



"WESTCOM" - THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS

from Page 44 - Access VIDEO Magazine Winter 1980

1979/80 has been a turbulent year for Westcom. We have been faced with both the dream of the establishment of a solid base for Community Television broadcasting and the nightmare of losing funding altogether and disappearing just at the time when Community Television was closest to becoming a reality. To work for the dream and head off the nightmare, keeping harmony and balance in the co-operative, has called for an extraordinary amount of energy and enterprise.

With the publication of the P.A.C.T. report, Westcom reassessed its attitude to the development of Community Television as a logical extension of the Video Access project. We had plans last year to develop our own small scale transmissions to the local area. These plans were put aside so that we could work together with Open Channel's proposal to initially establish a three month experiment in Community Weekend Television for the whole Melbourne Metropolitan area.

Many discussions were held between Westcom and Open Channel and I was invited to attend meetings of the Community Television Sub Committee of the Public Broadcasters' Association of Australia Conference held in Canberra, in March. The P.B.A.A. endorsed a series of resolutions supporting Community Television and the continued funding of Community Video Access. We have since joined the P.B.A.A.

Just at the time when Community Television was about to become a reality, we heard that the funding of the national Video Project was in danger of severe financial cut backs. An urgent meeting of the Video Access Centres was planned by the Paddington Resource Centre in Sydney. Westcom attended a planning meeting at Open Channel over one weekend and argued strongly for continuing, and stronger, financial support for the whole Video Access Project, to be taken to any future funding body proposed by the Government.

Westcom attended the National Conference held at Paddington in May; the conference, "Towards Community Television", was most successful and was reported widely in the media. Speakers included Rowan Ayers who was the producer of the BBC's "Open Door" programme for Community Access, and Mr. Tony Staley the Minister for Post and Telecommunications and a wide selection of supporters from the media.

The P.B.A.A. plans an experiment during the early part of 1981 which will bring to television screens in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Lismore community television programmes. The Independent and Multicultural Broadcasting Corporation will begin Melbourne transmissions on Channel 0 (VHF) and on Channel twenty-eight (UHF) in October this year. The proposal that Community Television will share this channel allocation, has been reported as far a field as the American entertainment paper Variety. When the experiment does take place, Westcom will be an important part of the project.

Negotiations with the relocated Footscray Technical School have resulted in access to the use of the new Colour Television Studio for Western Communications. This is an exciting development in the likely introduction of a permanent Community Television service.



The management of the studio is shared by a cluster group of schools and Westcom, who will represent the community.

We will become the clearing house for Western Suburban groups wishing to use this facility in order to take part in the development of Community Television.

Westcom has supported the growth of another communications co-operative, Western Region Broadcasters, who will be transmitting a 78 hour test community programme on the F.M. band in September. Our expanding Audio production facilities will enable programme preparation facilities for use by W.R.B. — F.M. and other public broadcasting bodies holding licences.

The Co-operative will be changing its administrative structure over the coming months; two part time positions will be filled by a community based video worker and a production worker at the centre in Williamstown. The Centre will continue to function primarily as a Video Access Centre but our new Community Television and Public Broadcasting commitments will provide a much sharper focus in the future for users of our facilities.

To make a success of these new developments all shareholders must reassess their attitudes to the fundamental base of our operations, which now demands a much greater commitment to cooperation and less of the destructive negativism, which during difficult times, was apparent amongst fringe elements.

The great potential of Western Communications outlined in this report demonstrates the great need for a positive and forward looking approach towards the realisation of our goals in access and Community Broadcasting.

Peter Duffy