

Editorial

Hypermedia

According to my dictionary “hype” means “a deception, racket or publicity stunt”. One needs to proceed with caution when writing an editorial beneath a title word prefixed “hype-”.

Last month at a conference at the University of York, some people from the Media Laboratory at MIT gave a presentation entitled “Creating and viewing the Elastic Charles”. It was a videotape, recorded at MIT, of a kind of documentary about the Charles river embodying motion video controlled by Hypercard on a Mac II, also embodying text, graphics, and digital sound. Costs were wisely not mentioned.

Yesterday (August 24th) the BBC demonstrated MediaMaker at Appleworld—Apple’s stylish new headquarters near London. Vannevar Bush would be proud of them. It looks as if something quite closely resembling Memex will be available for around £15,000 next year.

The system consists of a Mac II embodying a Microsystems Colorspace video overlay board, with the Mac controlling a CD-ROM, Laserdisk drive, and Video-8 player via a Supercard stack. Supercard is jazzed-up Hypercard with colour.

The objective is to enable the user to compile a videotaped multi-media recording put together by drawing upon an indexed library of his own and other people’s text, graphics, illustrations, motion video, digitized sound, TV material etc.

The top half of the Mac’s display shows a series of ikons (small windows in this case) displaying representations of the current set of loaded bits and pieces to be used for the upcoming composition. One class of ikon consists of key stills acting as indexing tags to motion video segments of up to ten minutes duration which may be called in from tape.

Along the bottom part of the screen a timing strip is displayed on to which any ikon may be dragged. When preparation is complete, the line-up of dragged-in ikons forms the visual sequence to be composed. The strip is calibrated in minutes and seconds. When each chosen ikon is slotted into place its length is automatically expanded or shrunk into its real-time duration. In other words the completed strip of small pictures depicts the content (sometimes a bit distorted) and duration of each part of the proposed composition.

The records of the indexed items are then retrieved from the appropriate player or Mac hard disk and recorded on videotape. The mechanics for retrieving specific segments of CD-ROM and Laserdisk have been available for some time. Up to about two hours of motion video segments may be stored on the video-8 player. The segments have been previously indexed and “hooked” to a supercard. The required ikon/supercard is retrieved by the Mac at the right moment, the player spins almost instantly to the required segment on the tape, and that segment is recorded on to the composition tape.

The completed tape may be viewed for editing, replacing items, changing their duration etc. The multimedia presentation is then complete.

The BBC’s role will be, of course, to supply multi-segment ready-indexed video-8 tapes containing a variety of shots culled from their tape library. Presumably the price includes a consideration for assigned copyright (more information about this aspect is awaited).

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