

address. Finally, Goal Solutions provides a full-screen form to simplify setting up multiple-goal problems (and eliminate the need to reformat your spreadsheets, as is required by Goal Seeker).

The consistent and well-designed user interface and the context-sensitive help system make Goal Solutions easy to use, even for complex problems. We award it an excellent rating in this category.

ERROR HANDLING:

The programs handle common error situations equally well, and neither will accept invalid commands. For multiple-goal problems, both programs give you the option of stopping or continuing if an error occurs.

Goal Solutions gives you more informative messages, and it even displays a problem index screen that explains the

error in detail and also gives some possible solutions.

Goal Seeker includes a feature that is missing from Goal Solutions: the ability to stop the goal-seeking process prior to its completion. This is a real time saver if you discover that you incorrectly set up a complex problem. With Goal Solutions, you must wait it out.

But overall, error handling averages out about equally for these two products, and each earns a satisfactory rating.

SUPPORT:

Although the two vendors differ in their level of user support, they do share a common feature: no copy protection.

Brown Bag Software provides toll-free telephone support for Goal Seeker seven days a week, 12 hours a day (eight hours on weekends). The company also main-

tains a remote bulletin board system for its customers and offers a 30-day money-back guarantee.

We had no trouble getting through on the 800 number, but our first call was not returned, and we called back a few days later. After a brief period on hold, the support representative acknowledged the disk drive light bug, and asked us to call back in a week or so to see if a fix was available.

Although our specific problem wasn't solved, we like the extended hours of toll-free telephone support, and were surprised at how easy it was to get through. We rate support as very good. The Goal Solutions manual doesn't mention the availability of technical support, but we later learned that vendor EnFin Software now includes its support phone number on an adhesive-backed card that comes with the package. Our call (not toll free) was answered by a friendly rep who left us on hold briefly while she got the answers to our questions. Support is available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific time. EnFin also offers a 30-day money-back guarantee. Although the vendor does not make this promise in writing, a spokeswoman said the firm will refund the purchase price to those who call and have problems. Overall, EnFin's support for Goal Solutions is satisfactory.

VALUE:

Goal Solutions now retails for \$79.95, while Goal Seeker retails for \$69.95. But while Goal Seeker is a satisfactory performer, its poor documentation and the relative difficulty of learning and

using the program prevent us from recommending this program — especially when a much better product is available for nearly the same price.

Still, Goal Seeker works, does what it claims to do, and only costs \$69; in addition, if you use VP-Planner or Supercalc 4, Goal Seeker's next version supports them, and Goal Solutions doesn't (Brown Bag says Multiplan will also be added soon). At this price, Goal Seeker is a satisfactory value.

In addition to its increased functionality, Goal Solutions has better documentation and is easier to learn and use than Goal Seeker. If you need a goal seeking capability, we highly recommend Goal Solutions and give it an excellent rating in value.

John Walkenbach is a consultant in marketing research, personal computer applications, and programming.

Volkswriter Deluxe Plus New Version Of Lifetree Program Has Spelling Check

By John Lombardi Review Board

Lifetree's Volkswriter line has established a tradition of strong word processing products at reasonable prices. The programs bearing the Volkswriter name are several, each designed to fill a particular need: Volkswriter 3 offers power and sophistication for the heavy-duty word processing user; Volkswriter Scientific provides special features for formulas and symbols used in scientific writing; and Volkswriter Deluxe Plus gives a good set of word processing features to users who do not need the power and sophistication provided by Volkswriter 3.

FEATURES:

The Deluxe Plus version is actually a reissue of Volkswriter Deluxe (see "Volkswriter Deluxe," April 16, 1984), with some subtractions and additions that we describe in this update review.

The original Deluxe program offered a sophisticated and powerful feature to customize keyboard, screen, and printer information so that any characters in the IBM character set could be displayed on-screen with any keystroke and could be reproduced on any capable printer. The great flexibility of printer, keyboard, and screen definitions offered the opportunity for foreign language customization, endearing the program to a certain set of users.

In Deluxe Plus, the new version, this flexibility has been eliminated (you can still customize characters in Volkswriter Scientific), while an excellent spelling checker has been introduced.

(Volkswriter 3, also derived from Volkswriter Deluxe, adds such performance features as math, sorting, print spooling, decimal tabs, automatic envelope printing, DCA support, and a larger spelling dictionary.)

PERFORMANCE:

This new edition also has improved on-screen formatting. When editing a paragraph and making changes, Deluxe Plus

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INFO THE NEWS WEEKLY

REPORT CARD

SOFTWARE
GOAL SEEKER

| | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Unacceptable | Poor | Satisfactory | Very Good | Excellent |
| 5.2 | | | | | |
| Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Documentation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ease of Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ease of Use | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Error Handling | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Support | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Value | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUMMARY

This is also a RAM-resident program that works with Lotus 1-2-3. *Pros:* Lets you stop in mid-process, requires less memory, money-back guarantee, great hours for phone support. *Cons:* Lacks simultaneous goal seeking capability, has smaller number of iterations (25 vs 99), poor documentation, less easy to learn and use.

PRODUCT DETAILS

List price, \$69. Version tested (3.0) available for IBM PCs, PC XT's, PC AT's, and compatibles running PC- or MS-DOS 2.0 or later. Requires 40K above what your Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet requires. Brown Bag Software, 2105 S. Bascom, Suite 164, Campbell, CA 95008; (800) 523-0764 or (800) 323-5335, and (408) 559-4545 in California.

The things that made Volkswriter Deluxe a good performer when first reviewed make it a good performer now.

Spell will automatically reformat the paragraph to even up the lines as you add or delete text.

This is a useful improvement, although the new Volkswriter Deluxe still does not have automatic reformatting when you change margin settings — you must still reformat paragraph by paragraph. Fortunately, the process is very quick and the reformat key can be held down to repeat and accomplish the result without much delay.

Otherwise, the characteristics that made Volkswriter Deluxe a good performer when first reviewed continue to make it a good performer now. It is fast, effective, and easy to use. A large number of printers are supported. Volkswriter's quick, flexible editing, good spelling program, comprehensive mail merge, and extensive printer support make it a good alternative to programs such as PFS Professional Write or Wordstar's Easy

Extra. We rate performance very good.

DOCUMENTATION:

The Volkswriter manual is as comprehensive and useful as in the original version; in most cases it is identical. Unfortunately, it comes in a paperback format instead of the previous three-ring binder, so it doesn't lay flat. The on-line help is much less effective and full than in PFS Professional Write or Easy Extra.

Nevertheless, we found the documentation so usable because of its clear writing and thorough coverage that we rate it very good.

EASE OF LEARNING:

This version of the program is, as with the entire series, straightforward in design and function. Although the screen is clear, lacking pull-down menus and other nifty user interface bonuses that are all the rage among low-end word processors, Volkswriter Deluxe Plus is fairly easy to learn because of its predictable and understandable operation, and its decent tutorial.

While the program is not as easy to learn as the extremely easy PFS Professional Write or Easy Extra, we do rate it satisfactory in ease of learning.

EASE OF USE:

Volkswriter Deluxe Plus is lean in operation and clean in appearance. It does what it is supposed to do with a minimum of intervention or prompting. This means that Volkswriter Deluxe Plus becomes easier to use the more you use it; as a matter of personal preference, frequent users may even appreciate its uncluttered design more than the busier interfaces they encounter with competing products. We rate ease of use as very good.

ERROR HANDLING:

Common errors are trapped easily and Volkswriter has an automatic backup facility. It is not easy to lose data by operator error. You must contrive to use the product on a floppy disk system and ignore the repeated warning messages about removing disks before saving the file. Balancing this feature is the lack of an Undo facility. Overall, we rate Volkswriter Deluxe's error handling as satisfactory.

SUPPORT:

Lifetree Software has an outstanding reputation for conscientiously supporting its users with free or low-cost upgrades and quality telephone technical assistance (though not toll free). In addition to the usual 90-day media-only warranty, Lifetree offers a 60-day money-back guarantee on Volkswriter Deluxe Plus. The program is not copy-protected. Volkswriter Deluxe Plus earns a rating of very good in support.

VALUE:

The loss of the printer, screen, and keyboard customization is unfortunate, but this is an ease-of-use product that benefits far more from the addition of the good spelling checker than it suffers from the loss of customization. The program can be run from a floppy disk system, although it works much better with a hard disk.

At \$99, the program is a very good value compared to its competitors: PFS Professional Write at \$199 and Easy Extra at \$149. In fact, Volkswriter Deluxe Plus is even a very good value on its own right.

John Lombardi is a professor of history and author of five books. He has been working with computers since 1967.



REPORT CARD

SOFTWARE
VOLKSWRITER DELUXE PLUS

7.2

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ease of Use | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Error Handling | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Support | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Value | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUMMARY

This review of a classic IBM PC word processing program is improved by the addition of a good spelling program and automatic reformatting when entering text, though keyboard customization has been removed. Not copy-protected. **Pros:** Quick, good speller, reasonably powerful, very good price. **Cons:** Limited on-line help, no document-wide reformatting to new margins, no Undo function.

REPORT DETAILS

List price: \$99. Version tested (1.0) available for IBM PC, PC XT, PC AT, or compatibles running DOS 2.0 or later. Requires 256K, two floppy disk drives. Lifetree Software Inc., 411 Pacific St., Monterey, CA 93940; (408) 373-4904, (800) 543-3873, (800) 831-8733 in California.

Review Responses

VITAL DOCUMENTATION

I support your response to Mr. Thomas Haag of Format Software (Review Responses, November 24) that documentation is a vital issue in software reviews. I regularly check the documentation evaluation and refuse to buy software that is not documented adequately. Developers have gotten away with ignoring documentation in this industry from the very beginning with the Altair 8800, and not a lot has changed since. Please continue to ride hard on this issue.

*David E. Smith
Editor and Publisher
Mac Tutor*

RATING THE LASER PRINTER

Thank you for publishing an informative and generally accurate review of the AST Turbolaser (see "Printer Produces Fast, High-Quality Graphics," November 17).

I would like to comment on your use of a four-page text printing speed test. As you know, laser print engines require about 10 seconds of start-up time for the first page in a document. Presumably, you very reasonably included this time into your measurement for each laser printer tested. But because this 10-second delay was averaged into a four-page document in your speed test for printing duplicate pages, your calculated original-page-per-minute rating for the AST Turbolaser does not reflect its true capability.

AST can demonstrate Microsoft Word output on the Turbolaser at 7.4

ppm for the 20 original pages of full-line single-spaced text, including the 10-second start-up, no tricks. Sustained performance for typical documents meets or exceeds our 8 original ppm claim.

Of course, AST recognizes that the new generation of "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" (WYSIWYG) word processors and page-layout programs may not be able to drive fast output devices, such as the Turbolaser, at their full rated speed. It is for this reason that AST has announced a high-performance/low-cost alternative to expensive 80386-based systems in the form of our 10-MHz, zero wait state AST Premium/286.

*Chuck Cortright
Director Marketing
AST Research Inc.
Irvine, CA*

The more originals printed in a single run, the better the rating will be, since the start-up cycle is averaged in over more pages. We use a four-page test to balance the higher performance achieved on long reports against the lower performance on single-page and two-page letters that form the bulk of business correspondence.
— Editors

SMART MODULES

As pleased as we were to see your favorable Special Report on the Smart Spreadsheet with Graphics ("Rating the Competition Among Spreadsheets," November 10), we were surprised to find