



MPs on the goat track

ELECTRONIC WAR has broken out in Parliament House over the lack of access to the Internet for members of parliament. On one side is the pro-Net faction including Shadow Communications spokesperson Richard Alston and South Australian Labor MP, Martin Evans. On the other side is the Parliamentary Information Systems Office (PISO) which will not allow members private access within Parliament House on security grounds.

'When it comes to parliamentarians having access to the Internet, let me simply say that what we have at the moment is no highway, it is more a goat track,' Senator Alston told the Senate in a recent debate.

He said every member of the US Congress had an e-mail address and Internet access so that their constituents could be in closer contact and to give members direct access to government information.

But it's no simple matter connecting Australian MPs, says PISO.

'If we provided direct access, Parliament House would be regarded as a prime target for hackers,' a PISO spokesperson told *CU*. 'It's a risk to have a link to an outside network of that kind.' Installing security technology such as firewalls was expensive and complex and certainly not something which happens overnight, he said.

Even Senators from the Committee investigating electronic bulletin boards have had no access to the Net (except via limited access from within the Parliamentary Library).

But Martin Evans, chairman of a parliamentary committee on the information technology needs of MPs, is convinced that Parliament House will be connected by at least late this year. 'It's clear that we have to secure the access but we have the mechanisms to do that now,' he told *CU*.

Getting MPs connected will be educative and productive for the community at large, he said. □

Telecom is watching you

ARE YOU a 'mover and shaker' or are you an 'urban elite'? Perhaps you're a 'suburban Eurasian' or an 'ethnic achiever'? No? Then are you 'rural well to do'? Perhaps you thought you were none of these. Well, think again. Telecom has put you into one such category and has started selling this 'geodemographic segmentation' information to businesses.

The new 'Constellation' system, says Telecom, will help companies identify where people of a 'certain income, education, age and lifestyle' are located.

Based on 1991 census information and consumer market profile databases, the system breaks the Australian population into 38 'lifestyle' segments, such as 'established urban owners' or 'greying rural', spread across three geographic categories - urban, town and rural. Each segment provides a picture of the particular group of households. For example, Group U4 are the 'urban tough timers' who left school with no qualifications, have young families - often to a single parent, rent small government houses, read 'Smash Hits' and drink cola. By contrast, 'movers and shakers' have degrees, read 'Elle', eat Thai, rent apartments and drive new cars.

According to Shala Ahmed from Telecom's national directory services, 'Constellation' is part of Telecom's plan to offer better services to business. Companies wanting to build a better profile of their markets give their databases to Telecom for analysis using Geographic Information System (GIS) computers, at a cost of around \$6,000 per thousand names.

She said Telecom's database of names and addresses was not available to businesses to build market profiles. □

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