Teleguide system breakthrough

The technology once described as "being in search of a market" has come into its own.

Toronto's Teleguide system of travel and leisure information has just been sold to San Francisco, one of North America's prime tourist destinations.

The Bay Area Teleguide is the first copy of a complete Teleguide system using Telidon technology and Infomart-developed software, according to William G. Hutchison, president and chief executive officer of Infomart.

"We are now beginning to see real commercial evidence of the application of videotex," says Mr. Hutchison. "I expect we'll be able to announce another four or five such sales to the United States during the coming year."

The $500 000 agreement includes Infomart's ITSS-V2 software, Teleguide operating software, communications network and ongoing consulting. Infomart anticipates that over the next two years additional billings of $2 to $3 million will accrue for hardware consulting services and royalty payments.

Peter Thieriot, president of Chronicle Videotex Inc., owner of the Teleguide rights for the Bay Area, said the company had purchased 300 terminals which will begin appearing in the San Francisco area next January.

Launched just a year ago in Toronto, Teleguide now has more than 460 terminals in place with Toronto residents and visitors alike currently viewing more than 11 million pages of information a month.

Mr. Theiriot says that a number of subscribers — information providers — have joined the system already, including Embarcadero Centre, Emporium Capwell, the Cannery, Hyatt Regency and Hotel Meridien.

"Teleguide is technology made easy — it was designed to be used on an individually controlled basis by people with no particular aptitude for computers," he says. "As the first electronic catalogue of its type, we believe that Teleguide provides enormous benefit to users and information providers alike. We've received indications of support and interest from everyone who has seen the system in operation."

Behind the facades of the Teleguide terminals lie a range of sophisticated technology. Information providers, for example, who wish to show their message, have access to what amounts to an elec-
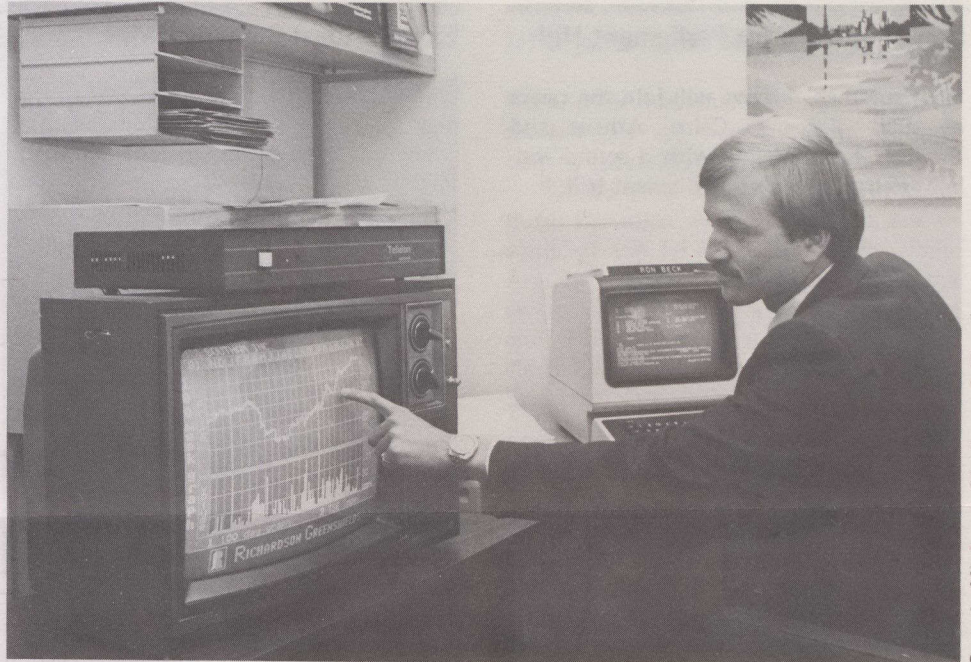
Infomart engineer Ron Beck checks graphic display on a Telidon terminal. Infomart will supply its Teleguide system to the San Francisco Bay area.

tronically based art agency — complete with copy writers and operators creating a screenful of information, enlivened with state-of-the-art colour graphics. Over 3 000 colours and an animated "paint-on" graphic format makes maximum use of logos, advertising themes or other visual elements identifying the business. The textual data is centrally controlled, enabling information providers to update anything from price lists to performance times daily, weekly or monthly.

Following page creation, the information is then stored in Digital Equipment VAX 11/780 computers. These computers will be the main data sortage centres for the Bay Area Teleguide as well.

(From Ontario Technology News.)

Canadian firm to study China's computer needs

China has invited a subsidiary of Canadian National Railways to study its needs for a computerized railways information control and telecommunications system.

CANAC Consultants Ltd. of Montreal, CN's international consulting arm, is sending a team this month to China to begin a four-month $250 000 study funded by the Canadian International Development Agency.

The study will determine whether CN's traffic reporting and control system (TRAC) can be modified to suit China's railway system, said Jacques Marchand, vice-president and general manager of CANAC.

If the Chinese approve the study's recommendation, it could mean more than $100 million for Canadian companies that would supply equipment and training, Mr. Marchand said.

"The aim of the study is to determine what will be required in terms of communications and hardware and software

to have an operation system suitable for the management of Chinese railways," he said.

TRAC is a computer operations system developed by CN in the early 1970s that keeps a record of all rail cars at any given time on the CN Rail network.

"We can find out when the cars will be empty and available for another load," said Mr. Marchand, explaining TRAC allows cars to be dispatched quickly and reduces the time between loadings.

"Since the system has been in operation, CN has avoided purchasing 20 000 cars, representing $1 billion in capital expenditures," said Mr. Marchand.

He said he expects the Chinese to respond quickly to the study because China, engaged in a modernization policy, seems to be interested in catching up in the data-processing field. Mr. Marchand said CANAC, which has performed work in Africa and other parts of the world, has also done a study for India's railways.