Prestel

A wealth of information available at the press of a button

in' to the Prestel network, so an even greater amount of information will be made available. More than this, it allows the private customer direct communication with different organisations. Banks, for example, will be able to offer customers the possibility of going straight into their internal computer to check account balances, change standing orders, initiate transactions or obtain information on loans and repayment terms.

Information society

Prestel was the first example of how information technology can radically alter the way people live and work by giving them instant and easy access to virtually unlimited information. Where it led, the world has followed, and life will never quite be the same again.
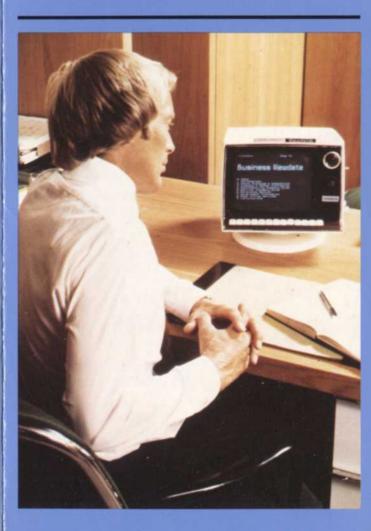

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Prestel

A housewife needing to buy a pair of jeans and some garden shears decides to avoid the crowds in town by purchasing them at home on her television set – choosing from page after page of shopping data at the touch of a button.

Her husband uses the same method at his office to buy an airline ticket to Australia, reserve hotel rooms and hire cars – as well as to bring himself up to date on the stock market and the fortunes of his favourite soccer team.

Back at home the set provides their children with games, puzzles and help with the homework.

Information for all

These events might seem like fiction, but they are very real and happening. This is the world of Prestel – electronic technology invented and developed by British Telecom. In the mid-1970s it wasn't exactly revolutionary to predict that the future of computers lay in making them easily accessible to everyone. The great difference with Prestel was that the men who invented it at the British Telecom research laboratories saw the potential for using the telephone network to bring the power and capacity of computers into homes and offices.

Prestel uses ordinary telephone lines to link modified television sets to computers. The customer simply phones up the computer and, by means of a small keypad selects what he wants – news and information on a wide and growing range of subjects.

Electronic pages

A Prestel user currently has access to more than 200,000 'pages', or screens full of information. He gets them on to his TV screen by means of a series of 'menu pages' which offer progressively more refined lists of choices, narrowing the focus of interest – for example, from travel, to air travel, to transatlantic air travel to a chart showing the availability of standby seats on today's flights to New York.

If it is a subject of regular interest, like a share price or the weekend weather, it is possible to go direct to the relevant page by noting its plug

A special control keyboard used for supplying information to Prestel

Shopping from home

Using the same keypad that calls information to the screen, customers can buy goods and services on Prestel. They call a special order form to the screen, key-in the order number of the item they wish to purchase, then key-in their credit card number. The order is stored on the Prestel computer, for the firm advertising the goods to collect and process.

Mailbox

Prestel users can also send messages to each other. These are stored on the Prestel computer until the recipient next uses Prestel.

World service

Prestel was the world's first public viewdata service, introduced in Britain in September 1979. Interest quickly spread overseas. Systems compatible with Prestel are now in operation in 20 countries – seven of them having been supplied directly by British Telecom expertise. Prestel itself is now a world service with items of global interest, such as shipping movements and commodities information.

Gateway to the future

The latest Prestel breakthrough is the introduction of its Gateway service. This allows private computers to 'plug