Windows, data sharing, open systems—they're all here in Desq, the big new integrating package from Quarterdeck Office Systems. Does it work? Yes. Do you need it? Perhaps. Does it integrate all your non-compatible software? Almost. What more do you need to know about this product? Lots.

Desq is big, powerful, effective, and complex. It can do an amazing number of things, many of them well, most of them effectively, and some with difficulty. The Desq system provides your computer with a second operating system that works on top of PC and MS-DOS 2.0. It provides powerful utility features that bring various programs into a similar operating environment. With it you can move information and activity from one window to another as needed. Desq's novelty and power come from its capability to bring dissimilar applications under one operating umbrella without losing the identity or capacity of the participating programs.

You perform tasks inside windows. Desq permits nine windows to be open and operational at the same time. Desq creates space for the program, starts the application, and then turns the work over to you. When you switch from one window to another, whatever is going on in the window you leave stops when you activate the second window, and it restarts when you return. You can use each window for the same, or different, applications. This allows you to closely coordinate different but related tasks and facilitates data transfer, one of Desq's other principal features.

What do you do with numbers in a spreadsheet that belong in the middle of a word processing document? How do you move database records into the documents prepared for publication? Most solo applications have a variety of file formats that help transfer information from the internal format of data storage to an external format for data transfer. Unfortunately, software producers do not adhere to any universal standard, making data transfer difficult or impossible. Sometimes this is a clever marketing, designed to encourage you to buy other programs that share special file formats; in other cases, it simply represents poor design. Desq addresses this problem in many ways.

In addition to windows and data transfers, Desq provides facilities that clarify normal "housekeeping" commands in the operating system. Most of the major DOS utilities have a counterpart command in Desq that makes using these facilities relatively simple and pointless.

That, in briefest terms, is what Desq does. Sounds simple? It's not. Making a shared environment that can cope with the incredible variety of programs available for PC- and MS-DOS computers would challenge any programming virtuoso and strain computers much larger than the IBM PC. Indeed, this gem requires a load of hardware for the typical IBM PC or PC-compatible owner. You'll need at least 256K of random access memory (RAM) to start up Desq, along with a minimum of 1.5 megabytes of hard disk storage to hold the Desq system files.

That's just for the Desq system, which itself doesn't perform any applications. You'll have to add whatever memory you may need to run your largest application—say 192K RAM for Lotus 1-2-3 or 128K RAM for WordStar 3.3. If you expect to have several applications running together that occupy two or more windows at once, you may need more. Thus, 512K RAM and 10 megabytes of hard disk storage would be comfortable—but not excessive—space for the Desq system. If you like, you can also add a mouse. Desq ships with several popular mice. (We did not test the operation with one.)

Installing Desq takes little time and is easy. The system comes on four diskettes, three for the system and one for the Agent Library (more about that later). Of these disks, the first is the Desq starter disk, which is copy-protected. You do not receive a backup until you send in $15 and your registration card. You must have the starter disk in drive A; each time you begin a Desq session, even if you start the program from the hard disk. If you damage the starter disk—which comes with its write-protect notch uncovered—before you have received your backup disk, you have to wait.

Once you install the system on the hard disk, the excitement begins. This system has more features, options, possibilities, and arrangements than DOS, Word Star, and Lotus combined. This provides impressive power, awe-inspiring complexity, and substantial knowledge to get the most.

John Lombardi is a professor of history and author of five books. He has been working with computers since 1967.
If you need to move data from one Word Star file to another, nothing could be simpler. Open two windows. In running Word Star, ask Desq to mark the text you want to transfer, move to the destination window, and Desq to perform the transfer in a few seconds you have it where you want it. This works the same for any other program. Desq type all the commands the application program needs to extract the marked block, keep the text in a temporary location, activate the destination window, transfer the text, and insert the text in the destination window.

When you want to move among different applications, the scenario gets trickier. If the two applications have Agent Support from Desq and share a file format (DIF, SYLK, ASCII text). Desq thinks it can perform the transfer and will try. The best results occur when the format shared by any two programs is something like a DIF file with all the information about the data clearly identified. The least satisfactory results often involve simple ASCII file transfers. It all depends on what you want to do.

If you want to move a 1-2-3 spreadsheet into a word processor document, then ASCII transfers work fine. But if you want to move a Multiplan spreadsheet into a 1-2-3 spreadsheet, you've got a problem. Desq tries, but it can't handle complicated labels, won't transfer formulas, and it emits columns when transferring from Multiplan to 1-2-3. This happens not because Desq performs the transfer incorrectly, but because 1-2-3's conventions for receiving text can't handle blank fields and because Desq's conventions for defining columns in ASCII data can't handle long labels having more than one blank character.

This is an instance of a difficult transfer that illustrates the complexity and variability of data transfer. Of course, Lotus understands DIF files and Multiplan understands SYLK, and though these two systems may be incompatible, they are probably translatable. Desq does not translate file formats; it transfers only the formats that the attached application can produce.

When all else fails, Desq lets you take a "snapshot" of the source screen and put it in the notepad. Then it lets you define columns or regions in the notepad and transfer them one at a time to the destination screen. This works even when programs that don't create text files for example, the display screens of application programs can be placed in the notepad and then transferred to a word processor program for use in making training materials.

We could go on at great length about what Desq does and doesn't do. The manual, about 500 pages, is well-done,
DAYFLO
A database manager and text processor

BY JONATHAN MARSHALL
Review Board

The designers of Dayflo must have had disorganized journalists in mind when they dreamed up this ambitious database manager and text processor.

Consider the typical information junkie's office: the right, four filing cabinets topped by stacks of yet-unsorted papers. Behind them, 10 neat piles of paper waiting their turn to be processed and catalogued. In short, the office is drowning in materials that seem to collect much faster than they can be processed.

Dayflo is a computer solution for the word-intensive workplace or study. It has little or no facility with things like numbers, graphs, spreadsheets, or accounts. But it deserves attention from writers, editors, secretaries, and managers because of its exceptional capability to handle unstructured information.

The program simulates the office environment. Records and data are divided among central files, working area "stacks," trash disposal, and the computer screen. You can retrieve, edit, and move information among all of these locations.

Dayflo supplies a no-frills but adequate text processor that allows you to write memos, letters, and reports from within the database environment on "scratch pads" (blank screens). Or you can bring in outside data, including spreadsheets, from other programs like 1-2-3 or dBase II.

You can whip up a letter, insert a name and address from a stored list, print the letter, and send duplicates to an "outgoing letters" attack and to the central file. When you don’t need it any longer, just send it to the trash.

An individual record (a letter, an address and phone number, or the like) can vary in length up to 32,000 characters—and unlike many programs, this one doesn’t insist on fixed field or record lengths. It stores new data in only as much space as needed. Within a 65,000-record limit, a single database can be as large as the room left on your hard disk.

All this sounds flexible, it is. Only a handful of database managers permit storage and fast retrieval of such unstructured information.

Best of all, Dayflo permits multiple entries within a single field. Suppose you have a client address list with a space for a phone number. If your client has but one phone, no problem; but what do you do when he or she has three numbers?

Dayflo is a computer solution for the word-intensive workplace. It has little or no facility with things like numbers, graphs, spreadsheets, or accounts.

In a traditional database, you must either set up every record to contain Phone1, Phone2, Phone3 as fields, wasting space and making record searches much more difficult, or set up separate records for the same person, each with a different phone number.

All that can get frustrating fast. Yet Dayflo handles the problem elegantly by allowing you to put multiple phone numbers (or whatever) into single field. That’s so easy — yet so rare in most software today.

But all this flexibility comes at a price. Dayflo is definitely not for the faint-hearted. The program gobbles up 1.3 megabytes of disk space, requiring a hard disk (preferably 10 megabytes or larger) and a minimum of 256K of memory (it likes to see even more).

Dayflo comes with two unprotected system disks, a tutorial data disk, an enormous reference guide, two thick tutorial books, a shorter 81-page "fast track" introduction to the program, and a nine-page reference card.

Though the documentation is clear, well-written, and professionally printed and illustrated, glowering through the sheer bulk of all this fine print can be a little daunting. And plow through it you must. The fast-track introduction to the program doesn’t even tell you how to set up your