Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group

Flushing the buffer

Telecommunications and your PC

by Jackson M. Hibler

I panic before I even turn it on. The modem! Lord, what dread. Oh, I've read all the documentation that Hayes gave me. It wasn't fun. And after I finished that I read all the stuff that came with my telecommunications programs. Yeah, a couple of them! And that was even less fun. I'm just not sure I've got the right ..Carrier Detect Mask... And I still wonder if I need to use some of the S- and X- codes in the ..initialization string...   And those DIPpy switches...

Of course a whole new set of commands has to be learned when I finally get onto a BBS -- and different ones for the next BBS, naturally.   And then there are those protocols for up- and down-loading: Kermit who? And the clock is running too! Hurry up! ...before they kick you off-line ...before the long distance charges beggar you.   Help!

Sandy Black of Omzig Corporation sort of glossed over that part. As he explains it, there are lots of full-featured programs out there that have ..script.. languages that will log you on to those BBSs; negotiate the protocols; automate the up-and down-loading; remember who you call; handle networks; run concurrently with your other software (background/foreground); even let you customize the user interface. Yep, all that and more...once you set it up. It's that setting-it-up part that, well...

"...hardware will soon be bundled with software, not the reverse ..."

Sandy has happier news for us in the costs category.   First, the hardware: ..Hardware prices are going down so fast that soon the hardware will be bundled with the software, not the reverse!.. ..Software is the 'appliance'.., who worries about the electric motor inside? (Lord, let it be true! Let it be soon!).

Second, long distance data telecommunication may be due for a price break. Currently the telephone companies resent data communications that tie up their local voice lines without yielding revenue. And users are reluctant to use the long distance service because it yields too darn much revenue! Packet-switching networks are changing the picture. It's starting to look like a profitable venture for the phone companies even without individual long distance fees. Telecom Canada is about to introduce its X.25 packet service called 'PC Reach' that will deliver for 15 cents what presently costs $1.75 on Envoy 100--this across Canada from local phone to local phone! (I think I am beginning to under-stand why Canada Post tried to get the ..postal.. designation expanded to include electronic mail.)

Now that we've got a number of versatile telecom ..appliances.. out there that (once they are set up...) can communicate both powerfully and increasingly cheaply across the continent, where does Omzig's Alexander Plus program fit in? What do you do if you have the worlds best tele-communications program that you have to promote in a world that already thinks it has a surfeit of such things? Sell it cheap? (Not much of an advantage there when lots of good ones like Telix and Boyan are already nearly free.)   How about selling it at a price high enough to include lots of support? (Now that might attract some buyers! Set-up remains the bottleneck in telecommunications.)

Inside.

Events ...

by André Cyr

The theme of the **January 27** meeting will be:..Microcomputers in the Federal Government..and the spokeperson will be from the Auditor General Office.

The door prize will be an audit.

Also the January meeting will see the election of the Executives members of your **CLUB**. Because of poor weather conditions the scheduled November election was postponed to the next scheduled meeting.

Alexander Plus – a fast look

At the November meeting, Omzig donated a copy of Alexander Plus communications software to the Group. This program is commercial software. The copy given to the club is not a demo program, but is the full package. It is available only to members of the Ottawa IBM-PC Users. Group and is not to be distributed elsewhere. It is a four-disk set and is available at the regular library price of $3.00 per disk. There is no documentation on disk. Anyone who wants to purchase a copy of the 200 page manual may do so through the software librarian. The cost is $25. It may be ordered by leaving a message on the Club's message machine at 723-1329. Following is a first look at the program.

I tried using the program without looking at the manual to see if it was possible to use the program without documentation. It is fairly straightforward and I managed to stumble through most of the basic functions through trial and error. Context sensitive help is available in the program. However, I recommend that anyone who intends to give the program a fair shake should buy the manual. Novices will probably find the manual necessary.

The advantages offered by Alexander Plus (over other packages such as Telix or Procomm) seem to be two-fold. First, the program can run in background mode. This allows you to transfer files while continuing with other tasks. As the

software librarian, this is a big bonus. I spend a fair amount of time gathering software from many sources and this allows me to utilize my hardware a lot better. When in memory-resident mode, Alexander Plus takes up about 200K of memory.

The other advantage is relevant to those who use electronic mail services regularly. Alexander Plus can automatically go out and get your mail at times you preset and even let you know if it found any. All while you continue to use your computer! If you have an electronic mail service that calls you, Alexander can take care of storing the mail for you. Again, this can be done while you are using the computer for other tasks.

There are a few other little specialized goodies such as ..screen sharing... With this option, you can have an application running on two computers connected by modem. Keystrokes on either machine are passed on to the other machine as well. Seems there might be some game playing possibilities there as well as being a consultant's tool.

Alexander Plus seems to be optimized for electronic mail. For the user of regular bulletin boards such as the Club's, Alexander Plus may not be the best choice. The only file transfer protocols are ASCII and X-Modem. The addition of Y-Modem, Z-Modem and Telink would be very welcome.

Operations in Alexander Plus revolve

around 5 main screens; Dir (phone directory), Email (electronic mail), Term (terminal), Util (utilities), and the Control screen (a crossroads point for moving between the other 4 modules).

The phone directory can store up to four numbers with each listing, labeled Work, Home, Data, and Telix. You can also keep multi-screen notes attached to directory entries, accessed with a single keystroke. Phone directories can be structured like subdirectories with navigation as simple as pointing to the next level directory and pressing Enter. A full script language is available to automate log-ons as well as perform other functions.

As I have never used electronic mail services, I have not looked into Alexander Plus's capabilities in this area.

The ..Util.. screen allows you to set communication parameters as well as many of Alexander Plus defaults.

A major difference users of Telix, Procomm or Q-Modem will find with Alexander Plus is that it is function key oriented, rather than Alt key sequences. The meaning of the function keys change as you move to different sections of the program. The 25th line shows the current meaning of the function keys. Personally, I find Alt key sequences easier. I also find that function keys that change their meanings can lead to errors.

Calendar.

Meetings of the Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group are held on the last Wednesday of the month except in July and December. The Meeting are held at the National Research Council Auditorium, 100 Sussex Drive (Gothic Building facing King Edward Avenue).a Memberships and club disks are available at 7:30 p.m. with the regular meeting starting at 8 p.m. Free parking is available at the rear of the Gothic Building.

The next meeting will be on:

February 24.

Telecommunications

From page 1

But how do you get a jaded world to even notice your program? Sandy has an idea: why not give it away free to users. groups! It will get circulated, evaluated, talked about, known about. Word of mouth may be the best hope in a crowded market... The only problem is, when do you get to sell some copies? Ah! Support! In this field a lot of us will pay for some effective, nitty gritty support.

We will get a chance at Alexander Plus through our library. Sandy asks only that we do not redistribute the program to non-members. There must be a threshold between successfully penetrating a market and becoming swallowed by it. The trick is to have something beyond the program itself that will bring in the buyers. For teleklutzes like me--and I sus-

pect we are legion--set-upsupport might be that something.

P.S. The January 26 edition of PC Magazine has an add by the makers of WATSON, a sophisticated telecommunication package that include voice/mail features. WATSON has just been reduced from $500(US) to $199(US)... and... at the bottom of the add a circled notice says: ..include Hayes compatible modem... No sooner said than done, Sandy!!!

For more information on Alexander Plus see the review of Chris Taylor and the notes in the Specialty Library column.

Computers and disks

IBM has demonstrated that a 3.5" hard disk can theoretically support up to 1.25 gigabytes of storage. Electron beam photolithography can create track widths of only 0.5 microns. The major problem now is that there are no read/write heads that can support such a small track width. On the price of speed -

Intel has released a 20 MHz. version of the 80387 math co-processor. Suggested retail - a cool US$1,195. - Info World October 5, 1987

On aspirations -

A sign in the office of Danny Hillis, founder of Thinking Machines reads "I want to build a machine that's proud of me".

Borland International bought the 4-page, front cover foldout of the November issue of Lotus magazine to advertise it's Quatro spreadsheet. There was no Borland advertisement in the December issue.

On memory-resident programs -

..When I first heard the phrase 'terminate and stay resident' I thought it referred to a program that had just crashed... - Robert Shostak, co-founder of Ansa Software.

On shareware -

..In any event, PC-Outline is very close to ideal. It combines a superb outline processor with a tolerable text editor. It reads Thinktank and Ready outlines. It outputs ordinary ASCII files. In a word, it does most of what you'd want an outline processor to do. This is a good program... - Jerry Pournelle, A User's View, Info World, Nov. 2, 1987.

On programming -

An article, ..Questions To Ask Before You Write Code.., advises to ask the following;

> What do they want?
> Do they really want it?
> Should they really want it?
> Who is going to use it?
> Who is going to support it?

From Lotus magazine, December, 1987

Membership renewals now available

As you know, all **OPCUG** memberships are good for the Group's fiscal year which runs from April 1 to March 31 of the following year (and NOT for a year from the date one has joined). However, since the Group has grown to more than 400 members since April 1, 1987, taking in renewals might be very hectic if everyone decided to take care of this matter at our last meeting which, this year, is March 30. Soooo, to encourage everybody to make the process less of a chore, you can send your own $20 renewal by mail, using the form that you'll find elsewhere in this newsletter.

And to thank you for helping your Executive, we will have a draw, at each of the next three Meetings, for a Diskette-of-the-Month subscription worth $25. If you renew before the January 27 Meeting, your name will be included in the January, February and March draws... if we receive your renewal between January 28 and February 24, you will then have two chances to win a Diskette-of-the-Month subscription, whereas you.ll get only one chance if it is received after that date but before March 30. As they say, you can't win if you don.t send in your renewal. While we'll still take in renewals at the meetings, you would be eligible only for the draws following that particular meeting. And whether you win or not, you

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Communications and games featured on speciality disks

There is lots of new things in the specialty libarary for January.

Alexander Plus (4 disks) The commercial communications package from Omzig. The manual may be ordered through the software librarian for $25. NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION OUTSIDE THE OTTAWA IBM-PC USERS. GROUP!

Crossword Creator V2.01 A program to help you design crossword puzzles. Also included on this disk is **SeekEasy V5.0**, a program that allows you to search for approximate text matches in files.

Disk Commando Utilities patterned after the Norton Utilities Advanced Edition.

Home Money Manager V1.04 (2 disks) A simple home checkbook, budgeting and credit tracking tool. Can handle 60 expense categories.

Shells Two File management programs. File Commando V1.30, Disk Navigator V1.2, and FFM V2.1. Makes life with DOS more pleasant.

Turbo Two Find ways to speed up your Turbo Pascal programs, convert .COM files to InLine code, fast writes to screen, and a professional quality source lister and cross reference program.

Wombat V1.0 A text adventure game. Discover the Forbidden City of the Great Lost Empire and unearth the mysteries it contains. CGA required!

Alexander.
from page 2

One keystroke command seems particularly strange. In all off-line modes (Dir, Email, Utils), a press of the Ctrl key returns you immediately to the Control screen. As I use Ctrl keys in all my normal editors as well as several other programs, I found myself aborting operations sometimes. As this only happens with off-line operations, it was a nuisance rather than a disaster. To return to the Control screen from Terminal mode (on-line), you must press Esc.

If you use electronic mail services or would like to be able to transfer files in the background, you may find Alexander Plus a nice addition to your software library. Thank you Omzig!

The Norton Guides - a review
New utilities versitile and fast

You are happily programming away in Turbo Pascal. You go to use the procedure ' Block Read'. You come up blank on the required syntax. You go over to the book shelf and hunt for the Turbo Pascal Reference Manual. After finding it in another room, you sit back down and clear off some space on your computer table. Opening the index you find .Block Read. and the page reference. You go to it and start reading. Sound familiar?

Wouldn't it be nice if instead, while in Turbo Pascal, you could just type ' Block Read', press a 'hotkey' and get a couple of screens worth of syntax, notes about the procedure and examples? While we are dreaming, how about if you could jump to information on related procedures? And once you had the information you needed, you could jump back to your programming in a single keystroke? Dream no more, The Norton Guides are here to show you the way.

The guides come in two parts. First there is NG.EXE, the Instant Access Program. Then there are the databases for various languages. Presently there are four databases; Assembly Language, BASIC (which includes separate database files for interpreted BASIC, Quick-BASIC, and Turbo BASIC), C (which includes separate database files for Microsoft C and Turbo C), and Turbo Pascal.

Each database is a rich treasure trove of information. The Turbo Pascal database contains help on more than 200 language elements from Abs to YCor as well as a list of all the compiler directives, program structure, data types, and more.

The Assembly Language database contains information about the instruction set, interrupts, ROM BIOS calls, low memory usage, addressing modes, pseudo ops, DOS functions and interrupts, error codes, the PSP and FCB structures, and more. This database is huge!

The BASIC databases cover about 200 language elements from ABS to XOR and include information on operators, data types, and what happens when you convert between data types, reserved words, command line switches, and error messages.

All of the databases include tables of the ASCII chart, line drawing characters, special characters broken down by categories (arrows, block graphic, foreign language, math and Greek), plus color and keyboard codes.

It is extremely easy to use the guides. There are only 13 pages of the manual devoted to using the guides with any of the databases.

The Shift-F1 command is the default 'hotkey', which may be changed if it conflicts with whatever else you have in memory.

The help provided by the guides is context sensitive. For example, if you were programming in QuickBASIC and the cursor was on (or just after) the word 'date', pressing the hotkey would present the following as shown in 'Table A' on the next page.

Since (in this example) the guides are in half-screen mode, the guides would automatically pop up in the half of the screen away from the cursor, allowing you to see your work. The F9 key toggles between half-screen vertically anywhere on screen.

A highlight bar would be on the line .DATE$.... and the word 'Expand' at the top of the screen would also be highlighted.

You can use the cursor control keys to see more. A 'thumbnail' in the right margin identifies your location within the entry. If there are related entries, there will be a 'See also' reference at the top of the screen, as in 'TIME$' above. Pressing Enter will pop that entry onto the screen.

The F10 key will immediately return you to your programming, or 'Esc' will take you out of the program, level by level.

If this was all that The Norton Guides did for you, they would be great. However, in true Norton style, they go an extra step for you. Included with the ' Instant Access Program' is a database compiler. The manual has a 12 page tutorial on creating your own databases,

followed by 22-page reference section.

If you want to design a help program for users of any other software, the guides can set up a very nice, elegant system. The tutorial leads you through all phases of setting up a database. Once you have gone through the tutorial, you should not experience any problems setting up a help system of any size on your own.

The Norton Guides use about 65K of memory. Only the Instant Access Program is held in memory. The database information is read from disk as required. Most of the guides could be run from a floppy disk, and they are remarkably fast considering the smallest database is larger than 226K. Search times are rarely more than two seconds on a floppy disk. A hard disk is highly recommended, both for the size of the databases and the ease of use. The C and Assembly Language databases are actually larger than 360K. They are distributed on standard 360K diskettes thanks to the self extracting archive program PKSFX from PKWARE, authors of PKARC. Hooray for shareware!

I would imagine that there are many programmers wondering, ..Why didn't I think of that?... Well Charles Woodford did and John Socha designed and wrote the guides. They were written in Microsoft .C. V4.0 and Microsoft Macro Assembler V4.0. They consist of 10,000 lines of .C. and 10,000 lines of assembly code. The language databases were written by various people on the Norton team.

The Norton Guides have made programming much easier for me. As I don't program that often, my trips to the manuals were frequent. Now, I seldom have to look at them. The guides are

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QuickBASIC 3.0 . BASIC . Language

Expand	Search...	Options	BASIC	Tables

| CVI	Convert String to Integer
| CVS	Convert String to Single Precision
| CVSMBF	Convert MBF Single-Precision String to IEEE
| DATA	Store Constant(s) for Retrieval via READ
| DATE$	Get or Set System Date
| DEF FN	Define Function
| DEF SEG	Define Segment
| DEFDBL	Define Variable(s) as Double Precision

Producing the newsletter

PageMaker desktop publisher

by Mike Roy

This edition of the IBM-PC Users Club newsletter was prepared with the Aldus 'PageMaker' desktop publishing program. The program features a number of pagemaking bells and whistles that make page layout quick and easy.

While there are more sophisticated programs on the market, PageMaker provides the editor with a quick and reasonably easy way to move text and graphics onto page layouts in preparation for final printing.

While I like PageMaker, the production of this issue was not without its more hazardous moments. PageMaker, at least this version, runs with MicroSoft's .Windows. program and I believe Windows was having some problems talking with my XT clone.

For example, after working on a page for about 20 minutes, the save command produced a blank page. A quick 'undo' command saved the day. Another time

the text was written in the 'Write' program (it forms part of Windows) but then stored in a WordStar file!

While I did experience problems with Windows, I have next to no trouble running PageMaker. The program automatically created the three-column format you see and I was able to create the headlines I wanted with just a few keystrokes.

Changing font sizes was a snap as the F10 key would enlarge the font while the F9 key would reduce it. The F5 key gave the user a normal font while F6 produced a bold font and F7 an italic font.

The F1 key produced an extensive on-screen help program that helps the user solve just about every problem an editor might encounter during a page layout exercise.

The Windows program appears to offer a number of features for the user. My problems, I suspect, were from two versions of DOS in one machine; my own version of PC-DOS and the MS-DOS in

windows.

Even with the problems, I was able to discover ways around the roadblocks to layout this issue. For example, some of the text written in Write could not be imported directly into PageMaker. I ended up transferring the text onto a blank disk in one of the floopy drives and then importing it once I was back in PageMaker.

Norton Utility

from page 4

modest in memory requirements, fast, simple to use and are clearly written.

The Norton Guides are available from;

Peter Norton Computing
2210 Wilshire Blvd. #186
Santa Monica, California
90403
(213) 453-2361

The following programs are available at a cost of U.S. $50 each: 'Instant Access Program', 'Assembly', 'BASIC', 'C', and 'Pascal databases'.

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Ottawa IBM - PC Users Group
3 Thatcher St. Ottawa, ON, K2G 1S6

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL   To March 31, 1989

My $20 dues for the 1988-1989 membership in the OPCUG is enclosed.

Gioven Name: Family Name:

_____   _____

Address:

Apt or Suite - Number - Street, Road, Cres., etc. _____

City & Prov.:   Postal Code:

Home Phone: _____   Membership:$ 20.00 _____

Bus. Phone: Disk Pkg.: $ 25.00

_____

_____   I also wish to subscribe to the Diskette-of-the-
                                          Month
                                          for which I have added another $25.00 entitling
                                          me to receive 10 consecutive DOMs.

(Signed) _____

N O T E : REMEMBER - There will be a monthly draw for a Diskette-of-the-Month subscription
at the January, February and March meetings. So, the sooner you renew, the more chances you have
to win this $25.00 value.

IBM PS2 VIDEO MODES

D.E. Macmillan 749-1232

When the new PS2 was introduced last spring, IBM handed us three new video modes:

MGCA - Multi Colour Graphics Adapter
VGA - Video Graphics Array
8514A- (IBM have not yet given this mode a name.)

I prepared the attached charts to help me understand these products. Notice that IBM did not make them backward-compatible with the Hercules standard. Left for a future study will be a matching chart which will present the market for suitable analogue monitors. (By the way, are you aware that Electrohome of Kitchener make an auto-scan monitor which works quite nicely with the PS2. Few of the US magazines give any attention to the Canadian Electrohome product. Free trade???)

TEXT SIZE in GRAPHICS MODE	MGCA (Model 30 Only)	VGA (Models 50 and up) (Optional on Model 30) GRAPHICS 320	MODE 640	TEXT 720	8514A (Add-on to Models 50-60-80) 1024	VERTICAL RESOLUTION (pixels)	FRAME REFRESH RATE (Hz)
VIDEO BANDWIDTH (MHz)		25.175		28.322			
8x8 char. box	CGA 320x200 4 simul col / CGA 640x200 2 simul col / MGCA 320X200 256 sim.col	CGA 320x200 4 simul col / EGA 16 simu colours / VGA 256 sim colours / Graphics Txt 40col x 25 / MGCA 320X200 256 sim.col	CGA 2 simul col / EGA 16 simu colours	NIL	NIL	200 (Two 400 scan lines at a time)	70 Hz
8x14 char box	NIL	NIL	EGA 16 simu colours (43 lines of 8x8 text in graphics mode)	NIL	NIL	350	
8x16	MGCA Text 640x400 80col x 25	NIL	FUTURE ONLY MGCA Text See note 1 below	Optional VGA Text 8x8 box 80col x50 / VGA Text 9x16 box 80x25		400 effective for text	70 Hz
	MGCA 640x480 2 simul col	NIL	VGA 2 or 16 simul col / VGA 256 sim col with optional kit / 8514 Graphic 256 sim.col / MGCA 2 simu colours			480	60 Hz
					TEXT 12x20 box (85 columns 38 lines) / 7x15 box (146 cols 51 lines) / GRAPHICS 256 sim.col	768	

Note 1: This mode is not yet supported by IBM BIOS (640x400 Graphics with 256 simultaneous colours.