INTERCONTACT

On-line information system on international organizations and conferences using information managed by the Union of International Associations.

Documentation prepared for an online presentation of the system - using the DOCUMASTER software - for the UAI Associate Members annual meeting. Brussels 21st September 1981.

SUMMARY

Intercontact is the first on-line information system on international organizations and conferences in all domains. The information is provided by the Union of International Associations as part of its function since 1910 as a clearinghouse for such information (cf. Yearbook of International Organizations, International Congress Calendar, etc.). The system under test contains information on 11,400 organizations and 7,500 conferences representing a total of 1,174,000 words of which 910,953 are individually indexed, whether in English or other working languages. The information would be accessible world-wide, directly or via telex, at an unprecedented level of detail through use of the DOCUMASTER retrieval software implemented by SLIGOS Benelux on an ITEL ASS computer. Decision on the final implementation is currently under review.

PART I: GENERAL OUTLINE

1. NEED FOR AN ON-LINE INFORMATION SYSTEM

1.1. Information explosion

It is unnecessary to comment on this widely reported phenomenon. As an example, the 1981 edition of the Yearbook of International Organizations lists 11,800 bodies, compared to 8,000 in the last English edition in 1979. Given the constraints and costs of recording information on paper, it is frequently impossible to reproduce information which is readily available - unless advantage is taken of the limitless capacity of information systems. The Union of International Associations, for example, has card files on meetings going back many decades which it has never been possible to render accessible by conventional means.

1.2. Need for information

Accompanying the information explosion is a proliferation of new needs for information which cannot be adequately met by conventional information tools.

1.3. Urgency

The new needs for information are now matched by impatience with the time delays associated with reproduction on paper. In addition much information on international organizations and meetings has a useful life which is shorter than the periodicity of paper-based documents.

1.4. Revolution in information technology

It is unnecessary to comment on this widely reported phenomenon. It is sufficient to note that many bodies working in relation to the international community of organizations are now using, or planning to use, some form of terminal-oriented information system.

1.5. Data bank society

The spread of on-line data banks is a widely reported phenomenon, whether it be reservation systems, documentation systems, or others. It is vital that information on the international community of organizations keep pace with the emergence of the « information society ».

1.6. New questions

The complexity and interdependence of social sectors, previously considered in isolation, has resulted in a proliferation of new kinds of question which users need to ask. These questions cut across the categories which have been traditionally used to order information in printed publications. Users want to formulate their own questions and are frustrated by imposed categories. It is only in on-line systems that users can be provided with a new level of flexibility.

1.7. New users

The possibility of asking new kinds of question creates new kinds of users whose needs cannot be met by information ordered in conventional ways.
1.8. Cost factors
The cost of using on-line systems is now at a level where a potential user must seriously assess the advantages of such a facility as compared with the costs and disadvantages of obtaining the information in other ways - or doing without it.

1.9. Next step in service provided by UAI
It was only by converting to computer-based production of publications that the UAI was able to maintain the level of service provided by its Yearbook. An on-line service provides a logical complement to the continued production of the Yearbook for the reasons outlined above.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE INTERCONTACT SYSTEM

2.1. Information
The Union of International Associations acts as the focal point for information on international organizations and conferences. This information has appeared for many years in two complementary publications and their supplements:
2. International Congress Calendar (21st ed. 1981) which contains descriptive entries on 4,300 future international meetings (usually sponsored by the organizations described in the Yearbook).
3. Supplements to both of the above publications appear, together with addenda / amendments, in the UAI Secretariat on a permanent files. Publications processed in this way include:

2.2. Computerization
2.2.1. The permanent computer files are held, under contract to UAI, by SLIGOS (London) since 1978. In September 1980, UAI and SLIGOS entered into partnership to computerize the International Congress Calendar in order to create an on-line information system on international conferences. The international organization information already on computer files was to be incorporated into this system. Since May 1981, SLIGOS has been testing the system with the two sets of information.

3. NATURE OF THE INTERCONTACT SYSTEM

3.1. Coverage
3.1.1. In its current test phase, the Intercontact system contains the information which appears in the:
   - Yearbook of International Organizations and includes historically meeting information prior to the date for the calendar.
   - International Congress Calendar Supplements to these publica-

3.1.2. Before it is made fully operational, it is expected that additional features will be added as the result of the production of the Directory of National Participation in International Organizations (Country membership).

3.1.3. Other categories of information can be added at any stage according to demand (and when funds permit) for example:
   - National member organizations
   - Statutes
   - World problem descriptions (already encoded)
   - French-language organization descriptions (already encoded).

3.2. Consultation of Intercontact
3.2.1. The above information can be consulted on-line, namely over a telephone line via a terminal in the user's office. In the absence of a terminal, various other compromise procedures are possible (telex, post, etc) as detailed in a later section.

3.2.2. On-line consultation means that the user formulates one or more appropriate questions which he types into his terminal. After a short delay, the reply is displayed on his terminal under the response.

3.2.3. For an on-line system to be convenient to users, it is essential that they should be protected from both the obscurities of computer jargon and from the complexity of the search procedures required. This is achieved by using a suitable software package - in this case the OCRMASTER package developed by Turnkey Systems Inc.
4. HOW TO CONSULT THE INTERCONTACT SYSTEM

4.1. The DOCUMASTER software is designed to appear exceptionally simple to users. There is one basic command FIND, which the user employs to specify whatever term(s) he considers significant in the meetings or organizations in which he is interested. For example: FIND agriculture or forestry not food and 1983.

4.2. On the basis of the FIND command, the computer replies with an indication of how many meetings or organizations (« documents ») meet the criteria specified in the FIND command.

4.3. The user may then choose:
- to display one or more of the « documents » found,
- to scan the documents found by computer for particular combinations of words or dates,
- to sort the documents, before displaying them,
- or to ask a more detailed series of questions to reduce the number of documents further.

4.4. Because of the exceptional ease with which questions can be formulated, it is up to the user to develop a search strategy which will best enable him to locate the kinds of information he is looking for.

5. USERS OF THE INTERCONTACT SYSTEM

5.1. The Intercontact system is designed to be of service to a variety of users including:
- governments, embassies
- intergovernmental agencies
- foundations and funding agencies
- conference services and organizers
- tourism services
- international organization research
- international action campaigns
- international publication distributors
- library and documentation services
- international organizations in general.

5.2. Users may participate in the system in a variety of ways, including simple consultation, systematic searches, supply of new information, direct entry and quality control of new information, subsidy of certain user categories, etc.

5.3. To distinguish between categories of users, the data bases they are each permitted to consult, and whether they are authorized to amend some portion of the contents, a system of confidential passwords is used.

5.4. In order to limit the inclusion of new categories of information, users may constitute themselves into « user clubs » with privileged access to the information on which they have invested. The same procedure may be used to fund special search programmes.
5.5. Complex organizations (such as the EEC or UN groups) can also use the system to store and retrieve information on internal meetings for which access is restricted to divisions of the organization itself or to a limited number of member governments. Such sub-sets of information can be used for scheduling interrelated meetings, facility requirements and calendar development.

6. POTENTIAL OF THE INTERCONTACT SYSTEM

6.1. The Intercontact system is a unique initiative to provide world-wide on-line access to the many interacting bodies of the highly dynamic international community of organizations and their associated meetings.

6.2. Of major significance to the potential of Intercontact is the deliberate effort to ensure its accessibility to users whether in a computer-oriented environment or who are at present only able to work with telex or the postal system.

6.3. On-line access to information on the international community of organizations sets the stage for a further development which is essential to the quality of the information stored. The range and status of users must be extended to enable them to use the Intercontact system to amend, add and exchange information through the on-line system (as is done in airline reservation systems). This step is vital to the elimination of the present delays resulting from dependence on postal services and publication cycles. The Intercontact system is thus the first step towards creating an information environment within which international organizations and associated meetings, complex international conferences and bodies interact in response to each others needs.

6.4. The real potential of Intercontact lies in the manner whereby it can be extended with further categories of data increasing significance to the day-to-day operations of international organizations. These bodies will then become directly involved in rapid update and additions to such information as a way of facilitating their own activities. The Intercontact system would then function as a dynamic evolving model of the international community - a major step beyond the series of static images which are at present available.

6.5. In a time of revolutionary innovation and chaos in a system of increasing complexity, it is astounding that no effort has yet been made to benefit from the revolution in information technology to order understanding of the full range of bodies attempting to act in response to this social crisis. Intercontact could have a major role to play in providing a necessary minimum degree of operational coherence in the overwhelming variety of international activities.

PART II USE OF INTERCONTACT VIA A TERMINAL

1. ACCESS TO DATA BASE (AND TERMINATION)

1.1. The communication link is first established via the telephone or data network from the user to the data base in Brussels. The number used on the telephone gives direct access to the data base in Brussels. The number used on the telephone gives direct access to the data base.

1.2. User then requests the DOCUMENT MASTER programme as follows (*):

```plaintext
> DM661 DOCUMENT MASTER STARTED
> press return
> data
```

1.3. User then requests the Meeting/Organization data base using the START command, and specifying the name of the data base (previously called DEMO) and the user's confidential password (provisionally UAINT). Without an authorized code a user cannot gain access to the data base. The code also determines whether the user has only the right to consult the data base, or some part of it, or whether he has also the right to update it.

```plaintext
start demo for uaint
```

1.4. The Meeting/Organization data base (DEMO) at present consists of two sub-data bases, provisionally named as follows:

E 1 Meetings (being the collection of meetings from the International Congress Calendar, 1981 edition)
E 2 Organizations (being the collection of organizations from the Yearbook of International Organizations. 1981 edition)

To gain access to these sub-data bases, the user employs the SELECT command, which will be accepted if he is authorized to use the data bases, select e1a2

1.5. The above procedure enables the user to formulate search inquiries. If however a user who is only authorized to make such inquiries, then attempts to SELECT the update mode in order to modify the data base contents, this will be refused as follows:

```plaintext
DM 138 OPERATOR NOT AUTHORIZED FOR UPDATE
```

1.6. The user may at any time terminate his use of the data base by use of the STOP command.
2. OVERVIEW OF SEARCH AND DISPLAY PROCEDURES

2.1. Search procedures

2.1.1. **FIND** is the basic command whereby a search of the data base is initiated. The command must specify one or more searchwords, and may also specify the name of the sub-data base to be searched (e.g. E1 for Meetings). 

**Example:**

```
FIND agriculture and forestry but not food
```

2.1.2. Instead of using **AND** to connect searchwords, it is possible to use **OR** or **NOT**:

```
FIND agriculture or forestry but not food
```

2.1.3. To facilitate searching, some words have been defined as synonyms. For example, conference is used as a searchword, then documents containing symposium will also be found:

```
FIND and conference and towns but not europe
```

2.1.4. Where various possible word endings exist, only the beginning of the searchword needs to be specified, provided it is followed by a -prefix

```
FIND and medio- and africa- but not south-
```

2.1.5. Some items of special significance in the data base are marked by prefixes. All present these as follows, with the lower case letters indicating how they are labelled within the data base:

```
meeting = DAT meeting-town = VIL meeting-country = PAY meeting-participants = PAR organization-number = ORG
```

When used in specifying a searchword, the prefix ensures that the word will only be found in the context specified:

```
FIND e1 and par: 1000 thru par: 2000
```

2.1.6. For those items which have been prefixed, which at present means meeting date, meeting town, meeting country, meeting participants, and organization reference number. For example, using the result of 2.1.7 above:

```
OM 527 0000 DOCS HAVE BEEN SORTED
```

2.1.7. The user must decide, once a search has been completed, whether the number of documents found are sufficient to warrant display (displayed under 2.3, below), or whether a more detailed series of searches must be used to identify a smaller subset of documents for display. A search initiated in any of the above ways may be further narrowed by continuing the search:

```
FIND e1 and par: 1000 thru par: 2000
```

2.2. Sorting and scanning search results

2.2.1. Before actually displaying the documents, the user may wish to have them sorted. The sort can only be done on searchwords which have been prefixed, which at present means meeting date, meeting town, meeting country, meeting participants, and organization reference number. For example, using the result of 2.1.7 above:

```
OM 527 0000 DOCS HAVE BEEN SORTED
```

Here the user requested that the documents be sorted by date within town, specifying that the sum should be made on 5 characters of the town name and 6 characters of the date (which is in the form 810625, for 25 June 1981)
2.3. Displaying search results

2.3.1. One or more documents (e.g. meeting documents) resulting from the above search query and any subsequent sort or scan may be displayed using the DISPLAY command (or the ENTER key on the terminal). Example of a single meeting document:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E000562</td>
<td>THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>FRANKFURT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.2. To control the number of documents displayed, the user may employ commands as:
- display 3 documents
- display all documents
- display next document
- display previous document

2.3.3. To control the number of lines to be displayed in a document, the user may employ commands as:
- set all lines
- set 4 lines

2.3.4. To control the number of lines to be displayed, the user may employ commands as:
- display next line
- display previous line

2.3.5. To control the number of lines to be displayed, the user may employ commands as:
- display next line
- display previous line

2.3.6. To display any portion of the index, the user proceeds as follows:
- index student
- index associate members
- index country

2.3.7. Display on paper: If the user wants a copy of paper on what appears on the terminal screen, he may use a special key on the terminal to transfer the information onto his hardcopy device immediately.

2.3.8. Display on paper of long lists: The user may prefer that long lists be made into paper at his request via the high-speed printer in Brussels (and then sent to him by post). The user can request such lists by using a special key on the terminal.