

IMPACT

Australian Associated Press Group Newsletter

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AAP Goes Satellite

AAP Information Services Pty Ltd signed a contract with the national satellite authority, AUSSAT in August, for Australia's first privately owned satellite communications network.

The long-term contract is for the lease of transponder in the national beam on one of the first two domestic satellites.

The satellite network will deliver AAP's news, information and value-added communications services to media and commercial clients, initially through five capital city earth stations and 50 smaller regional stations to be installed and operated by AAP Reuters Communications Pty Ltd.

Once operational, it will allow regional centres access to a wider range of AAP services — including news, financial, and thoroughbred racing data — which, because of the high cost of terrestrial communications, are currently economically available only to media and commercial subscribers in mainland state capitals.

"We expect the network to be operating by April, 1986, and grow to over 1,000 earth stations in the next five years," said AAP Chief Executive Lee Casey. "We believe it will be the most extensive news and information satellite distribution system outside the United States."

Commissioning of the earth stations will complete the integration of the company's satellite, Telecom leased circuit and private microwave systems and enable the nationwide delivery of AAP's new broadband data services.

AUSSAT General Manager Graham Gosewinckel said the AAP application was an excellent example of the use of satellite technology for cost-effective delivery of services from a central point to any number of centres, regardless of distance or location.

"We're delighted that AAP has signed today as our first major commercial customer," he said. "AAP's planned development of telecommunications is a prime example of the innovative use of satellite technology."



AAP Chief Executive Lee Casey signs AUSSAT's first commercial contract in the presence of AUSSAT General Manager Graham Gosewinckel and General Manager of AAP Reuters Communications Pty Ltd Barney Blundell.

AAP . . . The First 50 Years. II

AAP's arrival in Sydney in 1964 began an era of progress and expansion far beyond the expectations of the company's founders nearly 30 years before.

The next 20 years saw the introduction of computerised news and economic services, in both of which AAP took a pioneering role in Australia.

In addition, the successful splitting, or multiplexing, of AAP's first communications line around Australia in the early 1970's opened a new field of business and news service enterprises.

As a forerunner to these developments, it was now possible to give full strength to the agency's original role as a distributor of overseas news services.

The timely-provided means for this important step was a new and highly sophisticated cable linking London with Sydney, by way of Montreal and Auckland.

The Commonwealth Pacific Cable (or COMPAC) was in fact so vital to the future of AAP and its partners, it justified moving the whole AAP-Reuter-NZPA representation of the time from Melbourne to Sydney.

Without the move, AAP would have been faced with crippling costs of interstate landlines to bring almost its entire international news services to Melbourne after reaching the Sydney cablehead by leased multiple circuits.

In the days when international news travelled by radio-teletype links set up in Australia from London, New York and Singapore in the late 1940's Melbourne was considered the best central distribution point. But Compac's arrival changed all that.

After 29 years and three headquarters in Melbourne, AAP closed the last of them in Lonsdale Street and moved the whole operation to Wynyard House, in George Street, Sydney.

The American news agency services, which had previously been edited in New York by AAP staff and filed to Melbourne by ANZRAD radio-teleypes, could now be directed in full through Montreal, and dealt with in Sydney.



Looking at the routes of Australia's new overseas cables of the 1960's, the SEACOM link to Tokyo, left, and COMPAC to London, via Auckland and Montreal, which brought about AAP's head office move, with Reuters and NZPA from Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, to Wynyard House, Sydney in 1964: AAP's then Managing Editor, Duncan Hooper, (seated) with News Editor, Lyall Rowe, and NZPA representative, Bruce Hewitt. (Editor's Note: This is the real Lyall Rowe, not the one mistakenly named for Walter Parr in the first issue. Our apologies to the Media Services Manager who has his own picture to prove it).

They, along with the New York Times wire, made an important contribution; but London was still the major dateline which could now give comprehensive cover around the clock for the first time by entirely reliable communications.

The tight wordage limits that had applied for years could also be forgotten where major interest stories were involved, so that the AAP London Bureau had a freer hand to move copy from the Press Association and other sources.

Eventually, the main Press Association service was taken directly into Sydney, and Agence France Presse joined the already wide range of Reuter and other international wires in providing a comprehensive report.

The new communications meant not only bigger news files but a major change in editorial responsibility.

Selection and editing decisions made for many years in London and New York and carried through in Melbourne, now rested on the Overseas Editor in Sydney surrounded as he was by a battery of 14 or more teletypes pounding out the news.

Mostly in the Wynyard days he had a sub-editor to help him and one or two network operators, but the decisions were his and, during the night, responsibility as senior journalist for the whole newsroom.

The survivors of the Wynyard newsroom remember chiefly the incessant din of 89 teletypes of the old pattern, before the merciful relief of the tiny Extels at Sussex Street, and today's almost silent computerised terminals.

Some of the alarms and diversions of Wynyard are also remembered, like the easily-reported fire on the next floor which left smoke, water, and nerve damage; a raid by the drug squad which left a depleted night staff; and an empress-sized box of chocolates sent over by a watching American lady tourist in the Menzies Hotel next door, who said she felt sorry for those poor people working so late.

With the Compac overseas services running smoothly, there was time for AAP to think of a national news service and to build on the first promising steps at the Melbourne Olympics and the 1962 Perth Commonwealth Games.

The obvious opening looked to be a network service around the country to the growing number of commercial radio and television stations.

After cautious beginnings and some early stutterings over the different needs of the spoken word, the network was gradually accepted and reached a level in due course where first announcements of stories of world interest like Melbourne's test tube babies were made, by choice, solely through AAP.

The radio network also called for faster political news from Canberra and the state capitals, airport interviews, police and industrial rounds, sporting cover and an overall dependence on our own sources rather than previously published reports.

A further strengthening of our news resources in the states came about, first through AAP's merger with AUP in New South Wales in the Wynyard days, and then by agreements with the regional dailies of Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania.

Another innovation of the 1960's, the distribution of Associated Press pictures to metropolitan and regional newspapers, went through its pioneering days of limited casts from London and hand package delivery at this end, but was soon to become a national network of high technology.

Teletypesetting was gaining acceptance in Australian newspapers in the 1960's, and AAP moved with the times in providing typeset stock exchange figures and sports results, which outmoded some slow and long-used processes.

Another time-honoured procedure — the half-hourly updating of stock exchange markets — was about to undergo a more revolutionary change.

It began with the electronic researches of two American engineers of genius who invented Stockmaster, the little desk-top marvel which was to make them both millionaires; to bring dramatic changes in share trading around the world; and to reduce price updating from 30 minutes to seconds.

Some future historian, looking back on the 1969 mining share boom in Australia, may wonder whether Poseidon made the rush or Stockmaster, so great was the impact of its instant electronic prices and the even greater fascination of the video-screened Videomaster.

In a matter of months, these two pioneers in electronic information, which came to AAP through its association with Reuters, put Australia in world sales ranking.

Reuters through an agreement with the American manufacturers, Ultronic, held world selling rights outside North America, and by 1970 Australian sales were second only to Switzerland.

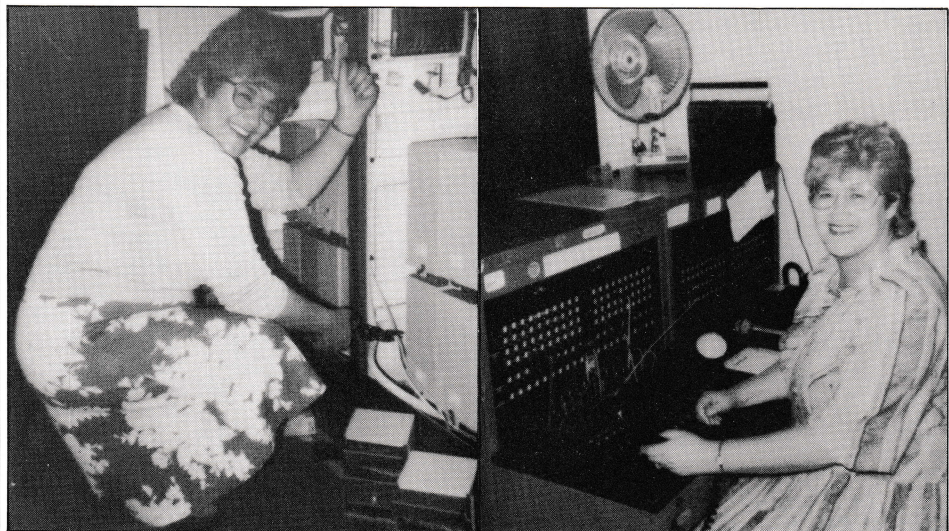
Even for boom times, some highly unusual things happened in Sydney once electronic share price-watching became the rage.

Big brokers ordered batteries of Stockmasters and built elaborate information centres in their offices, around specially made large AAP screens.

Cafes and drink bars caught the craze and displayed Stockmasters for their clients and their own share-watching. One chef in a Pitt Street restaurant kept pace with the boom through a Stockmaster beside the cooking pots.

(more to follow)

— By Bruce Hewitt



Two pictures of Melbourne switchboard operator June Mullins at the changeover from the last of the traditional boards in Stock Exchange House. Left: Cutting the cable (right): At an old-style switchboard for the last time.

Personality Piece: June Mullins

“A soft answer turneth away wrath.”

Proverbs XV 1

The soft answers of June Mullins from four AAP switchboards in Melbourne have done more than turn away the wrath of a few short-fused clients.

In 10 years, her voice has become probably the best known and liked in the AAP-Reuters group.

The quality that perhaps endears her most to the world outside is the talent in her job of being able immediately to put a name to a voice, whether it is a once-a-year London big name at the Regent, or a country stringer at the races.

She also manages to inject a reassuring calm to her conversations with anxious share traders, impatient reporters, sports nuts, racing fanatics and the publicity seekers of all shades who haunt the switchboards day by day and insist on having their say.

Some of this response comes from a natural good humour and as much perhaps from a long apprenticeship with a great newspaper, where there was a tradition in these things.

June began with “The Age” — she calls it “cutting my teeth on a newspaper” — in 1954 while her father, Jim Cooper, was Pictorial Editor and near the end of a 43-year career with the paper.

She learned from him, and from some of the other fine old professionals of the time, the importance of "The Age's" standing with the public and how to handle their inquiries.

June is proud of a family tradition; that both her parents were in journalism and that her father's standing was such that, at a time when such things had no precedent in Australia, he was given responsibility for the world photo pool at the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956.

Her mother, who must have passed on a delightful sense of humour, used to make fun of her days on the "Advocate" when girl reporters were unusual, and even rarer on church newspapers.

After 13 years with "The Age" in the old building at 233 Collins Street, June left to look after her twin boys, David and Andrew, but in a thoughtful gesture, she was invited back two years later to run the switchboard for the historic cutover to the new "Age" in Spencer Street, in May, 1969.

They needed her again in 1975 to relieve the long-service operators for their holidays, and it was then that she encountered AAP in its news and sports outpost, then in a corner of "The Age."

She became the AAP weekend operator in 1976 and made it a fulltime job three years later at Stock Exchange House when the rapid expansion of news and commercial services began.

The move to the present 8th Floor offices saw her switchboard doubled to cope with the increased demand, and eventually this year the old board was scrapped to make way for a natty NEC in-dial system run from a control board about the size of a portable typewriter.

We asked her to describe this revolutionary change, and with a nice journalistic flourish she wrote: "On this nostalgic day, I was handed the pliers to cut the umbilical cord of the old system, ending an association with plug and cord boards over the past 25 years."

As the true daughter of an old pictorial editor, she also has a picture of herself, pliers in hand, to some day show her grandchildren.

\$200 For A New Title

We are looking for a new name for the Group Newsletter.

None of the earlier suggestions met with approval, so to get the Newsletter started, we borrowed IMPACT from the editorial report.

What we want is a title of wider application; a word of five to seven letters which will mean something throughout the Group.

On the strength of success of the new system competition that produced BAUDRUNNER, we are offering a \$200 prize for a title as apt.

Send your entries to the Editor, Group Newsletter, AAP, GPO Box 3888, Sydney 2001.

Sports Extra

AAP boasts a large number of sports enthusiasts. Golfers, cricketers, runners, swimmers, skiers, squash and tennis players, and footballers in several codes are out doing their thing most weekends and any other time they can snatch away from work.

This has led to the formation of several office sporting groups, largely based around Editorial, but with members of all other departments keen and very welcome participants.

The AAP Social Golf Club can probably lay claim to being its most venerable sporting body.

It now has 26 paid-up members, four distinguished life members, and several occasional players, including some from interstate, who turn up to its Sunday morning matches on one of the 15 or so courses we frequent around Sydney.

Despite the often early hit-off time, (and the fact that it follows closely on the rigours of Saturday night), tournaments are keenly contested, with an annual championship played in October-November.

Handicaps are closely monitored. They need to be, with AAP having its fair share of those burglars the game is noted for.

Usual monthly prize is a bottle of very good Scotch and a dozen golf balls shared among the runners-up and nearest the pin.

This year for the first time, we've been invited to send a team to play in the New Zealand News Media Golf Day at Wairakei in November, and we also have a tournament of our own at

Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains on September 22.

But despite the rapidly growing number of women on staff, we currently do not have a female golfer. Any budding Jan Stephensons out there?

Fun Run

AAP's team of intrepid striders survived the annual ordeal of the Sydney City to Surf fun run this year with the help of Reuters Bureau chief Reg Gratton who provided much needed refreshments after the run.

Reg turned in a respectable 83 minutes although most of the AAP team managed to beat the one-man Reuter team to the finish line.

Operator Mark Ferrett took out the line honours coming in at 59 minutes after being up all night on an overnight shift.

• Also up most of the night squeezing in some last minute training was James McCullough who managed to complete the race in 83 minutes.

Ron Corben proved he has greyhound genes, coming in at 60 minutes while Bruce Hextall crossed the line in 69 minutes and Kevin Ricketts took it easy at 80 minutes to retain sufficient reserves for the apres-run activities.

Ted Simmons was at Bondi in his capacity as official end-of-the-race commentator but he swears he didn't see a single AAP runner — they must have been too fast for the human eye.