

beyond the reach of Joe Public. One of the fax services is called MetFAX Education and is aimed at schools. Even this is on premium-rated numbers. I think it is appalling to place such price barriers on schools. The Met. Office should be encouraging schools, not trying to screw the last penny out of them. Schools are desperately short of money and this price barrier will greatly limit their use of Met. Office expertise.

What of the future? Well, we are certainly in the midst of a communications revolution and an information explosion. The way in which information moves around the world has undergone a quantum leap. The information industry of two or three years ago is 'old hat' now. It has been replaced by something quite different. I am referring to the Internet or the 'information superhighway'. I am sure that everyone in the audience has heard of it but perhaps many of you are not quite sure what it is and what it means. It is certainly here and it is only the beginning of huge changes which we shall see taking place in the coming years.

The international meteorological community has jumped on to the Internet highway in a very big way. State meteorological services and academic institutions around the world have recognised that the meteorological community and the general public stand to benefit from the widest possible distribution of weather information and forecasts. The Internet is rapidly becoming the primary means of achieving that distribution without price barriers. Getting access to the Internet is not particularly difficult and is getting easier. The great advantage, from the point of view of the general public, is that it is very cheap. There are no price barriers. I have full Internet access at home and, for personal purposes, the Internet is now my main source of weather information.

As you would expect, there is a great deal of information available from US sources. The National Weather Service has an extensive database. So do the National Hurricane Center and the National Climatic Data Center. All universities with meteorology departments have extensive databases. In Australia, the Bureau of Meteorology has a database of forecasts, observations and imagery. Forecasts and imagery are available from the Japan Meteorological Agency. Environment Canada provides a range of forecasts, charts and imagery. All of this information is readily available to anyone with Internet access but where does the Met. Office figure? It has no presence at all. It is hiding behind the ramparts of its commercial fortress.

On the international meteorological discussion groups on the Internet there have recently been quite a number of enquiries about how to access

products and forecasts from the Met. Office model. The international meteorological community recognises that the Met. Office is one of the centres of excellence and expects that its products will be made available to the international community in the way that others are doing. The international community does not understand why the Met. Office does not want to contribute. If the Met. Office chose to do so it could make a great deal of information available on a server on the Internet. It doesn't cost that much – even the universities can afford it and they are not flush with spare cash. It only takes the will to do it.

Interestingly, the UK central government has an extensive database on the Internet. Many government departments also have. These include the Treasury, the Met. Office's paymasters. The full budget speech is available on-line plus the supplementary budget speech. The minutes of the monthly meetings between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England are there. The Department of Trade and Industry has an extensive database. The Ordnance Survey and HMSO are also making an appearance – where is the Met. Office?

With this explosion in information technology I believe the time is ripe to open a debate on the rôle of the Met. Office as far as the public in general is concerned. My own view is that the Met. Office has lost its way. It is our national weather service. As such it should be serving the whole nation, not just the small subset who are willing to pay a premium.

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Royal Meteorological Society Frisby–Green Prize – 1995 arrangements

Since 1983 the Association of British Climatologists has awarded an annual prize for the best undergraduate dissertation in the field of climatology. The first F. H. W. Green Prize was awarded in 1984 and this year will be the twelfth such award.

The prize was instituted as a tribute to the wide-ranging climatological work of F. H. W. Green. In 1993 the prize was renamed the Frisby–Green Prize in recognition of the support for the prize and the climatological contributions of Emily Frisby, one of the Association's founder members.

Heads of departments in universities and colleges in the UK are invited to submit one undergraduate dissertation in the field of climatology of sufficient merit to warrant consideration for this prize.

Further details and an application form can be obtained from: Dr J. McClatchey, School of Environmental Science, Nene College, Moulton Park, Northampton, NN2 7AL.
