



John Bianchi

into the system, you cannot only transmit them: you can process and manipulate them as well. We have been doing this with our own CAN/OLE system for many years now." (CAN/OLE or Canadian On-Line Enquiry is a system for searching the scientific and technical literature).

As an example, Wolters points out that CISTI, the great science library for which he works, must respond to hundreds of requests for scientific information each day. CISTI's version of electronic mail enables the library to display simplified, interactive request-for-document forms on terminal screens all over Canada, ensuring that inter-library-loan requests are correct and complete the first time around, and serving those who make the requests with maximum accuracy and speed.

"To make sure that our message system could be adapted to our requirements prior to proceeding on a national scale, we developed and tested a series of scripts in cooperation with Bell Northern Research and the Computer Communication Group. For our specific needs this proved to be a highly successful private sector/NRC proj-

ect. After only 6 months we are now receiving over 800 requests per month for documents via our system."

As well, Wolters and others within the NRC are now devising electronic means to store, retrieve, and cross-correlate the information in electronic mail. In this way, CISTI can channel electronic requests to the most appropriate people, adding its own comments and noting the redirected request for possible later reference.

And there's more in store. Says Wolters, "Once we attach a micro-processor to an electronic mail terminal to 'download' its data or interpret them to a more powerful machine, we can get quick, reliable information for our systems managers. Now it's pretty time-consuming for us to gather statistics showing us exactly which regions and industrial sectors generate the requests we respond to. If every piece of mail on the nationwide electronic-request network directed to CISTI were noted by a special program, our managers could know at the push of a button that a particular organization didn't seem to know about our services, or that interest in, and use of, scientific and technical information seemed high in, say, the aircraft industry. We could then take the appropriate action.

"For example, we might have to strengthen our database in production engineering if we found we were unable to field requests of that sort in-house. We receive a quarter of a million document requests a year now. That's impossible to analyse fully without the help of a computer."

How does one get to use the CISTI system? Much as for Telidon, a firm or individual simply contacts the Trans-Canada Telephone System and subscribes. Newcomers to the system need an hour or two to pick up the basics; those already familiar with the care and feeding of computer terminals often need less time. Authorized users receive a unique password and can then use the CISTI system at need.



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