

The Editor in the Computer Age — The Wyoming View

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THERE MAY EXIST in this world agricultural communicators who are not limited in their operations budget—but I doubt it. There also may be those communicators whose publication operations are the showcase of efficiency—I doubt that too.

The one predominant thing I am sure of is that most of us in publications are continually searching for another way of stretching our budget dollar, usually by becoming more efficient in some phase of our respective operations and experimenting with new approaches to age-old procedures.

One concept, which has been regarded by some as being equal to embarking on a moon launch and requiring the same budget, hardware, and expertise, is the use of computers for preparing printed material suitable for camera-ready reproduction.

However, the use of computers in printing (assuming that your institution has one) is really limited only by your imagination and willingness to become involved. And the benefits by far can outweigh the development costs in production time, in printing (and reprinting), and in creating and storing copy suitable for camera-ready reproduction.

Admittedly, it is necessary to have the computer, the programs, an interested programmer, and, in some cases, a budget for computation time. But most campuses have those. What is needed is you, the editor, to be willing to take that first step into the world of computer text storage, retrieval, and manipulation. And once that is mastered, then be willing to share your material with other institutions in a program of either centralized data/text storage, or in a computer net by which you can pull material from one campus to your own.

Sounds a little Buck Rogerish? Sure it does, but so did moon shots, satellite photography, and solar heating a few short years ago. At the University of Wyoming, we have a computer that is scientific-language oriented, and we can't use it. At the State Capitol, 42 miles away, is another computer with a computer text program that is accessible to us for storage, retrieval, and editing. It could be connected to our office by an \$85 monthly terminal fee and a line charge. It isn't, since the experimental input we provide can be handled by mail and put into the computer at a Cheyenne terminal.

Subsequent experimentation has indicated that we have too much "overkill" capability for our own in-house needs. With our capability Wyoming could exchange data in camera-ready form with other institutions with comparable programs and equipment, at a cost to them of approximately half of what it would cost to create, store, edit, and print it.

It was at this stage of computer text printing investigation that we became aware of the computer text development efforts of other institutions, including Penn State. Correspondence between Wyoming and Penn State and the common goal of making computers work in the publications field later evolved into a team presentation on the program for the 1973 AAACE meeting at Guelph—a meeting which outlined both the successful use of a computer (Penn State), and the frustration of storing data that is not only usable for the initiating institution (Wyoming), but also making it usable for other institutions as well with a universal program.

Computer text editing is here, and here to stay. And more and more campuses are turning to this method of production; but until we find the common denominator for computer programs and equipment, then it is going to become an "apples and oranges" approach with a fruit-salad solution. Still, if such organizations as the U. S. Forest Service, American Bar Association, National Association of Chemical Manufacturers, and the American Medical Association can effectively store, retrieve, and edit text material for their own respective areas of interest, then so can we in agricultural communications.

But the first step is up to the editor—to convince himself, his co-workers, and his directors that there is a better way of doing things. Neil Dowlin of Penn State has included a review of computer text retrieval systems at his institutions, and the trial and error that went with it. The application can probably be used in your own shop, all that you need to do is decide that “there has to be a better way.”