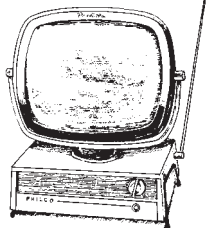


TELEVISION

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The TV Telephone

It is March 27th, 2011 and we are in Banjul, The Gambia, West Africa as part of a Mercy Ships/Smile Train cleft lip/palate surgical team. Last evening my wife Susan and I had a new experience; we spoke and visually communicated with our daughter and grandchildren by SKYPE. They are in Alaska and the call cost us nothing! When we purchased the computer last year, we had no idea that it had a built-in camera and thus was capable of SKYPE.

SKYPE can be downloaded from the Internet and used for free with another SKYPEer. Audio phone calls can be made inexpensively to non-SKYPEers. And you get a hands-free phone to boot, since your computer with mike and speakers becomes your communications device. It was the cheapest way to make calls from Africa! We used it a lot. Welcome to the world of TV telephone convenience!—RB

On April 7, 1927, Bell Telephone Laboratories demonstrated a TV telephone using mechanical scanning. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover participated in this first public demonstration in the United States of long-distance video transmission (1).

An experimental electronic system was displayed at the 1939 New York World's Fair (2), and by the time of the 1964 New York World's Fair, Bell Labs had developed the "Picture Phone," which enabled visitors to place calls from the fair to a special exhibit at Disneyland in



The 1927 TV telephone demonstration. Secretary Hoover at the phone.

California. In fact, AT&T placed in service a system which allowed calls to be made between New York City, Chicago, and Washington DC. A call between New York City and Chicago cost \$27 for three minutes (2)! The system did not become popular.

In 1986, Mitsubishi sold a system, for \$400, which was capable of sending

1964 Picturephone Set

A technological tour-de-force, this telephone let you see as well as hear. Its successors provide video teleconferencing service.



From a Telephone Company brochure.



The Mitsubishi visual telephone display.



Felix The Cat, a well-known early TV model, prepares to make a video call.

individual photo images over the standard phone line. Some years ago, I acquired a Mitsubishi LU-500 Visitel Visual Telephone Display. It is a solid-state device, except for the Vidicon and the CRT. The unit

is 7×7×8 inches with a display size of 2½" × 3¼" and with a resolution of 96 × 96 pixels. The camera tube is a ⅜-inch vidicon with a 16mm fixed-focus lens (3). Controls are: *power* (vidicon lens door), *brightness up* and *down*, *view/pose*, and *send*. It works over the standard phone lines.

The Visitel, powered by a 14 VDC power adaptor, is connected directly to a telephone line jack. A standard telephone is then connected to the Visitel.

To send a still monochrome image, one slides open the door covering the vidicon lens. After 20 seconds or so, the operator's image will appear on the screen. Screen brightness can be adjusted by 'bright up' and 'bright down' buttons. When the 'send' button is pressed, the image transmittal is completed in 5 seconds. During this time the audio connection is disabled. Up to three received images can be stored in the Visitel. These photos can even be sent to other users!

Shortly after acquiring the unit, I was in contact with another Visitel owner (with whom I have now lost touch) and was able to visually and aurally communicate. I would be interested in hearing from others who also have the Visitel. Please feel free to contact me at brewster@mercyships.org or call 631-734-5063 if you wish to make a TV Phone contact with Felix.

REFERENCES

- (1) Bell Telephone System. Monograph B-504, August 1930
- (2) Popular Mechanics, October 1940
- (3) Mitsubishi Service Manual, LU-500, Luma-1, 1988