Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group

Program has lots of features

AUTOCAD: an electronic drafting table

by Jackson Hibler
OPCUG

We walk in and... there's this coffee pot on the screen... No, now it's squashed down to a tea pot now... a nice one! Whoops, there it goes back up again... What the...? Creating the coffee pot-tea pot is Willie Smith, an architect with Minto Construction, and he is going to tell us about Au-tocad, a Computer Assisted Design (CAD) program.

"Engineers, architects, surveyors and industrial designers are on the periphery. Draftsmen are at the center of this program's ability. It isn't that it makes drafting easier... the original drawings can be done as quickly on the board as they can be done on the screen. It's the storage of data drawn on the screen that is the key," Smith said.

Listening to Smith, I start to realize that CAD is to the draftsman what word processing is to the writer. Its still just as much work to get the original ideas down. But editing... Ah, the editing... You want a larger dining room? Lets just use the 'stretch' command here. Want to bring over that patio design from another plan? No problem, where do you want it to go? A little smaller over here? No problem!

Once you have the drawing in the machine, there's a lot you can do with it besides editing, of course. From calculating the area of a portion of a drawing to structural analysis, Au-tocad can do it. Autocad has spawned an 'industry' of add-on programs, too.

"If you know how to use a camera, you know how to use Autoshade to produce a 3-D perspective that can underlay an artists drawing," Smith added.

Then there's a program called Auto-flex that gives you animation for $35! (I think that's what created that oscillating coffee pot.) Programs like Lotus and dBase can be linked to come up with materials lists and do cost analysis. Yet another program... I think Smith called it Autolist... can do parametric design: just draw the outline and it fills in the details according to the building code: how thick the

It was 50 disks ago today...

By Chris Taylor
Software Librarian

There is something about round numbers that cries out for attention. As this is Disk number 50, I would like to take a look at some of the changes that the software library has seen during the past few years.

Disk-01 was released in March, 1983. The librarian's name on the monthly disk was missing until Barry Arinstrong's name appeared at Disk-05 in October, 1983.

At Disk-07, in January, 1984, Gord Hopkins and Mike Schupan took over as librarians. The library benefitted greatly as Gord had come from the Northern Alberta PC Users' Group and had brought their library with him. Also, Gord had written an elegant BASIC program to provide a nice menuing system for the monthly disks.

The entire library, which consists of the monthly disks, the specialty library and demo disks, now contains more than 300 disks. There are programs of virtually every type in the library. My thanks to everyone who has made the library what it is today.

Disk Technician has lots of bells and whistles

by John Whelan
SYSOP 163/23

I happen to be a BBS sysop. Not the one who runs the club's board but one who simply does it for fun. (Well sometimes it's easier to get on your own board than it is to get through to the Bureau). I have already written a couple of articles on my own view of BBSing and I will like to share some of the problems I've witnessed.

Many BBS SYSOPs have had their hard disk crash. I've had one, 163/23 is having one at the moment, 163/1 had one a few months ago. They seem to be the latest fashion these days. Since these crashes are fairly expensive, many SYSOPs have their own myths, folklore, magic chants and magic charms. Mine run along the lines of 'don't run disk organizers three times a day after meals'. Recently I decided to buy a new, more powerful incantation that promised to protect my hard drives and ward off evil spells.

The product I brought was Disk Technician Plus. I brought it after reading a couple of reviews in PC Magazine and thought that you might be interested in my experiences.

I'll start with some of the drawbacks you might not have seen mentioned in the other reviews.

On the back of the package it stated that it now contains the following NEW features: Works with two physical disk drives on a single system up to 136 Mb for an MFM type drive and up to 272 Mb for an RLL type drive. It also claims to work with RLL controllers up to a maximum of 31 sectors per track and it has a built-in non-destructive low level formatter for AT type machines. If you are thinking of buying a copy and have two drives or think you might have two drives, then be sure to purchase the Plus version.

Not only is the program copy protected but at the end of the first run it writes its 'identification safety markings' on each hard disk drive and records this information onto its key disk floppy. If you happen to do a low level format, reparation your disk with FDISK, replace your hard disk or attempt to use the product on another system the user manual tells you to press an '@' character which will give you a '10-figure safety number'. Then you call the technical support number, (619) area code, quoting the safety number and the error message number and your serial number to enable you to use the program again.

Rumor has it if you copy the disk with a product such as 'Copywrit' before running the program the first time it will run from the copy. This could save you a couple of long distance phone calls.

The product interacts with Mace utilities RXBAK. The solution needs a long distance phone call for technical support. Disk Technician Plus and PC Tools' Mirror cannot operate together.

You may have to un-install copy protected software before the product will run. You will be able to re-install your other copy protected software after Disk Technician has run once.

Disk Technician does three types of runs, daily, weekly or monthly. The maximum time for a single monthly run on a single drive is 22 hours. The runs can be aborted but will take up to 20 minutes before control is returned. On my machine with two 30 Mb drives, the daily run takes about six minutes, the weekly run about an hour and the monthly run about four hours per drive. Any power failures during this time and it appears your disk gets scrambled.

Last TV show of season

Graphics: from both the artist's perspective and the needs of the animator are the subjects of the next edtion of the Whole Bit television show. The show is aired on the third Tuesday of every month with the next broadcast scheduled for June 21 at 10 p.m. on Ch. 22o (Ottawa Cablevision) and 22s (Skyline Cablevision). The Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group, along with other computer clubs in the area, is an active participant in this show. No shows are scheduled for July or August. Educational software is the topic of the next TV Bits show scheduled for September 20.

Price is not only consideration

Buying software: shop around for best deal

By Mike Roy
OPCUG

Today, it's easier than ever to purchase software. WordPerfect, Microsoft Word, Lotus 1-2-3 and dBase III Plus can be purchased from computer stores, ordered by phone and can even be imported from the U.S. Buying the software isn't a problem for today's consumer. Price, however, can be as almost every company sets its own prices for the products it sells.

A recent telephone survey of Ottawa-area stores plus published advertisements, personal interviews and experiences, etc. revealed a huge gap between the lowest and highest price for software.

WordPerfect v4.2 was chosen as

the test case but my findings seem to hold true for just about any computer software. I also expanded my search to some products for that other computer company, you know... Apple.

What really surprised me wasn't that the stores had different prices but the extent of the differences. The range for WordPerfect went from a low of

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BBS listing

Boards populars in area

Based on list compiled April 1, 1988 by René Kahle (Additions by André Cyr). The list below shows the name of the BBS, its phone number, baud rates, support and network affiliation.

Beaver Eight	731 2945	300 1200	IBM	163/8
The Bureau	745 8015	300 2400	IBM	163/14
Canada's Capital BBS	233 1879	300 9600	IBM	
Carleton University	564 5672	300 2400	IBM	
Code Conjurers Opus	224 4480	300 2400	IBM	163/6
Concepts BBS	726 1720	300 2400	IBM	163/29
The Contact	839 5889	300 2400	IBM	163/26
Heath	728 4661	300 2400	IBM	
IOCTALP	825 9522	300 2400	IBM	163/20
KEBBS	836 7835	300 2400	Most	163/16
Mindbinder	237 6714	300 2400	IBM	
Navan BBS	837 5826	300 1200	IBM	163/24
Next Generation BBS	592 4850	300 1200	IBM	163/18
Nitefiler BBS	749 1534	300 1200		163/31
Remote Control BBS	737 6058	300 2400	IBM	163/11
Rolling Hills	825 0899	300 1200	IBM	
Room 101	836 7667	300 2400	IBM	163/10
Solsbury Hill	825 2515	300 2400	IBM	163/5
Source Code Central BBS	738 1793	300 2400	IBM	163/4
SuperByte BBS	770 5163	300 2400	IBM	163/19
Synapse	561 5268	300 2400	IBM	
Twilight Zone BBS	225 9074	300 2400	Most	163/1
WholeBit TV News and	521 3690	300 1200	IBM	163/7

Program raffle...

Help one of Canada's top chess players and possibly win the accounting package Calam Accountant. The package is the prize in a raffle scheduled for the June 29 meetings of the OPCUG. Proceeds from ticket sales, at $2 minimum, will go towards blind chess player Donald Deaulau.

The same meeting will feature Nancy D'Amico of Sir-Tech who will speak on accounting and games. Plan to attend this last meeting before the summer break.

AUTOCAD doesn't replace pen or ruler

from page 1

walls? how steep the stairs? No calculator work, no flipping through the rule book.

"Of course we will go absolutely nuts when they change the building code!" Smith said.

Now the building code is not the only thing that will force changes. Autocad is an American program... you know... inches, dozens, pounds, that sort of stuff. Metric IS better in Smith's industry, but with Autocad that meant redrawing 1,200 symbols, from windows to toilets to have the items shown in metric measurements. (Smart manufacturers like Pella now supply drawings of their windows on disk.)

And how hard is it to do that 'drawing in' anyway... aren't there more than 300 commands in the latest version of Autocad? Smith suggests you start with draftsmen: guys who know PAD (pencil aided design) not CAD.

"We trained our people in-house and we don't teach them much about the computer beyond turning it on, bringing up Autocad and backing up to floppies, that's right, floppies stored with their drawings," Smith explained. "Don't throw away your drafting tools. PAD and CAD make a great marriage. You can overlay work from both sources.

"Of course some of the guys go crazy... working away with a quiet smile... and suddenly there's an extra bedroom in there!" Even if the operators are not, the program is pretty stable: "We have only had the program hang-up once in nine months use on seven workstations... and that happened today!" Smith said.

"You can UNDO all the way back to where you started. And because it's an open system, you totally re-configure it into FRITZCAD if you wish. You can make your drawings 30,000 layers deep. And zoom? One fellow spent three hours zooming in before the program gave up on him... so did we."

There's some bad news too: Plotting is the bottleneck in the system. "Everybody is cued-up trying to get a reasonable-sized drawing out in hard copy."

And Autocad has just one more little problem: "they come out with so many updates it drives you absolutely batty to keep up with them!" (But I got the impression that he has every intention

1988 IBM - PC Club Executive

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Enable	Bob Laidlaw	995 3708
PC/AT	Gord Hopkins	828 3834
Packages	Eric Clyde	749 2387
Whole Bit TV Show	Sandy Shaw	733 5088

Disk Technician will format hard drives

Disk Technician operates from its own bootable floppy since it requires its own CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT file. This means that any run requires your attendance at both the start and end of the run.

On one of my disks I'd run one of the Norton utilities which had identified several bad sectors. Disk Technician said there were too many and suggested running FDISK followed by a reformat. I simply tried reformatting first. This gave me a number of bad sectors. When I ran FDISK followed by reformatting, the reformat showed no bad sectors. Perhaps if you don't wish to buy Disk Technician, you might like to try FDISK and reformat your hard disk if one of the disk utilities identifies bad sectors. Also, it was suggested that FDISK could be used to start the DOS partition at a different track such as 1 - 5 if necessary.

The program sets up a safe landing zone for the heads to reduce the possi-bility of errors due to power failures etc. A memory resident program moves your head to this zone after seven seconds of inactivity. This time period can be varied from one to 15 seconds. Additionally, the program will do a low level reformat of a track

...Disk Technician helps keep your computer in tip-top shape...

if it's out of alignment including re-storing the data after the reformat-ting. This could save backing up the entire disk, low level reformatting and then having to restore the files. Copy-ing 30 Mbs on 360 kb diskettes is not fun.

I understand that the program can extend the useful life of a hard disk even after it appears to have crashed. Tips for extending the life of the PC are useful such as removing cards and cable connectors and then cleaning or replacing as needed. The time frames recommended are from 18 months to 24 months for a smoke-free environ-ment, six months where smoking is permitted. It also mentioned that an occasional vacuuming inside to re-move dust helps the machines cooling system and thus prolongs the life. It also gives warnings about static electricity when han-dling the internal com-ponents.

I think the program is worthwhile. I run RLL drives which appear to be more delicate than MFM drives and BBSs have a habit of hard disk crashes. The cost is less than a hard disk and I don't have any prob-lems putting the wrong copy of Disk Technician in the wrong machine. For normal use where the hard drives are not in constant use and you have sufficient funds to replace a drive, if necessary, you might like to consider whether the inconveniences of run-ning and the cost justify the program. I do not intend spending 12 to 15 minutes a day babysitting the ma-chine while the program is running, but plan to run it on a less frequent basis.

I have recently been offered a 3.5" hard disk with a five-year warranty so it appears that the new drives are more substantially built and in the long term these types of hard disk utilities will no longer be needed.

If you have any questions, leave a note on either my board, 163/24 (613) 837 5826, or on the club's board. A note in echo AREA 163 on the club's board will find me more quickly than the general message area.

AUTOCAD has many versions

of keeping up:)

"If I think of my original Autocad version, I now wonder why I bought it!" Smith added. But bought it they did, and use it they do... to the point that every building Minto designs is on Autocad now.

About hardware: "the fancier it is, the more likely it is to have an Autocad driver." A digitizer tablet is much preferred by Minto over a mouse. While Autocad will run on almost anything, discuss hardware with your software dealer to be sure you are getting the combination you want... and need Smith suggested.

Smith had one more recommenda-tion, a book: get 'Mastering Autocad' from SYBEX. "It's by an architect for architects, well written and an excel-lent introduction for novices, too."

Local firm may be best option
Buying software: the price range is staggering

$280 to a high of $715.

At the high end, the store said the list price was $715 but WordPerfect was on sale for $550. Another store said the list price was $699 but he'd let a copy go for $384. Before the call was over, he'd dropped the price to $375.

Another store offered WordPerfect for $475 while at least two Toronto-area stores advertised this package for $280. One OPCUG member purchased WordPerfect for $285.

WordPerfect isn't the only software

to be offered at every price level. Copy II Mac for the Apple Macintosh computer followed an almost identical pattern. One store sells it for $40 but there's a two-day wait as Copy II is not a stock item. The same store that offered WordPerfect for $550 sells Copy II for $59.

IMPORTING

At least one company in the U.S. sells Copy II for $20 U.S. plus another $10 U.S. for shipping and handling. Delivery times are usually a week from the day the order is placed. When the dust settles, this works out to about $43 Cdn.

A Chicago firm advertises WordPerfect for $185 U.S. The ads list the wholesale price. The company actually charges that price plus eight per cent plus an annual membership fee of $10 U.S. When the bill finally arrived, the cost had grown to more than $290 Cdn. And this does not include the cost of the long distance phone call.

Lesson One: while price must play a part in any purchase, buyers must really shop around to ensure what they are paying is a realistic and fair price. Paying more than $500 for a product

Paper deals...

A small 500 sheet package of 40 mil, sells for $9. Larger quantities of 40 mil (heavy) and 30 mil (light) are available for $35. Usually large boxes contain between 2,100 to 2,850 sheets, depending on the mil weight. Price includes provincial sales tax. For more information call your bulk purchasing dealers and ask Terry, Tim or Suzanne at 225 2630 or 226 2615.

More menus for WordPerfect

By André Cyr

In the last issue of the Newsletter I raved about WPMENU2.ARC (WPM.COM on disk-of-the-month number 50) and its capability of offering pull-down menus for WordPerfect 4.x. Since then I've noticed an

alternative to WPMENU2 on the bulletin boards (The Bureau and others).

The alternative is WP-BAR.ARC. While not as attractive as WPMENU2, it does provide all the source codes necessary to customize it to your own needs. It uses PC Magazine's 'SLASHBAR' utility (ie: alt-/) to access the menu features.

For those of us who have already sent in their upgrade fees for WordPerfect v5.0, the source code for this menu utility will permit users to build a 'homebrewed' WordPerfect 5.0 menu interface... perhaps this will lead to a 'local' menuing interface that will spread across North America's bulletin board network.

Thinking about it... this menu interface may be customized for almost any software (eg: Basic, Turbo Pascal, PC-WRITE) for those of us who want the basic benefits of the software without learning all of the intricacies. Food for though...

Bulk purchasing: five years of excellent service

By Terry Mahoney

Tim, Suzanne and I have been involved with bulk purchases and user group members for five years. We operate a small business specializing in Management Information Systems and Scientific Information Systems and related services. We like to provide complete solutions, including hardware and software needs, for our clients.

Through the years we have helped keep our own expenses down through the work we contribute to the users' groups. It has also kept us familiar with the rapid changes in hardware and software. We do not operate a computer store! We assist the user's group with bulk purchasing as our contribution to the club. We do it as a hobby and service to the users group members.

Now the service we can provide has expanded to the point that it encompasses thousands of products. It extends from computers to software, from chips to printers. In fact we can now get almost anything related to PCs.

The volume of items has become a problem. Often we get requests for price lists so users will know what is available. If you can tell me how we can earn a living and still keep a price list of more than 10,000 items on a voluntary basis; I'm willing to listen to you. Keep in mind that most suppliers change prices at least twice a quarter

OPCUG continues to grow

By Claude Jarry
Memberships

There's some BAD NEWS and there's some GOOD news!

The BAD news is that we have cleaned our slate of 169 members who decided to op out or have forgotten to renew their membership in OPCUG. In last month's newsletter, we had indicated that 213 members still had not renewed. This means that, luckily 44 members did renew between the time the article was published and the April meeting.

THE GOOD NEWS !!!

The GOOD news is that OPCUG is still stronger than it was at this time last year when only 272 members remained compared to 342 this year.

While we are saddened by the loss of all these members there are, nevertheless, some advantages. One is that some of the Group's services are now more readily available. For instance, the line-up for the monthly diskette should be shorter and the access to the BUREAU, OPCUG's own BBS should be a little easier.

Speaking of the BBS, as president Harry Gross mentioned at the April 27 meeting, the executive would like some indication from the membership about what it expects from the Bulletin Board... should it be used exclusively for messaging... for downloading of software or for a combination of the two as it is now.

Another advantage of a reduced membership is that there will be fewer name badges on the table at the meetings so that those of you who have yet to pick up theirs will perhaps find it easier to pick it now. Ideally, we should soon come to the point where the only badges to be laid on the table each month would be those of members who joined at or since the previous meeting. However, it's not enough to pick it up, one must wear his name badge at all the OPCUG meetings, seminars and other events.

Coming up...

Journalism and the computer will be the topic of the May 25 meeting of the OPCUG with special guest speaker Tom Hill of the Ottawa Citizen.

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). 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:

June 29.

Volume buying is key to success of service

and have weekly as well as longer term specials.

On request, we are able to provide a ball park quote on almost anything from the catalogs and price lists we receive by mail. This information may be out of date because of fluctuations in the marketplace or because a special is on. If you want to buy, we check with all our wholesale suppliers of a particular item and pass any savings realized back to you. Generally if you see a lower advertised price, or are quoted a lower price, it means there is a special that we haven't received pricing for.

Our experience has been that we can not provide 350 user group members with accurate updated quotes from multiple suppliers unless they are actually ready to purchase, not just shopping around. Ball park quotes are a different matter.

It helps us to know when and where you have seen a better price. Usually we can if you wait too long between the time of the ball park quote and when you decide to purchase, your quote may be out of date.

Recently, we have tried to make more time for you at the meetings by requesting volunteers to assist with disk and paper sales. The absence of volunteers to help us is hurting you.

The Ottawa IBM PC User Group bulk purchasing service exists to serve you, but the service is only as good as you make it. If you require something, tell us. You're not alone. By pooling the group's purchasing power, we can get you better discounts.

Buying software: caveat emptor rule still applies

when the same product is available in the same city for considerably less is just plain stupid.

Ordering by mail appears to be cheaper but there's a price to pay. If everything works properly, fine. But what happens if there's a problem? Dealing with firms by long distance, either phone or by mail, can be frustrating and the buyer may not always get what he bargained for.

Importing, on the surface, appears to offer some attractive features. In many cases, U.S. dealers are selling the latest release of a product before it arrives here. If being first on the block is important to you, then this might be one route to follow. But there can be pitfalls. If they take your credit card number and don't deliver the goods, you may be held responsible for the charges. And then you end up chasing someone in another country. The aggravation may not be worth it.

Lesson Two: in addition to price, service after sales can make all the difference between the buyer enjoying the product or suffering hours of frustration because the seller is in another city, province or even another country. Most of the large software companies do offer telephone hotlines to handle technical problems and many of these hotlines are via toll-free lines.

However, you may be better off paying $300 locally for the product than $280 by mail because you have a real, breathing human being to deal with and not just a voice on the phone or a box office address.

While there are fly-by-night operators everywhere, there are also a lot of reputable firms that want to keep your business. Ordering by mail or importing software has its risks. So does shopping at the neighborhood store. I suppose the really important rule for buyers is caveat emptor - let the buyer beware.

High quality disks return

High quality generic diskettes made by AXIOM are available in boxes of 10, complete with labels and write protect tabs for $7.50 on demand, or $7 prepaid (delivered at the next meeting). Lower quality generic diskettes by DYSAN are priced at $7 on demand and $6.50 prepaid with a minimum order of two boxes, delivered at the next meeting.). Provincial sales tax included. Reasonably priced AT high density diskettes and 3 1/2" diskettes are also available. For more information call 225 2630 or 226 2615 and ask for Terry, Tim or Suzanne, your bulk purchasing dealers.