Software Reviews

Total Word

Lifetree Improves on the Volkswriter Tradition
Powerful Word Processor Changes Name But Not Interface

By John Lombardi Review Board

Volkswriter, one of the earliest word processors to be released for the IBM PC, has passed through many upgrades and reformulations, each time maintaining its dedication to ease of use and relative simplicity. Total Word, the latest Volkswriter incarnation from Lifetree Associates, sheds the traditional name but not the family's traditional user interface.

Powerful and effective, Total Word offers a reasonable alternative to more elaborate professional programs such as Wordstar 2000 Plus, Release 3 or Microsoft Word 4. Optimized for laser printer users, Total Word will delight the devoted followers of the Volkswriter tradition and most likely attract new fans.

FEATURES:

Total Word's complement of features and capabilities includes most, but not all, of what we have come to expect in the most powerful office/professional word processing programs. As an editor, Total Word looks and feels just like its Volkswriter predecessors. All regular editing commands for cursor moves, cut and paste, and the like work well. Total Word does case change and conditional ends of page, and it permits the inclusion of nonprinting comments for tracking revisions and editing changes. Directory management has been improved, including document descriptions, directory sorting, pointing to file names for retrieval, and the capability to create new directories from within the program.

Footnotes or end notes can be included, a forms management capability and mail merge will interest office workers, and technical or scientific writers will be intrigued by the capability to enter complex formulas directly on-screen. The formula processing system makes use of alternate keyboards activated by a simple command, and the

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Synonym for: enjoyment
delight              satisfaction          ANTONYM
<N>                  <N>                   <N>
amusement            fruition              affliction
delectation          gratification         calamity
delight              satisfaction          care
diversion            triumph               detestation
indulgence                                 discomfort
relish                                     displeasure
thrill                                     dissatisfaction
zest                                       grief

Point, Ctrl-F8=Synonym for this word, ↲=replace, F1=Help
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of service under even the most demanding conditions.

The Solar line includes three new tents,

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Lyt 2  Space 1   Type-Standard Text  TU Times 12 pt Medium LSI          Col 1/2
C:  C:SAMPLE  .NLR 4-29-88   3 00 p.m.        INS              Pg 1 Ln 18  Chr 3
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The Total Word thesaurus provides synonym and antonym suggestions, appearing as a window in the document. The thesaurus and spelling checker both work well.

keyboards also provide access to a variety of foreign language and special character sets.

Other features include indexing, table of contents, line numbering, list generation, redline/strikeout, line drawing, macros, and a screen-capture graphics import facility.

Total Word's handling of page layout, style sheets, and laser printer fonts is particularly interesting. Based on the use of style sheets containing the specifications for margins, typefaces, tabs, and other appearance characteristics, Total Word's system permits the use of up to 250 layouts or sets of appearance specifications in a single document. In addition, the program manages printer fonts through

both the style sheets and independently through selection from a pull-down menu. The word processor comes with a Times Roman soft font of its own that can be used immediately with HP Laserjet-compatible printers. Additional soft fonts can be purchased from third-party vendors.

However, Total Word's mail merge capability is substantially less powerful than systems available in Wordstar 2000, Word 4, or Multimate, since it does not permit conditional list processing with variables. Moreover, Total Word has very primitive file transfer utilities — accepting only Volkswriter files and straight ASCII. Total Word does not support IBM RFT/DCA,

Wordstar, Microsoft Word, or the Word Perfect file formats.

While the program can show two documents on the screen at the same time, the second document can only be edited if it is another view of the first document. If the second document is different from the first, you can only copy text from the second document into the first.

While Total Word's features list lacks some of the sophistication of some other packages, it is strong enough to be a contender in this class of high powered products.

PERFORMANCE:

Total Word's editing capabilities make full use of special graphics cards and color. According to *InfoWorld* benchmark tests, the product performed slower than average office/professional word processors in most tests.

Reformatting a complete document requires the document to be scrolled past the screen — a relatively slow process. The spelling checker and thesaurus perform well, the thesaurus having both synonyms and antonyms, and on-line automatic hyphenation is effective.

Total Word's search and replace performs well, permitting a considerable amount of flexibility. The lack of a background search and replace, however, slowed work. The package only supports left-justified tabs, and deleting carriage returns is awkward.

Double-column, newspaper-style text is shown on-screen as a single column with status-line indicators of column location, but a nice page preview feature shows a graphic representation of the double columns with column breaks and spacing. The program does not allow uneven columns.

Total Word's undo command helps recover from accidental deletions but unfortunately does not recover block deletions, a serious dis-

WORD PROCESSOR BENCHMARKS	Total Word 1.011	Microsoft Word 4.0	Word Perfect 4.2
File			
Load	13.0	1.4	1.5
Save and continue	14.5	4.1	5.6
Import ASCII	12.0	1.1	18.3
Export ASCII	7.0	55.3	22.5
Import DCA	N/A[1]	58.7	20.9
Cursor Movement			
Top to bottom	1.2	0.5	2.9
Manual scroll	110.2	94.1	97.7
Reformat	160.8[2]	10.8	25.9[2]
Search			
Last word	4.6	2.2	2.7
Replace	211.1	14.4	5.5
Append document	5.8	0.7	0.8

Times in seconds.
[1] Cannot translate DCA files.
[2] Could not globally alter all rulers. Chart indicates the total time to alter each ruler manually.

advantage when compared to other products. Other block commands work well.

The program's style sheets are effective devices for handling page and formatting layouts. These are attached to each document and can be activated and deactivated with ease and simplicity. However, text files are given specific extensions that identify the style sheets that go with them — an approach that may cause problems for those who use standard file-naming conventions.

The indexing facility lets you index multiple documents for use when a long document is split into sections or chapters and later printed together. With revision marking and effective commenting, multiple authors or editors can work on the same text without losing track of who made which changes. Although reasonably automated, the TOC/indexing feature is not as flexible as many other word processors in this class. Total

> Total Word offers a reasonable alternative to more elaborate professional programs.

Word does, however, support cross-referencing and subtopics.

Fill-in forms automate the process of handling standardized documents, and a special utility permits the extraction of records from forms to create a data list that can be used in mail merge. The lack of conditionals in the list processing is a serious limitation, but the program capably handled most other mailing chores.

Total Word's math function is particularly easy to use, but the simple line-sorting function permits only one sort field and requires sort fields to be arranged in columns.

A graphics screen-grabbing program, called Snapshot, integrates an image into a Total Word document. Snapshot captured most screen images we tried, though we ran into trouble with some generic Hercules clone cards. More importantly, we could not find any way to remove Snapshot from memory once installed. In use, Total Word inserts the graphics file created by Snapshot and allocates the correct amount of space, but it won't flow text around the image. Total Word can't import any other standard graphics files, such as .PCX or Lotus 1-2-3 .PIC files.

While Total Word will number lines in the text, it does not do paragraph or outline numbering. And while it does footnotes or end notes, Total Word cannot handle both in the same document. Footnotes are easily entered using a footnote windowing scheme.

No true document history screen is available, but Total Word does provide a good redlining feature, including a comments facility.

Due to Total Word's limited importing capabilities, we rate compatibility a poor.

While Total Word exported to ASCII significantly faster than most word processors, its slow scores in most speed tests limit our speed score to poor.

DOCUMENTATION:
Total Word has good, clear documentation, including a printer manual and a quick reference guide. The on-screen tutorial is a good way to get started. On-screen help has been much improved over the Volkswriter model, although the original Volkswriter function key guide can be turned on and off on-screen.

Overall, this manual is very good, but the detail of some of the explanations could be increased to help with the more complex uses of utility programs such as Snapshot. We also discovered some minor inconsistencies in the documentation, mostly between what the text describes as being on the screen with what actually appears.

The special printer manual does a reasonable job of explaining how to use soft fonts and other features of laser printers, although it could have been clearer in spots.

The general documentation, good on-line screens, and reasonably complete printer support booklet earn this product a very good rating for documentation.

EASE OF LEARNING:
As is characteristic of the Volkswriter family, Total Word is very easy to learn. Because of its ready-made style sheets and pre-installed soft fonts, a novice can be up and running in a reasonable amount of time, producing moderately sophisticated newsletters and documents. Moreover, the predesigned layouts offer examples that help a new user learn how to take advantage of Total Word's capabilities.

Combined with the extensive help system, these features earn Total Word a very good rating in ease of learning. Among the high-powered word processing systems, Total Word is surely one of the easiest word processors for a novice to learn to use.

EASE OF USE:
Total Word wears well. As users gain experience, the function keys and other facilities make it possible to work quickly and effectively.

Total Word uses a clever system that displays a shadow cursor on the ruler line showing where your screen cursor would be on the printed line. This compensates for the fact that screen characters all have the same pitch while the typeface being used may be smaller, larger, or proportionally spaced. This system makes decisions about text element placement easier.

The program permits changes in installation parameters easily and quickly, allows different directory displays, sorts directories, and permits pointing at file names rather than typing them.

Some characteristics of the program, however, inhibit ease of use. For example, while Total Word has a feature to show or hide text markings used to establish centering, boldfacing, and similar appearance features, there is no way to tell what the displayed markings actually mean — they simply show up as peculiar characters.

When using the on-line help system, which has three levels (basic information, expanded information, and one that takes the whole screen), the escape key exits from the full-screen help, but for the other two levels puts an escape symbol in the text. The Makelist program that helps attach soft fonts to the program requires that the fonts be on a floppy disk, even if you have transferred them to a hard disk subdirectory.

When installed for a Hercules card, boldfacing does not appear on the screen, and page breaks are invisible except for changes in the status indicator showing the page number. If you change the type size in a line, you must manually reformat the line to have it fit within the margins. However, because the ruler line is expressed in inches, it is very easy to see where you are.

But these minor irritations are more than balanced by the substantial ease of use capabilities; we therefore rate this program very good in ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING:
The newness of Total Word shows in its rough error handling. Perhaps we've become spoiled by the outstanding error handling of most high-powered word processing programs, but Total Word crashed several times when performing rather routine functions.

One repeatable bug crashed the program when we chose the function that deletes a printer driver. Our lab could not get the "delete printer driver" function to

do anything. The undo command, as mentioned above, does not handle block deletes — one of the most common errors. This is the reverse of most programs.

If the program expects to find a soft font file for automatic downloading and doesn't find the right file name, it gets caught in an endless loop from which there is no exit in spite of the screen message that the escape key will exit.

From the main menu it is possible to mistakenly attempt to load a Total Word graphics file as if it were a word processing file. This produces a frozen program that doesn't respond to keystrokes and requires a reboot. A minor error occurs when you exit from the program while using a color monitor. In this case the program fails to restore the screen to the condition it was in before the program began. To restore the screen you need to issue a system command, CLS.

Despite these numerous and annoying

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bugs, we lost no data, so we rate data integrity satisfactory.

Error messages were clear and acceptable but without a high level of detail or any extras. We rate them satisfactory.

SUPPORT:
We called the technical support number provided on the documentation. We received nothing but busy signals in 10 calls during business hours on various weekdays. We rate technical support as unacceptable.

Support policies are reasonably good. Lifetree provides bug fixes to Total Word (we received a bug fix disk along with our program package), and in addition to normal guarantees of media quality, Lifetree provides notice of all improvements and upgrades and a free subscription to the company's newsletter, Newsline. There's also a 60-day money-back guarantee. The company supports an unlimited, but not toll free, customer support line open from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Pacific time.

The extra-long money-back guarantee helps earn Total Word a very good in support policies.

VALUE:
Among this class of high-powered word processing programs, Total Word is a good value. Somewhat less powerful and less flexible than the best in this class (Wordstar 2000, Release 3; Word 4.0; or Word Perfect 4.2), Total Word excels in ease of learning. With features sufficient for all but the most demanding office requirements or sophisticated document preparation, we believe this program is especially suitable for users who need an easy to learn and use word processor with strong laser printer support and effective soft font control.

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