

# Special Issue on Multimedia Devices/Systems to Enhance and Enrich People's Lives

## — PREFACE —



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THE 20th century saw the development of many new modes of communication, from radio, telephone and television to fax machines, personal computers and e-mail, and of recording media from records to magnetic tapes to compact discs. The 21st century will see these integrated and combined in a new age of Digital Convergence.

Digitization is now being applied to change the face of TV broadcasting, from a unidirectional medium that merely transmits images and sounds to an interactive medium for the transmission of data. The devices, functions and interfaces that will be needed in the digital broadcasting age to make this new type of service a reality are now being developed. The service will first be available in TV sets able to handle digital broadcasting and will eventually be incorporated into such applications as large-screen, wall-mounted plasma displays.

In the area of recording, just as digitization enabled the new sound recording medium of compact discs to evolve from records and tapes, DVD emerged as a medium that integrated digitized image, voice and text data. The development of the rewriting medium DVD-RAM enabled the audio-visual and personal-computer barriers to be knocked down, and the future is expected to see major developments in the area of bi-directional bridge media that will take the place of current VTRs (VCRs).

Another development is the increasing use of the

Internet to link all corners of the globe. In Japan, for example, the number of Internet users has now passed the 20 million mark. This completely new medium is now accessed mainly with personal computers, but we are moving toward a time when it will be just as common to access it with digital mobile phones or household electric devices.

It is recognized that the Internet will be both a key technology and a key application in the new Digital Convergence era. Its use is leading to the birth of new interactive services, thus bringing about changes in hardware and in the flow of data circulation. An example of these changes is the new communication services that enable mobile terminals to pick up news stories, music programs and so on. These changes signal the start of a new age, one in which people can access the communications they want at any time and at any place.

As we move into the future, Hitachi, Ltd. will continue to offer its customers added value by incorporating the most advanced technologies into the development of total systems and services, from digital consumer products for the home to multimedia systems for business use. Its aim in doing so will be the creation of a new era, one in which higher communication speeds, lower costs, increasingly widespread Internet use, and expanded use of digital broadcasting will enable users to have access to communications services wherever they may be.