

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 ASCII Corporation, one of Japan's leading software houses, had attracted more than 4,000 users within four months of being put into

Table 1. Major Telecomputing Systems (PC Networks) Operated by Individuals or PC Groups (As of February 1986)

Name of the System	Operator	Location	Telephone No.	Start-up Date	No. of Users
THE NET	System House Dnt	Hokkaido	(011)-612-0270	February, 1984	100
DAC APPLE MINI DATABASE	Delicious Apple Club	Iwate	(0191)-23-0056	January, 1983	132
Telecom Mash	OA Brain Morioka	Iwate	(0196)-34-0321	February, 1985	40
Tulip	Individual	Tochigi	(0283)-62-4120	1985	550
JOSAI-BBS	Individual	Saitama	(0492)-86-2233	1985	20-50
MGN	Individual	Chiba	(0471)-85-1088	April, 1985	60
Night Club Nagayama	Individual	Chiba	(0471)-59-4535	1985	Just a few
Kashiwa BBS	Individual	Chiba	(0471)-53-2605	1985	Just a few
The Micro-Net	The Micro-Net Secretariat	Gunma	(0273)-45-2554	January, 1986	40
CANS STEP 2	Chiyoda Japan Microcomputer Club	Tokyo	(03)-771-4054	June, 1984	700
JADA Teleport	Japan Amateur Data Communications Association	Tokyo	(03)-797-3946	June, 1984	400
JUG-BBS	Individual	Tokyo	(03)-426-8234	January, 1985	500
Mac Event Network	Individual	Tokyo	(0473)-79-0098	May, 1985	300
Microcomputer Communications	Japan Microcomputer Club	Tokyo	(03)-438-1869	January, 1985	130
Network "Halley"	Japan Amateur Astronomers Association	Tokyo	(03)-545-4921	December, 1984	4500
ODSY (ODESSEY)	PROSHIMA Co., Ltd.	Tokyo	(03)-232-6060	February, 1985	50
Personal-Unix-Net	Individual	Tokyo	(03)-924-2595	September, 1984	500
TGC	Teiji Kikaku, Ltd.	Tokyo	(03)-710-7755	May, 1985	157
TWICS	Sakako	Tokyo	(03)-435-1422	September, 1984	43
EXE	Ochanomizu & Nakano Microcomputer Club	Tokyo	(03)-581-8139	January, 1985	40
KWIX-BBS	Individual	Tokyo	(03)-581-8139	June, 1985	250
THE BOARD	Epson User's Club	Tokyo	(03)-351-4910	July, 1985	20
PIPIER	Shibusawa Hyoronsha Co., Ltd.	Tokyo	(03)-237-8315	1985	434
SHINKEI	Sap Co.	Tokyo	(03)-376-8768	1985	800
Minurvo	PC World Japan	Tokyo	(03)-551-3882	1985	200
					1600
THE SUCCESS	Individual	Kanagawa	(045)-782-4949	April, 1984	400
Odawara Microcomputer Club - Microcomputer Center	Odawara Microcomputer Club	Kanagawa	(0465)-23-3330	March, 1984	48
JATIC	Individual	Kanagawa	(0427)-47-4545	1985	40
Yokohama Totsuka BBS	Individual	Kanagawa	(045)-891-0722	1985	70
JADA Teleport Western Japan	JADA Kansai	Osaka	(96)-76-1016	June, 1985	80
Tezukayama Microcomputer Club	Telecom Division, Tezukayama Microcomputer Club	Osaka	(66)-674-1935	1985	110
Guliyama's Hoop	Individual	Osaka	(0720)-54-5125	1985	20
WEST SIDE SKYNET	West Side Software House	Hyogo	(06)-436-2799	May, 1985	650
NTT-VLC NETWORK SYSTEM	VLC N.V.N.S. Co., Ltd.	Shimane	(0852)-27-7700	1985	200
FUKUYAMA-CBBS	Fukuyama Microcomputer Club	Hiroshima	(0849)-22-1792	1985	180
COMEL	Iizuka Microcomputer Club Network	Fukuoka	(0948)-22-5486	1985	30
COARA	Osaka Telecomputing Amateur Research Society	Oita	(0975)-33-0220	1985	118
D-COM	Western Japan Microcomputer Data Communications Club	Kumamoto	(096)-367-2420	March, 1985	58

Source - Japan Computer Quarterly

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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 Shimpusho, 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 Sankel 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

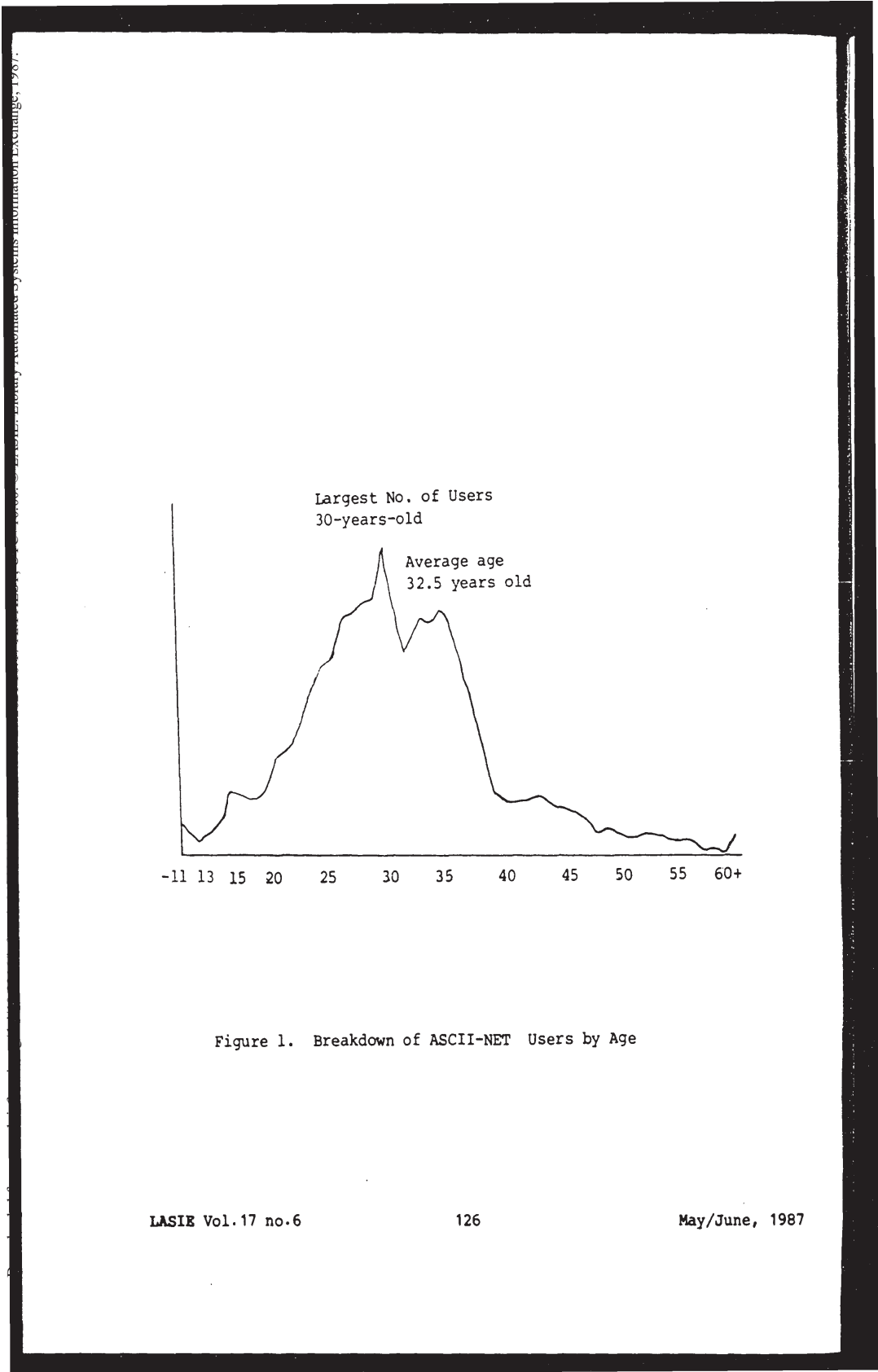


Figure 1. Breakdown of ASCII-NET Users by Age

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