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New Technologies In Communication Research And Documentation: Malaysian Country Report

By

Umitheti Nathan
NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION:
MALAYSIAN COUNTRY REPORT

by

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Submitted to the AMIC-UNESCO-USM Workshop on
"New Technologies in Communication Research And Documentation"
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Penang, Malaysia
22 June - 3 July 1987
I anticipate this workshop on the Use of Technology in Communication Research and Documentation, to be an eye-opener for a computer-ignorant person like me. Having been habituated to the pen and paper as well as to the typewriter and tippex in putting my ideas across, it now seems almost impossible to reorientate myself to the new technology. I have most often than not been afraid of machines, just like how I feared driving a car until I was compelled and pressurised to do so; and thanks to the automobile because with it I have been able to very quickly reach many destinations all by myself. I believe this workshop will help in overcoming my fears and this new piece of technology will take me at immeasurable speed across the horizon.

Institution Profile

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia has a Central Processing Unit (CPU) - IBM4341 Model Group P12 with 16 MBytes memory. The Computer Centre was set up in 1979 when the university management realized the need to cope with increased administrative and academic tasks. The centre handles the following systems:

1. registration & examination system.
2. student accounting system.
3. payroll system.
4. student housing system.
5. student record system.
6. personnel system.
7. transportation system.
8. telephone system.
9. patient care system.
10. general ledger system.
11. student intake system.

The Centre also plans to develop a library system and an inventory and stock system. The computer hardwares available are:

CPU - IBM4341 Model Group P12 with 16 MBytes memory.

Input/output hardwares:

a. disk drive - 13 units
b. tape drives - 5 units
c. line printer - 2 units
d. card reader - 2 units
e. terminal - 110 units
f. terminal printer - 6 units
g. graphics - 13 units
h. data entry terminals - 5 units
Controllers:

a. disk drives controller - 1 unit
b. tape drives controller - 1 unit
c. terminal controllers - 4 unit
d. communication controller - 1 unit with 16 lines that links the remote system to the mainframe.

IBM personal computers are directly attached to the mainframe IBM4341 and also in a cluster network. These IBM PCs have replaced the data entry function of the card punch machines. CMSBATCH facility is widely used by academics and students. The languages and packages available on CMSBATCH are:

a. FORTRAN
b. ASSEMBLER
c. SAS
d. SPSSX
e. PLI
f. COBOL
g. OMNI
h. RPGII
i. NAG
j. ChemShare

Overall, most faculties and departments have a minimum of 2 personal computers - the most popular being IBM (model?). The central facilities are largely used by students especially in writing their graduation exercises.

Conclusion

It is only the fourth day of the workshop, and thanks to UNESCO, AMIC, USM and especially Dr. Vincent Lowe, for I have been able to key my oral report onto the computer screen and I have become familiar with the onetime, so-called jargons. The workshop has been very educational and I am anxiously looking forward to more hands-on experience before the end of the workshop. I believe, and am rather optimistic that I will be far more productive with this newly acquired skill.

Note: I wish to express my appreciation to the Computer Centre, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for their assistance in providing me with much of the information on the computer facilities.
Feedback - Internal PR and Communication Theory Packages

1. Internal PR

As usual the Q-A session was a simplistic and realistic depiction of the PR scenario. What put me off was the lack of decision-making power in the PR person. He had to consult his superior and he had to edit the inhouse journal such that it meets his superior's whims and fancies. As expressed by his boss, the journal needed an improved effort, but when the PR person attempted to do so, he was not encouraged by his boss (poor chap). I think the Q-A should also have included the ethical aspects, and considered to add some discussional points on the issue between the PR person and his boss. Better luck next time!

2. Communication Theory

The good news first. It was very stimulating and exciting. Many a time I was so carried away that I started talking, swearing, praising and apologising to the PC. The questions cover a wide range of topics in communication and related areas.

Now, the not so good news. Do you find this medium serving very conducively in helping to export your culture? Sorry if I sound too harsh or if I seem to sound like a typical Third World spokesperson, but most of the questions are rather culture-bound.

Moreover, multiple-choice responses tend to further limit the non-interactive process between a user and the PC. This probably could be overcome through a discursive approach in the remarks for each response. Overall, it was an educational experience.