



Teletext and Viewdata

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Chapter 9

Teletext Production

So far in this book we have examined the techniques involved in decoding and displaying teletext. Now it may be interesting to see how the teletext service is handled at the broadcasting centres.

Ceefax

High over Wood Lane in west London, on the seventh floor of the BBC Television Centre, is the editorial suite from which the Ceefax service is controlled.

It is here, in a relatively quiet room away from the bustle of the television studios on the floors below, that a team of journalists compile the pages of text for the two Ceefax magazines. From a corner of the room there is an intermittent chattering as one of the bank of four or five teleprinters types out a news item. These printers provide much of the news information that you will later see on the Ceefax pages. Some printers are linked to news agencies, such as Reuters, whilst others may be collecting information from other departments of the BBC. A printer may be connected to Exchange Telegraph for financial and Stock Market news whilst another may be linked to a sports news service to give the latest racing or football results. Journalists will now take suitable items from these teleprinter machines and edit them to fit into the format of the teletext pages.

Next comes the process of composing the actual page of text that is to be transmitted. This is done by using a typewriter style keyboard which is linked to a computer system in another part of the building. In front of the journalist, as he composes the page, is a colour television monitor which is also controlled by the computer. On this monitor will be displayed the page of text as the journalist builds it up.



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Composing the page

Often the journalist will start of by typing in his copy without any commands to select a display colour. This produces a display of white text on a black background. At this stage he is interested in getting the text correct with an acceptable layout of the page. Next he may decide to add a page title with large letters. These extra large letters will be built up by keying in a series of graphics shapes. Sometimes if the title is one that is frequently used the set of graphics patterns will already be stored in the computer memory and the journalist merely keys in a command to insert the stored title into the page of text.

Very often a page that is currently being transmitted in the magazine may need to be edited. A copy of the page is set up in the computer memory and the journalist then alters it by adding or deleting sections of the text to produce an edited version. Whilst this process is going on the page being transmitted is not affected since only the copy in the computer is being altered.

Having composed his page of text the journalist may now key in colour commands to change the colour of parts of the text or he may add some more graphics to improve the appearance of the page. When he is satisfied he will key in a command which tells the computer to insert the new page into the current magazine and within a second or two the new page will go out over the air to the viewers.

The computer

To handle the editing and storage of the pages of text in a teletext service a small digital computer is used. This may well be a minicomputer such as one of the Digital Equipment PDP11 series computers or a similar machine by one of the many minicomputer manufacturers.

Data for the pages of text will usually be stored on a magnetic disk memory which uses a magnetic oxide coated disk as the memory device. As the disk rotates a magnetic head moves radially across it in much the same fashion as the pickup on a record player. Data is written in a series of concentric tracks on the disk and the head moves over the disk to select any desired track to read or write the data. A typical disk may store several million bytes of data, sufficient for several complete teletext magazines.

For editing or transmission, a page of data is read from the disk into the computer's main memory where it is more readily accessible. After editing has been completed the page of data may again be transferred to the disk unit for long term storage. A page for transmission is fed from the computer memory to a teletext encoder where the data is converted



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