

# Volkswriter 3 'In the Running' With the Best On the Market

By John Lombardi  
Review Board

When the IBM PC was introduced, one of the first word processing programs to support it was Volkswriter, a somewhat rough-and-ready yet easy-to-use program. (See "Volkswriter, Word Processing for the IBM PC," June 14, 1982.) In those early days, it had separate edit and print modules, could only handle up to a 9K text file, and was roundly criticized for requiring 128K of "expensive" random-access memory (RAM).

Since then, Volkswriter has evolved steadily into a strong word processor, acquiring polish as well as a list of features and capabilities that put it in the running with the best word processors in the business.

The newest version, Volkswriter 3, adds a large spelling dictionary, mathematical capabilities, sorting, format files, and a variety of new utility programs to what is still the clean, flexible package that we've liked in the past ("Volkswriter's Revision Sports Better Manual, Improved Speed," September 23, 1984, and "Review: Volkswriter Deluxe," April 16, 1985). The basic Volkswriter style remains, so the new Volkswriter ought to appeal to much the same population as its previous versions.

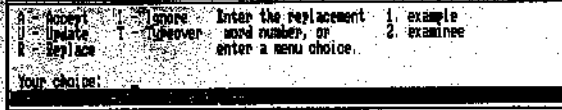
**FEATURES:** Volkswriter 3 offers considerable — and sophisticated — enhancements and enough changes to clearly qualify this update as a major revision over Version 2.2. In addition, powerful standard features such as speed, ease of use, powerful formatting capabilities, user-definable keyboard, screen display, and printer support have remained unchanged.

Some of the refinements affect the way text appears on the screen. For example, Volkswriter now shows line spacing on the screen, if desired; paragraph reformatting can take place either automatically as you type, or manually by command. The automatic reformatting, however, does slow the program down, especially if done with the new automatic hyphenation feature turned on. And a new text-merge capability combines data files with documents for form-letter processing, mailing-list management, and similar tasks.

As in previous versions of the program, commands provide users with print enhancements such as boldfacing, underlining, superscripts and subscripts, overstriking, and special fonts. This new version also takes advantage of the IBM Enhanced Graphics Adapter to allow up to 43 lines of text on the screen.

**PERFORMANCE:** We'll look primarily at the new features; you can assume that the good ratings awarded to features in previous Volkswriter releases remain the same for this version.

The first major new feature is the spelling checker. Volkswriter 3 has one of the most graceful spelling checkers we have ever seen. The large 170,000-word dictionary had plenty of options. It found most of the words in our documents and was easy to interact with. Whenever a word, a block of text, or an entire document needs to be checked for spelling, one



In addition, there is a very complete menu for document layout and the creation of style sheets.

Now, here's an example of a misspelled word using the spelling checker.



Lifetree Software has added a 170,000-word spelling checker to Volkswriter 3, the company's fast, easy-to-use, and very flexible word processor.

keystroke invokes the dictionary search.

Depending on where the dictionary is stored (floppy disk, hard disk, or RAM disk), the response ranges from fast to virtually instantaneous. The speller checks the word in question against its dictionary; if it finds a misspelling, it provides a menu that offers users a wide range of options, including searching for possible replacements, typing in a new spelling, or adding the word to a temporary personal dictionary.

Even more helpful is the fact that the speller maintains a temporary dictionary during each session of Volkswriter. As you check words, the temporary dictionary grows to include those words you use most often; thus, the longer you use the spelling checker at a particular session, the faster it responds.

The dictionary also provides the basic information for the automatic hyphenation feature. Compared to other hyphenators, such as the one in Wordstar 3.3, this one is a marvel. It works unobtrusively, does an excellent job of hyphenating correctly, and can be turned on and off.

Volkswriter 3 also allows the hyphenation zone to be changed, in order to hyphenate more or fewer words. The hyphenation zone is an area four to eight characters wide at the right margin. Volkswriter begins looking for an appropriate "break" in the word being typed when the hyphenation zone is reached; the wider the zone, the fewer hyphenated words your document will have, but the more ragged the right margin will appear. If you're using right-justified text, more space will appear between words.

In short, the spelling and hyphenation feature works exceedingly well and delays the operation of this program very little. We couldn't get the program to lose characters, either when hyphenating or typing at a very fast pace. Although there is a slight delay at the end of each line while Volkswriter checks out hyphenation possibilities, this delay, even without a RAM or hard disk, is barely noticeable.

Math capabilities greatly enhance the usefulness of word processing programs; Volkswriter 3's math function is no exception, permitting you to perform a wide range of calculations. The key concept for the math function is a "table." If a row or column of numbers is laid out correctly, Volkswriter can add, subtract, multiply, divide, calculate percentages, display subtotals, do row-and-column math, and provide row-and-column cross-checks. Highly versatile, this feature is especially useful when preparing tables and lists.

The math feature is invoked with a single function key once the appropriate table, column, or row is marked as a block. Then a series of options appear on a menu to help determine what Volkswriter should

do with the numbers. Calculating by row, single column, multiple columns, or cross footings are some of the options you have.

The math function works well but requires considerable care in preparing the tables to be calculated in order to get maximum advantage out of the function. Although Volkswriter uses standard math symbols for its calculations — such as plus, minus, multiply, divide, parentheses, at, and percent symbols — such symbols can be left out of the printed results if that would improve its appearance.

Sorting is a useful function that has been showing up on some advanced word processors recently. It can be done on any marked block. The sort routine is relatively simple, sorting whole lines only and ignoring case. It can do either ascending or descending sorts on fields defined by the column block function.

To use this sort feature most effectively, Volkswriter recommends putting data into fixed column form. For example, when sorting names, line up last names and first names in separate columns. While not a substitute for a sophisticated sorting utility, Volkswriter's sort function can be useful when preparing a variety of lists.

Another major change in this version of Volkswriter is the inclusion of style-sheet and layout information stored as part of a document. Previous versions stored a document's format information separately from the text; now all format specifications are stored within the document itself. In addition, special style sheets can be created and stored on disk. Such style sheets will then be automatically associated with the document that has a matching file-name extension.

Volkswriter 3 also has a special function key that invokes an elaborate but relatively easy-to-use set of menus to help specify document layout. The program allows up to 15 different layouts to be used in any single document, so it is possible to have one layout specified for text, another for tables, a third for quoted passages, and so on. Then when typing a document, you simply choose the appropriate defined layout for the section in question.

If you later want to change the layout, Volkswriter will reformat the text to match the new layout. When the document is stored on disk, all the layout information is stored with it and is instantly available whenever you reedit or print the document.

Although the manual could have been somewhat clearer about the various ways to use layouts and style sheets effectively, the program works exceedingly well and is a major improvement over previous versions of Volkswriter. In fact, these features make Volkswriter competitive with programs like Microsoft Word, which pioneered the use of such style sheets.

Finally, in the major revision category, Version 3 offers a wide range of utility functions that improve the versatility of the program. For example, most DOS commands can be entered on a command line provided within Volkswriter (the actual process is to exit from editing a document and ask for the DOS command line); Volkswriter then starts a DOS "shell" that allows other programs to be run, as long as they do not need to be stored permanently in working memory (the manual is quite clear about which DOS commands will work under specific conditions). When you have finished with a DOS function, you issue the exit command to return instantly to Volkswriter, with everything just as it was before.

In a commendable effort to make Volkswriter fit into an integrated word processing environment, this program has utilities that convert Volkswriter files into IBM's Document Content Architecture format and back again. Additionally, another utility converts files between Volkswriter and Wordstar 3.3 and back but unfortunately doesn't work for Wordstar 2000.

Although these utility programs work effectively, they are not as flexible as we would like; for example, the Wordstar converter only does one file at a time, on the presumption that this conversion will only be used occasionally.

Volkswriter 3 can also accept and export straight ASCII files in a number of ways, and the utilities section includes facilities for editing the spelling and hyphenation dictionaries.

Volkswriter's block operations work flawlessly, although they are still one-time-only functions. To move a block to two different places you must mark the block, move it, then remark it to move the same block again, since the block markers

## InfoWorld

REPORT CARD

### VOLKSWRITER 3

	Unacceptable	Poor	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent
Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Error Handling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**SUMMARY**

Fast, easy to use, powerful, and very flexible, Volkswriter 3 is an admirable improvement of an already successful word processing product. The addition of math, spelling, and much improved style and layout capabilities bring this feature-laden MS-DOS program within range of the best in the field. Not copy-protected.

**PRODUCT OFFERS**

List price, \$295; registered users of previous versions can upgrade for \$95. Version tested (1.0) available for IBM PC, PC XT, PC AT, 3270 PC, and compatibles running PC- or MS-DOS 2.0 or later; PC- or MS-DOS 3.0 required for print queuing. Requires 256K RAM, two double-sided floppy disk drives or hard disk drive. Lifetree Software Inc., 411 Pacific St., Monterey, CA 93940; (408) 373-4718.

reappear after one block operation. Also, once a block marker has been set, it cannot be changed without deactivating and resetting both block markers. These minor inconveniences are more noticeable in a product otherwise commendable for its ease of use.

With a full-feature word processing program of this class, it is difficult to adequately describe all the features and capabilities. While Version 3 does not have windows or footnoting, it has some special features of its own, especially in terms of printer support, math functions, keyboard and screen flexibility, and dictionary capacity.

This program's power exacts a penalty, however; it takes up lots of disk space and considerable memory. The program requires a minimum of 256K of RAM, but more memory will result in much better performance.

Volkswriter is such a large program that on a dual-floppy system, it takes two disks to start; the first disk starts loading the program, and the second one finishes the loading process, holding the files specifically needed for program operation and the dictionary files. With a hard disk, the program works faster, but even on a dual-floppy machine the performance is impressive, considering the constant need of the program to refer to the dictionary for hyphenation information.

Volkswriter 3 is also a well-behaved program, in that it will run under the IBM Topview manager. It will also coexist with memory-resident programs — such as Sidekick — without difficulty.

**DOCUMENTATION:** As has been a characteristic of this program over the years, the manual improves with each version. Volkswriter 3's manual appears very much in the mode of the Version 2.2 documentation, with additional information to illustrate the new features.

The manual is clear and well-written, and includes a comprehensive index. The section on the math feature is especially good, while the part on style sheet and layout explanations is less satisfactory (some additional examples on style and layout would have been helpful). And the explanations of the complexities of printer support, alternative keyboard, screen, and printing tables, while accurate and reasonably complete, are not designed for novices.

As a printed product, the manual is an excellent example of what can be done when using Volkswriter 3 with a Hewlett-Packard laser printer.

**EASE OF LEARNING:** This version of Volkswriter is not quite as easy to learn as previous versions, primarily because the program is complicated with many more features and options. Nonetheless, the useful on-disk tutorials, the forgiving nature of the on-screen menus and commands, and the good manual bring users to a reasonable level of proficiency rather quickly. Within the group of high-level word processing programs, Volkswriter 3 is one of the easiest to learn. While some of the layout and style concepts may be difficult for novice word processing users, it is easy to start using the program and relatively easy to learn how to use its more powerful features.

**EASE OF USE:** Volkswriter 3, like earlier versions, is easy to use. It is a function-key oriented program that implements features by combining function keys with other keys such as the shift, control, or alternative keys. The advantage of this is that function keys appear to be somewhat easier to learn. The disadvantage is that they are less easy to use when typing. Volkswriter should implement a control-key system in addition to the function-key system, for invoking special features and especially for editing and cursor control operations.

On-screen help has been greatly improved over earlier versions, and menus

help users create style sheets and layouts. The menus also make it easy to change the operating characteristics of the program. This program clearly earns a very good rating in ease of use.

**ERROR HANDLING:** Most errors can be handled routinely in Volkswriter. Disk errors — such as an improperly inserted disk — are gracefully recovered and come with clear error messages. Errors in using the program almost always produce clear messages, although some errors, unfortunately, cannot be recovered. For example, there is no "undo" command to recover mistakenly deleted text.

Volkswriter uses what it calls "spill" files to hold any text that is larger than available memory. This means that excess text is stored in temporary files on disk until needed; unfortunately you can easily scramble such files if you remove the disk before saving them. However, Volkswriter provides you with frequent and dramatic

warnings about this potential difficulty. It also offers the option of creating automatic backups as a safety feature. When using the program on a hard disk, of course, the problem is minimal since the hard disk can't be accidentally removed.

Volkswriter recovers from other errors, such as the ones related to insufficient memory, with considerable grace and no lost data. In general, error recovery is very good and error messages informative and helpful.

**SUPPORT:** Volkswriter's publisher, Lifetree, has an outstanding record of support. Its hot line is staffed by knowledgeable people who have the right answers, and updates are mailed to registered users along with additional information about program fixes or uses.

In fact, the update policies of this company are excellent, providing the newest versions to registered users at reasonable fees. Moreover, the company

does not copy protect its disks, making the program much easier to use and more reliable.

**VALUE:** The price of this program is now at the low end of the high-quality word processor market, yet it continues to add features and functions. With a spelling checker, text-merge list processing, math capabilities, and a powerful text-formatting capacity, this program is a very good value indeed. Lifetree has a variety of licensing agreements available, and the company says the program can run on a network.

Users who have complex formatting or printing needs, use a variety of printers, or need math functions or spelling checking will find this a very good program. Those who are looking for excellent, easy-to-use word processing may discover that this program has an ideal combination of ease of use, accessibility, power, and price. Volkswriter remains a highly recommended program.

## Mouse Word For the Apple II: Lots of Features At a Low Price

By Cynthia E. Field  
Review Board

Mouse Word is the third program in a series from French publisher International Solutions that brings the well-known Macintosh user interface to the Apple II line. A mouse-controlled word processor, it joins its siblings, Mouse Calc, a spreadsheet program, and Mouse Budget, a personal finance program, in the Apple II software market.

If you are thinking of making the shift from a keyboard-driven word processor to a mouse-driven one for personal or professional use, you would be remiss not to try Mouse Word. It's available for the Apple IIe, with or without the read-only memory (ROM) chip upgrade, and for the Apple IIc.

**FEATURES:** Mouse Word offers a multitude of features without confusion or clutter. The screen is about as clean as you can expect from a Macintosh-like program. The menu bar highlights intuitive word processing choices: ? file, edit, format, print, display, and communications menus.

With a point and a click of the mouse button, the ? menu pulls down to show the name of the file currently in memory, the name of the current volume, the amount of memory used, and the amount of memory remaining. Mouse Word measures memory in characters (roughly equivalent to bytes); there is about a 47,000-character limit for any one document.

The file menu contains Mouse Word's document and disk management features: new, open, insert, save, delete, select a volume, create a subdirectory, catalog, format a disk, and quit. The menu also provides access to "glossaries," which are special files that save time by letting you store and then recall often-used phrases.

For example, you could put your company's name into the glossary, stored under a specific "code" letter; you could then insert the company name into text at any time simply by pressing "open apple-g" and typing the code letter you selected.

Mouse Word's edit menu lets you manipulate text using the cut, copy, and paste options and using the find and replace



International Solutions' Mouse Word brings a Macintoshlike environment, complete with pull-down menus, to Apple IIe and IIc computers.

functions. The edit menu also offers an undo feature that allows you to cancel the previously selected command.

The program normally uses insert mode when writing, so that inserting text in the middle of a line pushes existing text to one side. It's possible to change that to overwrite mode, where text you insert replaces existing text. You can also cause the program to display carriage return codes.

The format menu offers features for packaging your text by changing margins, tabs, pitch, and spacing. Page formatting is determined here, too. You can control top, bottom, and paragraph margins, page numbering options, and headers and footers. Formatting commands, including those for underlining and boldfacing, are embedded in the text.

If you do statistical typing or prepare invoices and statements, the tab, decimal point and decimal place features assure that your columns of numbers will line up properly.

So that you won't have to reach for a desk calculator, Mouse Word does math. Not only does the built-in calculator offer the four basic functions of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, it also offers advanced mathematical functions such as trigonometric and Boolean operations.

The default format window lets you set up and save the page formats you use routinely. All margins (top, bottom, left, right, and paragraph) can be preset. The paper length and number of printed lines can be defined. Pitch (10, 12, or 15) can be selected. Either single sheet or continuous form paper can be used.

Business users and others who send form letters will appreciate Mouse Word's mail-merge capabilities. This personalized

form letter function is accessed from the print menu. You can either print the letters with names and addresses previously saved in a variable file, or type the names and addresses for any other desired direct input to each letter from the keyboard, with the program prompting you for the information it needs.

Mouse Word supports a number of popular dot matrix and letter quality printers, including those from Apple, Epson, and Brother. If your printer is not among the models listed, you can access and change printer options to set parity, the number of stop and data bits, initialization and printer codes, and other parameters as required. Once you save these values on the Mouse Word disk, you do not need to reconfigure your printer each time you use the program.

The display menu shows you the formatted document prior to sending it to the printer or modem. Page breaks are represented as broken lines.

Mouse Word's communications feature is another useful word processing adjunct for home or office use. In terminal mode you can send or receive text. If you want to connect with a computer or other selected information systems, you can use the automatic log on files already created by Mouse Word's developers. For other connections, you can create your own automatic log on files to speed up and simplify your communications tasks.

Mouse Word files can be linked with spreadsheets from the firm's Mouse Calc, from Appleworks and Multiplan, and with database files created by Quick File or Appleworks.

**PERFORMANCE:** Mouse Word performed satisfactorily in all respects. Mouse Word does not go overboard on using the mouse interface and pull-down menus.

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