[T]here are ... thousands of ... federal information systems ... only available through commercial vendors—who buy the data from the government in digital form and then sell it back to the citizens who financed its collection.

—James Love
Director, Taxpayer Assets Project, March 16, presentation, conference on Computers, Freedom, and Privacy

Events
JUNE

Notepad
Suggested magazine of the month:

Suggested book of the month:
Call: National Technical Information Service (NTIS), (703) 487-4600. $3 handling fee charged on VISA: $7.50 extra for direct billing.

StarText, the electronic information service of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, has joined with U.S. Videotex's National Videotex Network, a national online information network.

BY J.T. JOHNSON

Publishers, editors, and news directors have been spoiled for decades.
Fundamentally, they have come to subconsciously assume that the only money needed for newspapers was for salaries, phones, the wire services, and syndicates. Information was supposed to be free to anyone who could open a phone book (a gift from Ma Bell), call up a source (who was expected to provide us, gratis, with her time and data), and explain the significance of the information in pithy, but always colorful, quotes.

The journalism profession accepted the information handout as its due. But the information environment has changed, making it harder to deliver quality journalism without paying for information, specifically that available in online databases.

Journalism has been slow to grasp the power of electronic databases like Lexis and Nexis and Dialog, which have been around for 30 years.

Why? They were originally created for lawyers and defense contractors who could afford to pay—or pass on to clients and taxpayers in the name of efficiency—on-line charges that easily ranged from $125 to $300 per hour.

But now the base of potential customers is broadening as more of us are using personal computers and discovering how to quickly retrieve widely dispersed data.

Consequently, two trends are under way: 1) more vendors are making their products available at ever-dropping rates, and 2) some, some government agencies are actively trying to make their information available to taxpayers at the lowest possible cost.

There are some real deals out there for the savvy reporter and editor who have taken the time to learn the fundamentals of telecommunications, spreadsheets, and database analysis.

Knowledge Index
This may be the best bargain on the electronic shelves today. KI is the discounted, after-hours version of Dialog.

The information in the KI databases is the same as Dialog. But instead of having access to all of Dialog's 400 databases at rates ranging from $36 to $300 per hour, the KI subscriber can tap data in 120 files—but only during the night and on weekends.

The cost? Only $24 per connect hour.

The files are ones often used by journalists, such as full-text stories from 33 newspapers (with more being moved over from VNU Text monthly), Magazine Index, Facts on File, and the UPI archives.

Beginning April 1, however, the Knowledge Index system will be reached only through CompuServe. Access to KI will be included under the CompuServe flat-fee monthly rate of $8.95, and the usual 40-cents-per-minute KI connect time will be added to your CIS invoice.

All the KI user commands will be exactly as before, but there may be some changes in or-
**Professor network**

Public information officers at more than 100 colleges, universities, industrial research laboratories, and government-sponsored scientific institutions have created an electronic cooperative to give journalists and authors a quick and convenient means to identify experts among faculty and research staff.

Called "ProfNet," the cooperative is linked by Internet, the world's largest computer network. ProfNet enables any member of a news staff to send an electronic mail query via the Internet to PIOs representing more than 100,000 professors, scientists, and physicians. PIOs respond by e-mail, fax or phone—whatever route the reporter specifies.

**Electronic newspaper**

You can't read it on the train and it's awkward to hide behind while sitting at the breakfast table.

It's an electronic newspaper—"USA Today: The '90s Volume One." It contains more than 100,000 news stories from January 1990 to August 1992. It also contains loads of pictures—and even sound for radio-television fanatics who prefer sound bytes to printed quotes.

The stories, pictures, and sound recordings are stored on a single compact disk for use on high-end IBM-compatible computers equipped with a CD-ROM drive and a sound card. To access photos and graphics, you also need a Super VGA graphics adapter card and monitor.

**Multimedia venture**

Twelve of the nation's leading technology companies have joined forces to bring "multimedia" services, such as home shopping and computerized movie libraries, to American households by 1995.


Many observers consider these so-called interactive multimedia services as the next important breakthrough in consumer-oriented information technology, the Los Angeles Times reports.

Although companies including GTE Corp. and a number of cable television companies are working on similar projects, the First Cities venture is the first that involves a cross-section of electronics companies and telecommunications firms. Partners from the entertainment and publishing industries are expected to join the group.

**Hand-held linkup**

U.S. Newswire has introduced a hand-held computer link based on satellite technology. The Voyager System allows journalists to file stories and reports from virtually anywhere on the earth, using hand-held uplink terminals, which connect to standard portable computers. For information, call Sheila Webb at (202) 347-2770.

**FAX fills the gap**

More than a year after New Zealand's only afternoon daily folded, AP reports of plans to fill the gap with a paper delivered by fax.

The Star NewsFax will reach subscribers early each workday afternoon, providing a summary of the news with an emphasis on business. The publication will cost 1 Australian dollar, or 55 cents, a day, and the country's press association will provide news.