

RANDOM

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July 2004

COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

A short, jaundiced history of desktop publishing

I have to admit that I use the term “desktop publishing” although I’ve never much liked it and I’ve never published a desktop. Still, the term is widely understood even by people who may know nothing about typesetting and it seems less pretentious than alternative terms such as “electronic typesetting”.

In the early 1970s, I worked for the State of Ohio and was involved in preparing some of the publications for the Travel and Tourism Bureau. I typed information, using copious amounts of *Wite-Out* to fix my errors, and then carried pages across the street to the printing operation where someone else read what I had written and typed it into a photo-typesetting machine.

Again and again and again

Then the print shop sent me the output, which I read and corrected. Invariably the typesetter would correct some of my errors but introduce new errors. After two or three iterations of the process, we usually had something that contained only a few mistakes – invariably with projects that were the director’s (*or the governor’s!*) pets.

Later, when I was back in private enterprise, one of my tasks was the production of a newsletter. I still had to type the copy. Although I was using a computer in 1982, the typesetter couldn’t accept an electronic file, so I had to print the pages and deliver them.

By then I had developed a small program that would help me guess how many column-inches of text my typewritten pages would generate. The newsletter had about 40 column-inches available so I didn’t want to come back from the printer with 20 or 60 column-inches of output.

The process involved knowing the point size of the typeface, the amount of “lead” between the lines, the width of the columns, and a special magic number for the typeface. The magic number was in a book. I also had to know how many lines of input text I had, assuming pica type and double spacing – 250 words per page.

When the typeset text came back in one very long column, with the headlines delivered separately because they often spanned columns, I determined whether there was too much copy or too little copy, thanked the typesetter for finding and fixing some of my errors, and marked errors introduced by the typesetter. Sometimes we’d get it right in two iterations that spanned 3 or 4 days, but occasionally the process would take

two weeks. The final step involved gluing the columns of type and headlines in place on boards using wax.

The beginning of the end

About that time, several things happened that eventually put most small typesetters out of business: The laser printer was invented at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center and licensed to Hewlett Packard, two guys who had formed a small San Jose company called Adobe invented a printer-control language called Postscript, a company named Aldus invented PageMaker, and a programmer who had worked on the Gem project at Digital Research quit and wrote a program called Ventura Publisher. A Canadian company created *scLaser*, which allowed embedding type and style information within a text file. The *scLaser* program then converted the information into commands that could be interpreted by HP’s Printer Control Language. The result was the world’s ugliest typesetting: 300 dpi resolution, bad character spacing, few (or no) kerning pairs.

Typesetters looked at it, sneered, and fell over laughing. People like me looked at it, decided the low quality was less important than the speed and flexibility, and stopped sending work to typesetters.

These events didn’t occur simultaneously, but within a few years, laser printers were able to create output at 600 dpi and then 1200 dpi, which is (without a magnifying glass) indistinguishable from “real” typesetting. When the letterspacing and kerning problems were solved, do-it-yourself typesetting had the potential to equal the work turned out by the nation’s small type shops.

In the past 20 years, typesetting applications have continued to improve, but word processing programs have improved, too. Some people look at the capabilities of WordPerfect or Word and wonder why they need Quark XPress, Adobe InDesign, or Ventura Publisher. The high-end publishing applications may not be needed for every job, but it’s worth examining the workflow of your projects before making a decision.

Word processors are designed for letters, labels, and the like. Although they can be used with multi-column, multi-article, illustrated publications such as newsletters, the inefficiencies are enough to remind me of the old days when I had to work with a typesetter. Publishing programs allow the user to save templates with ready-made “holes” into which articles are “poured”. Formatting a newsletter in a word processor may

take several hours for every issue while formatting a newsletter in a professional publishing program will take several hours the first time and only a fraction of the time for subsequent issues.

The professional publishing programs also have features that word processors don't have (and shouldn't have). If you compare a letter to a magazine page, you'll see that both contain words but that the magazine page's design is different from the letter in many significant ways. *If your time to you is worth saving, then you'd better start typesetting or you'll sink like a stone.* (Apologies to Bob Dylan)

A quick run-down of your choices

The "big 2" in publishing are Adobe InDesign and Quark XPress. I've never been much impressed by XPress and early versions of InDesign didn't measure up to Ventura. This edition of the newsletter is an InDesign CS production and I have to admit that I like a lot about how it works. Even so, Adobe's flagship application still omits some features that Ventura users take for granted.

Here is a list of the applications you may choose from:

- **Adobe InDesign:** May have the best typeset output on the planet. The new CS version offers numerous worthwhile user interface improvements. This is the program to beat.
- **Corel Ventura Publisher (formerly by Xerox):** For long documents, Ventura may still be the best choice, but it doesn't run on Apple computers and Corel's future isn't assured. With the combined mismanagement of the product, first by Xerox and then by Corel, it's lucky to still be on the market.
- **Adobe FrameMaker (formerly by Frame Technologies):** This is a powerful application that's particularly strong for publications that must be produced in several languages. Like Ventura Publisher, Frame was never able to attract a large following.
- **Adobe PageMaker (formerly by Aldus):** Acceptable for small documents. Anything more than a 4-page brochure will tax your patience.
- **Quark XPress:** The king of over-priced, under-powered applications. XPress became the darling of the Mac design crowd because, when it arrived on the scene, the only other choice for Mac users was PageMaker.
- **TeX and LaTeX:** TeX is a typesetting system written by Donald E. Knuth, professor emeritus at Stanford University. He designed it to typeset math equations in his books, but it has been expanded, particularly with the LaTeX templating tool, to more general work. Those who have taken the time to learn how it works love it. It is free under terms of the GNU General Public Licence ("Copyleft") and is available for most computing platforms.
- **Microsoft Publisher:** Oh, please. This is a fine application for school projects and is adequate for people who are willing to cede design control to Microsoft.

Which to choose? For nearly 20 years, my recommendation has been Ventura Publisher and if you're using that application, there is little reason to change. But if you're in the market now for a new publishing application, I strongly recommend that you take a look at Adobe's powerful InDesign. And, yes, that is a tear you see in my eye. **B**

Protect your computer

No matter how much time and effort you spend on security, someone can always find a way to defeat it. Computer security is a lot like home security, though. Just as good home security can make your home a less appealing target for a crook, good computer security can make your computer a less appealing target for a creep.

Here are some important steps you can take to keep your computer and its data safe.

Be careful about what you download. Some freeware programs and peer-to-peer programs like Grokster, Imesh, and Kazaa come with several spyware applications that will use system resources and slow the machine. They may create conflicts with other applications and cause those applications – or the operating system – to crash.

Dell says about 12% of all its support calls deal with spyware. According to Microsoft, half of the calls tech support receives with requests for help with computer crashes involve spyware. "Half" is a conservative estimate because many victims think their problems are simply the result of Windows malfunctions.

The National Cyber Security Alliance estimates that 90% of personal computers have spyware installed. That may seem ridiculously high, but EarthLink tested 1,000,000 computers belonging to its customers and found more than 29,000,000 spyware applications!

Always install security fixes from Microsoft. When Microsoft releases a patch for the operating system or Internet Explorer, install it. Make sure the Java virtual machine software is also up to date because security problems in these applications can allow hostile applications to be installed without your knowledge or permission.

If you have one of Microsoft's later operating systems, set it to obtain updates automatically.

Beware ActiveX applications. ActiveX "applets" are programs that can interact with the files on your computer and the operating system. Just as you wouldn't open a random executable file that someone sent you by e-mail, you don't want your browser to run ActiveX applications without your knowledge.

Open Internet Options from the Control Panel and select the Security tab. Click Internet, press Default Level and then Custom Level. Now you'll have a list of options that you can turn on or off. In the ActiveX section, set "Download signed ActiveX controls" to Prompt, set "Download unsigned ActiveX controls" to Disable, and set "Initialize and Script ActiveX controls not marked as safe" to Disable. **B**

on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

*"You are responsible
for everything
your people do
or fail to do."*