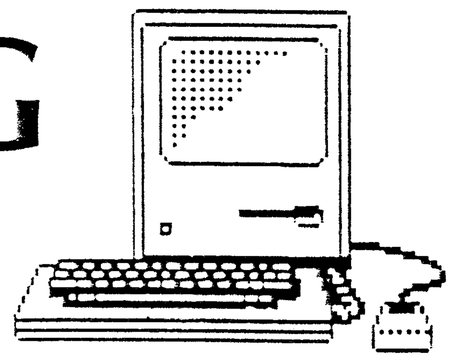
DESKTOP PUBLISHING WITH SPELLBINDER



With the development of sophisticated desktop Laser printers, and in particular the Hewlett-Packard LaserJet printer's popularisation of this form of printing in the IBM PC compatible marketplace, a number of programs have hit the market to control all of its features and others have been rewritten to control the expanded features of the LaserJet Plus.

by JAN MARSHALL

MOST of these programs fall into the class of utilities or post-processors. You create a document with a word processor, then use the laser control program to print the document. Few offer the full functionality of a word processor or page-making tool while simulaneously tapping the full power of the LaserJet Plus.

Spellbinder Desktop Publisher for the IBM PC (with IBM, Hercules or IBM Enhanced Graphics Adapter), which is an expansion of the popular Spellbinder word processing program, includes a number of publishing features that make it one of the most powerful programs available for driving the HP LaserJet Plus, while offering the full functionality of a word processor. The word processor itself is worthy of mention, but with the addition of the page composition and previewing features of Desktop Publisher, it is **a real personal publishing tool.**

To begin with, the word processor is much more than a word processor. It includes several macros — actually separate programs that greatly extend Spellbinder's already impressive power. There is a sophisticated mail merge macro for personalised letters and documents, and a forms handling feature that lets you fill in fields in predefined forms (while logging the date, time and contents of those forms), making it a small database publishing system as well. You can add, subtract, multiply and divide columns and rows, offering limited spreadsheet capabilities. There is also a built-in spelling and grammar checker called Electric Webster.

When it comes to type handling and page processing, the word processor alone is well-equipped. It handles proportional spacing with multiple fonts and has drives for a variety of printers of all types (including the HP LaserJet Plus, but excluding PostScript devices). The tab handling is good for flush left and decimal-aligned tabs, even with proportionally spaced text, though not for flush right or centred table entries.

You can keep certain paragraphs and groups of lines together on a page, and the program will control widows and orphans as well by moving lines to the next page.

The latest release, Version 6.2, also allows full page formats, called style sheets, to be added to a library of formats. Once a style sheet is selected, text can be poured into that format, page after page. On any page, exception or exclusionary areas can be established for diagrams or graphics. The text will automatically fit itself around that area. Both the graphics and the text are then printed in a single pass. This feature makes Spellbinder Desktop Publisher a most powerful tool.

Once the style sheets have been set up, virtually all the operator has to do is input the text. The same text can then be printed in a multitude of different formats, simply by changing the name of the style sheet to be used. A column command can also be incorporated into the style sheet, specifying the number of columns per page, and the gutter width between them, and Spellbinder will automatically do all the necessary calculations and flow all of the text into the column format, for single or multiple pages. Running heads and folios are also very much part of the style sheets, with a flexibility which allows just about any top and bottom, odd- and even-page, running head and page numbering scenario you can imagine.

In addition, "mini-pages" are now included. A "mini-page" is a page within a page. These pages have all the formatting capabilities of their big brother.

Everything, including 1-2-3 files, other graphics and text with different sized fonts and proportionally spaced characters can be viewed on the screen in a WYSIWYG (What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get) view. Moreover, you can zoom out for a full page view on a single screen or zoom in on a minute detail.

Lexisoft takes Desktop Publisher and makes it a real publishing tool. You can use up to 16 fonts from eight font fami-

Desktop Publishing With Spellbinder

lies in a document (bold, italic and underlining are displayed on screen, and a font indicator tells you what font you're using), with very precise control over letter and wordspacing. You can adjust word spacing in tenths of a space, and letter and line spacing in 1/300ths of an inch.

DESKTOP Publisher includes three **soft fonts** that can download and use with the LaserJet Plus: 18-point Old English, and Script, and a 12-point symbol font. The ability to download soft fonts from within the program is a very useful feature. HP offers several soft fonts on disk, as do a number of independent suppliers. You can add these fonts to your Desktop Publisher font list, download them to the printer and use them in your documents.

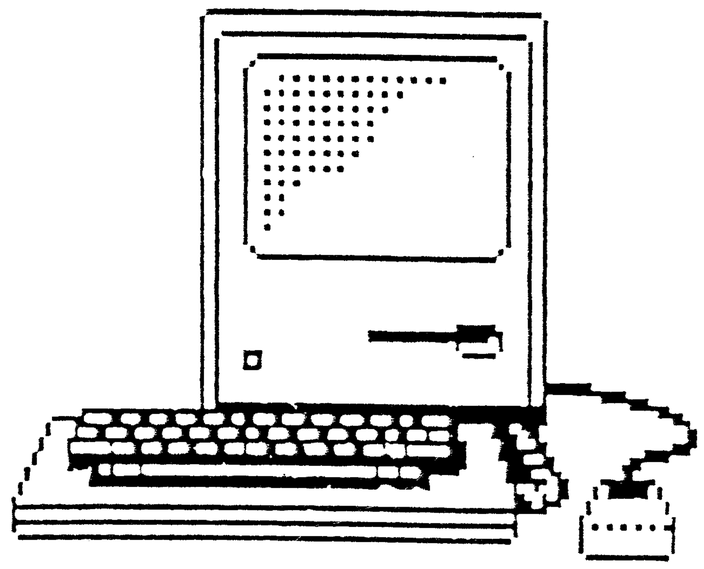
There are also kerning pair tables for HP fonts included with the program, so if you install the kerning pairs and turn kerning on, it will adjust the spacing between pairs of letters that may look inappropriately spaced otherwise. Spellbinder will prompt you for hyphens when it can't format a line within your word-spacing parameters, making it very easy to hyphenate a document and control how tight you set your type.

There are a number of commands that take advantage of the LaserJet's graphics capabilities, including tools for drawing vertical and horizontal lines, boxes, fill patterns, and for framing text (enclosing it in a box, which can be shaded or filled with one of the LaserJet Plus patterns).

In addition to lines and shadings, the "pic" files of line, bar and pie charts produced to graphically represent the information compiled in Lotus 1-2-3, the popular electronic spreadsheet, data base and chart program can be read by Desktop Publisher, scaled to print in a column of text in any size, and located on a page. Both graphics and text are then printed at the full resolution of the Hewlett-Packard LaserJet Plus printer. This makes it a very powerful program for business usage.

Additionally, the ASCII characters used by Lotus, often called stick characters, can be replaced through Desktop Publisher by any other font used by the printer.

Other developments in the current release in the area of graphics include integration of files produced by scanners and by PCPaint brush. This makes it possible to print the output from graphics packages or produce graphical images through Desktop Publisher.



PREVIEWING PAGES

ONCE you have formatted a page, Desktop Publisher lets you preview it on screen and zoom in and out to get more detail on different parts of the page. This page previewing feature is one of the most powerful publishing tools the program offers. It does not show actual fonts on screen (only generic representations in bold, italic and underlined) or shading and fill patterns, but it does show the position of all the elements, giving a good idea of what the final output will look like.

With all this power, however, there are some difficulties, the primary one being the difficulty of learning the program. There are several ways to do most operations and there are dozens of operations, which means many commands to learn. However, this process may be bypassed by those who only wish to use the specific publishing command and use text created in other systems.

Though you can execute many commands (such as font selection) from menus, there are lots of menus: two in command mode, two in edit mode, and two in font selection mode (the function keys perform various functions, depending on which mode you're in). It takes a bit of navigating to learn your way around the menus, though once you have them figured out, they are readily accessible.

For many other commands, you have to remember the one- or two-letter command: V to view a formatted page on screen, for instance, or VA to view the whole document a page at a time.

There are two methods of formatting text as well, depending on what you want to do. You can do much of the formatting from menus, but for many other things, you use dot commands (on a line by themselves with a period at the beginning of the line) and in-line commands (anywhere in the text, starting with an exclamation point) for more precise control, or if you find them easier.

Desktop Publisher's power and command orientation combine to make it a very appropriate tool for a real publishing production environment. Once commands are set up in a file, the program is extremely fast and powerful. Getting those commands set up, however, will require someone with some publishing and word processing expertise. This service is being offered by Software Source, the Australian agents for the package, at a nominal charge, so that those who want the power quickly and have a set series of page styles, can have it without the early learning phase.

As such, we see Desktop Publisher as a tool for a fairly sophisticated user who receives text from several sources, then combines it into finished pages, or for the not so sophistaced user with a series of style sheets. Its real strength is in its ability to tap the full power of the LaserJet Plus, including downloadable fonts and shading and fill patterns, and the fact that it incorporates these features into a very powerful word processing environment with full-page previewing.

The price of Desktop Publisher ($1,420 including sales tax), coupled with the price of the LaserJet Plus ($8,000 including sales tax) and an IBM PC/AT clone such as the Hewlett-Packard Vectra, make it part of an extremely affordable, yet powerful, personal publishing system.

REQUIREMENTS

Spellbinder Desktop Publisher version 6.2 requires a PC with 256K of memory, two floppy disk drives, and either an IBM, IBM Enhanced, or Hercules Graphics Adapter. A Hewlett-Packard LaserJet Plus is required to take advantage of many of Desktop Publisher's advanced functions.

For more information contact Co-Cam at 26 O'Connell Street, Sydney, 2000. Telephone: (02) 221 5755.

CO-CAM