

Robert Stein

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Mr. Charles Van Doren
Encyclopaedia Britannica
425 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Mr. Van Doren:

At the videodisc symposium I attended last week I had the opportunity to talk with John Hartigan from Sony. He is the head of market development for Sony Video Products. I discussed Sony's presentation to EB with him and talked about some ideas for experimentation. What I suggested to him went well beyond the content of my memo to Mr. Swanson, particularly the possibility of using the MIT soft-font typography for the reformatting of the text. Hartigan was impressed with the potential importance of such a broad experiment and proposed that Sony underwrite the costs of an experimental disc that would explore the whole question of encoding and displaying text on a videodisc.

Quite fortunately, Andy Lippman, whom you met at Negroponte's lab at MIT, showed up at the conference the next day. I asked Lippman if MIT would make the soft-font program available to Sony for an experiment. He said there would be no problem, but that he thought Negroponte would be interested in carrying out the experiment at the MIT lab itself, short of the mastering and replication of the disc. Additionally, Lippman suggested that they would want to include, as part of the experiment, digital encoding of text on the disc.

As you can imagine, I think this is a very special opportunity which should not be passed up. I needn't say how valuable it would be EB to have MIT and Sony carrying out such an experiment using the Encyclopaedia Britannica as the subject of the study. With EB playing a full role in the design of the experiment, it will be possible, at relatively little cost to EB, to get a head start on solving some of the technical and design questions related to electronic publishing that you will be facing in the coming years. Moreover, what is especially exciting is the idea that with the combined experience of Sony, MIT and EB working on the problem, it will be possible, in the course of the experiment, to really push out the boundaries of what can be done, conceivably moving the whole field ahead, one giant step.

It would be good if you could call Negroponte to establish a direct connection with him on this matter. If it turns out for some reason that he doesn't think they could do the work at MIT, then Sony would most likely want to do it themselves, at their own labs, using MIT's soft-font program where appropriate. John Hartigan will wait to hear the result of your initial discussions with Negroponte, after which it will be possible to begin making plans in earnest.

For your reference, John Hartigan is based in Detroit. His office phone number is (313) 477-4700.

Sincerely yours,



Robert Stein