

## TELECOMPUTING IN JAPAN

Database Promotion Center, Japan.

### 1985 - The First Year of Telecomputing in Japan

Large-scale telecomputing in Japan dates only from 1985, but development of electronic mail and bulletin board systems has been rapid since then ASCII-NET and Japan Air Lines JALNET are described in some detail, along with the many mini systems run largely by personal computer enthusiasts.

The world's first experimental bulletin board system (BBS), the CBBS/CHICAGO, was started in the United States on February 16, 1978. The following year, The Source and CompuServe, two large U.S. online database services boasting hundreds of thousands of users, started to offer BBS services to the general public.

Prior to March 31, 1985, there were no companies in Japan carrying out telecomputing services on a large-scale commercial basis. What little telecomputing there was at that time was being done by personal computer (PC) enthusiasts on an experimental basis.

However, following the revisions to the Telecommunications Business Law and the privatization of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation (NTT) on April 1, 1985, PC and users began calling for the construction of BBS stations and business enterprises started campaigning for the right to commercialize telecomputing systems, which they saw as the new form of electronic communications most likely to catch on in the future. For these reasons, 1985 has been labelled the "First Year of Telecomputing" in Japan.

The revision of the Telecommunications Business law created the basis for the development of telecomputing networks in Japan, and BBS stations capable of providing electronic mail and electronic bulletin board services have been springing up all over the country ever since (See Table 1).

Not all of these telecomputing systems are operated by individual or groups of PC enthusiasts; a number of systems intended for the commercial market have also been set up here. These soon-to-be commercialized systems have already boosted the number of password-holding telecomputing service users into the tens of thousands. For example, the ASCII-NET, a telecomputing system started in May, 1985, by the ASII Corporation, one of Japan's leading software houses, had attracted more than 4,000 users within four months of being put into



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operation. Although still in the testing stage, ASCII-NET is Japan's largest and most successful telecomputing network. As of February 1986, there were 12,000 users taking advantage of the services offered via ASCII-NET.

Even taking into consideration the fact that there are probably numerous telecomputing service users in Japan who subscribe to more than one service, it is estimated that there are around 20,000 people currently using these services here. And this number is expected to continue to grow in the future.

#### ASCII-NET

The BBS stations offering telecomputing services in Japan consist of two major types: those established and operated by companies as part of their overall operations, and those set up and run by individuals and PC groups.

The company systems include ASCII-NET established by ASCII Corporation; JALNET operated by Japan Air Lines Co. Ltd., a system called POPCOM-NET established and operated by Shogakkan Publishing Co. Ltd., and JANIS, a system offered by Honda Trading Corporation (See Table 2).

Let us take a closer look at ASCII-NET, which within one year of its establishment grew to become the largest telecomputing system in Japan. ASCII-NET was started up on May 1, 1985. Since then, users have been signing up at the incredible rate of 1,000 per month, raising the total number of users by the end of February, 1986 to 12,000. These users range in age from their low teens to over 60, the average age working out to roughly 32.5 years old (See Figure 1). The distribution of users within Japan is equally broad in scope. Approximately 60% of ASCII-NET users are from Tokyo and surrounding areas (Saitama, Chiba, etc.). The next highest concentrations are from the Kinki and Chubu regions, respectively, with the remainder of users coming from areas scattered throughout Japan.

The ASCII-NET makes use of DEC minicomputers and VAX/785 as its host computer, and is expected to enter full-scale commercial operation in the near future. At present, however, it is still being test operated. This is because ASCII Corporation had no previous experience operating telecomputing systems, and it is only through actual test operation that it has been able to determine the various forms of utilization possible, the optimum safety and security measures and major application trends. A sufficiently long test period is necessary to gain experience in operating the system and to iron out any technical difficulties that exist prior to putting the ASCII-NET into full-scale

Table 2. Major Company-run Telecomputing Systems

Name of System	Company	Telephone No.	Start-up Date	No. of Users	Special Features
JALNET	Japan Air Lines Co., Ltd.	(03)-284-2765	July, 1984	2,000	Provides information on everything from domestic and international flights and tours, to special articles sold by JAL.
JANIS	Honda Trading Corporation	(03)-253-6465	November, 1984	1,500	Originally begun as a learning system for the Source, provides services in English.
ASCI-1-NET	ASCI Corporation	(03)-486-7111	May, 1985	10,000	Japan's largest single telecomputing network system; upgraded host computer functions in December, 1985.
Teletar	Teletar	(03)-375-5784	April, 1985	5,000	Information providers include Mainichi Shimbun Newspaper Co., Tokyo Keizai Shimbun, Ltd., Japan Travel Bureau, Inc., and Hitachi Ltd.
POPCOM-NET	Shogakukan Publishing Co., Ltd.	(03)-263-6995	July, 1985	450	This system is designed to serve as an information pipeline between readers of the PC magazine "POPCOM" and that publication's editorial department.
Leisure Map Online System	Kokusai Travel Bureau Co., Ltd.	(052)-242-7018	May, 1985	500	This is the largest telecomputing system in the Chubu region of Japan. Constructed for the primary purpose of exchanging travel information with travel agents located throughout the Chubu region.
EYE-NET	Fujimic Corporation	(03)-359-6401	November, 1985		Data support from the Fujii Sankei Group.
ComCom	Data Brain Co., Ltd.	(06)-376-1053	December, 1984	950	Expanded version of "Station", a telecomputing system run by the Kansai University PC Club started there by Professor Fujiwara.
JAPCOM J&P HOT LINE	Joshin Denkai Co., Ltd.	(06)-644-5550	July, 1985	1,500	Telecomputing system operated by the largest chain of PC shops in the Kansai area; aimed at users in the Hanshin region.

Source - Japan Computer Quarterly

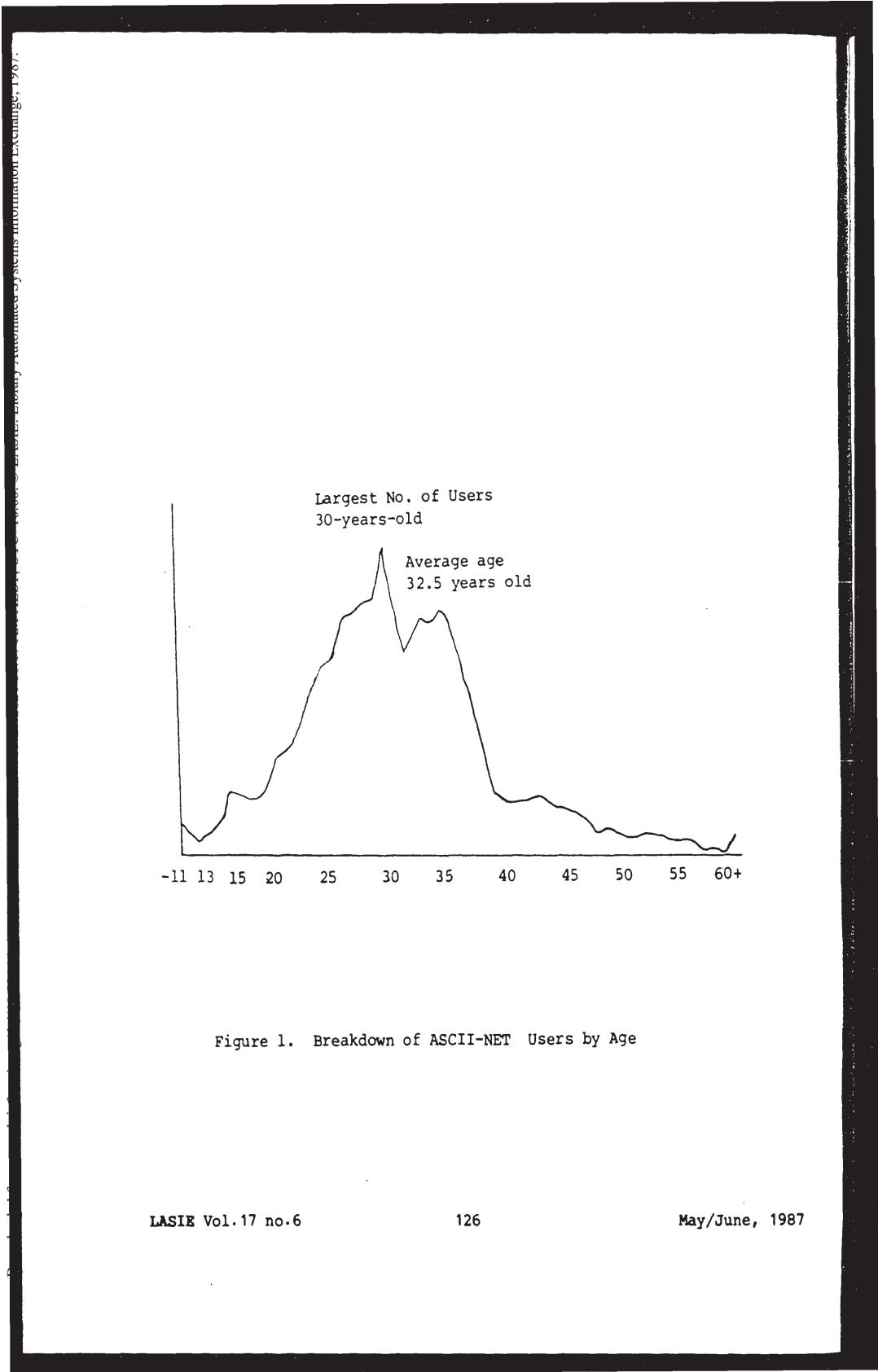


Figure 1. Breakdown of ASCII-NET Users by Age

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