COMMUNITY BASED

TELIDON COMPUTER NETWORKS

Betty Weinstein
Chief, Community Information Systems,
Department of Communications
365 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0C8

and

Robert Fancy

ABSTRACT

Telidon's capability to disseminate information (both text and graphics) makes it an excellent medium to reach a wide variety of users. In order to ensure maximum access to this medium there is a need to establish publicly owned communication systems at the municipal level to facilitate wide public involvement in a computerized network.

It is suggested that the system be operated by a local board-participants in the network directed by a cooperative, not-for-profit governing body.

RESEAUX INFORMATIQUES COMMUNAUTAIRES

RESUME

Télidon est un moyen par excellence de diffuser l'information tant textuelle que graphique à une multitude d'usagers. Afin que ce nouveau moyen de communication puisse rejoindre le maximum d'usagers, il faut établir des systemes publics au niveau municipal qui donneront accès à la population au réseau informatique.

Les systèmes proposés seraient gérés par un organisme à but non lucratif et de type coopératif appelant la participation des citoyens.

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RATIONALE

The basic reasons for developing community-oriented computerized networks on Telidon are the following:

- To create and broaden information sources for all Canadians by establishing mutually beneficial electronic networks between institutions and people in this country.
- To encourage Canadians to become better informed and assist them in obtaining information for better decision making.
- To enlarge the context in which Canadians can relate to each other as improved and expanded information services emerge.
- To show and demonstrate to the Canadian community as a whole the potential uses of computerized information dissemination, in order to ensure maximum participation in Telidon technology by Canadians.

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED COMPUTERIZED NETWORKS

A community information network consists of a group of two or more people within a community who regularly transmit information of concern to the group as a whole. Community information networks consist of members of a special interest group, e.g. women's groups, natives, ethnic communities, and the handicapped, who remain in touch for purposes of mutual benefit.

A network, in the community sense, usually begins as a word-of-mouth information link. As activities become organized and

regularized, the network matures into the use of published information (notices, newsletters, newspaper and magazine reports). For interest groups to grow beyond a neighbourhood size, (e.g. community-wide participation), the network has usually been expanded to provide additional information over radio and television. The possibility now exists to enable these groups to expand their constituency penetration via computer networks.

For example women's groups of a particular community could rent computer time on a community-oriented computerized network and store information on group organizations, activities, and operations using Telidon as the basis of information storage.

If the offices of all women's organizations in the community networks were equipped with a Telidon receiver, the electronic network for that particular group of groups would be complete. It would require a number of Telidon receivers linked to a central computer facility to comprise an electronic network. This would permit specific interest groups to relate to each other in order to send or receive information of particular interest to its members.

Some examples of the type of content of a particular information network

Continuing with the example of a women's network, it might contain some of the following information:

- information about jobs, information for job seekers requiring skills that women might fill or seek;
- up-to-date information about day-care centres, which would assist working women;
- information about re-training courses to assist women returning to the work force;
- a community notice-board providing information which women might want to convey to each other e.g. baby sitting exchanges, barter of clothes, etc.;
- community activities such as dances, sports,etc., which women might like to attend.

This type of content could be replicated by many "communities" to provide information by and for different user groups. Community-oriented computer networks would be operated at the local level by being connected to a local community computer facility.

This would be accessible to local users for both input and access to user communities, organizations and/or individuals who seek to communicate with each other or other network users.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRES

A community information centre consists of a computer which links community information banks together for purposes of community-wide access. A community information bank offers access to a wide variety of information sources to those users in the community who may access it by means of a user terminal.

The community information bank is a two-way door. Not only does it allow other communities to obtain information from a particular community, it enables that community to sell information to other users of that and other networks. Revenues from the sale of commercially useful information stored in the community information bank can be paid as royalties to the information storers and/or shared as cooperative profits among the cooperative members of the facility.

Some applications may be clearly "commercial" (such as Eaton's catalogue) whereas others may be clearly "public service" applications (such as entitlement to unemployment insurance benefits), while somewhere in between lies a large, ambiguous area. For example, consumer advice comparing prices of drugs is no less commercial than advertisements for a restaurant serving meals under $5.00.

However, for purposes of this paper, community-oriented information centres will focus on information providers who specifically seek to provide information for the community as a whole, regardless of whether the purpose of the information storage is commercial or non-profit.

Community-oriented information providers come from four main groups:

- Government (federal, provincial and municipal),
- Independent and quasi-independent voluntary associations,
- Commercial enterprises,
- Individual information providers (e.g. lobbyists, hobbyists).

STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY-ORIENTED COMPUTERIZED NETWORKS

- Establish local Boards to organize local community-oriented information networks.

- The Board of the community information bank would consist of local representatives of federal, provincial, municipal governments, with a controlling membership of representatives of local churches, voluntary organizations, business representatives, educators and union

representatives, who would all be potential information providers -- and users.

- The role of the Board would be to manage and run the Community Information centre, determine local policy for the facility and determine local needs requirements re federal, provincial and local government information to meet local information needs.

- The community-oriented computerized network would be run by its users -- on a cooperative not-for-profit, cost-return basis.

Who would use it?

The network would serve a dual function -- each information user could also be information provider. The information generated by patterns of requests could provide useful information to businesses, educational institutions, governments and others.

Patterns of enquiry could be analyzed in order to ensure useful information provision, providing the data is not segmented and individual privacy is ensured.

Where would the network be located?

Locations could include libraries, municipal government locations, community centres, shopping centres, offices and homes.

Access could also be available to institutional users such as schools, hospitals, farm representatives, offices, and voluntary organization offices.

What should be the characteristics of the network?

- Its prime characteristic should be user-orientation.
- Simplicity of access is essential.
- Information should be useful and timely.

How could this network be governed?

- Direct participation in the network by its users (a cooperative or not-for-profit governing body).

How would the network be financed?

The municipality in which the network would be based would issue industrial revenue bonds to finance the construction of the system. Revenues generated through the system would be used to pay off the bonds and maintain the system.

What would it cost?

Although no direct assessment of cost is now possible, one can state that a large scale databank network would provide economies of scale.

The more people utilizing the system as both users and information providers, the more possible it would be to bring the cost of the system down and lower its cost. The high cost of trained, skilled labor in this field would be used to best advantage by amalgamating trained skills in a centralized location.

Techniques for subsidizing non-profit activities by means of profits from profit-making activities may be devised e.g. municipalities in Britain have utilized this method for subsidizing community information on Prestel.

Some specific categories for the types of content in a community information data bank

- raw data -- statistical or directorized
- analyzed data -- data which has been selected for a specific purpose and analyzed
- data which has been analyzed and processed
- opinion -- subjective, editorialized data -- action oriented data presenting a particular viewpoint.

In order to ensure widespread appreciation of changes taking place, Canadians should be widely informed of the potential applications of computerized information dissemination.

There is a need for "consciousness raising" of the general public by publicizing what this technology can do, as well as discussion of the social, cultural and economic implications.

Organizations, groups and individuals should also be encouraged to act as information providers, with a view to creating a more active, informed population.

A diversity of information providers would ensure choices regarding the type of information available to users.

Because of the need for balanced information, non-profit applications could be subsidized by profit-making services, at the local level.

The issues of access to information on a national and international scale, privacy, copyright and national regulation will not be covered here.

I merely intend to outline one possible model for local Telidon networks. If these do have the opportunity to emerge, this will ultimately serve both Canada's economic and social goals, which are inextricably linked.

I would like to thank Sam Fulton, Bob Fancy and Don Whiteside for their contributions to this paper, the "Friends of the Future" network, who added their ideas and thoughts to this effort, as well as all the concerned Canadians I met with from coast to coast in discussing Telidon and the future.

Appendix A

Organizational Models for Community Based Information System

FIGURE 1

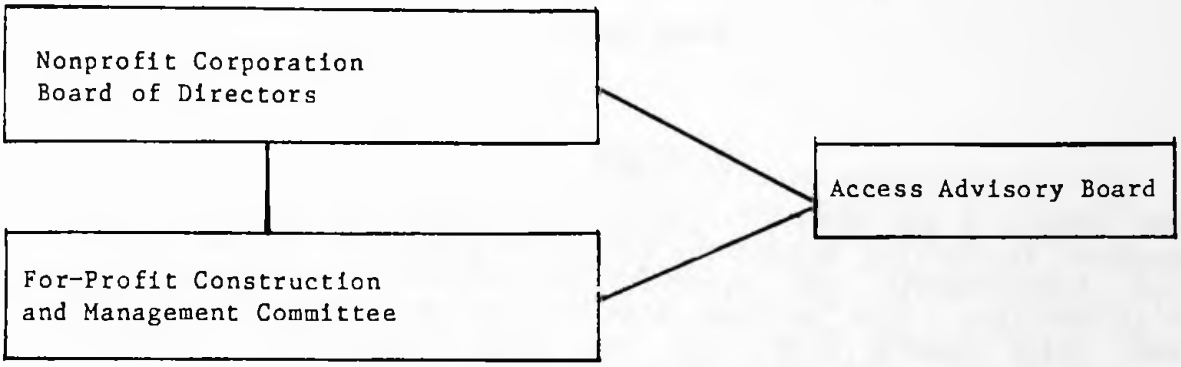
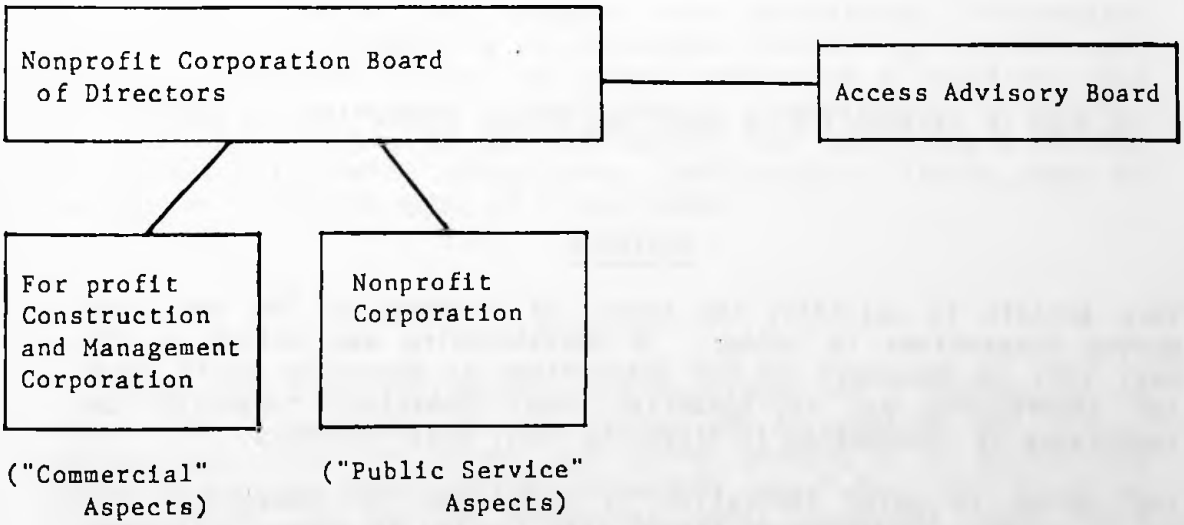


FIGURE 2



Thanks to the Publicly Owned Communications System for the City of Saint Paul, Minn.