

Phone sells over counter

Experiments in a new approach to selling the telephone service, in which customers can buy a telephone in a shop and connect it themselves to prewired houses and apartments, are meeting with considerable success in some parts of Canada.

The idea of a "phone store" system — to by-pass labour costs involved in the conventional system of service calls to install telephones at the customer's request — has been talked about since the 1960s. Last April the British Columbia Telephone Company opened a phone store in West Vancouver, in an area of high-rise apartments with a high population of mobile young people living in them.

They first converted 22,600 housing units to plug-in phone outlets with an average of three outlets per unit. Then they opened the store and awaited results. Business has varied between 50 and 300 customers per month and is being watched carefully so that trends can be established before a decision is made on extending the service.

Under the new system, houses and apartments are prewired for a telephone, with outlet jacks in several rooms. Once done, this remains a permanent fixture of

the house. The occupant is under no obligation to have a telephone or pay any rental. If he wants to be on the phone, he goes along to the store to choose a telephone and sign on for the service. He can then take his telephone home and plug in, moving it around the different rooms as required.

When the telephone bill comes in there is one major difference from the normal service. No extra charge is made for having more than one place to plug in. The outlet jacks used on the new system are mechanically different from the extension phone jack in common use (for which subscribers are charged extra).

Trials of the new system are also being run in the Kingsland area of Calgary, Alberta, and in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Bell Canada have been setting up trial systems in Guelph, Ontario and in Longueuil and Sherbrooke, Quebec.

The first do-it-yourself phone system was put into operation by an American Telephone and Telegraph Company (Bell system) subsidiary four years ago in a high-rise apartment complex in Florida. It was a success; people did go shopping

for telephones.

Another experiment to test reactions of people living in a community with different types of neighbourhoods was conducted by the General Telephone and Electronics Corporation of Los Angeles at Marina Del Rey, beginning in June 1973. The installers had some difficulty in making contact with householders to gain admission and install their plug-in outlets. But almost 90 per cent of customers requiring new installations or moving had come to the store. Of those having problems with their phones, 48 per cent came in.

Don Schumacher, director of marketing for the company, reckons that these encouraging results are due to the convenience of a phone store. Subscribers don't have to make an appointment and wait in for the telephone installer to arrive. They can stop in at the store when they happen to be out shopping. It is to the company's advantage that the customer can see all its products and try them out before deciding what to have. One significant development was that sales for pushbutton phones increased by 16 per cent. ♦

Agriculture:

Research extends northern farming

While some of Canada's best agricultural land in the south disappears each year under the concrete of urban sprawl, researchers are working to push the farming frontiers northwards into areas not previously considered very suitable for growing crops.

The Federal Government has an agricultural research station at Beaverlodge, Alberta, 270 miles northwest of Edmonton near the British Columbia border, which is the hub of a northern research group. Attached to it are two experimental farms at Fort William, Alberta (340 miles north of Edmonton) and Prince George, British Columbia. It is also responsible for studies of farming in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, where the main problem is the short frost-free growing season.

Research in the far northern areas has been limited because the need is not critical at this stage, but there are now about five million acres in agricultural

production in northwest Alberta and northeastern British Columbia. Dr. Lloyd Spanglo, director of the research station, says there is a potential of 14 million acres more. "This is exciting and presents a challenge to our scientists in evolving ways to use the land to best advantage."

One problem in getting agriculture underway in the Peace River area where the station is situated lies in the attitude still prevalent among most Canadians who persistently regard the area as "far North." Dr. Spanglo says, "There is a general acceptance that the Peace River region is the end of civilisation and we've even had people ask if we close the research station during the winter."

In fact, though they have a short growing season, the climate during that season is generally warmer than Edmonton. Most research at the station is concerned with the interaction between crops and the environment — that is, the climate and soil.

Because of the short season, farmers in this area must be quick off the mark with seeding in the spring or their crops won't ripen in time and they will get caught by the onset of winter. But Dr. Spanglo's colleagues in the south dispute his argument that it is much easier to manage a farm in Ontario because there, they say, all sorts of other factors enter in. "Here if it is Saturday and the fishing is good you don't have a choice — the seeding must be done!" Dr. Spanglo explains.

The area is good for forage and grass production and rape seed has proved a good crop in recent years. When the land was first settled in the 1930s by wheat-oriented farmers from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, they did not do so well. Today, as the first-generation farmers are being replaced by younger successors, wheat is gradually giving way to crops more suited to the region. ♦