

# multimedia: the great communicator?

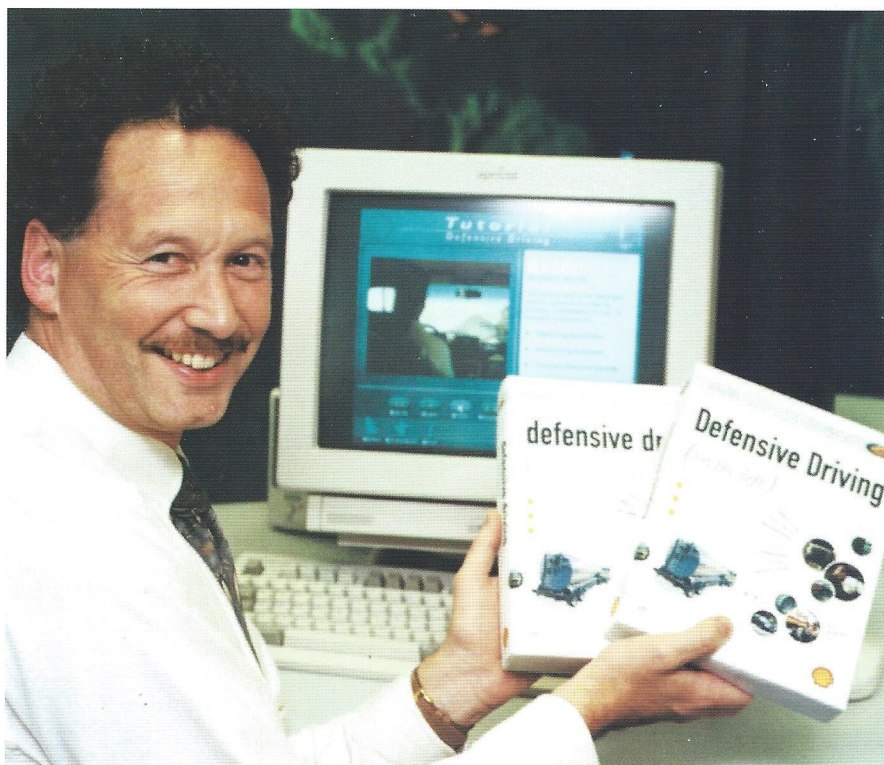
Oil Products has always been at the cutting edge in the use of innovative training products, and a brand new generation of multimedia programmes is about to be launched...

There have been many false dawns heralding the future of technology-based communication and nowhere have these been felt more than in the field of training and educational applications.

The current vision is that on-line training will one day be provided with rapid access to any and all kinds of information at the press of a mouse button. The reality is that technology has struggled to keep up with the vision of the "ideal" system – one which delivers manuals, directories, encyclopaedias and expertise to the user wherever and whenever they need it, supported by fast on-line help to "talk" you through processes and intuitive search tools which list only the things you want to see. Yet slowly, the scope and potential for multimedia and intranet applications within Shell is beginning to expand.

"We are trying to bridge the gap between the ideal situation – with the expert trainer standing at your shoulder, guiding and assisting you as you learn some new theory or practical technique – and the unacceptable, where the trainee receives a manual and has to get on with the job," said Peter Block, multimedia training consultant for Oil Products.

"It is possible to give the user a useful, informative and enjoyable learning experience by the creative use of existing education and training skills applied to the new technologies. The aim is to provide a range of multimedia programmes to support staff at all levels within Shell."



Multimedia man: Peter Block with the new Defensive Driving package.

Photograph: Geoff Bruce

Shell has remained at the cutting edge in the use of innovative training products. A series of interactive video (IV) programmes produced during the 1980s found wide use throughout the Group. Building on this achievement, a new range of multimedia programmes is being produced in conjunction with the Shell Film and Video Unit, the first of which deals with Defensive Driving. Shell has also collaborated with Harvard Business School Publishing to produce a suite of management training multimedia programmes.

Peter Block: "Over the next two-to-three years, many of the old IV packages will be transferred to CD-ROM, but this will present much more than a simple conversion of the programme to the new format. Users, trainers and multimedia programme designers have learnt a great deal over the past decade about technology based training and much of this learning

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has been incorporated into the new programmes. We have tried to develop more intuitive user interfaces and have given greater depth to the programmes, providing a reference tool as well as a training programme."

"The current technology is no longer a technical cul-de-sac. A major advance is



that the use of programmes is no longer confined to a training room containing specialist hardware and software. Almost any PC can run the new generation of training programmes so you can now choose exactly where and when you want to learn."

According to Block, the new Defensive Driving programme (commissioned by transport consultant, Trevor Watts, on behalf of OP's Distribution division) is a highly complex creation. It encourages users to develop a defensive driving attitude by participating in a tutorial, then taking part in 20 simulated "drives" based on common potential road hazards. The users are guided to think about the ways in which they can anticipate and avoid accidents in a variety of road conditions and environments.

"We have built into the programme several features which make it very easy to use. The programme runs under a standard windows environment but can be controlled by the keyboard or by just the cursor controls and spacebar. We chose this approach because the target audience will include people who do not have English as a first language or have limited experience of computers.

"Although it is essentially one programme, we will initially produce left and right hand drive versions in each of the two PC video formats, AVI and MPEG. There is no other programme like

this on the market as it has been devised to meet a very specific need in Shell," he said.

Developing CD-ROM titles is an expensive process and the partnership with the Harvard Business School has provided a valuable source of high-quality multimedia management programmes. Block: "When Shell was approached to join the New Media Council of Harvard Business School Publishing, it was seen as an opportunity to influence the content and production of high quality multimedia programmes. There are now six titles available which deal with a range of management issues.

"The programmes have a common format of theory supported by interactive case studies. They have been well received by reviewers in Shell and we are now making them available throughout the business."

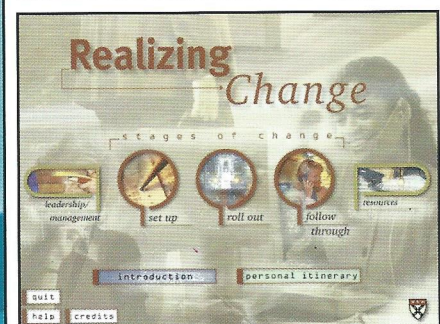
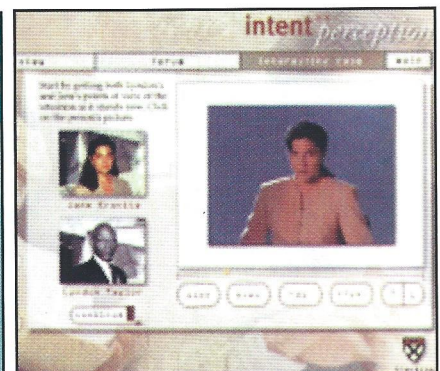
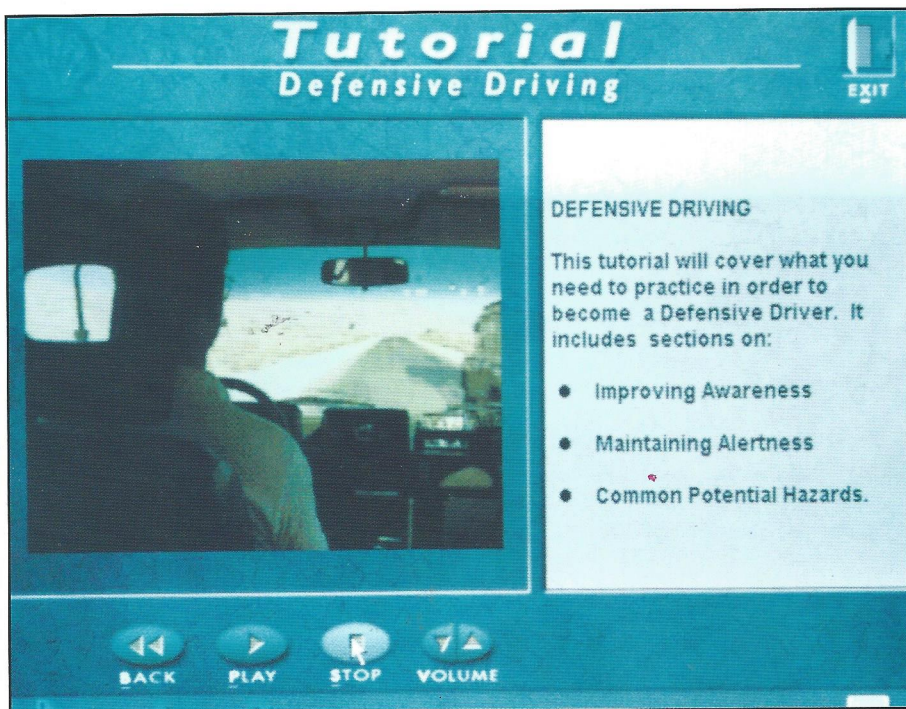
### Progress

For the moment, the CD-ROM will be the easiest method to distribute products. In the very near future, a mixture of reference data and video will be supplied on CD-ROM with more volatile information accessed directly from the Web and updated to the local desktop. But new delivery systems are being brought to the market place. For example, the Digital Versatile Disk (DVD) will become more widely available during 1998. It is

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backward compatible with the CD-ROM and has by current standards, an enormous capacity. The DVD disk is the same physical size as the CD-ROM and in its basic configuration can store up to four gigabytes – more than five times the capacity of the CD-ROM. This means a complete feature film could be stored on the system.

In time, artificial intelligence (AI) coupled with the ever-growing capacity of storage systems and computing speed will bring an increasingly dynamic product to the user, bringing the vision of the future a step closer to reality. ☉



An innovative medium: Pages from the Harvard Business School and Shell Defensive Driving multimedia packages.