

Our Living Past - a Strategic Asset

AT&T's archives soon will go on-line, making it easier for employees to access the richness of our history

The people of AT&T have always known that they were shaping the 20th century. The countless letters, transcripts, documents, paintings, memoirs, films, photographs, advertisements and artifacts stored in the company's archives prove it.

AT&T's archives have the original documentation of the company's beginning, growth and achievements, including the invention of the transistor, electronic switching systems and numerous other projects. "This isn't a collection of cute old stuff," says Marcy Goldstein, the company's head archivist. "It's one of the company's most strategic assets.

"The archives show us what was best about our past, what we can learn from it, what we should preserve," says Goldstein. They also help company attorneys document legal cases and prevent expensive duplication of research, photography and documentation.

Right now, Goldstein and her staff are centralizing the archives of all AT&T's business units and building a database to provide company-wide access to all archive information. The project should be completed by mid-1988.

Tucked away in the rolling hills of Warren, N.J., the archives are housed in temperature- and humidity-controlled rooms. Original documents are stored in acid-free boxes, and all of the information is coded and computerized and available on the LINUS* data base. The project entails such details as removing paper clips, which are prone to rust, and culling through more than 500,000 photographs to decide which are worth saving.

The effort is worth it: It will make it easier for employees to tap into AT&T's past. It also supports a company-wide effort to streamline internal use and management of information.

"The more we understand the origins, growth and achievements of our company, the better we'll be able to shape our future," says Goldstein. To emphasize the point, Goldstein talks about the oral histories the company's archivists have been collecting for years now.

Two of the people on Goldstein's staff conduct oral histories-tape-recorded conversations with company notables and people who have worked on history-making projects. Liz Roach, who cut her teeth doing a doctoral study of Samoan Islanders as anthropologist Margaret Mead did, says that doing the oral histories has given her "a sense of how close-

knit the AT&T community has been, how freely ideas have flowed."

Another archivist, Jeff Sturchio, has a doctorate in the history of science and technology and also is working on oral histories.

The antitrust and divestiture period-the '70s and 80s-was meticulously recorded. Now-retired AT&T Chairman Charles Brown requested that this be done so that future historians could understand the

wrenching experience of the most dramatic divestiture in corporate history.

Feeling connected to the past is important to any culture, explains Goldstein. "Divestiture made it hard for people to find each other," she says. "You always could find the information you needed. You always knew someone who knew someone." Now, with on-line access through the Library Network, employees have a wealth of information easily available to them.

Goldstein says that the archives can give employees a fresh perspective on the company: "You get a good feeling about the company. You come away with the conviction that good things have always been done here."

Susan Mach

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