

## Electronic service to provide news at a glance

By LINDA KRIEG  
Collegian Staff Writer

Newspapers may be a thing of the past if a new computer service from Pittsburgh, which provides shopping, sports and news information instantly, attracts consumers' attention.

Alan M. Horton, general manager of Viewtron/Pittsburgh, said the new consumer service from Scripps Howard Publishing Co. will be available to State College residents around Thanksgiving.

Those who have personal computers can purchase a modem that will connect the computer to a telephone line. By calling a number in Pittsburgh, the subscriber is connected to the main base in Miami, Fla., Horton said. The subscriber then has access to any information the data base has available.

The Miami data base offers a variety of services, including preschool lessons, soap opera updates and movie reviews, said Cheryl Patterson, public relations assistant in Miami for Viewdata Corp., the company offering the nationwide Viewtron computer service.

"It's a pretty wide range of information," she said. "(Videotex) has enhanced the way you read the news. It's more visually appealing, and it's fun and exciting to use."

In addition, the medium is more timely than a newspaper because stories are constantly coming over the wire and the data base provides them unedited, she said.

Although Videotex has been called the "electronic newspaper," Horton said the demise of the print newspaper is far off.

"I'm not predicting the funeral of the newspaper as we know it," Horton said. "Over time we will find plenty of people who want to do the electronic thing without ruining the subscription base of the print paper. And some folks may not want the electronic version."

However, many publishers are interested in developing this information service of the future.

The *Baltimore Sun*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Seattle Times* and the Capital Cities newspapers want to provide this type of service, he said. The Knight-Ridder chain is now considering Philadelphia for its next Viewtron base, Horton said.

Viewtron is a plus for busy people, Horton said. "It simplifies life rather than complicates it," he said. "It's like someone using a tool that saves time doing little things, so there's more time for human contact."

The company also runs an "on-air auction" program that allows sub-

scribers to bid on merchandise via their computers, she said. The price of an item is marked down every 15 minutes and anyone wishing to buy the item puts in a "bid" on his computer. The first offer to reach the data base enables the bidder to buy the item at that price.

The medium of this service — Videotex — allows subscribers and the data base to communicate with each other, Horton said.

"You don't have to pre-program. You send messages to the data base, ask for something and it will come back to you," Horton said.

Consumers have been able to use Viewtron, the national Videotex service, since 1983, he said. Knight-Ridder provides the national service, while the Pittsburgh operation will be Knight-Ridder's first joint venture with another publisher, Scripps Howard.

Scripps Howard decided to open the service in Pittsburgh because it "is a wonderful market for high technology. It has high-tech firms and software houses and Carnegie Mellon (University) is one of the most wired campuses around," Horton said.

The difference between the national service and the area service will be that Viewtron/Pittsburgh will offer localized information, he said. The service will include shopping cata-

logs for Pittsburgh stores and local calendars for events in the Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania areas, Northern West Virginia and Eastern Ohio, Horton said.

"Viewtron/Pittsburgh is the first and only one of its kind to localize services," he added.

State College subscribers of Viewtron/Pittsburgh will be able to use their computers to shop through catalogs from Pittsburgh stores in about a year from now, Horton said.

Eventually, Viewtron/Pittsburgh hopes to include instantaneous stocks, bonds and commodities information.

"For a slight surcharge, you can get up-to-the-minute stock quotes and will be able to buy and sell," Horton said.

The service will cost 22 cents per minute during workday hours and 9 cents in the evening, Horton said. Special services will cost extra, Horton said, because — as in the case of stocks — Viewtron/Pittsburgh must buy the rights to carry the information.

In addition to the usual charge, State College residents would have to pay for the long distance call to Pittsburgh, Horton said, adding that Viewtron/Pittsburgh is negotiating with phone companies to enlarge the local calling area next spring.

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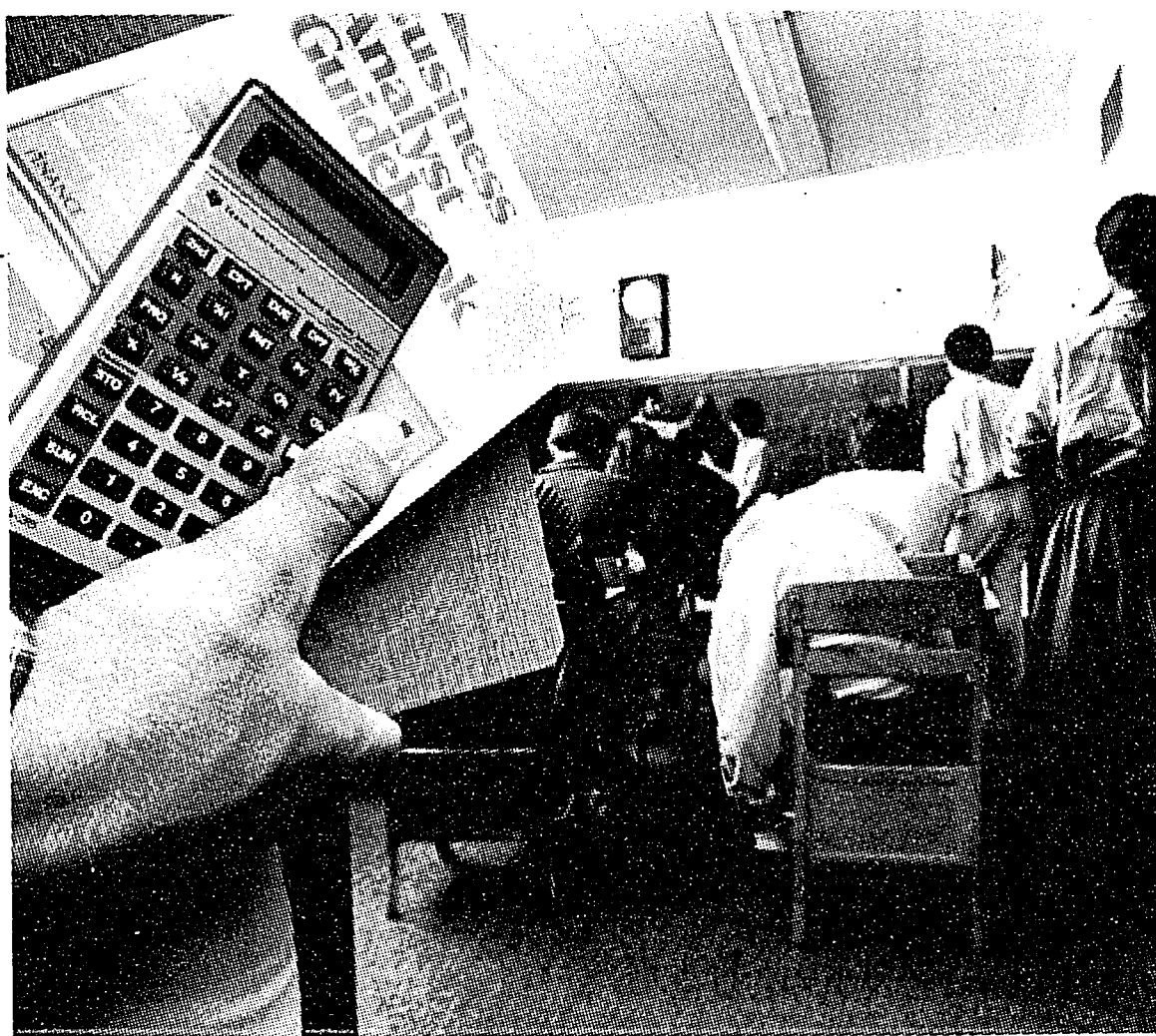
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