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The AMIC Experience - Installation And Use Of Mass Communication Data Base

By

Elsie Bong

&

George Tan
The AMIC Experience - Installation and Use of Mass Communication Data Base

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1. BACKGROUND

AMIC's Documentation Unit was established in 1971 to serve as the resource centre and clearinghouse for communication materials pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Region. Its vast collection of over 12,000 books, periodicals, conference papers, newspaper clippings, photos and audio-visual collection represents one of the largest collections of its kind in the region that concentrates on regional issues and topics. The Resource Centre is utilised by managers and practitioners of the mass media; staff of national and regional development support communication and extension units; policy-makers from ministries of communication/information; and researchers and academics. Numerous institutional requests for information have been received from both local and overseas organisations. Significantly, the number of requests for services provided by the Resource Centre have increased over the years since its inception.

For AMIC to continue to fulfill its commitment to provide and disseminate accurate and timely information on mass communication to its members and institutional organizations, it was imperative for AMIC Resource Centre to embark upon a computerization programme to enhance and expand upon the level of service prescribed by AMIC.

2. COMPUTERISATION OBJECTIVES

The computerisation plan is to achieve the following objectives:

- increase the range of outputs and services on mass communication
- improve bibliographic control especially fugitive materials
- activate a regional network of national information centres specializing on the subject
- promote information exchange with other COMNET centres worldwide
- improve and extend AMIC’s capacity to collect, repackage and disseminate information on communication throughout the Asia-Pacific region
The output of the plan is to facilitate information capture, storage and retrieval through the establishment of the following data bases:

a. bibliographic database on regional literature
b. statistical database on the state of communication in the region
c. a profile database of the region’s research and training institutions; and radio and television stations in member States of the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union
d. database of resource persons worldwide
e. a database on collection of selected samples of communication media used in successful public education projects, and
f. a semi-annual Media Monitoring Service based on news clippings from the major English-speaking dailies of Asia

3. COMPUTERISATION PROJECT

The proposal to computerize AMIC’s Resource Centre had the full support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Under an IDRC-sponsored programme, the computerization project was launched at an estimated cost of C$275,000. The project duration was phased over a three year period commencing in August 1987.

The initial phase of the project comprised the identification, selection and delivery of hardware, software, and staff training. The intermediate phase was for Data Entry activity, while the final phase will be used for networking and information marketing.

INITIAL PHASE

Hardware

For the range of outputs and services planned, the quantity of data to be processed and the need to access external data from the COMNET network and other sources dictate a multi-terminal minicomputer system, accessible by users from the Documentation, Publication, Research, and Training units of AMIC.
The hardware selected was based on following reasons:-

1. compatibility with other COMNET centres (BIBLIOCOM in Canada using MINISIS/HP 3000 and NORDICOM in Finland using CDS-ISIS/IBM mainframe)

2. compatibility with the equipment at the National University of Singapore Library

3. ability to operate on available software packages

4. ready availability of technical support services for the hardware

The HP 3000 system was selected for AMIC as it fully comply with the above specifications.

The total computer system that was acquired comprises an HP 3000 with 15 IBM terminals, 2 MacIntosh publishing subsystems and a laser printer. The MacIntosh serves the need for high quality printed outputs, while the IBM provide the means to accept MINISIS data entry package and CDS-ISIS microcomputer databases from AMIC’s network members.

Software Choice: MINISIS

Why MINISIS?

- MINISIS is a proven software package developed by the IDRC and has been in use for the past 11 years by 160 organizations worldwide

- MINISIS offers deliveries that is suitable for AMIC applications

- MINISIS is compatible with other existing operative COMNET centres eg BIBLIOCOM in Canada and NORDICOM in Finland

- its excellent support service

- MINISIS is constantly upgraded and enhanced by IDRC

- training support conducted by IDRC and held at various geographical locations on a regular basis
Training

Training on the use of the selected hardware and software was instituted to ensure that the benefits of the computerization programme is fully realised. Training on the MINISIS software was provided by IDRC specialists on a gratis basis. Additionally, these specialists conduct regular visits to sites to discuss or resolve problems encountered in the use of the software.

INTERMEDIATE PHASE

Data Entry

Under this phase, the creation of the appropriate Data Definitions vital for establishing the various databases required for data entry. Six databases were created to store AMIC’s collection as follows:

- Duacat - Books/fugitive materials
- Duconf - Conference proceedings
- Ducper - Journal articles
- Duavm - AV materials
- Duclips - Newspaper clippings
- Duserials - Serial titles/holdings

Two Data Entry Clerks were recruited to supplement the Unit’s present staff in data-entry, making a total complement of 4 staff.

At the end of this phase, the Resource Centre has completed the data entry for all but the AV materials. Total records in the six databases is over 23,000 entries, using approximately 135 mb.

FINAL PHASE

We are entering the final phase of the project which focuses on networking and information marketing.
This phase will involve the establishment of formal linkages and strategic alliance with agencies such as ministries of information and communication, broadcasting organizations, and newsprinters. AMIC will identify liaison representatives to form a cooperative regional network with at least one documentation agency in each Asian country. Such linkage, would among things, facilitate

a) the collection of relevant literature in the local languages

b) the availability of bibliographies on media in each country

c) the retrieval of indigenous materials from a country when a request is received by any other centre.

Network members can have access to our data through Telepac Connection.

CONCLUSION

The computerisation programme enumerated above will gear the Documentation Unit to meet the needs of the 1990s.
HP Micro 3000 Computer Configurations