

# VIDEOTEX



## ...videotex 'minder' a popular cl

British Telecom employees throughout the UK bring MINDER up on office TV screens every day of the week. It's not that they're addicted to the popular ITV series – it's just the quickest and most convenient means of obtaining up-to-the-minute information, on their own products. It's also an easy-to-use window from which to view the wealth of statistical and analytical detail contained in over 1000 market research reports commissioned across the broad spectrum of British Telecom interests.

'MINDER' stands for Market Information Data Entry and Retrieval a ROCC supported videotex interface between BT's Market Research

Section and BT employees at large. What it offers BT salesmen and others working at the 'sharp end' is a regularly updated file of background information on BT's own range of products and services.

Recently added to the service is a daily 'news headlines' feature, giving concise reports of telephone-orientated stories from that day's press to help BT salesmen keep one step ahead of the customer.

Less timely, but central to the Market Research Section's work, is a complete library of recent market research abstracts covering everything from public attitudes to the directory enquiries service and the latest new product ads to expected

demand for direct dial services to Tobago.

A user interested to see the findings of a relevant piece of research has a powerful range of options to select from within MINDER. If he knows it, he can call up the report abstract by title, date, report number, author, sponsor or general survey type. If, however, he knows only that he wants to see any relevant surveys that have been conducted of Trimphone purchasers in the Southeast with bedroom extensions, he simply enters up to six distinctive 'key words' and orders the system to search its records for abstracts containing all six.

If it finds any, the abstract titles

will be listed and the complete abstract presented to him page by page on demand. In many cases, the abstract will provide the detail the user needs, but if not, a copy of the complete report can be ordered via the electronic mailbox that is a further feature of the MINDER system.

At any one time, BT's Market Research Section is likely to have anything from 12 to 20 such market surveys underway through a variety of independent market research firms, so updating the abstract library is virtually a full-time job in itself.

The challenge of cataloguing this growing repository of survey data in a manner accessible to employees within the respective BT businesses provided the initial spur to development of the MINDER system.

"Videotex commended itself to us from the outset because of its immediate access advantages," commented Paul Wayman, information manager within the Market Research Section, based at Seal House in central London. "Virtually every BT office already had a Prestel set when we started looking seriously at the problem (in 1980), so videotex offered a quick as well as low-cost way of making this library widely available.

Key word search was a vital element in our minds if we were to help people from outside find reports relevant to their interests without lengthy, laborious gleaning of files."

By providing in-house videotex service we could offer such a facility; and so BT decided to put its requirement out to tender from a number of prospective suppliers near the end of 1980.

"ROCC was the ultimate choice," Wayman said, "on a variety of factors, but the proven nature of the system software, together with the support and backup available, were key to the decision."

By autumn of 1981, the system was up and running on an R800/70 with 66MB of data store and 20 input/output ports. Internal publicity quickly got 30-40 terminals signed onto the system, though daily usage rates tended to be low.



"At the start, our fund of information and market research reports was necessarily limited, so users didn't want or need to access the system too frequently," Wayman says. "Since then, we have increased the number of market research reports on file by over five times, and boosted the number of logged-in terminals to over 500.

We've also just added our daily headlines report, which provides a new level of immediacy to the MINDER service."

The headlines service is only the latest enhancement of a major Stage 2 development of the system that began in autumn 1983 to make the system more wide-ranging, yet still easier to use. Among these has been the extension of the powerful key word search facility from the market research abstracts library across the whole of the MINDER database. The database was simultaneously expanded by the addition of the dozens of BT product reports currently carried.

As part of the extension of the service, new ROCC hardware has also been installed, comprising an R2830 with 166MB of data storage and 24 ports to quadruple the MINDER system's processing power. The enhanced capability of this hardware will make possible an even larger but still confidential development of MINDER during 1985.

In the meantime, useful little 'tickles' will continue to be added, such as a planned instant order facility, whereby a user who has reviewed a report abstract can press a single button to order a copy, rather than entering a detailed order form as a separate transaction.

"We were initially concerned whether videotex, for all its user friendliness, could offer the power we needed to make MINDER a truly useful and timesaving tool," Wayman said. "In fact, thanks to the efforts of ROCC Computers' software support team at Crawley, we've been able to build in a great deal more power than we thought possible. The hardware is reliable, and the software has definitely delivered the goods."

## Choice on British Telecom screens.



(Far left) Paul Wayman, information manager and editor, who is responsible for BT's videotex MINDER information system.

MINDER offers a nationwide service to BT salesmen and other BT personnel working at the 'sharp end' offering up-to-the-minute information on BT's own range of products and services. It also offers a daily 'news headlines' feature giving concise reports from that day's press.

(Left) An R2830 with 166MB of data storage and 24 ports to quadruple the MINDER system's processing power is installed at British Telecom, Seal House, London.

Giselle Green, information executive and Tony Fahey, information assistant are discussing a query on a new user being entered onto the system.