

Ferdie J. Deering

NOV 9 1982

Cheer Up! 'Narrowcasting' on Way

THERE may be things our world lacks but news, information and entertainment aren't among the scarcities — not in this country!

We might not have read the latest news, we could be uninformed or misinformed, and sometimes we must choose between forms of entertainment because we don't have time or money for all.

But cheer up! There is hope. Technologists have invented devices to sort out the news, classify information for instant retrieval, and "can" entertainment until we can find time for it.

News editors always have tried to present the biggest news and items they believed the public wanted to read prominently with large headlines and to classify news and features where possible.

Busy executives have complained that they don't have time to read all the business and economic news they need. This has led to publication of scores of newsletters to summarize it for them, covering business and politics from agriculture to zoology.

Many magazines used to be aimed at what was called "the mass market," meaning that they contained enough features to interest people of all ages to have a family-wide appeal.

Gradually, specialized publications and other interests crowded out such broad coverage publications as *American*, *Liberty*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *Life* and *Look*.

Most of the thousands of magazines now on the market appeal to specific interests of readers — automobiles, electronics, farming, law, medicine, sports, embalming, education, cooking, etc.

As cable TV spreads, the number of channels available to any viewer is multiplied. Broadcasting is being transformed into what is referred to as "narrowcasting" or "cultivision."

Thus, various stations are aiming for specific audiences — sports fans, movie fans, music lovers, religious groups, and those who want to hear the news, no matter how bad it may be. Further selection may be made by electronic recorders to

transcribe programs to be played back later at the users' convenience.

In addition, home computers, video games and videodisc players can be hooked up to the TV, widening or narrowing the range of choices, as the user might prefer.

Manufacturers talk about coming perfection of customizers, microprocessors inside radios and TV sets to edit out information unrelated to a subscriber's interests.

A two-way system called "QUBE" has been in operation in Columbus, Ohio, for nearly two years but this use of TV cables still is limited. Through it users may order merchandise, call police, respond to opinion polls, or take part in TV game shows.

Each of these procedures tends to limit the users' scope of information. Will increased use of such devices as "customized reading" and "narrowcasting" make us narrow-minded? Or will facilities for selection broaden our knowledge? Results probably will depend upon the individuals, just as they have in the past.