Software Reviews

**Wordstar Professional 5.0**

Classic Word Processing Program Still Fighting

Update Challenges Rivals While Maintaining Original Interface

By John Lombardi | Review Board

The revival of microcomputing brought the word processing program, Wordstar, as an unw router to watch as Rockey's valuable software that had been favored by many more powerful opponents. Wordstar 4, with its features and improvements, showed us why the old fighter is still alive. New Wordstar 5 brings a competitive program that challenges its rivals; although it doesn't quite defeat the current champions.

**FEATURES:**

- Micropro has recognized the importance of the large installed base of original Wordstar users by maintaining the original interface and control-key commands.
- Corporate solution: Wordstar 2000 devoted substantially from these standards, thereby alienating many devoted traditionalists in recompence, Wordstar 5 has all the familiar control-key combinations for editing and formatting.

The core of commands have, of course, been augmented to account for a host of additional features, and the new interactive dot commands used to control page layout, headers and footers, and the like, have also been expanded. But lest the new generation of word processors have to change their feet to the old control-key. Wordstar Professional 5 adds an alternate interface of pull-down menus, and lets you switch back and forth.

Behind all this is a significant improvement: its most spectacular new feature is a page-preview system capable of displaying more views of a document than any of its competitors. You can view a full page, two facing pages, multiple pages (eight or ten on our machine), and thumbail pages (21 on our machine), up to 144 on some systems.

You also get twofold and fourfold magnification that shows this material exactly as it will appear when printed, including specific fonts and proportional spacing. On the multi-page displays, the text can be displayed as black lines that span the entire width of the text, but you can easily select a page from the thumbail and read the text even when it is not displayed. Furthermore, you can zoom into a 1-inch grid on the display with line marks going down the side and across the top of the page so you can see what lines are lining up as they should. Wordstar 3's page display is the best in the business.

As one's editing works as devotees have always wanted it to, with easy keystrokes commands, including date and time, non-magnified dot commands used to control page layout, headers and footers, and the like, have also been expanded. But lest the new generation of word processors have to change their feet to the old control-key, Wordstar Professional 5 adds an alternate interface of pull-down menus, and lets you switch back and forth.

Wordstar offers other enhancements, including some add-in programs. A fine outsider, PC-Outline from Brown Bag Software, is included, but is not very well-implemented. (For context, add-in and delete commands are not enough like Wordstar's.) A telecommunication program is capable of all functions, including script files and XMODEM errors or after, protocol, except for KERNAL file transfer.

Wordstar Professional 5 and any other word processing program can be customized to suit your needs. The mail list utility provides ready-made templates for an address file and an inventory file; these are very effective, although you cannot be customized. The mail list includes the capability of sorting and maintaining up to 32 pre-defined sort sequences. The mail list data integrates seamlessly into Wordstar's comprehensive mail management system.

ProFinder serves as an operating system shell for Wordstar users handling a host of tasks related to file management. ProFinder sorts file names, finds files, finds files, finds files, finds files...

(For details on our criteria and testing procedures for professional word processors, see our product comparison in the March 28 issue. For a ranking of direct competition, see our product comparison of September 26.)

**PERFORMANCE:**

Wordstar's Professional 5 version 3.0 offers pull-down menus in its excellent page preview includes miniatures for reference.

Wordstar's mail merge now supports a number of file formats directly, including Lotus 1-2-3, WKS/WK1, Quattro and Symphony, Draw II and III, and its own format and comma-delimited files. This mail list feature brings Wordstar Professional's mail list management solidly into the realm of powerful word processors, opening the powerful mail merge features against a few drawbacks: we rate Wordstar's mail merge very good.
The PC-Outlive program is a terrific outliner, although its integration with Wordstar 4.1. It also makes both outlining and note-taking easy. Table of contents generation and table of index creation is not difficult, but it does work. Outlining is much improved by the capability to mark, with a word a context-key command or embed the reference or cross-reference directly into a paragraph without disturbing its formatting. Users can watch as the text moves, page numbers, and metatags are updated. Table of contents and indexing are rated good.

The print button, notes, and annotations have been added. Each item is entered in a window and is embedded into the file, except only the menu reference. Notes are automatically updated while editing, although it is difficult to tell which are endnotes and which are footnotes. Wordstar 4.1 now displays the entire document as a file to download fonts to a laser printer. WordPerfect does a better job in this regard. We rate fonts and styles much improved.

Users can select the desired font from a list of four fonts. Installation of fonts, selection, and application are quite transparent, and the program includes a printer utility for editing fonts. The remarkable page setup window displays the fonts nicely. Wordstar still lacks style sheets, but 16 predefined styles, called "styles," can be stored, and macros can help fill in some of the missing functionality that style sheets provide. There is also a utility for converting page setup to fonts from Wordstar 2000 (where it is an included utility).

Overall, Wordstar 5.0 has picked up a little speed. While file loading takes marginally longer, the once-overlong file save time has been drastically reduced. Likewise, although jumping from the top to the bottom of our test document took more time, once loaded, searching and replacing took less time. We rate speed good.

Graphical integration, unfortunately, is lacking. Wordstar Professional continues to report only ASCII files, although the program will import Wordstar files from previous versions and export Wordstar 4 files. The file processor provides capability for Lotus 1-2-3 and compatible files is excellent, permitting ranges, whole files, and print-time insertion of text. This is not an add-on feature, but it is welcome. The reader finds the compatibility among word processing programs is not good. Micropro includes a coupon for a $30 conversion utility "WordStar from Systems Compatibility Corp." that supports many file types (versions 1.01 & 3.5), is scheduled to be available November 1st. Because DCA file exchange costs extra, Wordstar 5.0 does not meet our compatibility requirements; we rate it poor.

This version of Wordstar Professional ranks for the first fighter to market, and has moved to the top of the class.

DOCUMENTATION:

Excelled in an elegant three-ring binder, Wordstar documentation covers the program and all its add-ons, as well as printer and information and tutorial. A special section describes applications using Wordstar and a set of appendices explore customizing. The index is good.

On-line help is reasonably extensive. Error messages are informative and the manual's appendix provides good explanations of conditions and messages. Overall, documentation is well-written, clear, and thorough. Some of the explanations could have included more examples, but all in all this is very good documentation.

EASE OF LEARNING:

WordStar Professional 5 takes about 40 minutes to get up and running, depending on how complicated the font and printer installation needs to be. To learn the basic functions through the tutorial might take a reasonable computer-literate user under two hours. Those familiar with Wordstar will find little trouble at all. Micropro's pull-down menu interface follows IBM's SAA recommendations, resembling that of OS/2 Presentation Manager.

The good news, dialog boxes, and one-click hot keys are user-friendly. While not the easiest program to pick up, Wordstar Professional earns a good mark in this area.

EASE OF USE:

To become reasonably competent for daily work, a user will need three to five months of systematic practice. This is the same as Wordstar 4.1. The user who is familiar with the system, will find that Wordstar has many ways of doing the same thing, so you can use it the way you want to. It can be easily tailored to the amount of help needed. A host of customization options is available. Changes of the program to match the working environment of the user. The choice of menus and commands is fairly wide, available all the time, is an advantage, and many users will find themselves using both systems.

Ease of use is very good, inhibited only by some clumsy operations with character commands and the formatting requirement for new rule lines.

ERROR HANDLING:

Wordstar uses a backup system that always preserves the most recently saved file and the one before it. In addition, a timed backup option is available; unfortunately, you can't just trigger it on, you need to select Wordstar and the install routine to activate auto-save. The Undo command is one-level, which means that it is less flexible than other systems. The delete buffer is normally quite small. It is possible to change Wordstar to expand the buffer and undo single delete lines.

A system buffer overflow logs all data since the last save, but very little text will be lost unless you have made major changes after saving or implementing the auto-save.

SUPPORT:

Micropro offers a 30-day refund guarantee. There is a lot of documentation as outlined in the manual and advertisements. In addition, standard technical support is good for one year of release plus six months. Toll-free support is available 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pacific time, Monday to Friday, and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. A newsletter and information about updates are provided to all registered users. There is a CompuServe forum for Micropro products. It is not supported by the company but is very useful. Wordstar offers two levels of additional support for registered users. We rate support policies excellent.

Technical support is satisfactory. We had received a response to our email within four days over for a session communicating with a technician on a Sunday morning. One time we stayed on hold for 20 minutes before giving up. The other was held for 10 minutes each to be given up, and twice the phone was busy. To get telephone support you need a lot of free time. Fortunately, it is a toll-free number.

When we got through, we found technical support very helpful and accommodating. Each instance, our question received competent answers. The company admits that it was overwhelming by the volume of users seeking technical support, and says that it will increase its staff. Given the difficulty of getting through, we rate technical support good.

VALUE:

In its current incarnation, Wordstar Professional 5 ($495) offers a strong complement of features, exceptionally good in the areas of text editing and word processing. It provides correct formatting for mail merge and telecommunications, an editor, and a notepad at a reasonable price. We think Wordstar Professional 5 is a very good value in the professional word processing category.

John Lombardo is a provost of a major university and author of five books. He has been working with Wordstar since 1987.