Software Reviews

Multimate Advantage II
Word Processing Upgrade Adds Power, Features
Package Has Good List Manager but Limits File Size to 128K

By Lombardi Review Board

Multimate has finally caught up with mainstream microcomputer word processing programs with the Multimate Advantage II. Originally successful due to its similar-to-the-Wang system, Multimate recently lost ground to the many powerful, and particularly Word Perfect, and to a lesser extent Wordstar 2000 and Microsoft Word.

FEATURES:
Multimate is a page-oriented program like a dedicated word processing system, but serves as a sequence of separately treated pages, much like a typewriter deals with sheets of paper. Page breaks are fixed, and after heavy editing you can use a pagination feature to reform the document with the correct page breaks.

The alternative approach, document oriented systems such as a continuous stream, broken by dynamic page indicators but flowing smoothly from beginning to end, during heavy editing, page break indicators adjust the text's automatical-ly. As users have become familiar with computer editing they have demanded document oriented systems. Consequently, Multimate and other programs based on dedicated systems have softened their page orientation significantly to meet this user preference.

The most immediately visible change from previous Multimate versions is the optional drop-down menu user interface. Like that found in Ashton-Tate's Framework integrated product or Dbase II Plus database, these features can still use the familiar full-page menus of earlier versions of Multimate.

Functionally, one change we noticed immediately was in the use of the insert key mode, where Multimate now allows push-ahead in mode. This means that you simply insert the insert key and begin typing. The new text is inserted at the current text position and the following text is pushed ahead. The old drop-down insert mode, which opened a large blank space into which you type new words, is still available, but in this mode practically none of Multimate's editing commands are available.

Another important change implements automatic page breaks when entering text for the first time. This feature reproduces what document-oriented systems have always done: when you reach the end of a page, a page break is inserted and a new page starts automatically. However, pagination is not dynamic, so when you insert text in the middle of an existing page, changing the number of lines on the page, Multimate does not automatically adjust the page break. A separate pagination step is required to rearrange page breaks, in the manner of traditional page-oriented word processors.

Multimate's editing commands include most of the essentials. It handles foreign language characters and permits very extensive document conversions to bring material from another word processing program into Multimate. These conversions include the standard DIF, Wordstar, Lotus, 1-2-3, IBM Document Content Architecture/Revisable Form Text (DCA/RTF), ASCII, Wang and others.

The keyboard macro feature is particularly extensive, with the capability to edit and manage a significant collection of macros for playing back programmed sequences of keystrokes. A related capability provides the construction of phrase or document libraries with the capability to handle forms. An improved version of an add-on product called On-File is included (formerly it was sold separately). It implements a very nifty flat-file manager for multi-column, multi-line lists. These capabilities for managing data and generating specialized form letters, mailing lists, and similar list processing tasks are as good as those found in any word processor in the business.

The program has multime headers and footers, line numbers, and a multiple undo that will reverse previous deletions or destructive changes. It does not save data and do math, and it does not support multiple columns of newspaper-style stacking columns or any question-and-answer-style parallel columns. The theorem and dictionary are good. For feature, Multimate Advantage II falls easily in the top group of professional users' word processors that include pages such as Samna IV, WordStar 4.1, Wordstar 2000, Microsoft Word, and OfficeWriter 3.

PERFORMANCE:
This impressive complement of features performs well, although with some significant limitations that are the most serious of which concerns document size. Multimate can only handle documents of 128K or less. This works out to 80 to 60 single-spaced pages, depending on the document length, though there is a certain amount of file overhead. For long re-
Software Reviews

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INFO WORLD

Electric Typewriter

The TEC 2006 electric typewriter is designed for use in office environments, providing a reliable and efficient means of producing quality documents. It features a large, easy-to-read display, allowing for clear visibility of text. The unit is compact and portable, making it suitable for use in various settings such as offices, schools, or personal use. The TEC 2006 is equipped with a dedicated key for easy operation and includes a generous ribbon, ensuring prolonged usage without interruptions. For more information, please contact the manufacturer at 800-TYPING-4.
have any on-line help available; on-line documentation is restricted to the word- processing functions from within the program.

Thus, together, the voluminous but well-indexed manuals and the effective on-line help system earn Multimate Advantage II a very good rating for documentation.

EASE OF LEARNING:
Multimate is reasonably easy to learn. The drop-down menus are a major convenience for both new users and the on-line help keeps the novice fairly well-oriented. Still, this is a complicated product, and you'll take all the help you can get. The most expert user quite some time to be able to use all of Multimate's features.

You need read most of the documentation and approach this product systematically, you may have difficulty controlling its power and flexibility. On-line help is somewhat less easy to learn than the main Multimate word processor. Compared to the ease of learning champion in this class, Word Perfect, Multimate is somewhat less easy to learn, but in part because of the way it's structured. We rate it good as learning good.

EASE OF USE:
Once learned, Multimate is easy to use. Its editing is quick and effective. Its formatting and other commands can be invoked through simple control key sequences that are easy to use. Its menus are less important for experienced users but are available for inexperienced users and functions. However, the need to reorganize for correct page breaks and the inability of some functions to cross page boundaries detracts from the program's ease of use.

Since the highly structured and modularized menu systems make navigating around the program less easy than WordPerfect 5.0, for example. Overall, Multimate's ease of use earns a very good rating.

ERROR HANDLING:
Multimate supports two kinds of error corrections. The Undo command is much lower level, deleting only a buffer in a buffer one after another, and speeding to disk when memory is full. You can undo deletions from within a block of text is removed from a character to a block, the number of deletes that can be undone being limited only by the disk space available. Our test was able to restore 20 pages of deletions. In exercising the Undo command heavily, however, we several times had trouble bringing an erroneous printer error message; this sometimes resulted in garbled characters on-screen and sometimes in the loss of a few characters to three paragraphs of the text we were deleting.

Multimate has a recovery function that will recover a lost page or a corrupted file. However, the recovery feature is not entirely reliable (see the manual explains) and may not always recover lost pages. Nonetheless, it is easier to recover our work from Multimate, if not from the disk space taken by the program.

Normal errors such as open drive doors and wrong file names are handled gracefully. However, Multimate is not entirely protected against user error. We did not test very much. From an inappropriate function (attempting to sort across a page boundary under certain conditions instead of stopping us at the program froze, the result was a lost page and a file unable to be restored or saved without a reformating of the disk. This is not a problem in a non-standard word processor, but this program should have protected itself against data loss. On another occasion, Multimate gave an error message that a five-line page was too long with a real problem was insufficient memory.

Multimate's error handling is very good on some levels but not at all in certain situations; those situations are not documented, however, and the data loss was relatively minor. As a result, we rate error handling satisfactory.

SUPPORT:
Multimate provides a multilayered support system. For the first 90 days you get free telephone support; beyond that, you must pay for it. The registration card is a better deal. After the 90 days you can continue to get limited support by subscribing to an Extended or Professional Support Plan. The plan provides for four hours of help for $50 to $100 per year, for a variety of services, including 10 to 20 support calls per year. One of the best is a professional support plan.

There is also the normal 90-day warranty on the disks themselves and the manuals. On-site Tote docs, however, guarantee that it will fix "significant errors in the software that makes it usable."

Ashton-Tate does not copy-protect Multimate Advantage II, it does legally protect the package to one computer, another person, or computer, rather than the common leasing language that lets you put the software on as many machines as long as only one is being used at any one time. If you install this package on a machine in the office and then want to use it on the machine at home, you must purchase a Personal Use Extension for $52 that allows you to use the same software on another machine at different times. This will be paying an extra $52 for rights that other publishers give away for free.

We called Ashton-Tate's support line and asked about the ordering of extended support. The technical person we talked to was pleasant and gave mostly correct information. She identified the error as being a result of our using the sort in a non-standard way. However, she incorrectly described some conditions under which the sort would not work, and then failed to note that sort works differently on lines with hard returns from those with soft returns.

Overall, balancing the limited free support period against the availability of extended support, we rate Ashton-Tate's service as satisfactory.

VALUE:
Multimate Advantage II costs $555 (with 3-1/2-inch disks for $595 you get both 5-1/4 pr 3-1/2-inch disks). This makes it a bit more expensive than its competitors, which cluster around $495.

Multimate Advantage II benefits from solid, wide-ranging facilities with a much-improved user interface with drop-down menus, and the inclusion of a full-screen Outline Editing system. However, it has restrictions on file size and still displays pagination from the product's overall effectiveness. Nevertheless, we plan a second and good product, and much improved over its earlier versions.

We place Multimate in capabilities somewhere in the middle of its main competitors: below Word Perfect ($495), but above both Sarama IV and Lotus 1-2-3. Our rating for Multimate Advantage II is a good value.

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John Lombardi is a professor of history and author of five books. He has been working with computer documentation since 1974.