



Two-way cable was soon recognized by social, behavioral, and demographic scientists to be a blessing. Not only was a continual census possible, but researchers were afforded a means by which to gather wholly new varieties of information about the activities, behavior, and characteristics of people. Never before had such accurate statistical data been available to social scientists and planners. Government and corporate decision-makers, seeing the enormous potential of such statistical data gathering, defined this as a major element in public participation in policy-making, a method by which government could continually determine the needs of its people. This was deemed much more effective than the mere voting on issues and candidates. Therefore, 1995 was set as target date by which time all homes would be required to have at least one basic, two-way cable terminal.

In America the beginning years of the last decade of the twentieth century saw an unprecedented era of social stability brought about by strictly-imposed government policies. Although conflicts and disturbances periodically arose they were largely localized, short-lived and had little effect on society as a whole. The 1900's also saw the gradual formation of a new type of social stratification based upon differing degrees of access to certain types and qualities of information. The Kerner Commission and political scientists who in the late 1960's had warned of a racially divided society had not foreseen the impact of localized community communications. This permitted urban communities to defend themselves against intrusion by people they considered undesirable, resulting in a vast array of exclusive subcultural urban enclaves. Many communities formed around economic levels, while others formed around ethnic, racial, or work-role distinctions. Local cable systems facilitated the emergence of rigid in-group/out-group attitudes within communities while helping to legitimize and reinforce their particular beliefs and values. Such community atomization permitted government to identify and isolate potential trouble spots and deal with them without upsetting the larger society. The degree of social stability within America was, however, in sharp contrast to the increasing intensity of social, political, and ecological chaos in many other parts of the world.

Scenario II

Urban America in the last quarter of the twentieth century was the locus of a series of widespread social and institutional changes. The mid-1970's saw the breaking down of restrictive zoning laws in suburban areas while the general movement to outlying urban areas continued. Increasingly entropic conditions in central cities due to an overload of population concentration and diseconomies of overly complex institutions gave rise to desire throughout all economic, social, ethnic, and racial groups for alternative environments and live styles. Even while the popularity of suburban living continued to grow, however, it too was beginning to be seriously questioned as a suitable choice.

Concern for the environment and the quality of goods and services, initiated at the end of the 1960's, had by the middle of the 1970's expanded to a greater concern for the total living environment, including housing, transportation, services, community, and social inequities. Demands for a more humanely organized society were echoed by feelings that megalopolis had passed the point of diminishing returns and that different choices were sorely needed.

Moreover, people began to realize in the last few years of the decade that full and responsible participation in decisions affecting their lives and their communities demanded access to means of generating, receiving, and exchanging ideas and information. Only in such a way could common areas of concern be discovered and co-operative efforts at problem-solving be attempted. Adequate and easily available methods of inter-community and intra-community communications were necessary for effectuating mutually beneficial change.

By the end of 1976, cable communications systems had been installed in enough areas that people in many communities began to see their potential for facilitating collective action. Awareness of the potential of community cable resulted not only by the increasing availability of the medium, but from educational campaigns conducted by universities, video groups, and citizens organizations which explained that the cable was not merely an extension of further refinement of television, but an entirely new means of communication.

← Andy gets a haircut--shown on Public Access television. →