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NEWS BITS

Jill Champion

ANSI May Change

More than 500 computer- and communications-industry professionals recently signed a petition to ANSI, the American National Standards Institute, requesting that all technical standards documents be available in electronic form.

Petition signers included all members of the Internet Architecture Board, the key technical body guiding the evolution of the emerging global Internet, and other prominent members of the community, such as Mitch Kapor of the Electronic Freedom Foundation and David Clark of MIT's Laboratory for Computer Science. Individual employees from almost every significant participant in the computer and communications field-Apple, 3Com, AT&T, IBM, Mead Data Central, and Vision Quest, to name a fewsigned the petition.

ANSI, a private organization and the self-designated national coordinating body for U.S. standards development, has come under increasing pressure to make key technical documents more widely available at lower costs. ANSI charges up to \$10 per page for a large body of crucial documents. High-priced standards mean that college students and young professionals are unlikely to ever read the documents, which are a crucial part of their education as professionals, and lack of access leads inevitably to lack of knowledge.

Databases Aid Relief

There's a database somewhere with your name in it and a lot more. The information is constantly being gathered and compiled when you perform the most innocent of tasks, such as subscribing to a magazine or writing a check at your local grocery store. But don't think those stats are just wasting away in some computer's data banks; someday they could save your life. Thanks to one company's demographic resources, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FE-MA) received some relief of its own during the Hurricane Andrew relief efforts.

FEMA was allowed free use of CONQUEST, a PCbased geodemographic marketing information system that provides access to demographic, economic, and geographic databases supplied by Donnelley Marketing Information Services. Each day during relief efforts. FEMA used the CONQUEST system to produce a key facilities map, which contained both English and Spanish legends and showed the location of tent cities, water, food, disaster applications centers, and more. Copies of the map were then distributed to all relevant government agencies. FEMA also correlated maps of damaged areas with its own geographic information system databases to identify what existed in the areas-the number of trailers, businesses, and so onall of which helped pinpoint where and what type of disaster relief was needed most. For example, knowing that 18 percent of Florida City's residences are unoccupied most of the year helped FEMA identify the number of residences there that needed to be searched after the hurricane. The U.S. military also used the system to determine where garbage needed to be picked up and the location of burn sites for debris.

On the Bus

The Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA), a nonprofit organization that sets and supports video graphics standards for the benefit of end users, announced that

the VESA Local Bus (VL-Bus) standard has been ratified by VESA's general membership. Under development since November 1991, the VL-Bus standard is designed to bring workstation-level performance to a standard PC platform, removing numerous bottlenecks that have hampered PCs for several years. On the VL-Bus, peripherals operate at the computer's speed, thus enabling data transfer between peripherals and the system at maximum speed. Such performance is critical for bandwidthconstrained devices like video, multimedia, mass storage, and networking adapters. The low-cost, extendible, portable local-bus design allows systems and peripherals from different manufacturers to work seamlessly together.

Ergo Storehouse

Looking for that perfect ergonomic gift for the computer user on your list? The Ergonix catalog carries a complete line of chiropractor-recommended ergonomic products, including wrist rests, eyecare software programs, monitor extension arms, antiglare and antiradiation screens, footrests, ergonomic computer mice, books, videos, and more. The catalog is devoted exclusively to the ergonomic workstation.

Cofounder Amy Marks says, "We believe there's a strong market niche for these products, and not just from a health and comfort standpoint. As even more ergonomic laws are passed, these items will also help employers avoid costly workers' compensation lawsuits by giving their employees the absolute best environment in which to work. That's what Ergonix has set out to address."

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up exchange of standards, Hurricane Andrew survivors get relief, VESA takes the bus, and ergonomics finds a home.

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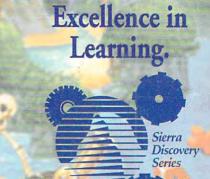
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