Volkswriter's Total Word Is Better but Not Good Enough

Update's features are limited and fall short of other high-end office/professional word processors, however, its features are limited and don't quite measure up to the standards set by its competitors.

Total Word is compatible with all previous versions of Volkswriter. It uses the same general user interface, with its Cut-key/function-key format, similar to that used in Word Perfect. The power and performance of Total Word, Version 1.3 far surpass anything Volkswriter could offer.

Version 1.3 brings continuing enhancements to Total Word. Many new features simply adapt the program to exploit: fancy facsimile printers, HP III laserjet printers, expanded memory managers, and local area network requirements. Total Word 1.3 now comes in a network version (a two-user license) and additional network packs are available.

The program continues to be steady and reliable, but shows its age as newer competitors continue to enhance their products and remain ahead of Total Word in the features, performance, and ease-of-use comparisons.

We have changed the criteria from Total Word's last review (January 23, 1989, Page 60); see updated testing criteria, refer to our product comparison of office/professional word processors (January 29, 1990, Page 89).

FEATURES:
Within the realm of professional word processing, Total Word offers a somewhat limited set of features compared to market leaders Microsoft Word and Word Perfect. However, the package may well serve small offices that do not have a need for some of the elaborate bells and whistles of the high-power programs. Although Total Word does not have programmable macros, direct import of spreadsheets, or table functions, it does offer a nice math feature for blocking and performing math on rows or columns, a reasonable line-sort facility, and a useful page preview. This version tracks documents with revision marking and redlining. For devotees of this word processing family, Total Word 1.3 remains a fine product with some welcome enhancements.

PERFORMANCE:
As a basic editing tool, Total Word has the essentials, including flexible cut-and-paste functions, good search and replace, full complement of tab stops, and automatic hyphenation. With the capability to add the hyphenation dictionary, it can search for type styles and will insert date or time anywhere in the text. Total Word permits two windows to be open at the same time; however, if both are on the same document, editing is limited to the first window.

The quick and responsive editing that has long been a feature of Volkswriter products remains constant in this version, earning the product a good rating for editing tools.

The thesaurus and spelling checker do a fine job. The thesaurus includes antonyms as well as synonyms with parts of speech. The spelling checker maintains capitalization; catches repeated words, and supports user dictionaries. We rate the spelling checker good.

Total Word's mail-merge facility handles letter/forms—create data entry forms that you can use to build data files...
Microtek announces the end of the font wars. Introducing the first TrueImage printer.

Introducing the Microtek Truelaser printer. A revolutionary new laser printer that gives you TrueImage plus PostScript and PCL compatibility.

All for less than $2700. This is the first printer to bring TrueImage technology to your desktop. Giving you absolute WYSIWYG fonts. With faster on-screen display. And faster printing.

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The program supports several sublevels and cross-reference capabilities.

document by running the document with the extension that matches the layout file. Total Word's layout files are, fortunately, easier to keep than to explain. Styles are satisfactory.

Total Word works effectively at managing multiple fonts and complex printers. Total Word uses a concept of virtual cartridges to allow users to manage the many fonts available in Postscript printers. In addition, there is a useful facility for creating additional printer drivers based on the information in existing drivers. The utility of this feature for laser printers, with their complicated font metrics, is minimal, but for proportionally spaced printers, this system works very well. The program supports automatic downloading of soft fonts and includes a library of six different soft fonts. It also offers considerable advice about network printers. We rate font support good.

Total Word offers footnotes and endnotes that are both in line and in context. Note numbers are inserted or changed. Footnote character formatting is independent of the rest of the document. We rate footnoting very good.

Keystroke macros and abbreviation expansion provide considerable power, although there are no variables or conditions, or programming constructs to enhance macros. Useful primarily for text editing shortcuts or for quick navigation through the program, the macro facility is satisfactory.

This version of Total Word includes a much wider range of printer support, particularly for Postscript- and Postscript-compatible printers. Although we found the documentation about printers somewhat obscure, the large list of supported printers and the capability of developing drivers to approximate non-standard products earns a very good score.

As a stand-alone product, Total Word's compatibility with other programs is weak, supporting only ASCII transfer, but not the very large list of word processing formats that can be read from Volwritter, Total Word, WordPerfect, and other programs. Nonetheless, on its own, Total Word's compatibility is poor.

Total Word operates a bit sluggishly in comparison with its competitors in the file load, export, and import portions of our benchmarks. However, its speeds are competitive for cursor movement and search and replace. We rate Total Word's speed satisfactory.

DOCUMENTATION: Documentation for Total Word, Version 1.3 consists of a manual plus additional booklets for printers, converting from Volwritter, changes in the new release, and a quick-reference guide. Unfortunately, the manual is for a version several releases old, so you must always check back to the update booklet to be sure that the information in the main manual is right. Some of the page references are inaccurate. Explanations are reasonably clear except for the tutorial section, which is rather thin on examples. Total Word does offer on-line and context-sensitive help, as well as three levels of help that range from simple to very detailed. We rate documentation satisfactory.

EASE OF LEARNING: Total Word's function-key/Click-key system and help format require considerable time before they become second nature. Although we have used Volwritter and Total Word extensively, we've never quite found the quick-reference manual easy to read, although the on-line help screens have been much enhanced and improved over the years. We rate ease of learning as satisfactory.

EASE OF USE: Compared to the various conventions of Total Word, users will find the program relatively easy to use. Editing is crisp and quick, its functions reasonably easy to use, and its interface effective. However, you cannot customize the interface except through the use of macros, which are few in number, and some will find the function-key/Click-key interface rather clumsy. Total Word earns a satisfactory rating for ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING: Total Word traps most user errors without causing damage to data. A timed backup facility is available, and the program will keep a backup file when saving changes, which is a welcome feature. Unfortunately, the program will not undo backspace or delete key errors. We rate error handling as satisfactory.

SUPPORT: Volwritter provides a 30-day money-back guarantee, plus unlimited free, but not unlimited fee, technical support. Support hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific time, Monday through Thursday, and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Friday. Volwritter offers a 100-page technical manual and a comprehensive help system.

VALUE: At $495, Total Word is the same cost as other high-powered word processors, such as MS-DOS Word and WordPerfect. Although it features list and performance do not match those of the top-of-the-line products, its present capabilities make Total Word a satisfactory value.

John Lombardi is president of a major university and author of five books. He has been working with computers since 1967.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office/Professional Word Processors</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Word</strong>&lt;br&gt;Version 1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Microsoft Word</strong>&lt;br&gt;Version 5.0</td>
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<tr>
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**Benchmark: Office/Professional Word Processors**

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<td>Append file</td>
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**Times are in minutes:seconds, using otherwise noted.**

**Fills test** uses a file that can be filled in 10-15 times.

**Sorts test** uses a file that can be filled in 10-15 times.

**Copy test** uses a file that can be filled in 10-15 times.

**Manual edit** uses a file that can be filled in 10-15 times.

**Scores test** uses a file that can be filled in 10-15 times.

**Sounds test** uses a file that can be filled in 10-15 times.

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