.

□ □ □

### Viewdata

Over the past few years the British Post Office has developed the viewdata system called Prestel. In the early days of the system's development it was known as Viewdata, but because of problems over registering this trade mark, the name was changed to Prestel.

Similar systems have been, and are being, developed in many countries throughout the world. For instance, in France, a hybrid system called Antiope Videotext, caters for both teletext and viewdata; and the Canadian system, Telidon, has the ability to reproduce involved graphics.

A major problem at present is that an international standardisation has not yet been established. It is understood Telecom is investigating all available systems to ascertain which one might be best suited for Australia.

An international version of Prestel is here in Australia at the moment on a market trial. Understandably, the amount and type of

### Prestel International . . . in Australia



information available on the Prestel International System at this time is limited.

For the trial, information is available on categories such as: stockmarket prices, exchange rates, political situation in 150 countries, international living costs, airport delays, weather, entertainment, international news, business and sporting events.

As the British Post Office says 'Only a limited number of carefully selected information providers have been invited to contribute to the data base in order to ensure that the information is accurate and as well presented as possible'.

From information received, it appears that the only Australian information provider at the moment is News Limited.

The BPO will be monitoring the market trial and are expected to give it the 'green light' around September this year.

□ □ □

### Teletext

Teletext has been in Australia for the last two years, and ATN-7 has been transmitting teletext information on a trial basis since then. The teletext licence was announced on 4 February this year, since which time ATN-Seventext has been fully operational six days a week.

Teletext was originally developed by the British Broadcasting Corporation, UK, in 1971. Its original use was intended to be subtitling television programs for deaf people, however it was subsequently discovered that teletext could also be used as a means of transmitting brief written information on the television signal. Since 1971, both the BBC and ITV have developed teletext services offering up-to-date news, sports, and weather information as well as a wide range of other information.

ATN-Seventext is Australia's first teletext service and provides Australian viewers with four 'Magazines'. Magazine One carries the 'instant' news (news headlines, sport, weather, finance, etc); Magazine Two is a general interest magazine (theatre programs, recipes, NRMA information, etc); Magazine Three has technical and background information about teletext; and Magazine Four is for the punters – TAB information on racedays.

□ □ □

### Will libraries survive

Systems such as viewdata and teletext must make radical changes in the supply of information. Will librarians see the systems as friends or foes?

I do not assume for an instant that I have the ability to see into the future. But it doesn't need a crystal ball to see that the pace of change is accelerating. Can libraries keep up with the pace? The answer must be yes, otherwise the library profession could join the

ranks of the Dodo and the Tasmanian Tiger.

Libraries, if they are going to survive in the next century and be effective information places, must greet systems such as viewdata and teletext with open arms; understand their capabilities; and learn how to use them to the advantage of all concerned.



Entering data into ATN's Seventext by means of an editing terminal

The next time you walk past a shop or large department store selling computer games have a look at the number of people interested in these games – there's always a crowd. What would you say if there was a crowd like that in your library?! If you were to instal a viewdata or teletext system in your library the probability is that the demand would be tremendous. If people were flocking to libraries, demanding to use new systems, then it would be evident that the demand was there and therefore more funding was essential.

□ □ □

### Escalating costs

Some may say the systems are far too expensive – nothing is cheap these days. Book prices have escalated to a frightening extent over the past year. This will continue.

Paper is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity. Have you noticed that *Incite* has been printed on three different stocks of paper this year? The reason is that sometimes the paper we use is not available. When it is, the price has increased, on occasions, by 20 percent from the previous month.

Will the day come when there's no newsprint for newspapers? If this happens you can bet your bottom dollar that all news pages will be relayed via the home TV screen. Who owns the TV channels anyway?

But not everyone owns a television set, let alone a telephone. So where are those people to get their information from?

Will the Department of Social Security instal viewdata and teletext systems so that people in dole queues can watch the news while waiting for dole cheques? Or will libraries instal the systems, and be information providers as well as users, so that they, and not others will be the information providers of the future? □