

JUNE 1982



Business News

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Sky Guide

AT YOUR SERVICE

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Flight - Tim

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UK 153
BR365
BR30
DLO11
BRO13

TIME NO

There's fog in Milan — again. The air traffic controllers in Paris are on strike. Your most important customer is due to land at Heathrow and you must meet him. But is his flight on time? Will it land at Heathrow at all, or be diverted? With anxious thoughts of an angry visitor fuming unmet at Gatwick, you try to 'phone the airport.

Extract from American Express World News for Cardmembers, 1982, Issue 2

The switchboard is jammed with hundreds of people in exactly your position.

Up to now this has been one of the inevitable disasters of business life. Enough to make it Just One of Those Days.

Not any more. Now it is possible to check out airport arrival and departure times without leaving your desk, simply by calling up the American Express SkyGuide pages on your Prestel TV set.

SkyGuide, new in 1982, is information technology at work. It uses the gadgetry of the IT revolution to answer vital questions. It is quick, easy to use and fundamentally very simple.

It gets over the hitherto impossible hurdle of passing vast amounts of fast-changing information from someone who knows it to someone else who needs it. An earlier generation of IT machines made it possible to display flight information quickly on an airport indicator board.

Now microchips and videotext make it possible to pass this information on to anyone in the country with a TV set, who can be as well informed as people actually on the airport concourse.

Apart from being downright useful, SkyGuide is important because, along with stock exchange prices, car-ferry booking information and the weather forecast, it is one of the things on Prestel to be constantly updated. The information available to Prestel subscribers is similar to that on airports' display boards, and it reaches your office or home TV set in under a minute.

This is the route the information follows. Air



Photo shows Tony Book — American Express Card Division's director of viewdata (Europe, Middle East and Africa) demonstrating the SkyGuide service.

traffic controllers and airlines pass on flight details to the airport authority computer. The data is picked up by a special microprocessor developed for American Express and transmitted via the packet switching system to American Express in Brighton, where it is adapted to the Prestel format, colour is added and it goes to the Prestel computers.

A Prestel user wanting to know what is happening

to a flight simply calls up SkyGuide by punching in its code number on the Prestel keypad. He then works through the frames until he finds the flight listed.

SkyGuide gives flight details for Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester and Luton, Newcastle, Birmingham, Stansted and the Scottish airports will be added later in the year. And soon European airports will be linked in.

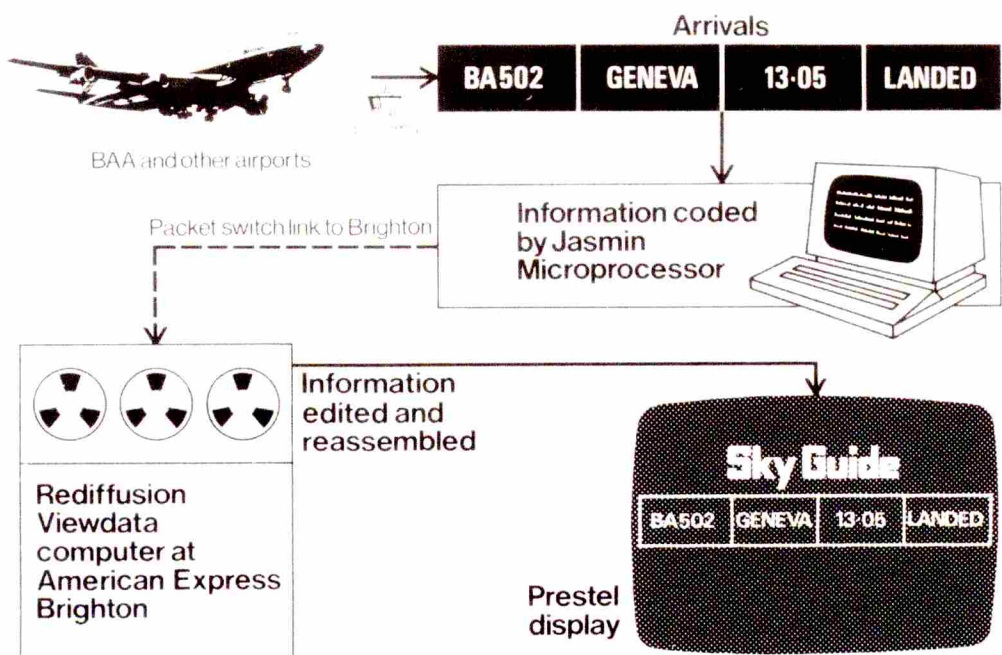
Videotext is now

worldwide. Twenty-six European countries have agreed on a compatible system, and trials are on in North America and Southeast Asia. This is one area of information technology where the Japanese are not in the lead — their complicated alphabet makes videotext less of a boon for them.

SkyGuide is a good example of creative information technology marketing. The facts were there, but it took flair to find a way of getting them to the people who need to know. As a result, time will be saved, business made more efficient — and a lot of people will be spared the worry of not knowing what has happened to a customer or loved one's flight from Milan.

● SkyGuide SM is the Trademark of the American Express Flight Information Display Service.

The Sky Guide Flight Information Process





IS UNVEILED BY MINISTER FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

— New American Express Viewdata Service launched London, May 18, 1982.

For the first time, people in Britain and on the Continent will be able to use their television sets to obtain instant flight arrival and departure information for most of the major UK airports. The new service, called SkyGuide, was unveiled today by Minister Kenneth Baker as the standard bearer for Britain's 1982 Information Technology Year. It is the result of more than two years' close technical cooperation between project leader American Express and the British Airports Authority, British Telecom, Rediffusion Computers and major British sub-contractors.

SkyGuide enables the flight information boards at Britain's major airports to be linked via computer to all Prestel Viewdata subscribers at home or in the office. For a few pence, plus the cost of a local 'phone call, viewers can check instantly whether a particular flight has arrived — or departed — thus by-passing the current procedure of having to telephone individual airports, where information delays can occur.

Heathrow alone, for example, handles over 26 million passengers a year, and for each of these, there is likely to be at least one other person involved in every arrival or departure, whether it be

business colleague, spouse, or secretary.

SkyGuide transmits all the data from the UK airports' Flight Information Display Systems to the American Express Viewdata computer at their Brighton headquarters. The complex information is then edited. American Express, in their role as

Viewdata Information providers, then issues an updated flight information service by keying into the number 2691. During peak hours all airport frames are updated about every few minutes.

ALL BRITISH TECHNOLOGY

SkyGuide uses all-British technology. Flight arrival and departure information is provided by air traffic controllers and airlines direct to the airport authority computer for display in airport lounges. This data is picked up by a "black-box" microprocessor-based monitor developed by Jasmin Electronics of Leicester using

predominantly Mullard microchips. A packet switching system relays the data to the Rediffusion R800/70 computer at American Express' Brighton headquarters for editing and re-presentation in a colourful, clear Prestel frame form. This data is then transmitted to Prestel for onward distribution to the network and is immediately available for user call-up.

Minister for Information Technology, Kenneth Baker MP, in launching the new service, singled out the relevance of SkyGuide to the concept of Information Technology Year, "harnessing new and complex technological procedures to provide a practical and valuable information service to the community".

"For us, SkyGuide is a prime example of creative information technology marketing," said Len Mannell, resident vice president, sales and marketing, Europe, Middle East and Africa. "It is central to our objective of providing the best in business and travel-related services."



Picture shows Len Mannell — resident vice president of sales and marketing for Europe, Middle East and Africa, American Express, welcoming Kenneth Baker — Minister for Information Technology to the SkyGuide press launch.

REDIFFUSION
A Division of
Rediffusion Ltd.

AMERICAN EXPRESS		26918013c	Op
12th May		09:35	
Gatwick Arrivals			
Flight	Time	From	
=====	====	=====	
PA090	09:15	MEXICO HOUSTON	
	DELAY TO	0950	
SF736	09:15	TRENTON OTTAWA	
	DELAY TO	0930	
RD300	09:15	BOURNEMOUTH	
	LANDED		
PA090	09:15	MEXICO HOUSTON	
	DELAY TO	0950	
SF736	09:15	TRENTON OTTAWA	
	DELAY TO	0940	
BD471	09:20	BELFAST	
	LANDED		

Key # - More Arrivals,
1 - Departures,
0 - Gatwick Index



A sample Prestel SkyGuide "frame".

ANOTHER VIDEOTEX SUCCESS FOR REDIFFUSION

The complexities of electronic publishing require that three activities work in harmony — first, the information provider has to establish a product with a defined cost structure, a market strategy and a competitive position; second, the distribution medium must exist to move the electronic publication economically to the consumer; and third, economic delivery mechanisms should exist at the consumer level to access and use the product.

The vision of American Express, embodied in SkyGuide, lies in the realisation that there is both a product in constantly changing, or 'dynamic', data and a delivery vehicle in the combination of a private videotex system linked into the public Prestel videotex network that together can give access to a vast public market.

SkyGuide emerged from discussions, begun during the second half of 1980, between American Express and Rediffusion Computers on a number of projects for utilising the new videotex technology that took advantage of the 'friendly' colour TV to access information held in computers.

The discussions led to

the installation in December 1980 of a Rediffusion R800/70 Viewdata Plus computer system at the American Express Brighton headquarters. This system was used throughout 1981 by a small joint project team to take a number of ideas to working prototype stage. SkyGuide is the first of these to be announced as a public information service.

The technical problems were formidable, but they paled into insignificance compared with the commercial problems. Different airports were owned and managed by different organisations. There were no policies for this type of operation and no common approaches. American Express were

exploring new territory, but fortunately the company received enthusiastic support from the Department of Industry and other well-placed well-wishers to help the project along.

The many practical problems along the way — such as the acquisition of sufficient Packet Switched Service (PSS) lines from British Telecom where none were available — were approached in the spirit, 'there must be a way — we will just have to find it'. There was a way and, with Government help, the PSS lines were found.

The way the computer system works is straightforward. Microcomputers at the airports send constantly up-to-date information on flight arrivals and departures to the Rediffusion computer at Brighton. This then edits, formats and sends update information to the Prestel 'Duke' update computer that, in turn, updates the Prestel dissemination computers around the country.

Four levels of computer, therefore, carry out

continuous dialogues over thousands of miles of PSS and PSTN networks to bring the consumer the SkyGuide information service.

The business or residential consumer has access to SkyGuide from normal Prestel receivers and terminals. The service is likely to increase significantly the Prestel penetration of business users from hotels, taxi firms, coach operators, cargo handlers, airport caterers and the vast number of companies with regular air travelling involvement.

The residential market is likely to be led by waiting wives and families eager to know of the arrival of a flight. And for regular air travellers, SkyGuide may well become indispensable, while for casual travellers it could make the difference between waiting in an airport lounge, or somewhere more congenial.

SkyGuide, in short, looks to be set fair to become the first really widely used consumer videotex information service.