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POST OFFICE

tele **communications**

JOURNAL

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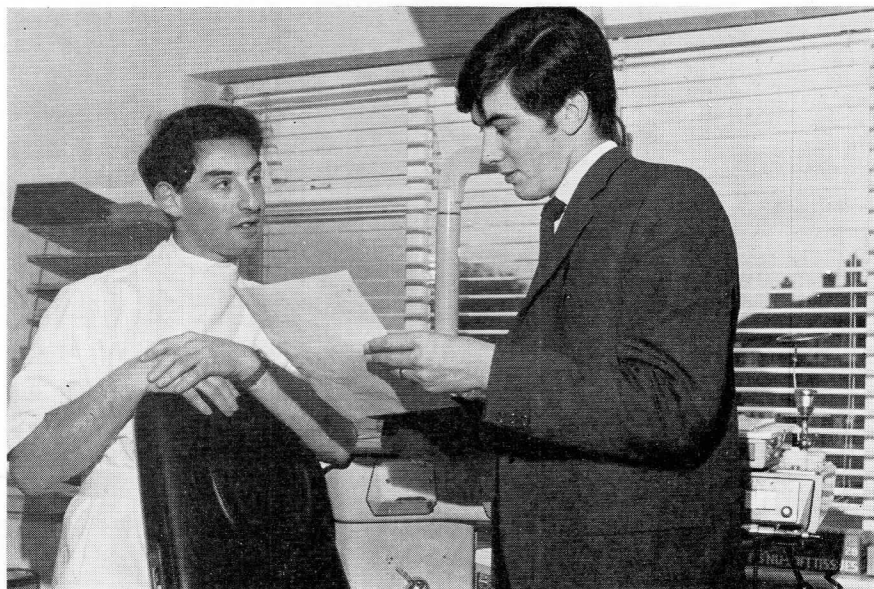
SIXPENCE

WINTER 1968

From TIM, through WEA and UMP to (possibly) Bedtime Stories

The search goes on for new telephone information services. The latest idea, supported by market research, is for childrens bedtime stories

Sales Representative Richard Walker interviews a dentist in the Oxford Telephone Area and notes his remarks on the questionnaire



A MARKET research report issued recently by the Marketing Department of Telecommunications Headquarters recommends a new telephone information service to be called "Childrens Bedtime Stories."

At first sight this might appear far fetched. But is it?

After a slow start, the range of telephone information services offered by the Post Office has grown steadily. The first dates back to the earliest days of public telephones and grew out of the need to handle spontaneous calls from telephone users wanting to know the time.

The telephone system was then wholly manual and the instruction to operators receiving such

calls was to announce: "*The time by the exchange clock is . . .*" and to avoid reference to "correct time" in case the exchange clock was wrong! But, with the conversion of the telephone system from manual to automatic and the development of recording techniques, the value was recognised of using recorded announcements for telephone information services.

A sophisticated Speaking Clock was developed, capable of announcing the time every ten seconds to a very high degree of accuracy and the Post Office introduced it to the telephone public as TIM. It was an immediate success and today attracts many more callers than all of the other information services together: 225 million calls in 1967-68, an increase of 17 per cent over the previous year.

By A. W. HASSAL

The success of the Speaking Clock showed that recorded telephone information services encourage use of the telephone, can be operated economically and contribute to the profitability of the telephone service. A search for other information services began and six more are now operating: Weather Forecasts, Motoring Information, Test Match Score, a Teletourist Service in four languages, Recipe Service and Dial-a-Disc. Although the last is available in only a limited area and is aimed at a particular age-group, its success has exceeded expectations. About thirteen million calls were made to Dial-a-Disc last year, a calling rate bettered only by the Speaking Clock.

Not all exchanges have access to all the information services which, however, are provided as equipment becomes available and whenever they are expected to be profitable. Ideally, telephone information services should not give rise to traffic peaks and callers should be able to obtain the information they want within a few minutes.

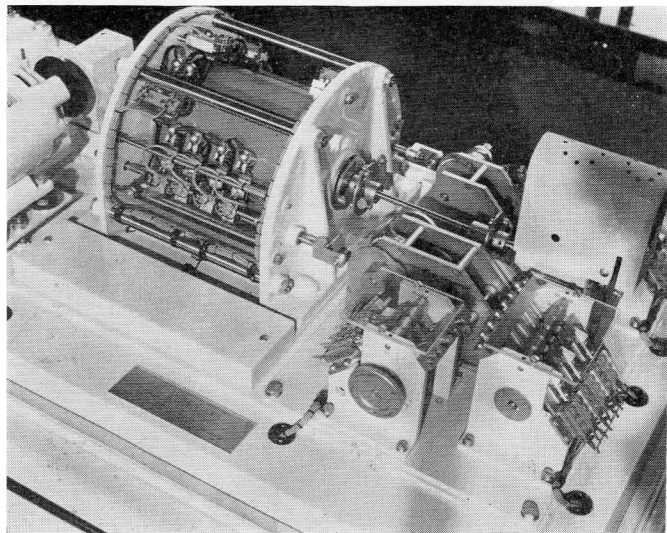
At the end of 1967, the Marketing Department was asked to continue the search for more information services by employing market research techniques. A questionnaire was prepared listing eight possible information services and co-operation was obtained from the Sales Divisions of ten Telephone Managers' areas, one in each Region. All members of the public visiting Sales Bureaux in the ten areas during a particular week in January and those visited by Sales Representatives on two days of the same week were invited to take part in a short market research interview. The public responded well. More than 1,200 interviews were completed and there were only four known refusals.

During each interview, the respondent was asked if he could suggest any new telephone information services that the Post Office should introduce; and if he thought he would use, and if so how often, any of the eight possible telephone information services that were listed on the questionnaire.

Not many customers were able to give a positive answer to the first question but this was not unexpected. A list of possible subjects for informa-

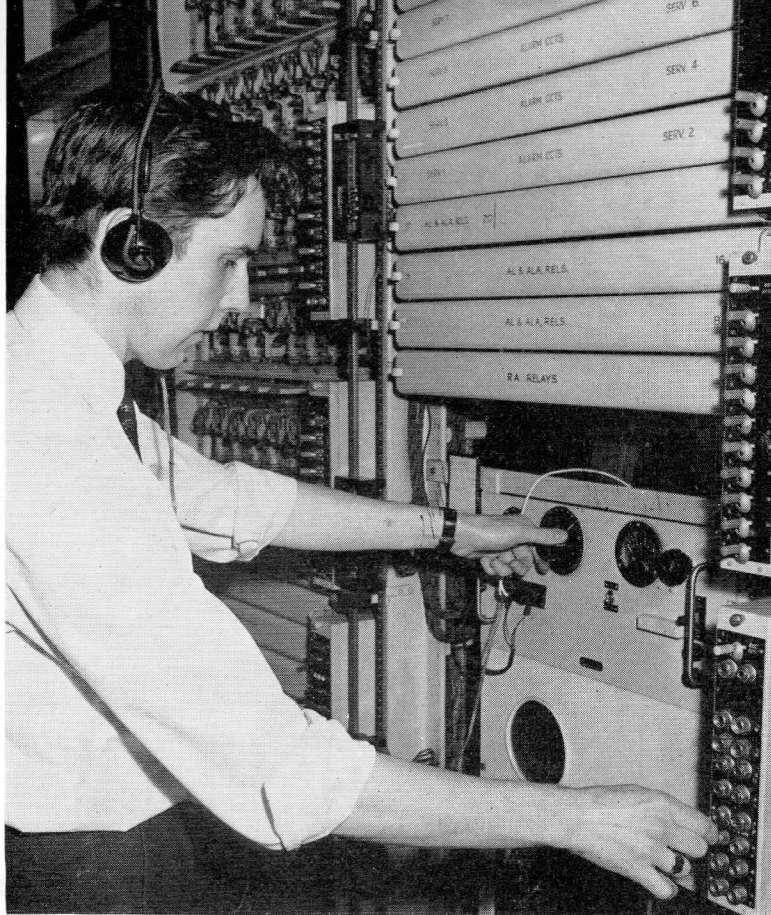


Miss Pat Simmons, the Post Office's Girl with the Golden Voice, with the Speaking Clock equipment at the London Trunk Control North. Below: One of the pair of speaking clocks on which Miss Simmons' recorded voice tells the time every ten seconds day and night.

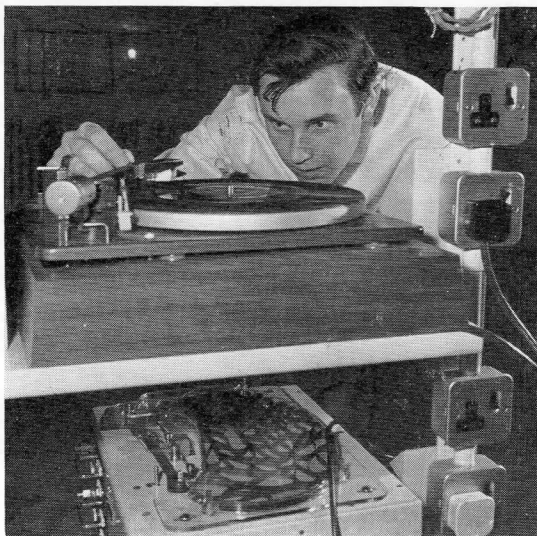


tion services had been compiled in Headquarters over many years and it was already realised that original ideas would arise only occasionally. But the search continues.

OVER



Engineer Robert Williamson adjusts the levels on the information services equipment at Trunk Control North in Judd Street, London.



Transferring a "pop" record on to tape for transmitting the number over the Dial-a-Disc service which was introduced in 1966.

Replies to the second question showed that of the eight possible services listed on the questionnaire, three aroused particular public interest. Thirty-two per cent of all those interviewed thought that they would use a Cricket Score Board service on average 3.3 times a week. This was the highest level of declared interest but the expected calling rate confirmed the view that very few people would want to know the up-to-the minute scores in county cricket matches. Public interest in county cricket has been declining for some years but this is not the case with Test matches. The Test Match Score service is very popular and attracted eleven million calls during all the five Tests in the 1968 series against the Australians.

Of those interviewed, 31.5 per cent said that they would use a Football Results service on average 1.4 times a week. The low forecast calling rate illustrates that football is not a good subject for a telephone information service. Its use would be confined almost wholly to Saturdays during the football season and, since most games last only

THEY GAVE THE TEST SCORES

This is the team of Post Office girls who obtained and recorded the scores for the Test Match Service during the 1968 series between England and Australia. They are (from left to right): Mrs. Ellen Moelly, Miss Yvonne Biddulph, Miss Pamela Hawes,

Miss Margaret Woodin, Miss Thelma Cumberbatch, Miss Pat Weighall and Miss Sheila Keogh.

The girls worked in teams of three, led by an editor—Miss Weighall and Miss Keogh, both Telecommunications Traffic Officers—who was in direct touch with the Test Match grounds. The two telephonists in each team took it in turns to record the latest score and check the telephone commentary against the information from the grounds. The average time between getting a new score from the ground and recording it was 25 seconds.



an hour-and-a-half public interest is maintained only for that time. Only the final scores and perhaps the half-time scores are sufficiently newsworthy to attract callers to a Football Results information service and, because they are widely publicised on radio, television and in the Press, it is most unlikely that the Service would be a success.

The service with the greatest potential appears to be Childrens Bedtime Stories—24 per cent of all people interviewed thought that they would use it on a significantly high average of 5.5 times a week. This service has several attractions. It would be unlikely to suffer seasonal fluctuations, it should attract use of the telephone outside the day busy hours and it would instil the telephone habit. But there are many problems to overcome before the Service could be launched, not least the question of where the Post Office can find an endless supply of stories of the right length and content. It is possible, however, that the telephone service might soon compete with radio and television in the world of childrens entertain-

ment. The day may not be far off when toddlers will reach for the telephone to hear about Tom Thumb's escape through the co-axial tube or Captain Scarlet's attack on the Post Office Tower.

Footnote: The "Dial-a-Disc" service, which began in Leeds in December, 1966, is now available in a number of centres throughout the country, including Bath, Bournemouth, Bristol, Bradford, Cardiff, Chesterfield, Exeter, Gloucester, Guildford, Grays (Essex), Huddersfield, Leicester, Middlesbrough, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Plymouth, Southampton, St. Albans and Swansea. It will be extended to other towns as equipment becomes available.

THE AUTHOR

Mr. A. W. Hassal, who joined the Post Office as a Youth-in-Training in Liverpool in 1941, became a Sales Representative in the Liverpool Area in 1955 and was appointed Assistant Sales Investigation Officer in the Sales Division of the old Inland Telecommunications Department in Post Office Headquarters six years later. He is now Assistant Controller Sales, Marketing Department in Telecommunications Headquarters with responsibility for market research into subscribers' apparatus and services.