

NEWS

COMMUNICOPIA INTERNATIONAL LINKS

New technology will bring international services into consumers' homes

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A New York Times/CBS News Poll indicates most Americans are willing to pay for the privilege of controlling what is shown on their televisions, and recent technological developments can make that, and other things, possible.

Equipment in place now combines the capabilities of television, the telephone, and the computer with satellite uplinks to multiply the flow of information, said Ted Creech, a Southern Bell spokesman.

The reach of the businessman has already been expanding overseas, and eventually the homeowner will have the privilege of controlling the entertainment coming into the living room, Creech said.

With the development of satellite communication and advances in telecommunications, vast amounts of information can be carried from one end of the world to the other.

"With the use of fiber optics, a company can carry as many video signals as you want, and the quality is high. Also, improved switching in phone companies

can squeeze a lot of information into copper cables and transmit it," Creech said.

The big phone companies began installing fiber-optic connections between major cities in the 1980s, Creech said.

Southern Bell has begun laying down the same lines in Columbia this year, he said.

Fiber-optic cable uses thin strands of glass that can carry larger amounts of data in optical currents; but the connections between phones and phone companies, televisions and local cable-TV operators, are not fiber.

Homes won't need to be re-wired before service can be complete, said Roger Dougal, a USC electrical and computer engineering associate professor.

"There are little boxes that connect to

your TV or your computer that change the optical signal to an electrical signal," Dougal said.

Already major cable operators and telephone companies are scrambling to get a piece of that pie. Tele-Communications Inc., the world's largest cable-TV operator, will market a new cable decoder early next year that can deliver up to 540 channels. Hughes Communications will introduce a satellite system that can deliver up to 150 channels, Creech said.

Major companies are building their own interactive networks so anything the customer wants to see will be as close as a phone call or the buttons on your TV set.

The role of existing broadcast networks can be taken over by libraries of information owned by businesses, which can relay the data anywhere in the world by satellite.

Users can link up with communication lines and request anything, including movies, the latest books and business information from any company.

This will probably be a "pay-per-use kind of thing," Dougal said.

"And South Carolina banks already have the ability to link up with international business. If you look, you'll see the satellite dishes on their roofs," Creech said.

Commercial companies put their own satellites into space. IntelSat and ComSat are consortiums to which businesses contribute to develop space communication; also, the phone companies have them, Dougal said.

"I regularly communicate with people in foreign countries through InterNet," Dougal said.

In the June issue of American Journalism Review, John Morton, a newspaper analyst with Lynch, Jones & Ryan, hints at a time in the future when we may

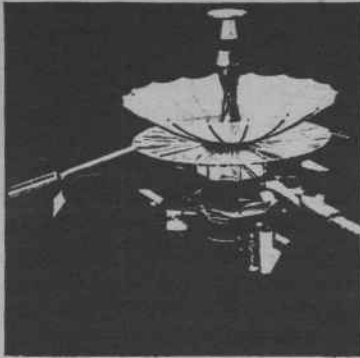
carry around electronic newspapers in our pockets for instant news, or stock quotes, or any of the information usually found in a newspaper or with a phone.

He said America is now rearing a generation educated in schools to use video display terminals as primary sources of information.

"It is possible that when this generation comes of age in 10 or 20 years, using an electronic display tablet or a home terminal will be second nature," Morton said.

But having the capability available does not assure that a mass market will develop, because most consumers don't have a pressing need for instant information, Morton said.

The biggest advantage to the consumer is they will no longer have to settle on whatever happens to be on TV for their relaxation and entertainment. They will have a wide array of choices on programs, dial-a-movie, interactive video games, video phone calls to friends, or books from electronic libraries. Communications will no longer be a passive experience, but an active, two-way process.



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