

Features

Electronic shopping growing

United Press International
NEW YORK — Electronic shopping by means of cable television and two-way video terminals in the home, talked about for years, becomes a reality in a number of American cities this year.

At least three two-way systems will be introduced.

Actually, electronic shopping will be only a small part of the capabilities of the new systems, known generically as two-way videotext display. People also will use them to pay bills, execute banking transactions, and to retrieve educational information and news from computer databanks, plus services as yet unforeseen.

Cox Broadcasting Co. of Atlan-

ta will inaugurate service in New Orleans, Omaha and San Diego, using equipment made by Oak Industries' CATV division of Crystal Lake, Ill.

Tocom, Inc., of Irving has sold equipment to Storer Broadcasting Co.'s cable division in Atlanta to be used in the Louisville and St. Louis markets and the northern Kentucky area across the Ohio River from Cincinnati.

Telidon Videotext Systems, Inc., of Stamford, Conn., a subsidiary of Informat of Toronto, has sold its system to Times-Mirror Co. of Los Angeles, which will install about 200 terminals in homes in Los Angeles and Orange counties in Southern California.

Dr. Gary Tjaden of Cox Broad-

casting and Gary Frank, a marketing official of Oak Electronics, said Cox expects to put 60,000 of the two-way text and transactional terminals in homes within two years. Cox expects to have 300,000 cable subscribers by that time and believes 20 percent of them will take the new service.

The basic fee for the Cox service will be \$4 a month, with a schedule of additional charges for more deluxe services, Tjaden said. Two subsidiaries of American Can Co., Home Service and Fingerhut, a mail order selling firm, will provide merchandise services for the Cox cable television databank, which also contains news, educational, transportation and other data.

Cox plans to offer two merchandising services. One will be a marriage of printed catalogs with code numbers which a purchaser can use to get additional information

from the databank and make arrangement for payment and delivery or pickup. The other service will provide a way of instantly ordering something that interests you and scheduling payment and delivery after seeing it advertised on cable TV.

Tjaden said eventually it will be possible for the databank to guarantee delivery of almost anything ordered within 48 hours. "The big problem," he said, "was to work out a reasonably good method of bill payment."

Many sellers of goods and services can take part in these systems.

Cox will start full service in San Diego as early as April, in Omaha probably in June and in New Orleans later in the year. Tjaden said the Omaha market alone has a potential of about 21,000 home videotext terminals.



Photo by Sue Mc...

What happened to fetching bones?

Knowing what living in the rainiest region in Texas is like, junior finance major Greg Cizik has trained his dog, Rufus, to carry his umbrella across campus for him on rainy days.

Solar home power: money is the lure, and problem

United Press International
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Imagine getting a monthly check from your local power company instead of a bill — and you'll understand why Art Litka grins every time he reads the meters at an experimental solar house near Kennedy Space Center.

By the end of the 1980s, Litka predicts, people will be able to obtain up to 75 percent of their household electricity without a power company.

They'll use energy-producing photovoltaic devices on their roofs. As technology progresses, cell banks may be able to supply entire neighborhoods.

"No alternative that I'm aware of is a panacea," says Litka, director of photovoltaic research at the Florida Solar Energy Center. "But this is the one that makes the most sense."

Litka's confidence stems from the early success of an experimental photovoltaic house — one of eight in the country — at the solar energy research site.

The three-bedroom, two-bath,

wood-frame experimental house looks like any other new Florida home except for 168 solar cell panels on its south roof.

The panels are rated at 30 watts each. The system has no moving parts. Experts estimate cell life of 20 years.

Sunlight on the panels generates direct current. The current goes to an inverter box that turns it into alternating current to run household appliances such as dishwashers, ranges and air conditioners.

"The solar portion of this system will contribute about 750 kilowatts a month," says Litka. "That's about three-quarters the power consumed by an average family in Florida."

One power meter for the system measures current produced by the solar cells. The other meter measures "excess" current the house feeds into the local Florida Power & Light Co. grid.

"You look at this like a bank account," Litka said. "The solar cells provide the deposits, the power you use is the withdrawal, and what's left is the balance."

The problem with present cells

is price. The total cost of design and installation of the solar energy house's system was \$55,000.

Litka and Dr. Charles E. Backus, director of solar research at Arizona State University, say federal and private researchers determined to cut that figure to \$10,000 in five to 10 years.

At that price, says Backus, photovoltaic electricity will be cheaper per kilowatt hour than conventional power in Boston and Phoenix, and competitive with the cost of power in Miami.

"The current assumption is that it will pay for itself in 15 years, and that's without any tax incentives like there are now for the installation of solar hot water heaters," Backus said.

He thinks solar cells can provide 2 percent to 10 percent of a nation's electricity by the year 2000. The challenge, he said, will be getting people to buy them.

With first systems, he said, people still will have to rely on public utility companies for power at night and on rainy days — because batteries and devices to store solar cell-produced energy are still in the developmental stage.



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