

Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group

3 Thatcher Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2G 1S6

March, 1988

28 new members registered

It's renewal time for OPCUG members

Twenty-eight members sent in their renewals by mail before the last meeting and another 38 renewed at the desk. There were also 28 new members registering at the desk.

At the end of December, there were 428 members in our Group. By the end of February, 135 had renewed and another 25 renewed by mail between then and mid-March. It would appear that more than 60 per cent of the membership intends to stand in line at the registration desk on March 30 to renew their membership.

While many have the same attitude towards paying income tax, there are considerably more people to process the tax returns than handle membership renewals at the OPCUG. There are two alternatives to a long

wait for the remaining 268 members. The first one is to leave a completed renewal form together with the 'exact change' of \$20 dues in cash or by cheque (\$45 if you wish to subscribe to the Diskette-of-the-Month) at the desk as you come in. Your member-

ship card will be available at the desk at the April meeting.

The other possibility... and by far the best one... is for you to send your renewal by mail using the form you will find on page 8.

Some TLC for your Sysop

By John Whelan.
BBS 163/24 Sysop

This article suggests ways of keeping one particular Sysop (SYStem OPERator) happy. Other Sysops may have different ideas but the basics will probably be the same.

Bulletin boards are run by a

strange breed of people often called Sysops. In the U. S. the average life of a bulletin board is about three months. This leads to a number of problems; finding new boards before they close

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SLED offers many features

By Jackson Hibler
OPCUG Ottawa

Desktop publishing programs have sort of put the full-powered word processing programs into a time warp, haven't they? It's sort of like the early days: one program to write... another one to print. Oh, I know you can do columns and footnotes in WordPerfect, you can show italics on screen with Microsoft Word... and lots more... if you can remember or find

the proper control sequences in the nested menus or manuals... it's in there somewhere.

But there are limits: most of which have to do with fancy page layout and type faces. That's where desktop publishing comes in... and where what little familiarity of using your word processor goes out!

First you have to import the documents from Multimate, or whatever.

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:

April 27.

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Ottawa IBM-PC Users Club

Sysops can provide lots of help for BBS users

down, eliminating the frustration of attempting to use bulletin board phone numbers that have been disconnected and learning where the good bulletin boards really are. So, by being kind to your local Sysop you save him throwing his hands in the air and saying forget it as he closes down his bulletin board.

Other problems include phone company exchanges being tied up as people try to reach the board by dialing Joe's BBS every 17 seconds. These same people wonder why they experience problems reaching any BBS. Systems do vary but most operate only 25 per cent of the day. There are very definite peaks of high usage; early mornings between 6.30 and 8 a.m., lunch time from 11.30 a.m. until 1.15 p.m., after supper from about 6.30 p.m., and again from 9 p.m. until midnight.

Improving service costs money. The average Sysop spent from \$2,000 to \$4,000 on his equipment. He or she spends at least \$10 per month for the phone line and many spend much more on echo and matrix mail. The bulletin board user might belong to a pay board but many simply use the freeboards. Pay boards, by the way, count as a commercial service and are likely to pay commercial phone rates to Bell. To improve the system users can do quite a bit. Different boards have different characteristics depend-

ing on their Sysop. Some love graphics, some are only interested in Echo Mail, others are interested in and maintain enormous collections of shareware, some specialize in C-64 software. If you reading this, you probably are mainly interested in IBM-PC related topics and files.

If you can find a board that seems to match your interests then stay with it, and use the message areas to communicate with other board members. It gives valuable feedback to the Sysop that they are on the right track.

Many boards either have the entire node list or the Ottawa-area part as a list of bulletin boards in the Ottawa area. Beware because all that means is there is a computer that will accept Matrix mail during National Mail Hour. At least one board in Ottawa only operates during National Mail Hour and that board does not accept human callers. During the day that phone line may be used for other purposes.

If you have the choice of calling at either 300, 1200, or 2400 baud rates, call at the highest speed that both you and the board support. Most boards can operate at 1200 baud, so if you are thinking of buying a modem buy one that can handle the 1200 baud rate. If you get a bad line ... call back, you normally will get a different routing and the noise should go away. If it doesn't, try calling back at a lower baud rate, 300 baud is more tolerant than 1200. By the way, a 2400 baud modem running at 1200 baud usually will manage noisy lines much better than a 1200 baud modem will.

If you don't get through immediately, set the auto repeat dial to wait at least three minutes before redialing, this might prevent the phone company from getting nasty and reminding you that it is illegal to call more than 10

times with an auto dial feature. Usually you'll get through just as quickly

Different telecommunication programs running the same protocols can take different amounts of time to download the same file. Try to use one of the faster ones, such as Telix that remembers the filename you asked to be downloaded so that you don't have to type the name a second time.

When you download a file, use a protocol with a large block size such as Y-modem rather X-modem, the file is downloaded faster resulting in shorter times on the board so others will be able to log on. The exception is on a noisy line when blocks are being resent. The smaller block size of Xmodem can sometimes be faster.

Uploads can be a problem for a Sysop. This may sound strange, but whilst uploads are normally welcomed, some specialized boards may not have the room to store more than 5 Mb of downloadable files. Their reason for existence might be to exchange information, between 'bobin lace makers' or 'butterfly collectors'. They might not want your latest flashing whatever.

Other boards have problems when you load up the same version of a file they already have. When using the Bureau (the club board) download the Bureau.arc file and check it with an editor or word processor search function to see if that file exists, sometimes the file names can become hidden in a different area or the 'new additions' bit at the bottom.

If you upload a version of a program that is an earlier edition than the one on the board, all you are doing is making the Sysop work harder by trying to discover which copy must be thrown out. At best your upload gets slung out as unwanted. At worst the

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For sale ...

IBM color graphics adapter (CGA card), only \$90. Also parallel printer port card for \$30 or best offer on both items. For more information, contact Marc Riou at 733 2092 after 5 p.m.

But BBS users have responsibilities too

new improved version gets accidentally overwritten by your version which has a number of 'undocumented system features'.

Most boards have a user manual, the OPUS boards certainly do. Download it and READ it. It will explain useful features such as how to reduce the menus to either single characters or just a prompt. Another feature allows single string commands, such as FA3DY opuser.arc. This particular string goes to the file section, switches to area 3 then downloads the file opuser.arc using Y-modem protocol.

On an OPUS board if you call in to read the messages you might like to consider using the '=' command. This simply reads the messages non stop. You can either capture to disk for later reading or use the Control S to stop and Control Q commands to slow the messages down so you can read them again. Please, if you have a general query, leave a message in the general message area and not in the messages to Sysops area. One of the other users may be able to assist you. Sysops are not the font of all knowl-

edge and many prefer a quiet life. They can always answer your questions in the general message area.

On the Club's board (the Bureau) many files are marked off line. If you're lucky the off line file might be stored on my board 163/24 (613) 837 5826. If it's a local call for you, check before asking for the file to be reinstalled on the club's board.

To make you Sysop really happy, use the script file capabilities of Telix, Procomm or other telecommunication software to call the board during the

quiet times of mid-afternoon to download files, messages and even enter messages.

Please don't shout at your Sysop, he only runs the board for fun. If it isn't fun he probably won't do it. If playing on bulletin boards isn't fun for you perhaps you should think of doing something else.

1988 IBM - PC Club Executive

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Our mistake ...

Observant readers of the February, 1988 edition of the Ottawa IBM - PC Users Group newsletter noticed a number of mistakes. We apologise for these errors. Some were human, others were software problems. We're working hard to correct all of the problems to bring you the best newsletter possible.

SLED makes word processing easy to use

from page 1

Next you discover you have to strip away the formatting and fonts that you had carefully set up in the original program in the first place. Then you have to learn yet another set of arcane commands and procedures... and heaven help you if you need to do some heavy editing once you've got that far!

Wouldn't it be nice to own a quick and easy program that would just let you produce the words? A program that could clean up the formatting mess created by other word processors and put out straight ASCII text that any other program could take in

without a hiccup? Well, I think I've found one!

Instead of starting my search at the top end of the ASCII word processors (P.C. Write) I started at the bottom: EDLIN. My, was that a mistake! EDLIN is neither fast nor powerful. Its commands and procedures are Byzantine. Its only virtue is its ASCII output. Working up from those depths I tripped over FRED (an IBM-EDITOR clone) and E88 (a much more powerful programmer's editing tool) but these things are neither easy to use nor really designed to perform the basics of word

processing efficiently. Then I discovered SLED on our bulletin board...

SLED is a hybrid. It has its roots in those full screen, programmer's editors, but it knows what word processing is all about too. SLED understands how to make use of the keyboard that IBM gave us (something that Word Perfect still can't get right)! HOME, END and all the other cursor control keys are supported, and their reach is extended with control-key combinations. SLED uses mnemonic ALT-key combinations to give us things like elegant block handling and formatting: ALT-X marks the spot; ALT-C, -M or -D copy, move or delete it; and ALT-F will reformat one or all of your paragraphs depending upon how long you hold the key down. How long is that? I find most functions are finished before I can even lift my finger from the key!

The function keys are used to initiate the fancy stuff: list, load or flip through your files (Yes, you can have multiple files in memory and copy blocks between them, too!); search and replace; file saving or discarding... each task has its own function key. You are not forced to search through scattered levels of different function keys (a-la WordPerfect) to accomplish a given task. ESC always lets you back out of what you started and don't want to finish. The help screen is only an ALT-H away. When it would be a good idea to ask the user a question, SLED does so. The bottom line shows the path and filename you are working with, the line and column location of the cursor... even the time of day, if you wish.

Aside from producing text for uploading to a BBS or exporting into a desktop publisher, what about printing directly? To print a draft just save the file to disk (F4), go to DOS (ALT-

IBM - AT system for sale

IBM-AT Computer with 640K and fully loaded with a 20Meg hard disk and a 1.2 Meg floppy, Hercules card with IBM monochrome monitor, AST advantage card supports up to 2Meg of additional memory. Two serial ports, three parallel ports, game port and Microsoft Mouse.

Lots of software and manual including:

- DOS 3.2 with Technical Reference Manual
- IBM-AT Technical Reference Manual
- Basic Manual
- Macro Assembler
- Pascal Compiler
- PFS Graph
- SideKick... And more

All in excellent condition with original boxes...	\$3,600
EPSON FX-100 Wide Carriage Printer with extra ribbons and letter quality software driver...	\$350
TTX-1014 letter quality daisy wheel printer with extra wheel and ribbon...	\$250
VOTRAX personal speech system with 64K processor handles speech, music, and sound effects...	\$300
Koala Pad with drawing software...	\$25

Contact: Gord Hopkins (office) 763-3590 (home) 828-3834

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SLED is a good program for working with ASCII text

Y) and call PRINT.COM, DOS's quite sophisticated background spooling printer driver, to do the rest. Left margins and page breaks can be quite easily added at print time too: first save the file as above, then hit ALT-N to rename the file (it's still in memory) with a .PRN suffix so you won't attempt to edit this version of

the file later. (Leading blank spaces are the bane of ASCII text file editing, they can.. easily become scattered throughout reformatted text.) Now hit CTRL-HOME to go to the beginning of the file; hit ALT-X to mark the beginning of the block and then hit CTRL-END to go to end of the file; now hit ALT-X again to

mark the end of the block; HOME to the move the cursor to the beginning of the line; and then ALT-= (the +/- key) 10 times to force a 10-column left margin into the document. (All this happens quicker than it takes to tell it.) If it is a big file, I use the F10 key or RETURN to add 11 blank lines every 55 lines of text. I then save the file and call PRINT.COM as before.

And double spacing? Forget it.

Speaking of formatting, SLED can be easily configured to default to the format that you like to work with. It always runs its text from flush left on out to the width you set with ALT-W. (I use a 60 column screen so that I can force in a left margin when I want to, but SLED can handle lines much wider than the screen if you want.) You can make these (and many other settings) temporary or permanent

with ALT-P and the SAVE key (F4). The documentation says you can trigger SLED to automatically reformat files from almost any other program to fit your default when you import them. I couldn't always get that to happen on my machine, but reformatting a file once it is loaded is simplicity itself, using ALT-F.

nal location when that block has been moved to the wrong place and is immediately deleted; and expansion of the ALT-D (block deleting) buffer to hold other deletions so as to give a modest 'undo' capability.

Automatic paragraph reformatting during editing and a wee printer driver to give double spacing and such would be nice too...
But just as it stands,

...the designer describes SLED's word processing abilities as 'primitive'. If integrated spelling checkers and printer drivers are necessary to the definition of word processing, then I suppose that's quite so. But if word processing means the manipulation of text, this is definitely not a primitive program. I would love to see a later version...

SLED is a joy to use. I thought I would only call upon it to edit batch files, and clean up my word processor's documents for submission to our newsletter's desktop publishing program. Yes, it does that most nicely, indeed. But I find I am writing more and more of the

SLED has the ability to get rid of the blank columns that many ASCII conversion programs leave at the left margin... a feature worth the price of the program alone! ALT--(the minus key) deletes such columns in the same way that ALT-= was used to add them above... but be careful, once deleted, a marked column is gone, not saved to a buffer like ALT-D does!

So what's wrong with it, then? Darned little! The designer describes SLED's word processing abilities as 'primitive'. If integrated spelling checkers and printer drivers are necessary to the definition of word processing, then I suppose that's quite so. But if word processing means the manipulation of text, this is definitely not a primitive program. I would love to see a later version add by-the-word cursor moves and deletions; automatic return to a moved block's origi-

originals on SLED in the first place... like this article!

SLED is probably not for those who regard an automatic choke and transmission as the quintessence of automotive technology. But if you are one of those who cheered the return of the manual choke found in the 4-speed and 5-speed European and Japanese cars, then you will want to give SLED a spin: it's got four-on-the-floor and never chokes up. If enough of us send in the very modest \$15 registration fee, maybe Sam Wilmott will be encouraged to give us a 5-speed!

SLED is available on our BBS in the word processing file area. Documentation and the designer's address are included. Try it. I think you will like it.

COMMAND.COM target of latest 'virus'

by Jackson Hibler
Ottawa PCUG

It's an apt analogy, 'virus'. Just a wee bit of DNA in a protective sheath that wriggles its way through the cell wall; attaches its self to the nucleus' vast array of DNA and turns it to its own purposes: first, reproduction; then propagation; and finally, destruction.

Lets carry the analogy **further**: disease prevention. First line of defense: fever. Viruses can't take the heat. Second line of defense: strengthen the cell wall; keep `em out. And what if they get in anyway? Antibodies: antiviral bits of DNA tailored to find and kill their prey.

Lets look at the current nasty and see what can be done about

the COMMAND.COM virus.

This virus is described as a small amount of code that has been inserted into the 'stack' area of the COMMAND.COM program. Because space for the stack is built right into the program code, the fact that some of it becomes occupied does not show up in the total byte count of the program. There is a limit to the stack space, and thus a limit to the size of the virus if it wants to stay hidden. That limit may prevent it, in its present form, from subverting other functions that check code size, or control read/write permissions, or change the date the program was last modified. But new "mutations" might gain new abilities.

Reproduction occurs first: whenever a disk containing an infected COMMAND.COM is 'touched' by an uninfected COMMAND.COM... the use of TYPE, DIR, COPY, DEL or other internal DOS commands upon that tainted disk is sufficient... the virus will try to copy its code into the stack space of the uninfected COMMAND.COM program before it does what you commanded, even if your first command was to DEL B: COMMAND.COM! If B:'s was infected, it will infect A:'s before it's deleted. (FORMAT.COM is external to DOS, and is believed to be a safe procedure with this virus.)

Propagation is next: after each 'reproduction' the virus sets its internal counter ahead one. (Its buying time for the infection to spread.) When it reaches four reproductions it goes into its destruction mode: it will erase any file it can reach.

One suggestion is that every program, in the public and private domain, be fingerprinted in such a way that object code changes from the author's original can be exposed. One approach would be to run a CRC check of the program and compare the results with a list published in the public domain.

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Club adopts new DISK policy

Generally in response to the wave of virus programs that seem to be circulating, some of which piggy-back on the DOS command processor COMMAND.COM, it was decided that none of the disks in the software library should be bootable.

To users of the software library, this means that you will no longer be able to start your computer with the monthly disk or DISK-00. Instead, start your computer with your DOS disk and then place the monthly disk in drive A. Log onto drive A and type MENU followed by a carriage return. This will load up the menu system.

On the plus side, there will now be 40K more of useful programs on each monthly disk!

Some help is already available for members

Naturally, the list must be widely distributed to protect it from mischief, updated systematically, and the CRC program used must be carefully documented before someone gets into it as well.

Keeping the heat on will definitely slow the spread, but it won't stop the infection where it has already taken hold.

First defense: Blood Test. Has the date of your own **COMMAND.COM** changed? If so, it's sick. Until we can publish a complete list, you will have to check your original DOS diskette, IF you are in doubt after looking at the date of your working copy of ".OMMAND.COM. Do this ONLY if you have a safe environment: floppy-only system or hard disk switched OFF. Cold boot from your original DOS diskette and note **COMMAND.COM**'s date (DIR A:). If it's earlier than your purchase date, put your archive diskette away and check every other copy. If all check out the same... read on.

Second defense: Monogamy. Stick to your Number One! Open no archived programs that have included **COMMAND.COM** with the package. Many of us use **PKXARC.COM** to quickly open archived programs we

download from our BBS. Unfortunately, unlike **ARC.COM**, **PKX** cannot be selective. So stick with **ARC.COM** and go to the peep show first. If you see **COMMAND.COM** inside the archive ...dump it; don't bring it home!

It might be possible to use many non-DOS directory programs to examine and clean up suspect archives and disks. There is a new program called **SPKX.COM-SPKX.ARC** in Area 20 of the OPCUG BBS that may give selective file capability to **PKXARC**, but I haven't tried it yet.

Third defense: Separate Bedrooms. Create an isolation environment: a 'scratch' diskette with a copy of your own **COMMAND.COM** in drive A: the diskette to be tested in drive B: and NO drive C:! Power down your hard disk... fit a switch(!)... and do everything from your floppies. There is NO reliable way to isolate your hard disk while it's running. **PATHS**, **SHELLS**, subdirectories, and write-protects are as easily penetrated as they are to set up. If you find **COMMAND.COM** on the new diskette, go ahead and delete it, but don't forget to purge your scratch diskette in drive A:... it will have become infected when

you **DELETED** **COMMAND.COM** on drive B: if that one was infected. And ask your sources for **COMMAND.COM**-free diskettes. (Isolation is also a good environment for testing unknown programs, it won't help with delayed-action trojans once you bring them out of isolation.)

Two 'antibiotics' have already shown up in the public domain: **FLU-SHOT.COM**, which tries to guard **COMMAND.COM** from disk writes and **VACINE.COM**, which wants me to load it into my C: drive root directory before it tells me how it works... (Editor's note - **VACINE** is used by the club's software librarian and he hasn't lost its hard disk... It will be part of the March 1988 disk of the month.)

I wish I could be more optimistic, but this problem is not going yield to a strictly technological solution. You might ask yourself how many of us will take even some of the precautions outlined above: Some, for sure. But ask yourself how many of us will contract a social disease despite all the warnings. Some, for sure!

Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group

3 Thatcher Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2G 1 S6

Membership renewal

Name: _____
(Please print or type clearly)

Address: _____
(Please include complete mailing address, Apt. number, street, road, crescent, etc)

City: _____ Prov: _____ Code: _____

Home: () _____ Business () _____

Memberships in the Ottawa PC Users Group (OPCUG) are \$20.00 per person and are valid until March 31, 1989. Members may also subscribe to the OPCUG's Disk-of-the-Month (DOM's) service which entitles the subscriber to ten consecutive DOMs. Please make cheques payable to the OPCUG and mail to the address at the top of this form.

Check one:	
New:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Renewal:	<input type="checkbox"/>

Membership fees:	
Membership:	\$20.00
Disk subscription:	\$25.00