

The new system will allow BICOs to search for a document using its header (date, author, addressee, etc.), file number, or text of the material itself. As a result, the process will be a lot more efficient. "We expect we'll have a higher success rate when people make obscure requests," one MIR staffer comments.

Rick Dossett, Acting Manager of BICO Services in MIR, says that CATS will make a world of difference to everyone concerned. "Now when we have a request for a letter or document, we often have to delve through backlogs of unfiled material. With CATS it will already be in the automated text storage file. We'll have it at our fingertips without having to hunt all over the department for the file. Our work will be much faster, and that will pay off for users."

CATS system to evolve

CATS will be operational in Phase II. After the change-over date, all new material, whether electronic or paper, will be handled through the CATS system. The current records system will continue to be used to locate older material.

David LaFranchise, Acting Deputy Director of Records Information Systems in MIR, says that some aspects of CATS will evolve over time. "In a sense we're feeling our way. The technology has run far ahead of our ability to plan how people are going to use it." In the meantime, he and colleagues in the MIR working groups, who are developing procedures for CATS, promise a streamlined records information system to unify access to paper documents, electronic text and data.

Tag it "formal"

Whether your message is "formal" or "informal" will to a large extent determine where you file your documents. An official letter, memorandum or telex is considered a formal message. It must be filed as such, and will automatically be stored in CATS. You may also choose to file a formal message in your personal or shared cabinet for ready reference.

However, a comment, opinion, or round-trip memo is "informal" and won't be filed to CATS automatically. Dossett is anxious for all COSICS users to understand the reason for formalizing official information.

"In order for us to provide fast and accurate retrieval of documents, it's important that users send those documents through the formal mechanisms to the CATS database."

COSICS Previewed at HQ Demonstration Centre



Joanna Barclay of DEC conducts COSICS workshops at Headquarters.

(Photo by Ron Devries)

From early June to mid-October, more than 1000 employees got a glimpse of COSICS' possibilities in the Demonstration Centre at Headquarters. Staff from Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) ran a series of daily workshops for the Department, demonstrating the main functions of the COSICS system in English and French.

There were 165 demonstrations. They included "a day in the life of a COSICS user," giving an overview of the system; and detailed looks at the electronic mail function; TEAMDATA, the database and spreadsheet program; WPS-PLUS, the word-processing program; and Time Management, the daily calendar.

Most of those who attended the workshops found them to be very well presented and a useful introduction to COSICS.

Transition into COSICS

As the installation of COSICS proceeds in the pilot areas of the Department, neither CATS nor some aspects of the shared filing systems are fully operational. However, all information is being captured and will be filed to records in paper form.

David LaFranchise points out that CATS working groups are ready, willing and able to field questions and opinions on anything to do with records. "Start with your own BICO or records service, and let them know what you would like to see. We don't want people to have unrealistic expectations of CATS, but the new system will let us put more effort into providing service rather than putting away paper."

Your Local COSICS Representatives

When your turn to get a COSICS terminal rolls around, one of the people you will meet is your TSSO, that is, your Telecommunications and Systems Security Officer.

As COSICS moves into the Department, communicators are receiving training for new COSICS-related duties. Most of what the CMS-turned-TSSOs will be doing is behind the scenes, somewhat sensitive, and rather technical. Some of the TSSOs' responsibilities, though, entail direct service to users: the TSSOs are the local representatives of COSICS. Familiarity with some of the jargon might make communication with your former communicator a bit easier.

When HCLP¹ and later the Ottawa COSICS Centre or your post TSSO gets the order to put a new user on the system anywhere in the world, a **user²** account is "built" for that person. The TSSO or Ottawa COSICS Centre:

- lets the system know that a new user is joining the system;
- develops a **user name³** (for now it consists of your last name, initials, and a number in case there is more than one user with the same name, such as BELLMR1 or MARCHANDS1; later the user name may include an indication of the location of the user, such as your division's symbol or the city where your mission is located);
- tells the division or mission that the account is ready; and
- assigns your first **password⁴** which will give you **access to your user account⁵** the way your P.I.N. number for your banking machine gives you access to your bank account.

Have you ever come back from a vacation and found that you cannot remember your combination? If you have forgotten your COSICS password, the TSSO will give you access to the system. Then once you are logged on, you will be issued a new password.

But the job of a TSSO is not all glamour. **ALL-IN-1⁶** has an electronic "wastebasket" where it keeps any **files⁷** which you have deleted until you tell it to "empty" the waste basket. Until it is emptied, you can retrieve any file from it: it's something like fishing a piece of paper out of your regular wastebasket for a phone number or name. But if you never empty your electronic wastebasket, it is the TSSO who will have to step in after about a week and do it for you. Note, though, that the TSSO cannot read your files: your account is personal, and no one else, including the TSSO, has access to your files.

Are you a night owl? When COSICS is set up in a mission or division, normal operating hours are determined by local conditions and needs. The details are still being worked out, but in general, if you need to work after normal COSICS operating hours, you can let the TSSO know so that your terminal remains connected after hours. Similarly, if there is a crisis in the middle of the night, system security requires that the TSSO abroad will have to go into the mission to arrange terminal access to COSICS, just as communicators do now when they have to send or receive urgent telegrams. Some things never change.

Finally, the TSSOs **back up⁸** the system on a scheduled basis so that there is a second copy of each file in case anything happens to the first. If there are any other problems with the system, the TSSO will be the first to try to work them out. They have been trained to run tests on the system to diagnose the source of the trouble. Then, depending on the problem, the TSSO will replace the module or component, call in a regional technician, or consult with Ottawa.

So when you find out that you are getting your COSICS terminal, take out this article again and bone up on the terminology. You may find the whole process more "user friendly".

¹ The computer centre in the depths of the Pearson Building.

² A "user" is anyone using COSICS.

³ The form of your name which the system recognizes.

⁴ A series of letters which you type on your terminal to get access to your COSICS files.

⁵ Will allow you to use COSICS and your personal files in COSICS.

⁶ The collection of programs which COSICS runs for messaging, word processing, for creating spreadsheets and databases, and so on.

⁷ Messages, reports, or any documents you work on using COSICS.

⁸ To make copies on removable media such as disks or tapes of all files on the system.