Wordstar 5.5: Grand Old Man Gets a New Hat and Cane

This update of a classic adds enhancements while maintaining its traditional user interface.

BY JOHN LOUBIERMAN CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Since 1979, the classic version of Wordstar—now Wordstar 2000 but still the original Wordstar—has faithfully served a large and devoted following of microcomputer word processing users. This office/professional product, now known as Wordstar Professional, continues to be heralded by its cryptic but remarkably easy-to-use control-key commands for editing and more specialized features. Wordstar fell on hard times a few years ago as word processor productivity with menu-driven interfaces, pull-down menus, and enhanced features pushed it out of the word processing line.

For many years, Wordstar International (formerly Micropro) focused attention on the bottom line as Wordstar 2000, hoping it would defeat Multimate, Wordperfect, and Microsoft Word. Meanwhile, the company let the classic version of Wordstar languish without a major update since its introduction. In 1989, though, the release of Wordstar Professional 5.0 changed the product's orientation to a heavy-duty word processor. As Wordstar 2000 index, Wordstar Professional 5.5 has picked up many of its enhanced features to be more competitive in this rapidly changing and cutthroat market.

FEATURES:

Wordstar 5.5 continues a company tradition of enhancement by attachment. While keeping the basic word processing engine that powers the program, the program grows through the addition of stand-alone modules that bring new features to the user without a major rewrite of the underlying program.

Originally, Wordstar had a multi-record program for handling mailing lists; then came a spelling checker, a thesaurus, and random file manager. Now Wordstar has included a telecommunication program, a graphics program, and a file-conversion utility. Many of these add-ons are the same products featured in Wordstar 2000 Plus. Each of the products is partially integrated into the Wordstar operating environment and responsible for add-ons to Wordstar 5.5.

One of Wordstar's more innovative features has always been its orientation toward the touch-typists. The connection-management of cursor movement and practically all other functions lets touch-typists operate at top speed without removing their fingers from the home keys.

However, the touch-typing approach has gradually lost ground to the menu for ease, drop-down menus, and menus on the PC. Consequently, Wordstar 5.0 and 5.5 have pull-down menus accessed by Alt-key combinations or a touch-typing approach to the traditionalists, however, everything can still be done with Ctrl-key combinations.

Now to this update is a paragraph style function that arranges a group of characters such as fonts, margins, justification, and line heights to a paragraph and all subsequent paragraphs until the next style code is inserted. These styles can be saved by name and accessed as a group, a concept pioneered by Microsoft Word and adapted by many office/professional systems. Wordstar's implementation of this feature in the update eliminates a conspicuous defect in the previous version.

Wordstar 5.0's biggest claim to fame was its page preview, the best in the business, capable of showing text in a wide array of formats from magnified sections of a page, single pages, facing pages, and multiple pages per screen. The preview puts a grid on the screen to permit accurate depiction of text placement on the page. This feature remains, and Version 5.5 now shows landscape pages as well as graphic elements that can be inserted into a Wordstar document. Graphics included in this Wordstar 5.5's competitive edge, has been partially remedied by including the laser graphics program.

Wordstar's telecommunication module has been optimized for use with modems such as Carrierwave and includes the telephone and Xmodem-etc file transfer protocols with several terminal emulations. The telecommunications script language for automatic log-on, file transfer, and log-off is adequate for the task.

Wordstar's Lotus-line, a compliant outline, from Button Bar Software, is automatically integrated into Wordstar and uses a significantly different command syntax.

In addition, Wordstar 5.5 does well in comparison with its competitors; although there are plenty of features it still lacks, such as support for multiple dialog boxes and text, revision marking (although there is strikeout capability), editable side-by-side columns on-screen, footnotes in the document, the ability to edit endnotes allowed, headers or footers linked to the paper, it is a learning tool for line sorts, tables of authorities, and sophisticated graphics integration.

The classic Wordstar word processing engine works smoothly and has been enhanced significantly, but many added features integrate poorly with the main program and require separate manuals, installations, and command logic.

Performance:

Wordstar 5.5's editing capabilities are equal to the competition in many areas, and touch-typers will love the control-key editing. However, the use of dot commands for a variety of formatting options such as on-screen functions inhibits some functions. For example, you cannot block a section of text and center it. While you can edit two copies of the same file, the versions are actually different and the one you have last becomes the current file. On the other hand, replaceable tabs and date stamping are supported, and you can window and edit multiple files. We rate basic editing very good.

Wordstar 5.5 has better-than-average layout capabilities, although it does not show columns, side-by-side columns, or columns, but true page layout control, and include columns and automatic leading. Its page preview is effective as described above. Unlike Microsoft Word or even WordPerfect, Wordstar does not allow you to modify the view the display will look. In Wordstar, an unformatted page view either with line lengths easy to see contents or with line lengths wrapped as they appear on the page. Wordstar 5.5 only shows the lines wrapped as printed. Also, Wordstar 5.5's display of formatting commands is different than the reveal codes window system used in WordPerfect. Formatting is very good.

Font support in Wordstar 5.5 includes soft fonts of various types and a complete and comprehensive printer driver and font-wide table modification program. Font changes are easy, and the page preview is made more precise by including screen fonts derived from the printer fonts. However, the font selection system in Wordstar allows you to select more soft fonts than a Laserjet, for example, and can build and will create a download soft font batch file that can overload the printer. You may font support very good.

Style sheets, a new feature in this revision, are not as extensive as those in Microsoft Word. Yes, Wordstar's paragraph styles are a great improvement on the simple embolden ruler lines of previous versions and let you name new styles. We rate style sheets good.

Wordstar 5.5's word processor and textbase have more features than WordPerfect and are even an improvement on Wordstar 2000. Release 5. Not only is the
dictionary and thesaurus capabilities, but no thesaurus or synonyms database. The dictionary has 100,000 words, with an extended customizable dictionary. The dictionary includes 250,000 synonyms. The program supports user dictionaries, foreign language dictionaries (out of print), and maintains a dictionary of commonly misspelled words. The dictionary has parts of speech and spelling suggestions. Spelling checking and thesaurus features are excellent.

The mail merge program, one of the first mail merge programs, offers features for preparing form letters, selecting files, recording letters, and editing letters. You can sort lists, and the companion mail list program provides a useful form letter editor. The database. We rate this mail merge good.

The features included in WordStar's PC version include spell checking, letter formatting, and more. However, with a substantially different command syntax, PC-Only's integration of the program is less effective than it should be. Still, you can expand and condense levels and perform standard electronic outlining capabilities. We rate outlining good.

Table entries are not limited to strings, and in WordStar's PC version, the program allows you to enter strings, numbers, dates, and other data. The added benefit of indexing against an external file is that multiple levels are supported, as in a single cross-reference list. However, there are no separate files for tables or figures. We rate tables of contents and indexes good.

Footnotes support includes both endnotes and footnotes, with the added benefit of indexing against an external file. However, the program does not support the elaborate cross-reference feature of the WordPerfect mail merge program, for example, which supports tables of contents, indexes, and other data. We rate footnotes good.

Macros, called shortcut macros, in WordStar are powerful and flexible, with the ability to customize text and commands that can be stored in a file and reused. Although an acceptable substitute, add-on utilities such as the WordPerfect macro cannot double as a word processing programming language for complex word processing tasks. The program is not as flexible as WordPerfect, and some features, such as paragraph styles, do not convert from WordStar to WordPerfect. We rate WordStar's macro support good.

The printer support for WordStar's PC version is strong, although there is a lack of support for third-party plug-ins. WordStar handles a larger range of printer configurations and supports a wider range of printer commands than WordPerfect. However, the printer support is not as extensive as WordPerfect's.

Overall, the program is well-documented and well-supported. The documentation is helpful and useful, and the program's features are clearly explained. The program is easy to use, and the user interface is intuitive.

Having said that, the program is not without its drawbacks. The program is more complex than WordPerfect, and the learning curve can be steep for new users. The program's features are not as extensive as WordPerfect's, and the printer support is not as extensive as WordPerfect's.

In conclusion, WordStar's PC version is a solid program, well-documented and well-supported. However, it is not as user-friendly as WordPerfect, and the learning curve can be steep for new users. The program's features are not as extensive as WordPerfect's, and the printer support is not as extensive as WordPerfect's.
from Wordstar do completely unexplained things in the outline. The backspace feature of the users' interface is the most annoying thing in our white space for the graphics-inclusion, reduce the output page of use rates from being very good to rather good.

ERROR HANDLING:

Wordstar always edits a copy of your saved file — never the original file on disk. When Wordstar saves a file, it always creates a backup. Wordstar supports this backup, but only for PCs with DOS 3.x. A user-specified backup path is not supported. The user must manually specify a backup path if a backup is required. Wordstar does not have an automatic backup feature.

Support:

For 90 days, Wordstar International warranty is that the product will do what the manual says it will do. If you find an error that the company can fix, you can get your money back. There is toll-free technical support available, and a CompuServe special-interest group, and extended corporate support. The package comes with a 30-day, free trial version of Wordstar and a Bitstream coupon for $30 front-installation.
The software is very good.

In 14 attempts to reach technical support at various times over two weeks, we received no technical support but busy signals. This calls to this company's support line during busy periods have produced only busy signals, not support. We reach our questions. As an alternative, they offer a free online forum to provide support.

As a rule, we no longer judge technical support unless our inability to get through.

VALUE:

At $495, Wordstar 5.2 is well within the price range of office/professional word processing packages such as Word Perfect and Microsoft Word. It is less powerful than those packages as a word processing package, but it includes a highly capable outline writer, which we must judge to be an attractive option, not available in editor of the market leaders. Further, some users will prefer its interface over the more complex features, such as outlines, special keys, and macros, of Microsoft Word. Word Perfect also costs $495. We rate Wordstar 5.2 as having a very good value.

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

RELATED REVIEWS

Office/Professional Word Processors

Microsoft Word 5.0, June 1989

Price: $995

Word is a powerful text editor, Office/Professional word processing package. It is well suited for basic word processing tasks, but it offers limited outline capabilities, which are often necessary for more complex documents.

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PC Link 386-33 Is Extremely Fast, Powerful DOS System

With its excellent expandability, compatibility, it offers an affordable system and a good value.

BY AMIRROO REVISTA

INFOWORLD TEST CENTER

PC Link Corp. makes an entry into the new world of super-fast machines. The version of a 33-MHz 386 system. Don’t be fooled by the ordinary-looking case. Caged inside is another mighty number-crunching animal.

FEATURES:

The PC Link 386-33 employs a 33-MHz CPU on a single board, supports both the 386 and 80386 math coprocessor, and comes standard with a 4-megabyte RAM expansion slot. It offers 94% of 20-megabyte static RAM cache memory, controlled by a 28F33-338 speed-up memory controller and a 3172.15-megabyte hard disk, which features 14.5 megabytes of super-speed cache memory.

The vendor offers a choice of OS/2 or Windows, available separately.

PERFORMANCE:

Our system arrived with 10-megabyte RAM instead of the advertised 80, and 15-megabyte hard disk instead of 20. The vendor said it had shipped out one. This means our CPU results will be lower than yours, but by an amount so small as not to affect our scoring. Our 48-hour benchmark test, the PC Link 386 registered 8.7 in CPU speed, which places it at number 1 in the 10-megabyte hard disk category.

White CPU indexes for these 33-MHz speed demons have jumped 25 percent and more over the past two years because of 25-MHz machines. Hard drive performance isn’t as inclined to break records. Still, with the new generation of hard disk devices being shipped with these systems (reflecting their suitability as network file servers), the hard drive indexes are all at the top of the field. PC Link earned indexes of 4.8 in sequential hard disk access and 4.4 in random hard disk access on its 150-megabyte Miniscribe with its 11-interface controller, for an excellent score in both categories (the vendor is now shipping 150-megabyte Micropulsion drives).

In the uncrashed throughput tests, PC Link performed our Autolabor in 22 seconds, our Word Perfect write-in 10.1 minutes and 17 seconds, and our Paradox test in 55 seconds. Each score is somewhat faster than the scores of the fastest 25-MHz units. The Lotus 1-2-3 test took 25 minutes and six seconds; again somewhat faster than the typical 25-MHz systems through slower than our best score, the 25-MHz Dell 230, which finished the task in six minutes and 25 seconds.

The PC Link has no problems running our software: WordPerfect, dBASE III, WordStar, etc. It is also very good at running the standard applications. For increased compatibility, the DOS can also be run at 8 MHz using a provided on-board resident utility. This version will also provide a request for a front panel control switch to control the system.

For expandability, PC Link offers a very promising package for a high-end system. Six 16-bit slots and one full-length general-purpose slot as well as a 16-bit slot dedicated to memory expansion are provided. The system comes with a standard half-height mass-storage mounting positions and two add-on slots. There is also a 14.5-megabyte hard disk, which is a key to electronically disabling the keyboard. The PC Link rate is excellent in everything.

DOCUMENTATION:

We received a preliminary copy of the PC Link manual and found it excellent. The manual shows dedicated features and standard configurations. The only drawback was a map of the register motherboard. The manual is clearly designed for the user who will have the system configured by the vendor; it is not written on information about expansion. Troubleshooting is covered along with some extra technical information. In balance, we rate the documentation satisfactory.

SETUP:

The PC Link machine has a standard desktop case, which made it easy to take out of the box, position it, and power up. This procedure should not take more than a minute for anyone. We rate it as setup good.

EASE OF USE:

The PC Link is a very basic, IBM AT-like machine, with the addition of a front panel control panel with keypad, reset button, and signal lights. There is a lot of information about the one use of, we rate it satisfactory.

SERVICE/SUPPORT:

The PC Link has a clean motherboard fitted with a Chip & Technologies chip in mass production. Systems showing up at our door in the past week or two are not working correctly. Chips are being repaired.

The basic PC Link 386-33 includes a 4-megabyte of system RAM, 64K of static RAM cache, a 150-megabyte hard disk, and a 12-megabyte disk drive.

set. The majority of the logic components are socketed. As with other very early 386 machines, the CPU is not soldered to the socket, so the socket can be replaced if necessary. The vendor does a good job of providing a suite of chips that are compatible with the standard 150-megabyte hard disk, which is a 12-megabyte disk drive.

The CPU indexes for the 33-MHz speed demons have jumped 25 percent over the previous generation of 25-MHz machines.