

SHORT LOOKS

Short Looks are quick, initial looks at products by members of InfoWorld's review staff and the InfoWorld Review Board. They are not intended to be full reviews of the products.

WINTXT

If you have Microsoft Windows but don't have a high-end word processor, you might want to look at Palantir's Wintxt. Less powerful and less complex than Word but more versatile and comprehensive than Windows Write, Wintxt is an executive word processing system with some nifty features.

As a Windows application, indeed as the first third-party word processor to be written solely for Windows, Wintxt shares the Windows common user interface, including icons, mouse support, and collapsing and expanding windows. Printer support — an important consideration for any word processing program — comes via Windows, and Wintxt uses the Windows drivers and printer installation to get its font information.

All the versatility of Windows stands ready to serve Wintxt (as it does for Windows' native word processor, Write). For example, graphic images created or modified with Windows Paint can be imported easily into Wintxt, where they can be positioned or sized to fit.

Because of the common Windows interface, Wintxt's closest competitor is Windows Write. Of the two products, Wintxt has far more features. For example, Wintxt will handle files of indefinite length; it supports a useful and reasonably sophisticated mail-merge capability, handles boilerplate text, and includes a multilevel Undo command. Wintxt provides a grecked-page preview display of the final text and offers file conversion routines for Word Perfect, Multimate, MS Word and Write, Framework, ASCII, and ANSI files.

Wintxt includes all the standard word processing features to cut, paste, delete, and otherwise manage blocks of text. The program supports up to four windows in the same or different documents and can display them tiled, horizontally or vertically divided, or overlapped. Using the clipboard, text or graphics can be moved from one file to another.

The hyphenator splits words according to formula rather than dictionary, but it does a reasonably good job. The spelling program also works well, but it must be loaded before Wintxt or an insufficient memory error can occur. The spell checker works separately from the word processor or in the background; it also supports user dictionaries. Another facility will do a simple sort on paragraphs.

Mail-merge works with delimited data files, and the manual includes an illustration of how to use the search-and-replace feature to change Dbase III delimited files to work effectively with Wintxt. The selection criteria include conditions and logical operators, providing a powerful mail-merge facility.

Like many Windows applications, Wintxt's greatest shortcoming is its snail-like pace. Almost every operation takes appreciably longer with Wintxt than with other competing executive word processing programs, including Microsoft Write. Even when the display of graphics and other text characteristics are disabled to improve speed, movement and execution of functions remain substandard. This slowness also reduces the effectiveness of mouse commands and even the control-key shortcuts.

Running within the Windows environment, Wintxt requires the same hardware as Windows. As with most Windows applications, Wintxt benefits from a mouse, although it can be run entirely from the keyboard.

As an executive word processor, Wintxt is a little pricey at \$350. Yet it is currently the only word processor other than Write that runs under Windows.

Wintxt 1.0 requires Microsoft Windows, 512K of memory, and a graphics monitor.

Palantir Inc., 17314 Tomball Parkway, Suite 101, Houston, TX 77064; (713) 955-8787.

— John Lombardi

SPLASH

How about a splash of color in your life? If you have a VGA board and an analog monitor, it can happen. Splash is a paint program that fully exploits one of VGA's most deceptive assets. It produces images that can have up to 256 colors. It might seem that with a resolution of 320 by 200 pixels, the pictures produced would look like a classic case of jagged lines — not so, with all those colors available. Spinnaker Software has supplied some stunning pictures that gave me the feeling of having a lot higher resolution.

Splash only runs on a VGA board. It uses an icon-based menu that is easy to learn and use. One menu contains the various functions of the program, and a second menu at the bottom of the screen contains the color palette, brush style, and patterns.

Some of the tools are air brush, lines, squares, circles, area fill, cut and paste, rotate and flip, and others. Included fonts have the capability to take on the texture of the selected pattern along with the color. Rainbow letters are easy to do, and there is a magnified edit available for bit-by-bit editing.

One of the nicest features is how all of the colors are selected. There are other paint programs that can utilize 256 colors, but they force you to select them in groups of eight or 16 — seeing how shades relate to each other is hard. Splash has all the colors visible at the bottom for individual selection; the individual color squares are small but not hard to hit. Once a color has been selected, it is displayed in a larger box. The patterns available can be edited, or a new pattern can be drawn on the screen and then pasted into a user pattern box. Splash gives you numerous ways to edit the available color selection. If you need 256 shades of green to paint your pet frog, it can be done.

Color shades are the secret to why pictures at a relatively low resolution give the appearance of a much higher resolution. The shades allow you to give realistic shadowing of drawn objects. This blurs the fact that lines are jagged, and as a result, your eyes don't see the edges of the lines clearly.

One of the soft points of the program is the lack of drivers for different pointing devices. On the output side, the list of printers is also relatively short. Fortunately, most of the more common brands are represented here, including some inexpensive color printers.

At \$99.95, Splash is priced well and also comes with a screen capture utility that can grab some of the higher-resolution screens up to a maximum of 256 colors.

For a more detailed review of Splash,



Splash lets you generate VGA images with up to 256 colors.

see the upcoming product comparison of PC paint programs on December 5.

Spinnaker Software, 1 Kendall Square, Cambridge, MA 02139; (800) 826-0706.

— David Chalmers

GEOQUERY

If you have longed for a way to view data in a geographical format, Odesta Corp. has a solution. Geoquery for the Macintosh merges database files containing a ZIP code with an on-screen map of the United States. You can extract information about your data, based on its location, from the customized map. Geoquery accomplishes this trick by knowing the location of common five-digit ZIP codes. The program is targeted primarily at sales and marketing managers who base decisions on customer locations and sales territories. It is also useful for those making site location and distribution decisions.

Geoquery uses a "pushpin" format to display individual records on a map. Like the cities on a road atlas, each record or group of records within a ZIP code is represented by a pushpin symbol. Different symbols can be used to represent groups of records, giving even more information on the screen. Once the pushpins have been loaded, the map can be "queried" by defining territories. Geoquery then produces reports based upon the records within the territory.

Geoquery includes three atlas files covering the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. In addition, there are two database files with U.S. cities and Midwestern hotels. Specialized atlas files and charts are available separately.

Geoquery works best on a Mac II in color, supports Laserwriter and Imagewriter printers, and will print maps up to 22 by 22 inches. It can export queried data in ASCII format to be included in spreadsheets, word processors, or databases.

Getting Geoquery up and running is very simple. The program files on the floppy disk can be copied to any convenient folder on a hard disk. There are no init files or system files to install.

Geoquery only reads one database file format. Imported files must be in an ASCII/Tab delimited format. This means that files may have to be translated every time they are exported from the original database. This could be a major drawback, depending on the database you are using and how frequently the files need to be updated.

Working within Geoquery is fairly easy. Once you have created your custom map and added the pushpin records, you can begin data analysis. Geoquery has a paintlike toolbox along the left side of the screen. These tools enable you to add text titles, measure distances between pins, define an area for analysis, or add pushpin labels. Another box called Snooper pops up a record-detail box associated

with a particular pushpin. Unfortunately, only one record can be viewed at a time, and despite the fact that text in the record can be highlighted and an I-beam appears, the records cannot be edited.

On a color screen Geoquery adds a color palette to the toolbox. Almost any of the map features, such as labels or borders, can be colored by selecting the item and clicking the desired color. This greatly improves the readability of a map with closely packed pins and labels.

Geoquery is best described as an analytical tool to use with your database or spreadsheet — it is not an application that all Mac users will add to their software libraries. If, however, you need to create simple charts of facility locations, or graphically show client distributions, at \$349, Geoquery may be what you are looking for.

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— Tracey Capen

KONAN TEN TIME

Software disk caching programs that speed up disk access have been available for some time. Generally, these use extended or expanded memory to buffer disk reads but have no effect on disk writes. Enter the Konan Ten Time hard disk controller.

The Ten Time has 128K of high-speed RAM and proprietary cache controller chips, making this an intelligent controller. The controller also has a lithium battery backup to prevent the loss of data from the write cache if a power outage occurs. The cache has the added feature of a look-ahead buffer that places additional sectors into memory, anticipating the next data that you will need.

Aside from the caching capabilities, the Ten Time has zero latency time and the capability to do a 1:1 interleave. Zero latency is the capability to read data from the disk no matter which sector the heads are above, while the 1:1 interleave allows data to be streamed directly off of the disk without inserting a pause between each sector.

All of those fancy terms and high-tech capabilities are a way of saying that it's faster — at least 10 times quicker (hence the name Ten Time), according to the vendor. Our testing revealed it to be more like three or four times faster, which is still quite fast. We tested it on a Compaq Deskpro 286/12 with a 20-megabyte CMI 6426 drive and a variety of software. InfoWorld's Autobench showed the drive to be twice as fast in sequential access as the same drive with a Western Digital controller, but the random access was a bit slower. Applications such as PageMaker and Dbase III ran considerably faster. The vendor says the access speed is 10 times faster; the throughput speed is only three to 10 times faster.

The installation of the board is simple as a result of the clear documentation. Software is supplied with the board to format your drive and set the parameters. The board has several jumpers on it, but we found it to work flawlessly using the default settings.

The hard/floppy version of the board costs \$695; the hard disk version only is \$595, which is less than the price of upgrading to a faster drive. Although the random access isn't as quick as it would be with a faster drive, the price/performance ratio is quite nice.

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— Michael Hildum