Not the Right Combination

WANG’S OFFICE ASSISTANT TRIES TO JOIN DEDICATED WORD PROCESSING OTHER APPLICATIONS, WITH AVERAGE RESULTS

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Dedicated word processing systems for offices have been hit hard by the proliferation of personal computers and high-speed word processing software. More flexible and cheaper than the dedicated system, the personal computer seems destined to replace the Wang's Office Assistant, Wang Laboratories, which has built a business in office automation especially with dedicated word processing systems, has come under the personal computer onslaught with hardware and software products that capitalize on the company's extensive experience. The latest is the Office Assistant, which consists of a tightly integrated combination of software and software designed to create an efficient, single-user workstation for the business environment. This package reviewer has a high-resolution green-screen, Wang keyboard, a unit with a disk drive, an additional disk drive, printer, word processing and text management software, system software, and Microsoft's Multiplan spreadsheet software.

Although it uses an Intel 8086 microprocessor and runs Multiplan, this hardware bears only a superficial relationship to an MS-DOS standard machine. It is only meant to be a Wang word processing system that also runs some other programs. The most telling sign: The installed height, 500 kilobytes, produces disks unconvertible to MS-DOS data disks. Instead of waiting for your action, the disk drives automatically read a disk when the drive is closed. Therefore, you won't be able to use any IBM PC-compatible programs with this machine or exchange data disks between Multiplan on a PC. For example, the Wang computer is sold as a hybrid between Wang's dedicated word processing machine and a personal computer, the Wang Office Assistant leaves some things to be desired. The word processing program is a full-featured system, but not complete, copy of the Wang's software. The Wang Office Assistant is intended to run on an IBM PC. The disk utilities, including those for disk management and text editing, are provided with the software. The performance of the disk utility is a bit slower than that of a personal computer, the Wang Office Assistant leaves some things to be desired. The word processing program is a full-featured system, but not complete, copy of the Wang's software. The Wang Office Assistant is intended to run on an IBM PC. The disk utilities, including those for disk management and text editing, are provided with the software. The performance of the disk utility is a bit slower than that of a personal computer.

PRODUCT DETAILS

Last year, there were 59,995 disk drives sold, 55,995 last year, including those for disk management and text editing, are provided with the software. The performance of the disk utility is a bit slower than that of a personal computer. The Wang Office Assistant leaves some things to be desired. The word processing program is a full-featured system, but not complete, copy of the Wang's software. The Wang Office Assistant is intended to run on an IBM PC. The disk utilities, including those for disk management and text editing, are provided with the software. The performance of the disk utility is a bit slower than that of a personal computer.

SUMMARY

Designed as a hybrid between Wang's dedicated word processing machine and a personal computer, the Wang Office Assistant leaves some things to be desired. The word processing program is a full-featured system, but not complete, copy of the Wang's software. The Wang Office Assistant is intended to run on an IBM PC. The disk utilities, including those for disk management and text editing, are provided with the software. The performance of the disk utility is a bit slower than that of a personal computer.
The Office Assistant from Wang attempts to bridge the gap between desktop word processing machines and personal computers, without much success.

The system works well, allowing you to create a template on the screen that will match exactly what appears on a preprinted form. You have to do the setup only once using the system printer and the form. Everything you type to fill out the form, you call up the function, select the appropriate form, and fill it in. The Office Assistant and printer type the information exactly where it should appear on the form.

The interesting feature in this area is the typewriter mode, in which the Office Assistant and printer become a typewriter. You can either type directly, each keystroke going immediately to the printer, or type a whole line, correct it, and then send it to the printer. This system works nicely for letters and other odd-sized items or quick notes.

The Office Assistant supports two different Wang printers. The unit shipped to me with the better of the two printers, the Wang 5010 is a 12-line wheel printer, rated at about 50 characters per second. It uses right-aligned double spaced fonts, all including proportionally spaced fonts, so that you can use the printer to get above line instructions attached to the computer.

The maintenance aspect includes such functions as preparing disks, coping the system disk, changing keyboard characteristics, and installing optional software. In addition to the word processing software that comes with the Office Assistant, the system has the capability to attach other software, although only programs specially prepared for the Office Assistant environment will work. This new system came without Multimate 3.1, which attaches to the system with the same plan. This version of Multimate works just like it does on the IBM PC.

Because the Wang Office Assistant is a non-standard system, products from the IBM PC or other microcomputer libraries cannot be attached. Moreover, since you have installed a program on the Office Assistant, it will not work on any other Office Assistant, although you can make backup copies. Worse yet, there are no instructions provided for moving test files from the Office Assistant to any other computer system. For a machine that might be attractive to an environment with dedicated Wang machines and IBM PCs, the capability to move files would be a major advantage.

The documentation that comes with this system is quite extensive and serves as user training manuals. The large, clear, and comprehensive Word Processing Training Guide offers excellent instruction on the basics and includes some technical information not included in the user guide. The user's manual provides a reference manual for each of the activities and menus available at the system. Each manual includes descriptions of error messages and indexes, although the indexes are a bit skimpy. Our copy of Multimate did not come with a manual, although one is evidently available.

The printer manual has good instructions and a technical specifications section that outlines its capabilities. There is also a good Unpacking and Installation Guide, with the same scope and detail, and a complete manual is included that covers all aspects of the Office Assistant.

Wang is famous for its support, and this product has several levels of assistance. First, there is a toll-free hot line that provides no technical assistance, but provides technical assistance, with a wide range of topics. You need a touch-tone phone, as well as a well-lit office, and a computer system. You can call in a maintenance request, and someone will call you back. The maintenance request will be processed, and you will receive a report on the status of your request. The report will include a description of the problem, a list of steps to solve the problem, and a list of parts that may be needed. The parts list will include the part number, the description of the part, and the cost of the part. The report will be sent to you via email, and you will receive a confirmation of your request.

Overall, the Wang Office Assistant might be a good choice for a Wang office environment in which some control over the machines and software may be desirable. The word processing software with the product is adequate for office use but not any better than what is available on stand-alone machines from many manufacturers. The closed nature of the system, the lack of an alternative selection, and the difficulty of transferring files between Wang Office Assistant and other word processing programs.