

IMPRESSIONS

Windows Spell From Palantir Does Checkups on Excel, Write Users

Palantir's Windows Spell offers the option of spell checking a wide range of documents under Microsoft Windows. It does the expected formats such as Word, Windows Draw, and Windows Write, as well as standard ANSI and ASCII text files; but it also handles Word Perfect, Wintext, Excel, Micrografx Designer, and Inavision. (We looked at Version 2.5; there is now a 3.0 that includes Pagemaker spell checking.)

This utility runs only under Windows and has the capability of checking words in such programs as Excel or Draw. Because Write, Excel, Draw, and some other Windows programs do not have spelling checkers of their own, this product has considerable utility in that environment. Windows Spell does the usual job of running through the document, stopping at words that don't match anything in the dictionary. You then have an opportunity to change, accept, remember for this session, or add to the user dictionary.

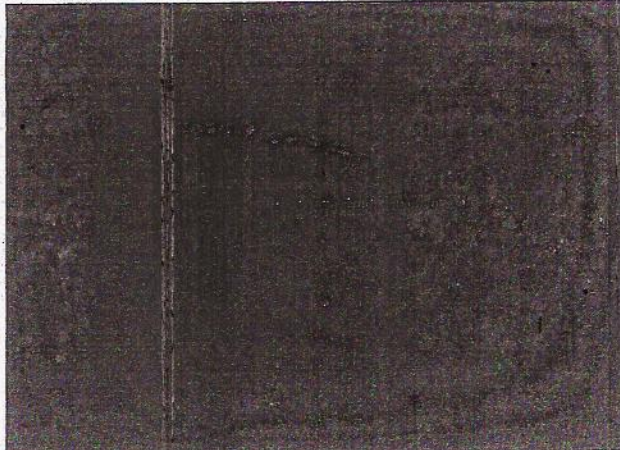
Our quick test indicates that Windows Spell is quite a bit slower than a word processing spelling checker, such as the one found in Word Perfect. It is somewhat clumsier than some since it requires you to indicate whether you want suggestions instead of just presenting them to you. Its hit rate is about on a par with the best word processing checkers we have seen, although it doesn't handle most common first names (Albert or Anthony, for example). Like most spelling checkers, it does poorly with compound words (such as *subdepartmental*, *multicultural*, *unclarified*, and *codirectors*) not separated by hyphenation. It misses some very common compounds (*bookstore* and *statewide*) and doesn't always get plurals

“Windows Spell is a useful spelling checker for those who have no alternatives.”

(weaknesses), but by and large it is only somewhat less effective than word processing spelling checkers.

There is a background mode where you start the spell check; it becomes an icon, and you can go ahead and work on something else. When it finds a questionable word, the icon flashes, you click on it, and the spell-check screen appears. After you respond to the identified error, the spell screen shrinks to an icon and you are back in your previous application. This works all right, but because you must intervene manually for each error, the icon is generally blinking and the spell check won't progress until you attend to the icon.

Although Windows Spell will do Word Perfect documents, we were able to hang the program with a Word Perfect 5.0 document that had something in the header that confused the speller. In another instance a Word Perfect document loaded into the speller all right, but then the speller proceeded to check all the codes in the header (few of which qualified as words). These glitches indi-



Backloader is a memory-resident font manager that readily shows which fonts are loaded in your printer. Its status screen can vary with each of your applications.

cate that Windows Spell is not entirely bulletproof yet; however, we don't find this to be much of a disadvantage because Word Perfect users will use its own faster and better built-in spelling checker.

In short, it is a useful spelling checker, especially for Windows Write and Excel users, who have no alternatives. Windows Spell costs \$95 and requires an IBM PC or compatible running Microsoft Windows 2.0 or later with 512K of RAM. A hard disk is recommended.

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— John Lombardi

Backloader 2

ROXXOLID CORP.

Supporting laser printer users isn't easy, and the most common complaint is "My fonts won't print!" Perhaps someone forgot to download the correct fonts before printing their document, or maybe the printer was shut off and the fonts need to be reloaded. Backloader 2 eliminates these problems by downloading fonts on the fly as your application needs them.

Backloader is a memory-resident, automatic font manager for Laserjet and compatible printers (it also works with the Deskjet) that require only 32K of system memory. When your application prints, Backloader analyzes the print data and looks for font changes. It then automatically downloads any fonts that have not already been downloaded to the printer.

Because the program maintains an internal font list, it knows which fonts and how many of them are in the printer's memory. Once the Laserjet's 32 soft font limit is reached, Backloader removes the least recently used fonts to make room for new ones. With this type of intelligent font management, you may never need to worry about downloading fonts again.

The program is very flexible and provides so many options that it may well be the only font manager you'll need. For example, if you routinely download groups of fonts, you can create font lists for Backloader to use in batch files. Since downloading occurs in the background,

you can run the batch file and get back to work immediately.

Within your application, you invoke Backloader's pop-up screens with a special key combination (Alt-B is the default, but you can choose your own). The screens allow you to view cartridge and font categories, download one or more fonts, select fonts for printing with applications that normally don't support fonts, send a form feed to the printer, erase one or more fonts from the printer's memory, or reset the printer.

Backloader works with both "laser-smart" and "laser-dumb" applications. Laser-smart applications, such as the popular word processing and desktop publishing programs, properly support fonts.

Laser-dumb applications, such as Lotus 1-2-3 and Dbase, don't know how to work with fonts, so Backloader provides "control tags" that can be embedded in the text to signal font changes and other printer controls. You can change the control tags Backloader uses, and even create your own custom control tags for often-used printer functions.

Installing and configuring Backloader is easy — you copy the program files from the diskette to a subdirectory of the hard disk, then run the configuration program. You select the printer and port, specify which cartridges you use, and indicate the amount of printer memory available. Screen colors and the hot key can also be customized.

When you configure Backloader, you tell it which directories contain soft fonts. It then finds and lists them in the pop-up screen. If you like, you can have Backloader automatically search your hard disk for all soft fonts so that you can access any font from any application.

You can create multiple configuration files and use them in batch files for different applications. For example, you may use one group of fonts with your word processor, but you may want Backloader to work with different fonts when you use Ventura or Pagemaker.

Configuration files are easily edited with any ASCII word processor or editor. In fact, I preferred editing the file directly, because it contains many comments and tips for advanced configuration.

I ran across only one problem with Backloader, and it was easily resolved. I use the Z1A cartridge, which contains three different symbol sets. Backloader's default Z-cartridge configuration assumes you are using the ASCII symbol set, so Backloader downloaded soft fonts whenever my documents called for one of the other symbol sets. Once I changed the symbol set for the Z cartridge in the configuration file, Backloader stopped downloading those unnecessary fonts.

What really separates Backloader from other font management programs is that it can be as invisible as you want it to be. For new users with no font experience, set it up in AUTOEXEC.BAT to download on the fly. Show them the pop-up screen and instruct them to reset the program if they turn the printer off. Backloader will handle all the rest. For people using "laser-dumb" applications, create

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custom control tags they can use in their text to switch fonts and control other printer functions. For those who use various applications, set up multiple configuration files and use Backloader to change the configuration in each application's batch file. More advanced users will appreciate the program's flexibility, and will want to create their own custom configurations.

Backloader, Release 2 has a list price of \$89 — and that's a bargain for all it does.

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— Christine Rivera

SL Peripheral Sharing Device

BUFFALO PRODUCTS

What would you think of a business proposal printed on an aging 9-pin, dot-matrix printer? You probably would think as much of that poorly printed bit of work as you would a proposal to put a laser printer on every desk in your company; both seem equally ludicrous.

The obvious alternative is sharing letter-quality printers. If your PCs are on a network, you probably already share peripherals; but if you just need to share peripherals and nothing more, LANs are much too expensive. Perhaps the most popular — and certainly less expensive — alternative is an intelligent peripheral sharing device. In essence, these devices automatically reroute output from a number of computers to a desired peripheral. This is precisely what Buffalo Products' SL is.

This device includes six serial and four parallel ports, any of which the user can configure as input or output. Like many competing products, several SLs can be