

Prestel Travel

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Prestel for the Travel Trade

**This booklet is written for all users
of Prestel in the travel trade.**

It explains:

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An Introduction to Prestel

What is Prestel?

Prestel is the name given to the British Videotex system, which is based on the use of an existing communications network — the telephone line.

Videotex systems are being developed throughout the world because, in comparison with other computer systems, they are relatively inexpensive.

As part of British Telecommunications, which leads the world in communications developments, Prestel comprises a network of six computers strategically placed around the UK, each containing identical information which is continuously updated by a master computer.

Information is supplied to Prestel mainly by industrial and commercial organisations, government agencies and many other sources, for the benefit of customers, clients and other users of the system.

The suppliers of information are called *Information Providers* and those who use the system are *Prestel Users*.

An *Information Provider* (IP) leases blank pages from Prestel for the information he wants to convey. There are now more than 1,200 information sources.

Prestel Users

There are 60,000 registered Prestel users in the UK, at present 45% are in the home and 55% in business and 5,500 of these are ABTA Travel Agents.

Accessing Prestel — What Equipment Do You Need?

An individual within the home or office can connect a terminal to the Prestel computer by dialling in over the ordinary telephone line. For 98% of the country's telephone population this telephone connection can be made for the cost of a local call.

There are 3 options available regarding equipment for accessing Prestel:

- 1 A purpose built videotex terminal with keyboard and printer costing approximately £1,500 to buy or around £650 per annum to lease.

- 2 A small adaptor — that looks like and is the size of a keyboard — can be used to convert a normal television set. This costs from around £250 to buy.
- 3 A microcomputer. Many popular micros — e.g. BBC, Spectrum, Apple — can be connected to a modem and, with an appropriate software package, can be run to receive videotex.

The only other requirement other than the equipment mentioned above is to have a suitable jack socket attached to your telephone line. The type of jack you require depends on the equipment you use and the cost is either £18 + VAT (jack 96A) or £28 + VAT (PST jack, which is also compatible with any recently installed modern telephone).

Finding Your Way Around the Database

Hundreds of thousands of pages are available on Prestel. To find information you can either use the simple on-screen "menu" indexing, or else refer to printed sources to obtain the required page number. Travel is one of the major subjects stored in Prestel computers and is grouped under one control index for easy access by the travel agent and tour operator.

Prestel Travel centralises a vast and continuously updated amount of travel information — for example:

- Fares, timetables and availability of air, rail, coach and ferry services.
- Details and availability of hotels, holidays, restaurants, theatres and cinemas.
- Exchange rates and visa requirements.
- Inoculations and insurance.
- News and weather reports.

How Much Does it Cost?

The cost of using Prestel can be broken into 5 elements:

- 1 Equipment costs. See above.
- 2 Prestel standing charge. (There is no limit to the number of terminals you may use in one location on a single registration.)

- 3 Time-based charge for using the Prestel computer.
- 4 Frame charges. Some pages on Prestel carry a specific "access" charge which can vary from 0.1p-99p. Only a very small number of travel related pages carry any frame charge at all.
- 5 Telephone charges. 98% of UK telephone users are on a local phone call to Prestel. (The information is sent to your phone from your local computer.)

For costs refer to the Tariff Guide.

Among the current uses of Prestel are:—

- Comprehensive late availability information from over one hundred holiday companies.
- Brochure ordering facilities.
- A daily travel news service.
- Rapid relay of flight arrival/departure information from the electronic boards of UK airports.
- Gateway on-line reservations for holiday companies, ferries, buses and airlines.
- Reservations services for car rental, hotels and theatres.
- Daily USA standby prospects from the North Atlantic carriers.
- Electronic mail and telex.
- Operational news from British Rail, London Transport, ferry companies and airlines.
- Updates on health and visa requirements.
- Exchange rates and travellers' cheques ordering services.

What are the Benefits of Using Prestel?

Cost Savings

The Prestel local call network can mean direct cost savings in carrying out transactions with principals who are not on a local call from your agency location.

Time Savings

If information is comprehensive, up-to-date and well-indexed it can be quicker to obtain from Prestel than via a telephone call or printed matter.

Ease of Use

Information is normally easier to understand via a Prestel screen than via a printed document.

Point of Sale

It often helps to clinch a sale by showing the customer the information "on TV". It is obviously useful to have a printer to provide both client and file copies of transaction or information.

Expansion with Prestel

Already you can add new facilities to your Prestel terminal.

Most travel agents use a printer: now you can use the latest Sony/Philips Prestel terminals that connect to laser disc or video. This enables you to switch from Prestel to laser/video or even to put Prestel Information on top of the picture at a press of a button. Micro computers can now access Prestel and be programmed to send mailbox messages to branch multiples or customers, sort-out replies, strip off messages, etc.

Becoming a Prestel Travel Information Provider

Prestel Characteristics

First of all you should be aware of the special features which make Prestel such an attractive medium:

Simplicity

Prestel is a very simple system — a user can learn how to operate it within a few minutes without any special training. An Information Provider can be taught to edit pages onto the system in just a couple of days.

Immediacy

The information on Prestel can be updated continuously by an Information Provider. News, special offers, prices, etc. can be entered by the Information Provider and seen by all users within minutes.

Scope

Prestel computers can store hundreds of thousands of pages of information therefore there is no practical limit to the size of database you can have. Also it is possible for several hundred users to simultaneously access any single page.

Communications

Prestel enables users to be in direct 'electronic mail' contact with Information Providers and other Prestel users through response frames and mailbox facilities. Prestel can also be used to send or receive a telex from anywhere in the world.

Statistical reporting

Prestel records the number of times pages are accessed. It is therefore possible to ascertain which parts of your database are being most heavily used.

Attractiveness

Information can be displayed in a compelling and attractive way, using colour and graphics.

Economy

Compared with more sophisticated computerised information retrieval systems, Prestel is extremely cheap. It was designed from the outset as a system which would support large numbers of simultaneous users. Prestel is available on the basis of a local telephone call in almost all parts of the country which helps to keep its costs low.

Role of the Information Provider

Most new Information Providers go through a simple learning process in order to operate on Prestel with maximum effectiveness. Here are the steps that are involved:

- 1 Firstly an Information Provider will consider what part of the range of his information may be particularly suitable for Prestel presentation. The decision may be related to the level of financial commitment he wishes to make.
- 2 With some proposals in mind, the prospective Information Provider should then contact Prestel Travel for advice. The proposal can then be refined to the point where its overall attractiveness can be assessed and the decision taken whether to go ahead.
- 3 At this stage the Information Providers divide between those who choose to contract directly with Prestel (full IPs), and those who find it more economical or more convenient initially to sub-lease pages from a full IP and may or may not choose to be responsible for editing their own pages onto the system (sub-IP). A full discussion of the differences between full IP and sub-IP appears in the next section.
- 4 When the page-entering work is complete and the database is 'opened' to Prestel users, the good Information Provider continues to compare his offering against other databases looking for possible improvements and will examine his frame counts (the number of times users have looked at individual pages) to identify the most popular areas and build on them. He may also look to identify his users by utilising 'response frames' through which users can communicate back to Information Providers.

Full IP or Sub-IP?

There are currently two options open to Information Providers on Prestel:

1 Full IP

A full IP contracts to buy page space directly from Prestel. This includes the facility to enter and amend information and to retrieve response frames, 100 frames (pages), editing training for 2 staff (2 day residential course), and an editing manual. Additional frames can be purchased individually. There is not time based editing charge to a full IP.

A full IP also has exclusive ownership of a '3-digit node' — i.e., rights to all page numbers beginning with the particular 3 digits.

2 Sub-IP

A number of full IPs known as 'umbrella' IPs are in the business of sub-leasing frames on their database to other businesses who need fewer than the minimum 100 pages obtainable directly from Prestel.

As a sub-IP there is a choice between letting the full IP do the editing for you, or being able to edit yourself.

A sub-IP without editing facilities: allows the full IP to do all the database creation and updating. The obvious advantages is in not needing to allocate staff time, not needing editing equipment and in the convenience of letting someone else do the work for you. However, one thing to bear in mind is that any response frames you require (messages) will have to be retrieved initially by the full IP and then physically delivered to you later.

A sub-IP with editing facilities: has two of the advantages of being a full IP — editing one's own information and retrieving one's own response frames.

An organisation which decides to become a sub-IP will find that costs vary considerably among 'umbrella' IPs. Costs generally depend on the number of pages and whether or not editing capability is required. If the full IP is to handle the editing then frequency of update, sophistication of graphics and whether response frames are required will all affect the quoted price.

For a database of up to a few dozen pages it should normally be far less expensive to become a sub-IP. Those who want total control of their own large database will probably find it cheaper to come directly to Prestel as a full IP.

It should be noted that in the case of sub-IPs, editing time is charged for by Prestel at all times.

For costs refer to the Tariff Guide.

Entering Pages onto Prestel

1 On-line Keyboarding

An information Provider can edit his pages by dialling our Update Computer and typing on a Prestel set with an editing keyboard (similar to a typewriter with special keys for colours and graphics.)

2 Off-line Keyboarding

You may wish to save on phone costs by purchasing a more sophisticated editing terminal (costing from £3,000-£20,000) which allows you to create your pages off-line, and only phone our computer to feed them at a higher speed (1,200 bits per second) once they are ready. Some of these terminals offer word-processing and other facilities to make the keyboarding job faster and more efficient.

3 Transfer to Computer Files

Your data may already be on a computer, though not in the format of Prestel pages. Various software programs are now available for converting such files to Prestel format and putting them onto a magnetic tape that will feed into Prestel for you.

Apart from these three methods, there are other technical possibilities, e.g. direct computer-to-computer link-ups.

Closed User Groups (CUGs)

An Information Provider may keep his pages on 'open' access — i.e., allow any Prestel user at all to see them — or he may choose to place the page(s) in a CUG. Access to any page in a CUG will be restricted so that only users specially selected by the Information Provider can see them.

Prestel Travel — 470 and 747

The 470 and 747 Databases Explained

Prestel Travel now offers two services:

470 for all ABTA Travel Agents. This service incorporates an efficient indexing system, ABTA news and some direct reservation services, all without paying the Prestel computer time charges.

747 for all other travel users and travel managers. It incorporates the new indexing which is a duplicate of the indexing on 470.

Both services allow the user to index through to any Travel Information Provider and to reach the main Prestel index.

The 747 Service

This database contains indexing and information for the non-ABTA travel user. It caters for a broad range of interests from the professional travel user (principals, travel managers etc) and the frequent business traveller, through to the casual holidaymaker.

Normal time-based charge is payable on 747 usage.

747 is on 'open access' to all users. However if you wish to have 747 as your main index you can do so. If you choose this option then each time you call Prestel your Welcome Frame will lead to page 747 and each time you key *0# you will return to page 747. You can still access other parts of Prestel by keying *1# for the general main index page. Obviously it only makes sense to opt for 747 as your Main index if your Prestel usage is travel dominated. To request the 747 Welcome Frame see *74767471#.

The Similarities

Apart from the specific (470) trade only topics mentioned above, the indexing on both databases is almost identical. In fact nearly all of the editing is carried out simultaneously using one keyboard to create duplicate identical pages on each database.

(IPs should note that any index requests for 747 are automatically considered for duplication on 470. This does not necessarily apply to the news indexes and stories).

So whichever database you use, Prestel Travel can help you find the information you need as quickly as possible.

Prestel/ABTA Travel service — 470

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), very much aware of the important role videotex has to play in their industry, has been, however, concerned that its use was becoming too fragmented.

Having identified a number of areas where it felt a better service could be offered, the technology committee approached Prestel to discuss ways in which to improve access by the travel trade.

Improvements to the Service

Points identified by ABTA included improving indexing, local call access (at that time only around 62 per cent of the country was covered), the encouragement of intelligent Gateway hosts, the question of time-based charges — in fact the provision of a total trade service.

The extension of local call access was already well underway and now 98% of the country is covered, so the two areas pinpointed for action were improved indexing and time-based charges.

The main requirement of indexing was that it should involve the user in as few choices as possible: logical really, bearing in mind that in a travel agency the Prestel set is very often used as an information source/sales aid combined, while the clerk is dealing with customers. Having to find one's way through a cumbersome routing structure is less than ideal in that situation.

Time-based charges, meanwhile, were seen as something as a disincentive to the widespread use of Prestel booking services. An agent accessing a private system pays telephone charges. The same agent accessing Prestel booking system pays telephone *plus* time-based charges.

The Solution: "470"

The solution: to both of these problems comes with the database on 470 which is run in conjunction with ABTA and access to it is restricted to ABTA members.

What's on 470?

A key element of 470 is superior indexing. The task of improving travel indexing had already been put underway with the introduction of the Prestel Travel service on 747. Agents belonging to the service go into a special travel welcome page which then leads into an index dedicated solely to travel information.

This has already had a marked effect, on accesses to Prestel Travel. Accesses have risen over 50 per cent, with some operators and general services providers reporting 'staggeringly high' increases.

Indexing on 470 has been developed by Prestel Travel working closely with ABTA. It is designed to give the user the fastest and easiest possible route to Prestel's wide range of travel information and services.

The second key element of the service is that while in 470's database the agent incurs no time-based charges, only the cost of the telephone call. This means that on a cost-of-use basis, Prestel booking services can now compete more directly with the private systems.

In fact Prestel offers the agent more. Already there is a 98% local call coverage and most agents have Prestel on auto-dial. In addition, there is the fact that with Prestel's resources, users have good quality lines and services and twin-computer back up for reliability. And, of course, they have the benefit of the whole range of travel related information on Prestel.

There are two main aspects of 470. **Gateway** — Prestel Travel hope that eventually all IPs offering Gateway facilities for booking schedule information and so on will choose to operate these through 470 so that agents may reap the benefits of lower-cost usage.

There are currently 62 Gateways operational on Prestel. These include tour operators, airlines, ferry companies and coach operators.

The other side of the service is the *ABTA trade news service* which supplies confidential trade news. An example of this is ABTA's emergency service to notify agents of arrangements should a company cease trading.

How the Travel Agent uses 470

Although 470 is a CUG, the travel agent can pass freely from 470 to the rest of the travel information on Prestel.

When passing to normal Prestel the computer charge is clocked up to 1/100th of a minute. When the travel agent has logged off of Prestel, the computer charge time in 1/100ths of a minute are added together to give the total computer charge amount for Prestel usage. Most travel agents spend a certain proportion of their time on Prestel working through the indexing. Because this indexing is on '470' and free of Prestel time charge they are likely to find themselves paying far less for a more efficient and effective travel service.

To request the 747 or 470 'Welcome Frames' please contact Prestel Travel.

Private Database on Prestel

What is a 'Private Database?'

A Private Database is a section of Prestel reserved for exclusive use by a travel agent.

No other Prestel user can access the information in the database, which is a Closed User Group.

The minimum number of Prestel pages allowed in the database is 20. The maximum runs into thousands.

The database can be used in any way. Prestel can help design page layouts and an indexing system to make it just as easy to use as the rest of Prestel.

The information can be updated on the Private Database at any time and the new data will then immediately be available at any location.

How would a Private Database benefit a Travel Agent?

Increased sales of late availability holidays

All branches will be advised simultaneously about late availability holidays from particular travel principals. As the holidays are sold by the branches, they can report back via the Private Database to ensure that the list is always up-to-date. This gives a travel agent greater control of branch activity.

Improved communications between HQ and branches

The Private Database is a two-way communications system combining the accuracy of the written word with computer speed and colour graphics. All branches can be circulated with complex information within seconds. They can respond – and communicate with each other too.

How would it work in practice?

Setting up the Private Database

First, Prestel Travel would liaise with the travel agent to create page formats and indexing for the information to be placed on the database.

'Response Frames' can be included to enable the branches to communicate with HQ — when a late availability holiday is sold, for example.

Colours and graphics can be selected to match the house style.

Message pages, late availability pages, a staff news page and general reference pages can all be part of the database.

Running the Private Database

When the database has been created and is running smoothly, Prestel hands control over to the travel agent.

The travel agent then edits/updates the information on the pages, adding, deleting and amending at will.

Data for insertion onto the pages may already be held on a computer, though not in the format of Prestel pages. If so, software may be available for converting the files to Prestel format without re-keying.

A direct computer-to-computer link up may also be possible.

The support of Prestel Travel staff is available to help travel agents get the most from a Private Database.

Costs and payment methods

Prestel Private Database costs are split into two types:

- 1 The Database Rental Costs — an annual fee paid in four quarterly instalments;
- 2 Prestel Usage Costs — for Private Database use, you can choose *either* to continue paying standard Prestel time based charges *or* to pay a fixed lump sum and not time-based charges.

To simplify any accounting, Prestel can arrange for all Prestel charges associated with usage to be collected together and billed to the HQ in one quarterly amount.

Costs are dependent on the package.

What is the experience of other Agency Groups with their own Private Database

Agency groups already using their own Prestel Private Database include Hogg Robinson Travel.

Hogg Robinson use it primarily to coordinate late availability bookings.

Details of late availability holidays are collected by Hogg Robinson Head Office, processed by microcomputer and fed into the database.

Communicating via Prestel

Mailbox

Mailbox is an electronic mail service that allows you to send instant messages to other Prestel users, e.g. other travel outlets, tour operators, hotels, etc. It avoids delays and gets messages quickly to people who may be difficult to contact on the phone. It saves the frustrations of dialling congested switchboards, and means, in effect, that you can send messages to people without having to know where they are at the time.

Mailbox also helps to streamline company communications. Information, reports, and instructions can be quickly exchanged without disrupting other work. No meetings are disturbed when the phone rings, and messages cannot go astray.

How Mailbox Works

Mailbox needs no computer language or programming skills, and no special equipment over and above your Prestel receiver and keypad or keyboard. The procedure for sending messages takes about five minutes to master.

First dial into any Prestel computer, access the mailbox page on *7#, and choose the message you wish to send. You can select a ready-made text, or type out a message of your own. Specially designed electronic greetings cards are available for special occasions.

Fill in your correspondents Mailbox number, which can be found in the Mailbox directory indexed off of *7#. When you have completed your message, the Prestel computer can automatically add the date and time to the page. You have an option to send or cancel the message.

Once sent, messages are stored on Prestel until read. The recipient is informed of messages waiting the next time he or she begins or finishes a Prestel call. Any number of messages can be left waiting for you.

The Benefits of Mailbox

Mailbox offers a host of advantages over conventional methods of communication.

- A Mailbox message can be sent in a fraction of the time it takes to post a letter or make repeated telephone calls.
- Mailbox cuts the telephone bill incurred by such calls, and costs only a few pence per minute during the business day.
- Mailbox is convenient. The recipient collects messages when he is ready and can give them his full attention.

Mailbox Applications

The application of Mailbox, both at work and in the home, are expanding rapidly as more and more Prestel users appreciate and exploit its advantages. It is used increasingly for routine office-to-office correspondence, for immediate confirmation of telephone conversations, and for confirmation of bookings in the travel and entertainment trades.

Mailbox also helps company headquarters, branch offices and field salesmen to keep in touch and respond quickly to sales leads.

You can gain access to Mailbox by keying *7# and request your name and Mailbox number (found on page *102#) to be entered into the Mailbox Directory.

A new Mailbox Service for the Travel Trade *757#

In response to requests from various travel organisations, Prestel Travel has set up a Mailbox directory for the Travel industry. The directory is in 3 sections — U.K. Travel agents are listed by town and then alphabetically. London agents and travel principals are listed alphabetically. By concentrating the Mailbox numbers of Prestel's travel industry customers in a separate directory it is very straightforward to find the number you need.

The Travel Mailbox Database

The Travel Mailbox main index is on Prestel page *757#. For new users, there are demonstration sequences of sending, receiving and storing messages plus a full explanation of the service. There are response frames for you to complete to request your entry in the directory. If you would like to have your Mailbox number printed on your business cards and letter heads, you can find it on Prestel page *102#.

Find out more about Travel Mailbox or send us your comments and suggestions, on page *7579#. We will be very pleased to hear from you.

Telex Link

Telex link works in the same way as Mailbox. You key *8# and you are on the Telex Link index. You then select the telex page and fill in the correspondent's TELEX NUMBER. Complete and send your message.

Telex link works by linking the Prestel telephone system to the telex system. Your message which is sent from Prestel is printed out on the correspondent's telex terminal.

To send a telex

Prestel users can send messages to telex subscribers in every country in the world which is served by direct dial telex facilities — well over 100 countries. Users are also able to send telexes to ships on the high seas provided they are equipped with telex served by INMARSAT.

To receive a telex

Prestel users can also receive telexes from any telex terminal in the world. The messages are delivered via Mailbox, so all the sender must do is include the nine-digit Mailbox number as the first item in the telex. The telex frame can contain approximately 500 characters.

Incoming telexes free!

Incoming telexes must be sent to the TELEX LINK telex number, which is:
295141 TXLINK G.

They must begin by quoting the recipients Mailbox number in the first line, in the form of

To MBX

The Mailbox number is found on Prestel page 102 and consists of 9 digits.

Who can you contact?

At a stroke the number of people and organisations which can be contacted via the Prestel terminal has been increased from 60,000 to over 1,600,000.

How much does it cost?

There is no subscription charge for the telex facility: a charge is made for each telex sent, making it ideal for businesses who could not justify rental of a telex machine.

There is no charge to the Prestel user for the incoming telex facility, irrespective of the country of origin of the message!

For costs see the Tariff Guide.

The uses of Prestel Telex.

Travel businesses are likely to find the facility especially useful for hotel bookings and confirmations — especially for last minute arrangements for independent travellers.

Prestel Travel Trainer

Introduction

The Prestel Travel Trainer is a self-study package for travel agents, students of travel and tourism, travel principals and travel managers.

It covers all aspects of Prestel as a videotex service for the travel industry.

Prestel can be used as an information source, a communications medium and as a means of making reservations.

The trainer teaches the use of these facilities in easy steps. Self-study questions and model answers are used to help assess your progress.

There is a training database on Prestel which can be used in conjunction with the Trainer for hands-on practice.

After studying with the Prestel Travel Trainer, you can apply for an exam paper. Successful candidates will be awarded the Prestel Travel Proficiency certificate.

The majority of Travel Principals are turning to videotex to promote their services, distribute information and offer reservations facilities.

Videotex skills are becoming increasingly necessary. Use Prestel to check schedules and fares for all types of transportation, look up late availability on many types of holidays — no need to make hundreds of phone calls anymore, send mailbox and telex messages from your set, use the ABC Electronic Airlines Guide with confidence. Impress future or current employers with your knowledge and your certificate. Your clients too!

After completing your study with the Prestel Travel Trainer, you will know how to log-on to Prestel, how to find the information you require, how to send and receive messages and you will be familiar with the reservations facilities available via the Prestel Gateway Service. You will be able to use Prestel with confidence to assist you in your daily work.

What is the Prestel Travel Trainer?

It is a self-teach training package containing 15 sections.

You are given an introduction to each section and a list of study objectives. Then there is information about the subject of the section.

To help you assess your progress, there are self-study questions and model answers at appropriate intervals.

On completion of the course an exam paper can be applied for and The Prestel Travel Proficiency Certificate is awarded to successful candidates.

What does the Prestel Travel Trainer teach?

It teaches the 'student' that Prestel is an information source and communications medium based on videotex technology.

It explains in simple terms what videotex is and how it works. It explains the Prestel network and gives information on the equipment used to connect to the Prestel computer. It advises how to position the equipment for maximum efficiency and what to do if something goes wrong with this equipment.

It explains how Prestel can be used in the agency as a selling tool for transportation and holiday services. This is done by reproducing, in print, the actual screens of information that a travel user would see. It explains, next to each screen, the information contained there and how to move to the next piece of information required.

The same approach is used to teach the messaging services, travel news services and miscellaneous services such as visa, health, foreign weather reports, currency exchange rates, theatre bookings, travellers cheques etc. etc. . .

The final chapter is devoted to reservations or information services obtainable, through Prestel, from computers which are owned by other companies and are connected to Prestel — ABC Travel Guides, Pan Am, Citalia, Yugotours, Townsend Thoresen, National Express etc.

— The majority of these sections were written by the companies themselves and use the same approach of reproducing, in print, the screen the agent will see and giving relevant explanation.

Why a Prestel Travel Trainer?

The Trainer is based on a one-day 'face-to-face' training course which was devised by Prestel Travel. The course has proved very popular with the travel industry and feedback from people who have attended show the following:

- 1 People are afraid of technology. They think 'I'm not clever enough to be able to use that'.
- 2 They are not aware of the amount of information on Prestel which could be of great use to them and in a lot of cases save them time and energy involved in thumbing through numerous directories, tariffs, manuals etc. to find information.
- 3 There is a Prestel set in their office but they don't know how to switch it on or the passwords they need. They do not realise that using Prestel is easy. Some people think it may be like using a micro and that because they are not sure of what they're doing they may wipe the memory or damage something.
- 4 They don't know that Prestel can be used to send messages to other branches or business associates.
- 5 They think Prestel is expensive. However, Prestel can quite often save money on long distance calls because it is available at local call rate to 98% of the UK. Printed tariffs and manuals cost a lot of money too and invariably they are partially out of date by the time they are delivered.
- 6 At the end of the one-day course, people always say that they have learned a lot, that they didn't know it would be so easy, that they didn't realise there was such a vast amount of travel information on Prestel and that they can't wait to get back to the office and use Prestel. They are no longer afraid of the equipment or that they may make a mistake.

What are the Benefits?

- 1 A reasonably priced training package which can be studied at anytime and anywhere.
- 2 It assumes no prior knowledge of Prestel and explains everything from switching on the set to using the sophisticated reservations services. (The A-Z of using Prestel effectively).
- 3 A certificate is awarded to successful exam candidates which should impress current and future employers.
- 4 The majority of principals and agencies within the travel industry are using videotex as a means of supplying or retrieving information and for reservations and messages. People who are afraid to switch on the set won't last long.
- 5 The Prestel Travel Trainer can be studied on its own or in conjunction with a training database on Prestel. The training database gives further examples of information available and experience and confidence in using the system. People who have been unable to use the training database because they do not have access to a Prestel set will still be able to take the exam. They can try the training database as soon as they have the opportunity to do so.
- 6 The trainer can be used not only as a training course but also as a 'day-to-day guide to Prestel' reference book. If a Prestel user is having difficulties in locating information they can refer to the appropriate section in the trainer which will inform them how to find the information.

For costs refer to the Tariff Guide.

The Prestel Network

Local Call Access

Local call access means that a user dialling into a Prestel computer is only being charged the price of a local telephone call.

Prestel now covers 98% of the UK population with local call access. This is achieved by running a line from each of the 6 retrieval computers to a black box known as a multiplexor or node. These boxes are located throughout the UK.

The user dials into Prestel, the call is connected via the telephone system to the multiplexor which links the call to the nearest Prestel retrieval computer.

Prestel supplies information to a variety of industries — banking, insurance, stock market, travel, etc. It also has residential users. These different groups of users have different peak periods of usage during the day so that Prestel does not suffer from intense congestion at one time. Of course, usage grows as the number of users increases. It is Prestel's policy to monitor usage at several locations and to aim to match access demand and supply wherever possible. You get the benefit of dealing with a large expanding network.

PRESTEL LOCAL CALL AREA



LOCAL CALLS TO PRESTEL
ARE AVAILABLE FROM ALL
LOCATIONS IN THE
SHADED AREA

The Computers

Prestel consists of 9 GEC 4190 computers.

- 6 computers are located in pairs:—
Dickens & Keats in Birmingham serve N. Ireland, Scotland, Wales, N. England and overseas customers
Derwent and Enterprise in Croydon serve S. England
Dryden and Kipling in London serve London.

These computers are used for retrieving information. *If one of the computers is faulty or engaged the user is automatically switched to the other computer in the pair, thus providing the user with a very reliable service.*

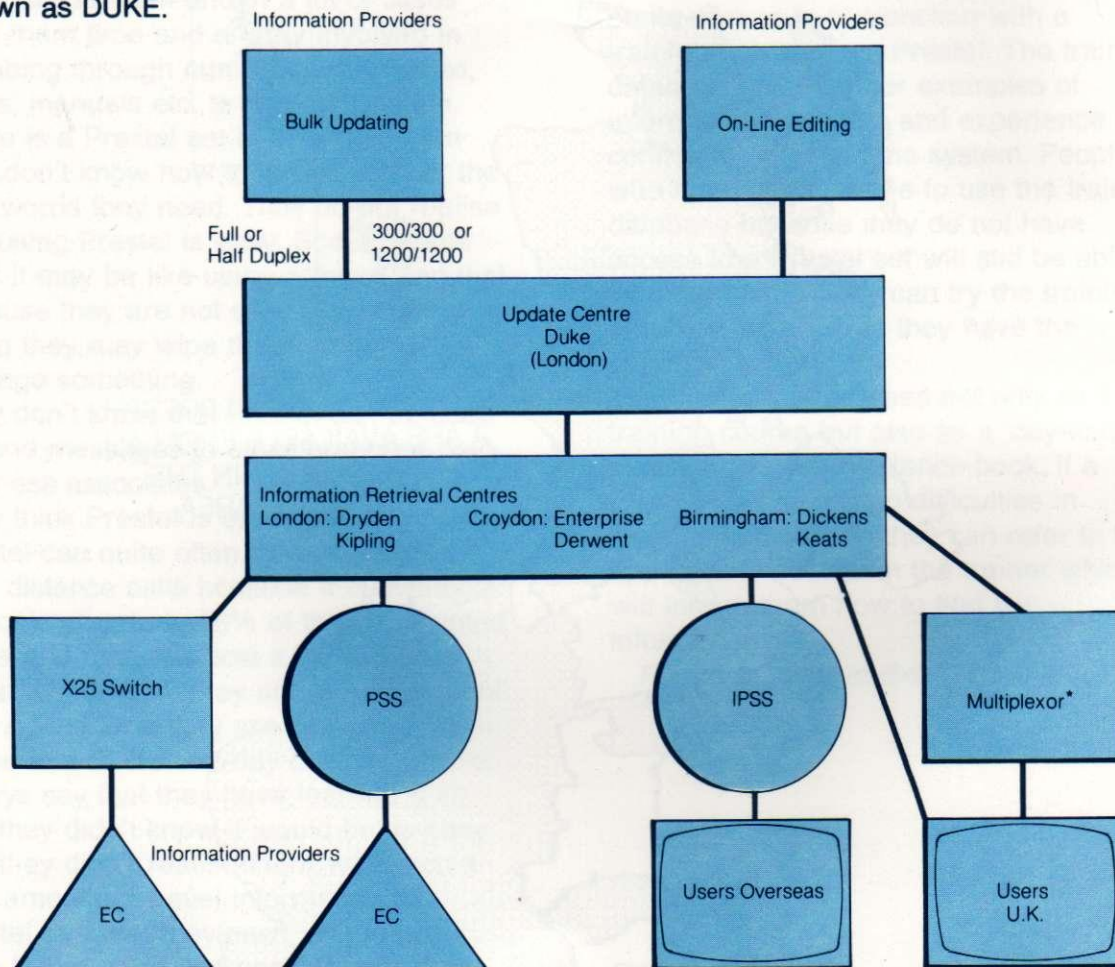
- The computer used for updating information is located in London and known as DUKE.

(The names of the Prestel computers derive from the names given to the Victorian telephone exchanges, these were based on poets and adventurers.)

- Another pair of computers located in London is used for Prestel Gateway.

These computers are known as X25 switches. They collect all the calls made by users through the 3 pairs of retrieval computers and switch the call through to the appropriate external computer.

The second computer in the pair is a reserve and is only used in the event of the other machine failing. Under such circumstances all Gateway links that were connected to the computer are switched to the reserve computer.



EC = External Computer (ie non-Prestel)

PSS = Packet Switch Stream

IPSS = International Packet Switch Stream

*NB. 98% of the UK telephone population can access Prestel at local call rate

Prestel Gateway

What is a Prestel Gateway?

Prestel Gateway is a facility that allows a company to connect their reservations computer directly into the Prestel system.

Prestel Travel users pass through a special 'Gateway Page' on Prestel and can then access the external computer directly.

They can respond as well, making confirmed reservations on the external computer at the push of a button.

What if a Company doesn't have a reservations computer?

If a company does not have a computer it is possible to use a computer bureau that has a link to Prestel and place the information and reservations on the bureau computer.

Does all the information have to be on a Gateway?

No. General information for travel agents on Prestel can be provided exactly as it is at present using the Gateway solely as a means for agents to make confirmed reservations on the external computer.

However it may be beneficial to hold all of the information on the external computer for access through the Gateway. This is particularly useful for data which is changing minute by minute.

Does it matter where our computer is sited?

No. The external computer can be sited anywhere in the world.

Can a company restrict access to their Gateway?

A company can have as many 'Gateway Pages' as they like and these can be used in the following way:—

- The 'Gateway Page' can be placed in a Closed User Group thus restricting access to members of that group.

- Passwords can be built into the Gateway page as an added security measure.

These facilities allow companies owning a Gateway to charge a subscription fee, if they so wish.

- Pages held on the Gateway computer can carry a frame charge. Prestel will bill the user for access to such pages and pass on the revenue to the external service provider, net of an 8% factoring charge.

- A Gateway page can be used to channel a group of users to specific information on the external computer. For example a 'Gateway Page' for ABTA agents may allow them to enter the external computer and look at availability and make reservations, while a 'Gateway Page' for business users may restrict them to only checking availability.

Why Prestel and Reservations?

Prestel's advantages to the Travel Principal are:

- 1 Because the telephone and television are part of most people's way of life, every business and household in the country is a potential target for Prestel.
- 2 Prestel has an extensive national communications network which makes Prestel accessible to the whole country, and over 98% of the country is on a local cheap telephone call.
- 3 It has a charging and billing facility.
- 4 In the UK there are approximately 60,000 Prestel users, all of these are likely to use travel information on Prestel, especially the 5,500 registered ABTA agents.
- 5 Prestel Travel centralises a large number of different information sources, such as fares and timetables for airlines, coaches, railways and ferries; reservations; availability; tour operators; weather and exchange rates; hotel and country information.
- 6 Prestel lets the Travel Principals and agents communicate with each other or with customers, order brochures or confirm bookings through response frames, Mailbox and by Telex.

- 7 ABTA travel agents are rooted to this information via '470' — the ABTA/Prestel Travel Service.

Prestel as the Ideal System for Reservations:

- 1 The Travel agent only needs to dial into Prestel and "log-on" once, in order to access a number of different IPs' GATEWAY and other information on Prestel.
- 2 On leaving an IP's GATEWAY, the travel agent does *not* leave Prestel and therefore can continue to access further information or to access another GATEWAY. Thus the travel agent does not have to go through laborious and time-consuming "log-on" procedures and can make reservations with different companies one after the other.
- 3 Because of the variety of travel information on Prestel Travel all GATEWAYS can be accurately indexed and easily found by the travel agent.
- 4 If the IP uses an alternative system to GATEWAY and does not come through Prestel, the travel agent will not only have to use different dialling numbers, log-on procedures and security numbers for each system but also have to remember what information is on what system. This is confusing as well as being time consuming. GATEWAY users are spared this as only one procedure is necessary to access many principals' computers.
- 5 With Prestel and GATEWAY, an IP can provide all his general information on Prestel for the travel agent, who can then make a confirmed reservation by going through GATEWAY to the IP's reservations computer.

This saves the IP time and money as his reservations computer will not be slowed down by being accessed for general information.

- 6 It can also save the travel agent money as he can now make a reservation on the reservations computer by going through Prestel. For the majority of travel agents this will be a local call.

Prestel as Part of British Telecommunications

There are many benefits from the fact that Gateway is on *Prestel* which is part of BT.

- 1 British Telecom is a world leader in new communications developments.
- 2 With tens of thousands of customers the Prestel network is in use around the clock and offers local call access to 98% of the UK.
- 3 Prestel Customer Service is available via Freefone during business hours and the Prestel computers are maintained 24 hours a day by the operations team.
- 4 Each user is registered on at least two (identical) Prestel computers. If one fails, or is busy, the call is automatically routed through to the other.

The Future of Prestel

Because it is easy to use and inexpensive to access there are already 60,000 Prestel sets registered in the UK and several hundred abroad.

In terms of expansion every business and household in the country is a potential target for Prestel.

Videotex is universally accepted and already worldwide standards have been laid down.

Videotex services now operate in most industrialised countries, most of them using the Prestel standard. Interconnection between the national systems of various countries is a strong possibility in the years ahead.

What This Means

- 1 Prestel gives you one of the widest communications networks in the UK. So you can provide your information and reservations to either a targeted audience, with a Closed User Group (CUG) e.g. ABTA 470 for ABTA travel agents only, or to all users on Prestel.
- 2 For the user it means the information can be found on one database and one set of log on procedures gives him access to extensive information and a wide variety of direct reservations. It is also time saving and cost effective.

What a Gateway IP Needs to Connect to Gateway

Software

To operate as a Gateway Host the Gateway computer needs to support the following software:

- 1 *X25* To communicate with Prestel's computers up to a packet level.
- 2 *Gateway Protocol* To prepare and transmit data in blocks suitable for interpretation by Prestel as frames for information display and data collection.
- 3 *Application Protocol* To search and process data from the Hosts own files and interact with the Gateway Protocol.

Standard Packages for 1 and 2 are available from approved supplies.

Communications

To connect to the Prestel Network, Gateway IPs now have a choice of connecting to Prestel via Private Line or by the Packet Switched Network (PSS).

Private Line Connection (Option 1)

A Gateway IP may connect directly into Prestel's own network via a London Computer site. The IP can purchase a 48K or 9.6k/bit line, and both British Telecom's Kilostream and Private Wire lines can be connected. Where available the Kilostream digital lines are considerably cheaper and are recommended.

PSS Connection (Option 2)

A Gateway IP can purchase a dataline connection to their nearest Packet Switching Exchange (PSE) operating at various speeds, i.e. 2,400, 4,800, 9.6K, 48K bits. The speed of line influences the speed of Gateway connection and the total number of simultaneous Gateway calls (i.e. the number of users accessing the Gateway through the Gateway page on Prestel at any one time) that can be supported without serious distortion of information sent back to the user.

As far as the software protocols are concerned there is no difference between operating via Private Line (Option 1) or PSS (Option 2). Some IPs may prefer to have a line via both options for added security of connection.

Costs of Connecting to a Gateway

Setting Up

Software to operate X25, Gateway Protocol and an Application protocol are required. The X25 and Gateway protocol are available from approved suppliers and a list is available on request. The application protocol will be specific for each Gateway IP and will require discussion with the eventual X25/Gateway Protocol Supplier who will be able to offer advice on the interaction available.

Communication Charges

Option (1) Private Line

Lines of 9.6K and 48K/bit are available.

The cost of a Private Line whether analogue or digital will be dependent on the distance from the Gateway IP computer and Prestel's London Computer Site. For analogue lines modems will be required but for Kilostream services a Network Terminating Unit is included in the price. The cost of lines can be quoted by Prestel on request.

In addition Prestel charge a port fee for connecting to your network. No usage charge is incurred.

Option (2) PSS Lines

Connection via 2,400, 4,800, 9.6 and 48K/bit is available from Packet Switching Services. Charges can be supplied on request. In addition to the cost of renting a dataline which includes a modem and is independent of distance to the nearest exchange, charges are levied on usage.

For costs refer to the Tariff Guide.

The Connection between a Gateway and External Computer

User Access to Prestel and the external computer

Each Prestel user is given a telephone number to dial into their nearest Prestel retrieval computer.

In most cases this is a 3 digit number. The number can be programmed into an auto-dialler and the user can therefore dial this number very quickly.

The user is required to input an Identity Number and Password. These can normally be programmed into the Prestel terminal.

The user then enters Prestel. This total process takes only a few seconds.

The first Prestel page the travel user sees is the "Welcome Frame". Programmed into this frame are several routes, and one of these routes could therefore lead straight into an external computer.

Other ways for the user to be directed to an external computer are through:—

- The indexes
- To have an easily remembered Gateway page number, e.g. *111#.

The amount of time it takes for the user to bring up a page from an external computer depends on—

- 1 *The type of machine used as the external computer. The fastest time for retrieving information through a Prestel Gateway is less than 2 seconds.*
- 2 *The speed of the line. A direct line from the external computer to the X25 Switch consistently achieves lower response times than through PSS.*

- 3 *The amount of data transferred over the lines, and how fast the external computer takes to process the information and turn it around to be sent back down to Prestel (this can be improved by the use of 2.3 Gateway — see opposite page).*
- 4 *The amount of time it takes for Prestel to send and respond to the Gateway connection (this is so small that it is unmeasurable).*

It should be noted that the bulk of static information can be retained on a database held on Prestel. This considerably reduces the time spent by the user on the external computer, leaving the link between Prestel and the external computer free for transactions only.

The link between Prestel and the external computer.

Every link between Prestel and an external computer has to cater for the number of users waiting to connect to the external computer.

The user having dialled into Prestel has to then connect to the external computer. This connection is provided by a private/kilostream line or a line through the PSS. This connection in turn provides a quantity of simultaneous phone calls. This quantity is governed by the size of the line used in the connection.

A 2.4 line allows up to 10 simultaneous phone calls (a phone call is 'a channel') a 9.6K line allows up to 20 simultaneous phone calls and a 48K line allows up to 100 simultaneous phone calls. It is up to the company owning the external computer to determine how many simultaneous phone calls it has to cater for at peak times.

It will of course need to have the appropriate number of ports available on its own computer.

The Latest Version of Prestel Gateway – 2.3

This version raises a frame held on Prestel. This frame holds the details which the user fills in to make the reservation. When the user keys # to connect to the external computer, only the information the user has filled in is transferred to the external computer. The external computer replies by triggering a frame on Prestel and filling in the information requested. This reduces the transfer of data by 80-90% and reduces the time previously wasted by the user filling in all their information on a frame previously held on the external computer. It also allows the external computer to deliver its information in any way. Thus there is no need for the external computer to have videotex software.

Costs of a Gateway

For full details of costs either for a courtesy connect Gateway where the host accepts the Prestel computer charge or a normal Gateway please *contact Prestel Travel or refer to the Tariff Guide.*