

AMERICAN BELL PREMIERES IN STYLE

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American Bell [will make] its long-awaited debut in style on [January 1, 1983] and continuing through the first week of January. The company capped several years of intensive planning with opening ceremonies at a number of locations, the launching of new advertising campaigns, and announcement of new products.

For the past few years, American Bell had, to many, seemed more a concept, a paper company, a commercial silhouette constructed in dotted lines of responsibility. Not anymore. The company has hit the ground running, with 28 thousand employees and hundreds of millions of dollars in assets. Now it's real. And it's in business.

Headed by Charles Marshall, American Bell has two major components Advanced Information Systems, headed by Archie J. McGill (an interview with McGill appears on page 14), and Consumer Products, headed by Randall L. Tobias. Technical support will be supplied by the company's Engineering Design and Development Division, which is under the direction of Lee S. Tuomenoksa and Thomas H. Thompson.

Following its premiere, American Bell promptly rolled up its sleeves and opened shop. Consumer Products' Bell PhoneCenters opened their doors for business on January 2, 1983, and Advanced Information Systems (AIS) recorded its first sale at 7:30 a.m. on Monday, January 3. A few days later, the Consumer Products Division expanded its product line introducing the Genesis telesystem and the Touchmatic 1600 terminal at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. The Genesis telesystem uses software cartridges to supply a long list of features, including custom calling - formerly available from Bell only through a central office for residence customers.

Under the provisions of the FCC's Computer Inquiry II decision, American Bell, through its Consumer Products division, will be the sole purveyor, among Bell System companies, of new, Bell-manufactured customer premises equipment for residence customers. The division will sell its products at the 460 Bell PhoneCenters it operates throughout the country; in addition, it will act as a wholesaler, selling in quantity to Sears, Target Department Stores, and other select retailers. The division's product line currently includes desk and wall-model telephones, decorator telephones, answer and record equipment, cordless telephones, accessory items, and new home communications terminals. AIS will serve what was formerly referred to as the "business market," selling products such as:

- AIS/Net 1000--This is the new data communications service permitting data transmission between computers and terminals made by different manufacturers and are normally incompatible and unable to communicate, Net 1000 is AIS' first service.

- Voice communications systems – the Dimension[®] system and the Horizon[®] system are two leading examples.
- Data communications terminals Dataspeed[®] terminals and Teleprinter 1000 are examples.

New communications systems integrating voice and data systems will also fall under AIS' aegis.

AIS is organized along three major lines of business. One handles general products and systems for small businesses. A second handles large and intermediate telecommunications systems, and the third handles Net 1000 and will develop enhanced network services. Both AIS and the Consumer Products Division will institute a nationwide pricing policy for their products.

Setting up this major corporation in barely more than two years—the company's 4.3-billion-dollar capitalization plan was approved by the FCC in November has been an "exhausting challenge" according to those involved. That challenge will be revisited in 12 months when divestiture takes place and American Bell's population more than doubles as installation and maintenance forces, formerly employed by the operating companies, join the ranks.

AT&T expects American Bell to grow at an annual, compounded rate of 15 to 20 percent. McGill estimates that AIS will exceed that pace; three AIS customers have indicated they would like to absorb the entire initial capacity of Net 1000 during its early stages in 1983. Meanwhile, Tobias says he plans on his division "becoming the vendor of choice for 80 million homes."

-- Bob Kinhead