Step-Saving Utility Converts Among Six Word Processors

By John Lombardi

Converting documents from one word processing program format to another can be a pain in the neck. Word processors don't use common formatting codes, so transferring even a heavily formatted WordStar 3.3 file can be a task by itself. Software can be a big help. The common method is to strip out all the formatting, read the file into the other word processor, and spend an hour or two getting the formats back in.

There are other solutions, however. Some word processors offer their own conversion programs. PagePerfect, for example, will convert WordStar files with most formatting codes preserved. Other programs support Document Content Architecture/Revisable Text Format (DC/RTF), a format translation standard created by IBM. These programs can convert documents from one system to another for you, and can handle more exotic files such as those from dedicated word processors.

Word for Word is a program that promises to convert almost any popular PC word processor on the market today, retaining virtually all formatting. Our test showed that Word for Word pretty much does its job of conversion---though it makes a few items like soft hyphens and centered text.

It also offers the useful capability of transferring formatted text files by modem.

FEATURES:
Word for Word converts documents between any of several formats. The current list (which will grow in subsequent releases, according to the vendor) consists of versions of six popular word processors: WordStar 3.1 and 3.31, Lotus 1-2-3, WordPerfect 3.0 and 4.1, Multimate 3.3, and WordPerfect Deluxe 2.2, and WordStar Version 1.0. In addition, it can convert to and from ASCII, EBCDIC, and a special communications format.

The function of this program couldn't be simpler---converting document files from one of these formats to any of the others. The program can run in a batch mode for multiple file conversions, or through an interactive system with helpful prompts and information screens. It will print an exception file that includes a coded list of all the features that could not be transferred between the source and the target systems. These exceptions can also be flagged in the text of the converted document.

PERFORMANCE:
Word for Word is fast. The conversion process signs right along, and is faster than the conversion routines that make up a part of the Vollkrieger 3.0 or WordPerfect 4.1 programs. Unfortunately, Word for Word did encounter difficulties while attempting to handle some complex formatting conventions.

We prepared a reasonably complicated document that included such items as print enhancements, a two-line header and footer, footnotes, centered lines, indented lines, decimal-aligned columns, justified text, hyphenation, and newspaper columns. Some of these features are specifically listed in the Word for Word documentation, which otherwise states that if a feature exists in both source and target word processor, the converted document will be a mirror image of the original.

We prepared the text file in Word

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WORD FOR WORD

6.5

Inexpensive

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Performance

Documentation

Ease of Use

Error Handling

Support

Value

Word for Word translates documents from one word processing format into another, keeping most of the formatting and print enhancements intact. Not copy-protected. For the IBM PC, Print Quick hands on an unconvertible code, so conversion programs can send formatted files by modem. If your word processor doesn't transfer, so some cleanup still required.

HELLO METRIC

"Hello, I'm Lisa Metric. Whenever, wherever and however you need DP equipment, you'll never need anyone but me."
Perfect 4.1, then we converted the WordPerfect document into Worderdat 3.31 format and Volkswriter 3 format to test how well this system worked. The results were mixed.

The converted documents were perfectly editable in Wordperfect and Volkswriter. The text-enhancement codes for bold, italic, superscripts, and subscripts, and the like translated perfectly. Features not available in the target word processor were handled by Word for Word in various ways. Sometimes, not available in Volkswriter. There was no conversion, but left in the text. The first line of a two-line header in WordPerfect became a single-line header in both Worderdat and Wordperfect, which only do one-line headers; the second line translated as a text line. The same happened with a two-line footer. We had a decent-aligned column in the WordPerfect document that was transferred without alignment into both documents, though both Worderdat and Wordperfect had decimal columns.

The main glitch in the Volkswriter text was the conversion of WordPerfect's header without hyperlinks, which are hard tasks in Volkswriter 3.1, even though Volkswriter has a hyperlink facility. The Volkswriter manual is a known problem that is fixed in Version 1.9 (newly shipping).

Converting from WordPerfect to Worderdat 3.31 did not convert the changing margins specified explicitly in the WordPerfect document, although Worderdat has a feature that allows a ruler line command to be embedded in the text. In our conversion, the hyperlinks characters were simply removed, even though Worderdat 3.1 also has hyperlink characters. We had included an image with a title as a special character; Worderdat doesn't support that character, so the Worderdat version dropped the title and kept the n, a reasonable compromise. Formatting characters such as centering (which Wordperfect has) and right (which Worderdat does not) were lost. (The vendor says the Worderdat centering and hyperlink problems are being fixed.) Changes in pitch were translated by the appropriate dot commands, and justification 564 commands were also included.

In both the Worderdat and Wordperfect documents, the cleanup required to get the document to look exactly like the original Word Perfect document was frustrating, and some assuming problems were the failure to handle tables and headers properly. However, both converted documents were completely editable, and the cleanup, while time-consuming, posed no significant problems.

None of these difficulties should surprise any veteran user of word processing systems. Complete conversions are not really possible because word processing systems differ in the amount of information that is stored with the file. Many do not store page-size and page-length information with the document but rather apply settings from within the program. Similarly, features that exist in one word processing system but not in another (such as multileader numbering) cannot be converted.

There are two other conversions of interest included in this package. The ASCII conversion takes a word processing file and strips out all the special characters that may have been inserted for formatting information. The result is a file that can be read into almost any word processing program, albeit without any formatting and print-enhancement information. When we converted an ASCII file back into WordPerfect, we found that all lines ended in hard end-of-line characters, which meant a lot of reformatting.

Word for Word also has a routine to convert files into the codes used by many word processing systems called Extended Binary-Coded Decimal Interchange Code (this includes ASCII). By those who want such a conversion, this program will serve nicely.

The reconverting word processing files is a problem for many word processes, whose coded files often cause a modem to choke and quite often the communications software automatically strips out all special formats. Word for Word includes a special communications module that sends this communications problem elegantly by converting the document into a file that can be sent by modem and then reconverted, with all its codes intact, at the other end of the transmission using a second copy of Word for Word.

Though Word for Word fails a little short in converting everything it could, it does a fairly good job of reducing the amount of postconversion cleanup needed. The result is a program that can greatly reduce the work involved in moving documents among word processors. The tools are extremely effective for performing this feat. Word for Word offers two less common bonuses: the EBCDIC transmission and other utilities. For this reason, we rate Word for Word very good in performance.

DOCUMENTATION:
The Word for Word manual is clear and easy to use. It has basic information available, indicates enough technical details for a reasonably expert word processing user to understand what will and won't work, and explains the various ways of using the program. We feel that the documentation overstates the completeness of the utilities possible, and in its marks on the amount of work needed to get one complex document working on another word processing system is optimistic. This aside, the documentation warrants a satisfactory rating.

EASE OF LEARNING:
This program is almost trivially easy to learn. In the interactive mode, the menu and instructions are very clear. Online help explains every step. We rate this program excellent in ease of learning.

EASE OF USE:
Word for Word is also very easy to use. The option to use batch commands that automate multiple document conversions is helpful, and the menu system for interactive conversion is very easy to use. Access to different directories and disks is easy. The Exceptions file that includes a list of unconverted features is somewhat difficult to decipher without some careful reference to the translations of the program. Although some postconversion cleanup is required, Word for Word still merits a very good in ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING:
The program recovers from simple errors such as misspelled filenames file names and path names without any difficulties and with no lost information. If you type the drive letter or leave a drive door open, the program simply gives you the "Abort, Retry, Ignore" message from DOS, and if you can't correct the situation, it stumps you back to the operating system. Fortunately, no damage is done to files because no files are open at the time. Word for Word will overwrite an existing file in the interactive mode.

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Software Reviews

without querying the user. We think there should be a warning.

However, the product does not
provide a means to replace the errors.

SUPPORT:
In the version we tested, several major
word processing programs were not sup-
ported. The vendor told us that Version 2
will be available at the beginning of the
year and will support almost all programs
as well as DCA. The upgrade will be free to registered users of
Version 1. Future upgrades will be available to existing owners at a nominal
cost. Planned for future upgrades in
support are System III, The Leading Edge
Word Processor, and Simplicity, Word, the
vendor said.

The program is not copy-protected,
and no specific warranty appears in the
documentation. However, the vendor
said the product has the usual 90-day
media-only warranty. The quality of the
phone support was fine. We got through,
and we got good information.

Because of the lack of copy protection,
the competent technical support, and the
good upgrade policy, we rate support
satisfactory.

VALUE:
At $149, this product will be considered
by those with a professional need for
regular updates. Other alternatives for
some conversion: For example, WordPerfect and Yellowbrick both convert to and from Wordstar and DCA/RFT. Other systems convert to and from Wordstar, DCA/RFT, and some
programs. Even public domain programs
convert files to ASCII.

However, these alternatives are not
always superior. WordPerfect's Word-
star conversion routine produces cleaner
results, but it is slower, and DCA has its
own quirks and dropped formats. As a conversion utility, Word
for Word does a fine job at a fair price. We
rate its value as satisfactory.

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More than just a turn-on.

Word Finder
Updated Thesaurus Includes Larger Index, More Synonyms

By Tom A. Summers' Review Board

When we last reviewed Word Finder, an
updated version, we commented that
because its main index was too small and because
we didn't always find its synonyms helpful. The new version contains
an index that is more than half larger than the old one. And with a new
synonym dictionary of 220,000 words, Word Finder now locates many
synonyms for each word as it did before.

Also, standardization in Word Finder
is the fact that it is now bundled with
Wordstar Professional and Microsoft
Word.

Word Finder still has rough spots,
though. Although Word Finder is about as fast as other thesauruses, some
competitors are more versatile and can index more words.

And with such a paucity of
words available, users will still have to
see the appropriateness of synonyms that Word Finder suggests.

FEATURES:
Word Finder is a RAM-resident program
that finds synonyms for the first 15,000
words and comes with two synonym
dictionaries: a smaller one with 90,000
words for floppy drive systems and a
larger one with 220,000 words for hard
disk drives or RAM caché. In contrast,
Wordstar and Word processors
(see "Synonym Finder Works Well
Without Sacrificing Speed," November
10, 1983) have a smaller dictionary (128,000 synonyms) but indexes more
words (20,000).

A two-keystroke command activates
the program, which then finds synonyms
for the word at the cursor position.
Synonyms appear in a window at the
corner of the screen. You can select one
of the synonyms to replace the word in
your document automatically. As with
most thesauruses we've seen, Word
Finder will automatically capitalize
the replacement word if the original word
is also capitalized.

Like Turbo Lightning, Word Finder
will display a list of similarly spelled
words when it can't find a reference for
the word you specify.

PERFORMANCE:
Word Finder requires 33K of RAM
above that used by your word processor
and other utilities. It works with Sidekick
and Windows/Linux/DOS with no problem.

You can configure it for any of 24
word processors, including Word Perfect,
Microsoft Word, Quicken, and Multimate. Because you can specify which keystrokes will activate
the thesaurus, there's no problem of
collisions with your word processor.

As you would imagine, Word Finder is
faster with the smaller dictionary.

But we found Webber's to be more
agile. For example, when you choose a
synonym with Webber's, it will put the
synonym into the same grammatical
form as the original word, thus matching
advantage and so on. Webber's will also change an article from a to an
if the synonym requires such a change.

You can chain through Word Finder's
list of synonyms, or effect deriving
synonyms for the synonym. But since
the words are extensively cross-refer-
ced to another, this chaining won't
give you a very solid idea of the
synonym's depth.

Word Finder's speed is about the same
as the competition's. The program's
fewer capabilities are balanced by the
larger synonym list, earning a satisfactory
rating for performance.

DOCUMENTATION:
Word Finder comes with a stapled, 47-
page brochure for a manual. It explains
installation, usage, and basic use of
the program, but it includes only a very brief,
two-page reference section. It does offer
instructions for using the program with
DOS or with word processors that
require a slightly different setup. A
separate Quick Start card tells experi-
enced users how to install and start
the program without reading the
manual.

Word Finder has on-line help
screens, but since the program has only
one command, none are necessary. We
rate the documentation as satisfactory.

EASE OF LEARNING:
A simple installation program makes it
easy to configure Word Finder for use
with your word processor and system.
Once you've figured out how to get
the cursor, which keys to press to activate
the program, and how to replace a word
with a synonym, there's nothing left to do.
Nearly everyone will be able to pick up
this program and do everything it offers in just several minutes.

Because things couldn't be much
easier — largely because the program is
smaller than competing products — we
rate ease of learning as excellent.

EASE OF USE:
Since Word Finder has only one
command, it's extremely easy to use.

Again, because it is smaller than its
competition is, it is easier to use. We rate it
as excellent for ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING:
We couldn't get Word Finder to crash by
printing wrong keys. It either ignores
your mistakes or simply keeps going. However,
the program makes no effort to help users
when it gets stuck. Word Finder's lack of
which disk is in the drive, a feature
offered by Webber's. We tested Word
Finder with Sidekick (Version 1.10),
and there were no problems. We rate
Word Finder's error handling as satisfac-
tory.

Although Word Finder is about as
fast as other thesauruses, some
competitors are more versatile and
can index more words.

The latest version of Word Finder includes a 220,000-word synonym dictionary.
Synonyms for a particular word appear in a window at the bottom of the screen.