

Public terminal network, Jun 1991

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In the days before we had GSM, let alone GPRS or mobile web, this was a possible way of providing people with high speed data or public information. Looks like it would have worked if we'd done it back then, but some limited versions of this are certainly around today.

Suggestion for a Public Terminal Network

Introduction

The mobile network is limited in bandwidth and cannot cope with high speed data transfer. There is a high speed fixed network but no convenient way of accessing it. There will also be significant competition from other network operators. This note proposes a new type of network access point which will allow simple and convenient access to the high speed fixed network.

Mechanism

Some (but not all) of the following assumes a certain level of technology advancement, eg the existence of a broadband network, and that users will have personal smart cards and or electronic books, which are multimedia capable.

At present there are phone boxes liberally sprinkled around the country at certain locations. These offer simple voice connection. If a simple terminal could be built which were capable of reading a customer's smart card or otherwise communicating with his electronic book, then the customer could simply drop in his card and send his accumulated mail (multimedia) to the recipients, and download any mail waiting for him. He can then walk away and browse the mail at leisure. These terminals could be placed in 'phone boxes', or whatever the future equivalent is, and also at many other locations where phone boxes may not be justified. The terminals would be small and robust and simply hang on a wall or stand alone on a pedestal.

Advantages

- These terminals would be ideal for messaging, placing no load on the mobile network yet being convenient and functional.

- They would offer very fast transfer of information of any kind, thus saving the customer time over mobile comms. Messaging itself is more efficient than real time comms, and messages can be created at any time and later edited, so is sometimes an attractive medium.
- Because the fixed network is used and mobile bandwidth is saved, this service could be offered at a reduced tariff to encourage its use.
- Networking costs could be kept low by using shared media (LANs).
- Advertising revenue could be attracted, with adverts being part of message dumps.
- Terminals could double as public information sources. An example may be tourist information at various sites. These could be partially (wholly?) funded by the respective organisation, while still providing the comms facilities. Indeed, many organisations may welcome the chance to site a terminal if it gives them a chance to present information to passers by. Others such as banks could combine teller machines with comms terminals, making their machines more attractive to use and at the same time providing us with network revenue.

There are already various networks which may be of use in establishing such a network. Many shops make use of point of sale (POS) terminals.

mail at leisure. These terminals could be placed in 'phone boxes', or whatever the future equivalent is, and also at many other locations where phone boxes may not be justified, such as shop walls, ATM machines and incorporated into POS and EFTPOS terminals. Standalone terminals would be small and robust and would simply hang on a wall or stand on a pedestal.

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- Existing networks could be utilised, EFTPOS and bank machines for instance. The

Risks

The progression of this technology is a natural evolution from the current network. It is certain that if it can be cost justified, our competitors will also be attempting the same networks. If BT does not have such a network, then significant revenue may be lost to competitors, not to mention being seen to have a network which is not up to date. Such a network would therefore seem to be urgent.

Ian Pearson June 1991