
Pacific telecommunications users: A spectrum of requirements

By Danielle Mihram

*Assistant Curator, Bobst Library
New York University*

The ninth annual meeting of the Pacific Telecommunications Council.

The ninth annual meeting of the Pacific Telecommunications Council (PTC) was held this year, as in previous years, in Honolulu, January 18–21, 1987. PTC is a voluntary, independent organization which promotes the development, understanding, and beneficial use of telecommunications in the Pacific region. With headquarters located in Honolulu (1110 University Ave., Suite 308, Honolulu, HI 96826), it is governed by an international board of trustees, and its annual meetings provide a forum for the latest developments in telecommunication technologies, as well as governmental and organizational policies and regulations regarding the use and servicing of communication links. A report on PTC '85 appeared in *Library Hi Tech News*, July/August 1985.

The focus of this year's conference was on the users of telecommunications. Its general theme, "Pacific Telecommunications Users: A Spectrum of Requirements," attracted to Honolulu a record number of registrants—about 157 individuals from 29 countries (not including exhibitors). When compared to earlier meetings of the PTC, this conference was somewhat of a disappointment for those who might have hoped to find workshops or discussions dealing with the needs and requirements of "small users": that is, individual users or relatively small companies (rather than small geographical

areas such as islands or rural areas) as opposed to national or international organizations. In contrast to PTC '85, where a library workshop was part of the program, the scope of the presentations and papers remained, to a very large extent, at the national and international levels, and dealt with the daily concerns of very large private, governmental, and commercial enterprises involved in broadcasting, data transmission (whether cable, fiber optics, or satellite), electronics, and telecommunications. A number of papers concentrated also on the latest developments in equipment, linkage, and servicing of very large telecommunicative systems.

The program featured plenary and concurrent sessions, as well as working groups, and concentrated on three major areas of interest: "state of the art" reports from those providing the services and facilities (e.g., AT&T, British Telecommunications International, Japan's Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications), updates on current developments by the regulators of such services, and papers by those concerned with the social, economic, and policy aspects of telecommunications. In addition to the conference, one had the option to register (for two days following the conference) for tutorials on topics related to telecommunications: VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminals) technology, videoconferencing, patents for telecommuni-

cation systems, and ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) from the user's perspective.

Each day a plenary session was followed by sessions on related topics, the conference's overall program being divided into three major parts:

1. Large Business and Industrial Users (with sessions on users perspectives (Japan and USA), national developments (Chile, Japan, Korea, and USA), and technical applications (Japan and USA)).

2. Governmental and Public Users (with sessions on public and private networks (Australia, Canada, and USA), shared tenant services and teleports (USA), and the use of broadcast media and information systems (Canada, Japan, and USA)).

3. Remote and Small Users (with sessions on rural and remote users (in Australia, Canada, Korea, and Micronesia), educational uses (in Canada, Fiji, and USA), and applications of small aperture earth stations (in Hong Kong, Japan, and USA)).

From the brief overview of the countries represented by the authors of the papers presented, it is clear that the predominance of speakers originated from Canada, Japan, and the United States.

In view of the conference's very general theme, one could not anticipate (prior to receipt of the final program) that the meeting would not include sessions which focused on the needs and requirements of the "small users" (as I have defined the term). There were, however, a few papers which seemed to discuss concerns common to both small users and large national or multinational organizations. One paper in particular, "International Users: Their Place in Planning," presented by Peter Smith (vice-chairman of INTUG, International Telecommunications Users Group), dealt specifically with the essential needs of users; yet, here also it became clear that the users in question were by no means "small." Nonetheless, the ten major issues (or "ten commandments" to use his terms) could very well be applied to the concerns of the individual user or of a library.

INTUG, a non-profit organization, promotes the international interests of telecommunication users, and urges user and user group participation in the development of national and international policies. That organization is by no means small: it comprises 44 member organizations (themselves quite large, e.g., EUSIDIC, which itself comprises 1,800 organizations in 27 countries, including library associations) and its main *raison d'être* is twofold: standardization in the industry, and maximum freedom for the user in the choice of telecommunication needs. That last requirement is apparently not easily satisfied in government-regulated industries; hence the thrust of INTUG's activity.

Smith presented the goals of INTUG as a set of ten requirements which, when summarized, centered around two major areas: first, the need for the development of a "benign telecommunication infrastructure" so that national and international legal and regulatory environments be kept under

active review and adapted to ever-changing technological developments, thus eliminating the current existence of complex standards, as well as the strict regulation and interference by some governments.

Secondly, Smith voiced concern about the current lack of freedom to choose among competitive suppliers, a freedom presently restricted by monopolies among the suppliers of equipment. Closely related to this freedom to choose, and its many consequences, were considerations such as the reduction of barriers (governmental regulations as well as contractual restrictions by vendors) to the free flow of information and the need to have available an adequate supply of suitably qualified staff (a rare commodity, currently) to serve those who use the information technology and who are regular customers of the telecommunications industry.

Interesting, and following closely on the theme of free flow of information, was the workshop, "U.S. Technical Data Export, Licence Regulations and National Security," organized by a lawyer, Fred M. Greguras (from Palo Alto, California). The workshop included a discussion of the contrasting views of the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Defense on the regulation of flow of information dealing with U.S. technical data in both the public and private sectors and how such regulations affect both freedom of information and public libraries. For example, Greguras noted the Department of Defense's report of 1985 ("Soviet Accession of Militarily Significant Technology: An Update") and its concern that the compilation of unclassified information into a single database permits extensive manipulation and analysis, and can thus lead to aggregated information which is itself security-sensitive. Greguras, who has had discussions with representatives from Dialog, pointed out that librarians can become involved, very easily and unsuspectingly, in such "sensitive" data retrieval when asked by users to compile very specific searches. He did feel, however, that it would be rather impossible to expect from librarians to become "customs officers" in this process of data retrieval. His paper discusses in detail the various problems (and possible solutions) related to this aspect of information dissemination and retrieval.

As governments undergo pressures for more cost-effective information services (for both internal and external users), the current availability of a wide range of electronic systems (either in the form of Value Added Services—such as videotext, electronic messaging, or text transfer systems—or office information systems, offering in-house electronic mail, electronic filing and retrieval, and electronic publishing facilities) enhances the opportunities for efficient and affordable electronic information dissemination (EID). An interesting paper on that subject was "Electronic Information Dissemination: Opportunities for Users in the Public Sector" (by David Richardson et al., Coopers &

Lybrand WD Scott, Melbourne, Australia), presented by John Spence. The paper outlined the characteristic features of the public sector, examined the potential applications of EID technology, and provided a conceptual model of a large organization, that model being successfully used by that firm when consulting assignments involved the introduction of EID in the public sector. Both the paper and its presentation provided succinct and interesting insights which, judging from the list (included in the paper) of some clients, could readily be applied to small organizations and libraries or agencies using local and/or wide area networks.

One major problem for conference registrants was the scheduling of 19 concurrent workshops in one lengthy afternoon period (2:30–4:45 p.m.)! To add to the frustration, a few of the scheduled workshops, each with interesting topics, did not eventuate (because of absent discussion leaders). As a result, the attempt to roam from one workshop to the other and “sample” the nature of the discussion became frustrating. A better arrangement would have been three 45-minute periods of, say, six workshops each. However, since the position papers of some of the workshops were published in the proceedings, some information can still be retrieved. The topics varied from the specific (e.g., Social Science Networks, Securing Your Communication, Smart Cards, Education at Home Through Teleconferencing) to the general (e.g., Global Implications of the Information Revolution, Telecommunications in the People’s Republic of China, Alternative Telecommunications Financing in Developing Countries).

A major attraction of the meeting was the presentation of USIA-TV, broadcast by WORLDNET, our government’s global satellite television network which provides programming about the USA to more than 70 countries, including daily service to Europe and Latin America.

Their EANET (East Asia Network) is currently being developed for the Pacific Basin area and is scheduled to begin operation on April 1, 1988. WORLDNET’s live “interactive” programs, already in service, allow journalists from all over the Pacific area to participate in unrehearsed press conferences with American leaders in politics, medicine, science, and technology. Those satellite services are currently available to broadcasters, cable systems, hotels, and universities, and, as a demonstration of that service, several video “interactive” sessions were offered and linked sets of world “tele-ports.” For example, one of the subjects covered during those sessions was “commercial arbitration,” which demonstrated techniques directly transferable for use in judicial systems.

Because of the conference’s focus on national and international systems, it is not surprising that the majority of registrants were either executives from large companies or university professors. However, in view of our arrival into the “Information Age” or “Age of Telecommunications,” (two labels frequently used currently), such conferences are of considerable interest and relevance to librarians and library directors determined not only to keep abreast of the new technology in information dissemination and retrieval but also to find ways to interact with representatives closely involved with decision-making—such opportunities, to be heard and to be among the forgers of new applications and policies or regulations in technological advances, cannot be overlooked by librarians (see, in this context, Carlton Rochell’s “The Next Decade: Distributed Access to Information,” *Library Journal* 112 (February 1, 1987):42–48).

Regrettably, it is beyond the scope of this report to review the many interesting exhibits which were part of the conference. Also, one can only touch very briefly on a few of the many topics discussed during the conference’s three days (a report on papers dealing with recent technological developments appears in the September 1987 issue of *Library Hi Tech News*). Similarly, it would be difficult to convey adequately the exhilaration one experiences at the close of the conference when made aware of the existing technology as it could be implemented (excepting, of course, financial and regulatory constraints) and as it is described in the sessions and demonstrated by the exhibitors.

The cost of registration remains problematic (\$450 pre-registration rate for non-members of PTC, \$400 for members) and a discount is offered only to full-time students (\$125 pre-registration rate, \$150 registration on-site). Such fees would obviously discourage many an ALA member from attending. Nonetheless, the proceedings constitute a useful addition to any major library (be it public, research or academic) and should provide useful and practical insights. ■■

Alternative materials

James P. Danky and Elliott Shore are planning a new edition of *Alternative Materials in Libraries*, a book originally published by Scarecrow Press in 1982. One chapter of the new guide will include an updated, expanded version of the directory of “Collections of Contemporary Alternative Materials in Libraries.” If your library has a substantial collection of alternative contemporary social and political materials, particularly those with roots in the activist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. If you have not yet received a questionnaire for the directory, or if you know of similar collections that were not included in the first edition, contact: Ellen E. Embardo, Special Collections, Homer Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut, U-5sc, Storrs, CT 06282.



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