AN AUSTRALIAN DOMESDAY PROJECT?

Progress Report

As reported in the previous issue, a feasibility study on the potential for a Domesday Project in Australia was initiated by a Steering Committee of the:

Australian Computer Society
Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Commission for the Future
Commonwealth Schools Commission
Australian Bureau of Statistics
Australian Bicentennial Authority.

The report, titled "A Self-Portrait Of Life In Australia", has been completed and a summary of it is being circulated for comment, as the report itself is very lengthy. A videotape describing the Australian proposal is currently being produced.

The report identifies what a Domesday could look like in Australia, which organisations might be involved, how much it would cost, and how we might finance a project of such magnitude ($5 million).

The Steering Committee has worked for over six months interviewing potential participants to ensure that the building blocks are firmly in place for this exciting project. Nearly 50 organisations including universities, education authorities, government departments, and businesses have contributed to the report, and the mailing list is over 200.

The Committee is currently in the process of returning to the targeted sources of finance with the completed proposal in hand to negotiate actual dollars and cents. It is too early yet to announce whether the project will get off the ground, however, the Steering Committee has raised sufficient funds to continue its work in driving the project forward.

Recommendations from the report indicate significant improvements over the British project in terms of project management and involvement of schools, in user interface and software design, and in technology.

A combination of CD ROM and videodisc would enable Australia to create a product as sophisticated as the British version but at half the price. Both the CD ROM and videodisc versions of the database could be constructed as modules and marketed separately, thus reducing the price considerably further, particularly for schools. Each would be designed to take full advantage of the individual technology's main features: videodisc for pictures; CD ROM for digital data.

It is envisaged that the use of telecommunications in the process of collecting the community data would enable schools to refine and polish their contribution after comparing it with other schools' data on a dial-up database. It is recommended that part of the community collection be based on previous census and Gallup poll results as a starting point for our search for an "Australian identity" in the bicentennial year.

A national education dial-up database could be a continuing legacy of the project and so could "interactive television", an innovative scheme which proposes that there be a regular "Backchat" style programme interviewing communities that are collecting interesting data. Schools would be invited to survey their own local community on the same topic explored in the programme and to transmit their results via telecommunications, or fast mail, to the television station for broadcast and analysis on the next programme.

The report also recommends greater state involvement in planning and implementing the project than the highly centralised British project. This participation would be reflected in the data collected for publication in the "self-portrait". In addition to the British national/community structure, Australia would utilise a national/state/community structure for both the project's process and for its final publications.

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