Review: Volkswriter Deluxe

BY JOHN LOMBARDI
Contributor

With word-processing programs appearing and reappearing at a fantastic rate, it's not surprising to see Volkswriter Deluxe, another incarnation of the original and successful Volkswriter. This version includes added features and special capabilities, but the program looks and feels much the same as the first edition. With its new features it approaches the standards of top microcomputer-based word processors such as WordStar.

Word processing consists of two important functions: editing and formatting. When you edit you are primarily concerned with the content of the document. You enter text, rearrange words, sentences and paragraphs, determine section titles, and consider chapter divisions. Once you get the content the way you want it, you then focus on the formatting, or how the document will look on the printed page. Issues of spacing, placement, boldfacing, underlining and the like all become paramount.

Volkswriter's editing functions are fast, clear and comprehensive. The program can handle documents of up to one megabyte in size if you have enough disk space to hold the overflow from memory. The program uses whatever memory is in the system and then keeps the rest of the text to disk.

Practically anything you may want to do while editing text is possible. The range of editing features is almost complete. Though you can delete by word, line, block and from the cursor position to the end of a line, you can't delete from the cursor position back to the beginning of a line. Lines cannot be joined by deleting the end-of-line character; instead, you are required to reformat the paragraph. Indents work effortlessly. The tabs are easy to set and clear, though you can't tab from right to left. There is no hyphenation facility.

Volkswriter Deluxe allows you to move the cursor over the text rapidly and effectively. Although you can't insert place markers, you can move line by line, scroll through the text a half screen at a time, go

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to the beginning or end of the document or to specific page numbers. This is more than adequate for most uses.

Block operations of the cut-and-paste variety are effected quickly and easily. To make multiple moves or copies of the same block you must reset the block markers each time.

Find-and-replace operations work well. You must specify an exact match (including uppercase and lowercase letters), and you can only go forward in the file. Once you specify a search string, the search can

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Report Card

Volkswriter Deluxe

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Performance	□	□	□	☑
Documentation	□	□	☑	□
Ease of Use	□	□	☑	□
Error Handling	□	□	□	☑

Summary: Volkswriter Deluxe is top-notch word-processing program that has excellent editing, strong formatting, good user documentation and tutorials, modest on-line help, an adequate list-processing function, and excellent keyboard-printer customization routines. You must have a good deal of knowledge about your printer in order to use the program well.

Product details: List price, $295. Available for IBM PC or compatibles running DOS 1.1 or 2.0. Requires 128K random-access memory; two disk drives; printer. Published by Lifetree Software, Inc., 411 Pacific Street, Suite 315, Monterey, CA 93940; (408) 373-4718.

be repeated as often as you like until you reset the search string. If you're in the middle of a file, you can find and replace to the end of file and then continue from the beginning.

All editing operations in Volkswriter Deluxe use function keys, sometimes in combination with other keys. Volkswriter does not use control keys directly for editing. The argument over control-key versus function-key editing often generates more heat than light, but it's probably fair to say that whatever you use the most will seem to be the best. Some fast typists prefer the control keys because they are easier to manage on the run. If you insist on control-key editing, this program is not for you.

Scrolling, screen re-display and other cosmetic features of this word-processing program work cleanly, predictably and fast. When you come to the end of the last line on the screen while typing, Volkswriter jumps up half a screen and continues. This happens so fast that it can be a bit disconcerting at first.

Line 25 on the screen displays line, column and page numbers along with the name of the last file accessed by Volkswriter. A minimal Help screen provides reminders of what each function key does. It is not possible to determine how much disk space is available for storage, how large the current document has become in bytes or the length of the file in characters.

Volkswriter can manage two kinds of files. Its word-processing files contain both the text and some information used in formatting the document for printing. Volkswriter can also produce standard ASCII text files that are used for program coding and the preparation of data for use by another program.

Editing often leaves spaces in the text. To clean up the screen, Volkswriter reforms paragraphs with a Reform key. This process must be initiated for each paragraph, and the reforming works reasonably quickly. As there is no repeat function, you must reform each paragraph manually if you want to change your margins

You can determine the appearance of a printed document in three or four different ways. Most importantly, you can create a special file that lists the built-in features of the printer that you wish to have

automatically activated when you print. Standard line lengths, character spacing, line spacing, boldfacing, single or continuous forms and the like can all be selected here. You can invent any number of variations on these formats, and you can arrange to attach the appropriate format to specific documents whenever you edit or print that document.

Volkswriter Deluxe expects you to be able to visualize some of the formatting characteristics and does not show them on the screen. There is no screen representation for justification, proportional spacing, or line spacing, though the length of screen lines takes proportionally spaced character widths into account. Volkswriter only shows things on the screen that affect the location or appearance in a way that requires operator attention. If you use justification, you don't need to see what it looks like on the screen because justification doesn't change the number of words per line, only the spacing of characters on the line. Page breaks are always visible on screen.

A second way to affect appearance is by setting boldfacing, shadow printing, strike through, underlining and superscripts and subscripts in the editor itself. You can also select up to four different fonts from within the editor; should your printer have the capability.

Appearance of the text can also be affected by the insertion of dot commands. These direct the print-formatting program to implement headers and footers, set page numbers, insert files or change formats in mid-document. The range of dot commands and print-time formatting available from within Volkswriter is adequate for most applications, though not as comprehensive as those available in WordStar. Volkswriter Deluxe easily manages multiple-line headers and footers, and will place this text left, right, centered or on alternating sides of the page. You can also chain files and print particular pages. You can print multiple copies simply by chaining the same file in a loop.

Volkswriter allows you to manipulate the printer directly by entering special control characters into the text. You can also insert a dot command that requires Volkswriter Deluxe's formatter to print all subsequent text verbatim without interpreting any control characters.

The combination of all these features produces a formatting capability that is flexible and powerful. The specific formatting features available to you, however, will depend in part on the special intelligence built into your printer. For example, Volkswriter can usually manage underlining, strike through, bold print, superscripts and subscripts, and justification on printers that have no built-in word-processing intelligence but do have flexible

line and character spacing. The program will not give you shadow print on such a printer (unlike WordStar).

The package has a special program called Configure that allows you to tell it what printer you are using so that Volkswriter can take advantage of its features. Unfortunately, the exceptionally useful features of this configuration program are virtually undocumented in the materials that come with the program. With all the expertise the Volkswriter people have with printer drivers, it's a peculiar anomaly that their description of their own program's printer setup is so deficient.

The feature that makes this word-processing program indispensable for specialized applications is the ability to customize the program. Volkswriter lets you set up your keyboard and printer any way you choose. This means that you can have your keyboard set up to work with foreign-language characters or rearrange the keyboard to suit your writing style. Doing this does not require much effort on your part beyond careful attention to the code numbers for each key and each displayed character.

Volkswriter Deluxe expects a lot of knowledge from you. You must be willing to learn what your printer does, how it does it and how to instruct Volkswriter Deluxe to work with it. If you learn all this, Volkswriter will provide you with a powerful and flexible word-processing system.

If you want to use this program with a variety of different printers you will incur a substantial training cost or will need to be sure there is a Volkswriter Deluxe guru available to set up special formats and deal with printer peculiarities. Volkswriter

does not always handle the printer for you, but does give you the ability to extract the most from whatever capability is in the printer.

For example, there is no software "handshaking" (instructions that make sure the printer and computer are ready to communicate with each other) in Volkswriter's printer files. If your serial printer is connected to the computer with a cable lacking the alternate hardware handshaking wires (a shortsighted but common arrangement), Volkswriter won't work properly. You must also know what characters are on your print wheels, and their positions, in order, to use the powerful special features that customize the printer output to match a custom keyboard assignment. None of this is particularly difficult, but it presupposes quite a bit of computer knowledge on the part of the operator.

Textmerge is Volkswriter's built-in form-letter, mailing-list and boiler-plate facility. The program works with standard comma-delimited files produced by Basic and most data-base programs. It does not have the extensive special options available in comparable programs such as MicroPro's MailMerge.

In sum, this is a unique word-processing program with excellent editing, strong formatting, good user documentation and tutorials, modest on-line help, an adequate list-processing function and good keyboard-printer customization routines. The program is distributed without irritating copy-protection schemes and is easily installed on a hard-disk system. Lifetree, the distributor of the program, provides exceptionally helpful and competent assistance to registered owners, and the company's update policies are excellent. ●

Review: VersaForm

BY GIOVANNI PERRONE
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VersaForm is a data-base-management system that is both powerful and easy to learn. It takes advantage of your familiarity with the paper forms and handling procedures, permitting you to automate forms, worksheets, file cards, ledgers and reports.

To use VersaForm, you start with an existing or desired paper form. Then you duplicate the form on your computer screen, making provisions for error checking and cross-referencing at the same time. Once the form is duplicated, you enter information into the computer by simply filling in the blanks. The informa-

tion on your form is automatically stored for future use in the VersaForm data base. Now you can print the information directly on preprinted forms or create new ones. You can also extract the information from your data base and produce any type of a report.

To enable you to create forms on the screen, VersaForm provides a screen formatter for designing and editing forms. It combines this with a data-entry program that includes advanced features such as forms filling, table look-up, calculation and range checking. There is also a data-base module that handles the complexities of storing information; a report generator that collects and sorts data, formats reports and works with word-processing