

# Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group

3 Thatcher Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2G 1S6

April, 1988

Program is powerful and flexible

## Powerhouse: more than just a database

by Jackson Hibler OPCUG

Funny how they're all coming down to our level, isn't it? I used to think the mainframe and mini types were too proud to stoop... but maybe it was really a lot more difficult than it looked. The early PCs were pretty short of memory; had awfully small disk storage; and their CPUs didn't have much horsepower either. So I guess it wasn't that easy to give us a taste of what the big guys were running.

All that's changed: desktop PCs can rival the minis now. And the 'big software' is starting to trickle down. But PC people don't have time for batch job processing style software,

and all the arcane that goes with it. They want interactive computing. Anything that comes down from on high has got to be flexible and has got to allow fiddling and tinkering or it won't be welcome in the PC world.

Strange, but wasn't that one of the reasons for Powerhouse's success in the mini world? All is not roses in the mini world either. It seems one of the problems with minis is that the big fast CPU has to do an awful lot of work when it must do everything for everybody... and all at once, too. So why not let micros do some of the work? Prototyping, programming, data entry... why, there's a whole lot that

PCs can do at the local level, and then dump their results back into the big machine.

Aha! Let's port Powerhouse down to the AT! We can have the same language running across various architectures: portable applications! My goodness, here comes Micky Gill with COGNOS' Powerhouse PC under his arm. Now, Powerhouse is NOT just another database, we are told. Just because it can let data migrate between Lotus, dBase, ASCII and DIFF, that isn't all it can do. It's a programming language designed to set up business, even scientific, appli-

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### Matrix and echo mail

## Getting the most from your BBS

By John Whelan  
BBS 163/24 SYSOP

This is a guide to bulletin boards, matrix mail and echo mail. It is a very basic explanation that provides some of the jargon. It is not an idiot-proof guide on how to use them.

A bulletin board is a place where messages can be left by one party and read by others. You have no control over who reads your message. You do hope, however, that someone will receive the information and possibly reply to your questions.

In micro-computer terms, bulletin boards are computers that can be contacted electronically via a modem. They began with a simple message area. If you wanted to know the answer to a problem, you left a message and hoped you would receive a knowledgeable reply. Later someone wrote a program, a utility perhaps, that he wanted to share and the program could be down-loaded for others to use. At first only the source was left. Later, with reliable transfer mechanisms, such as X-modem, the object code or a

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cations and then allow them to be modified and maintained as conditions change. Conditional compilation allows a Powerhouse program set up on one machine to be modified to fit various architectures. And yes, it's got extensible file systems, scrollable data fields, supports Xenix, DOS 3.2 and OS/2, windows (small 'w').

And yes, it's got: referential integrity! That means table validation, descriptive terms, pick-a-number tables, overlay descriptions for input numbers, scrolling through tables... Hey! I thought this wasn't a database! Some pointed questions from the floor

revealed that although the file system is extensible to fit the capabilities of a given machine's architecture, the file architecture is not yet published, so

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...yes, it's got extensible file systems, scrollable data fields, supports Xenix, DOS 3.2 and OS/2, windows

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direct access by other programs is not possible at the moment... Links to

COBOL? No... Macros? Not yet... XT compatible? No, Powerhouse is too disk-intensive for slow XT's... Move Powerhouse files to dBase? Sure! Put Powerhouse file to a sub-file and run a conversion program - but that's the only way to do it so far... How's it compare to ZIM? ZIM is a relational database. Powerhouse has a flat file database built in, but it is NOT a database... it's a 'forth generation programming language' (darn it). The demo diskettes were quickly snapped up... one remains for our specialty library.

There was no door prize offered, but at \$1,295 a crack, I suppose that's not too surprising.

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### Pull-down menus

## WordPerfect gets some help

by André Cyr

WordPerfect is a wonderful and powerful word processing program. It's also a complex program. How frustrating it can be trying to remember the correct series of keyboard commands to operate the program. Is it 'Shift-F6' or 'Control-F6' to centre the text? This is where WPMENU2 comes to the rescue.

If you don't want to continually refer to the WordPerfect manual or a third-party book, then WPMENU2 is what you need. WPMENU2, available through your bulletin board (THE BUREAU) or other local bulletin boards, provides a series of pull-down menus featuring the most commonly used WordPerfect keyboard commands. Entering WPMENU2 is simple, you simply use the ALT-Z

command.

This utility is also mouse-driven if you run MS/PC DOS 3.x or higher. In non-mouse environments, the WPMENU2 pull-down menus are controlled from the keyboard for WordPerfect 4.x.

Unless you're a particularly skilled WordPerfect user, this utility program, at the touch of ALT-Z, will give you access to the basic powers available in WordPerfect.

However, there is a price to pay for those of us who work with WordPerfect with the CLAVIER or CLAV201 utilities to obtain French characters. For everything to work properly, you must save your text and reboot if you want to use the dictionary or thesaurus. Otherwise, you run the risk of having your computer crash.

### 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:

May 25.

Antibodies can create problems

## COMMAND.COM virus still in the news

by Jackson Hibler OPCUG

Last month we looked briefly at the development of two 'antibiotics' for the COMMAND.COM virus: FLUSHOT.COM and VACINE.COM. Unfortunately, the first program... now in its third version called: FLUSHOT3.COM... has become the target of mischief itself.

A trojan program called: FLU4TXT.COM has been circulated on some BBS boards. This is NOT a text file, but is a .COM program that might fool someone into thinking that it is just a description of version four of the FLUSHOT program. Indeed, it starts out by printing some of the documentation that comes with FLUSHOT3, but then goes on to demonstrate how the hard disk can be trashed by doing it to yours! Beware of .COM files masquerading as .TXT or .DOC files! This event brings to mind a story circulating that an ASCII text

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...the first program... now in its third version called: FLUSHOT3.COM... has become the target of mischief itself.

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file can contain a trojan or a virus.

In the UNIX world of dumb terminals driven by escape sequences, this IS possible. An ASCII file could contain ESC sequences that would trigger the terminal to take action... that's how the terminals work. Indeed, that's how many printers work! But DOS does NOT use or respond to

escape sequences, so such sequences would be ineffective if read by your PC. This time you can relax... unless you operate your PC as a dumb terminal in a network!

While we are on the subject of rumor, here are two more: First rumor: "Are you sure this COMMAND.COM thing isn't a hoax? I haven't seen it, have you?" Let me put it to you this way: it doesn't matter. I have seen the C code instructions for creating a virus. I have read descriptions of how to wipe files and FAT tables with very little code. The species is real. We must prepare our defenses, regardless of how far this particular virus gets.

Second rumor: "The big guys planted this virus themselves to scare everybody into direct purchases from them... cutting out the middlemen, the little programmers..." You know, you always hear these stories. They don't make sense: it is not that there isn't someone crazy enough to do it... someone HAS... but it won't benefit IBM or Microsoft; it will hurt them as people turn away in confusion to the Macin-

tosh or UNIX. (My wife has just found another reason to stick to her Epson QX-10 and CP/M, thank you very much!) I'm sure the big guys are working hard to isolate this virus, and perhaps many mutated versions too. If they can, they might come up with a

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Don't be mislead. Because you have not experienced any problems with COMMAND.COM does not mean there isn't a problem...

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counter virus that will latch onto the bug and neutralize it, or expose it. But a 'cure' might be as troublesome as the disease (ref. FLUSHOT, above). My guess is that the big boys will be among the first to get on board a public domain CRC Registry that would help separate the good from the bad BEFORE a program is run!

## Patch needed for PC-jr menus

by Chris Taylor

It has been brought to my attention that the menu system used on the monthly disks does not work on the PC-Jr. Specifically, the pop-up program SLASHBAR doesn't pop-up.

I would welcome a patch by any of the assembler whizzes in the Group. In the meantime, I would like to point out that what the program provides for the monthly disks is trivial.

All that SLASHBAR provides is

the ability to view or print any of the files ending in .TXT. You can do exactly the same functions as SLASHBAR does from the DOS prompt.

To view any file on the console, simply type "SHOW filespec". To create a formatted printout, simply type "PR filespec". Following are two examples;

SHOW DISK-49.TXT

PR AN-INTRO.TXT

## The BBS: more than just a message centre

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code or a machine executable version of the program could be left. Thus file areas appeared.

As time progressed it became apparent that some boards attracted more knowledgeable users than others. Some questions became more complex and less easy to answer. One solution was for everyone to call many boards and ask the same question on each board. Not a very convenient solution. Another solution was to copy the question to a second board and any answers copied back. This was done by the sysops. This had some interesting results... both the readership and the number of answers grew.

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### ... sysop plays important role in operating a BBS...

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This copying back and forth lead to Matrix mail. A message is left on the board but not sent to other boards until later, usually when there is little activity on the boards. For example, I might dictate a message at 7 p.m. but not send it to other boards until 1 a.m.

The original work began on the west coast of the United States. Because of the time zones, 1 a.m. on the coast is 4 a.m. in Ottawa and that just happens to be national mail hour when many bulletin boards communicate with each other completely unattended.

Knowing which board to send the message to was also a problem. The solution was to pass or 'echo' the message to many boards. The echoes were divided up into subjects since both the users and their tastes differ

and each sysop decides which echoes to carry.

Echo mail can be extremely useful for some types of queries. I was feeling mystified by the difference between ANSI terminals and VT100. When I

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### ... The BBS system isn't limited to a city or even a country, messages can and do go around the world...

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asked the question in TELIX echo, the answer came from Perth, Australia, which shows just how far some echoes can travel back and forth.

Both echo and matrix mail can be sent to a board much faster than it takes for you to type the message in once you've logged onto the board. By placing messages together in a file then using data compression techniques, the total transmission time needed to send this mail is reduced. Efficient protocols such as Z-modem and Janus (the latest I heard of allows file transfer in both directions at the same time with some modems) are often used. When mail is transferred from board to board over long distance telephone lines, transmission speed becomes important.

Some boards now have high speed modems, (9600 baud or more) simply to keep the long distance phone bill down. I think modems operating at 2400 baud are the fastest ones currently operating on the Ottawa net but there is a 9600 baud modem sitting in Toronto as part of the 'backbone' that

echo mail is received from and transmitted to. I suspect someone in Ottawa will purchase a 9600 baud modem shortly.

Echo mail has become quite sophisticated. National mail hour can be filled with long distance traffic on a busy board and the bulletin board programs have become more flexible. Today OPUS and many other boards can accept and send mail anytime the sysop chooses. When the calling board sends or 'crashes' mail it has a special code that starts 'YooHoo', if memory serves me correctly. At the end of the message is a list of boards that have already seen the message (the 'SEEN BY' lines) so the message is sent to each board only once.

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### ... one BBS network boasts more than 3,000 member boards ...

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There are about 3,000 boards associated with the Fido net so a single line message saying "Thanks Alf" might not look large but, by the time it has been seen by a few boards, it has become quite a large file to transmit.

Matrix mail has also become more flexible. Messages may have a file attached or ask for files to be sent (file request) in a similar way that is used for down-loading. Not all sysops have implemented all of these features and there are also such things as password protection, message receipts and other goodies but these really are beyond the scope of an idiot guide.

# Sign up now Membership deadline draws near for 213

Membership in the Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group ends on March 31 of the next year following a renewal or original membership application. If you join the Group in June, 1988, your membership is valid until March 31, 1989. This method is used so that all memberships are due for renewal at the same time. During January, February and March, members are encouraged to renew their membership before the end of the Group's year. This allows those members that do renew early to continue to enjoy OPCUG's many benefits.

This year, 213 members of the Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group had either forgotten or failed to renew their membership and technically became non-members. However, if you are part of this group, this newsletter is being sent to you one last time to encourage you to renew your membership before your name is struck from our list. We have even provided the renewal form to make your task that much easier. But this is definitely your last chance. Please don't let your membership lapse.

## Many face last chance to renew membership...

On another subject, we're asking members, once again, to pick up their name badges at the next meeting. The badges are color-coded to help you retrieve yours with a minimum of trouble. The color is related to the first initial of your surname. The colors and the respective first initial of the surnames are as follows:

with the letter A or B your name

badge is BLUE

with the letter C or D your name  
badge is YELLOW

with the letter E, F, G or H your  
name badge is GREEN

with the letter I, J, K or L your name  
badge is PURPLE

with the letter M your name badge  
is GREY

with the letter N, O, P or R your  
name badge is ORANGE

with the letter S or T your name

badge is RED

with the letter U, V, W or Y your  
name badge is BLACK

PLEASE pick your name badge and KEEP IT with you. One way to remember your name badge is to place it near or with your diskette carrier or the notepad you usually take to the meetings. Besides introducing you to fellow members it also serves to identify you as a club member.

## 1988 IBM - PC Club Executive

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## Utility can generate forms and graphs

by Terance P. Mahoney

Channelmark Corporation's 'Power Up!' software is an unusual line of utilities. A superficial look can leave you asking yourself: "Why would anyone want to do that?". Don't be fooled. Think in dollars and they may make sense to you.

### FormsFile

Take FormsFile for example. It uses your printer in graphics mode to produce business forms. A superficial look left me asking why I needed someone else's purchase order, or invoice, or ... I can buy generic invoices, purchase orders etc. Nebs will sell me a 100 for \$36.50. Larger quantities would lower the unit cost, but I don't need a 1,000. There are 100 unique forms in FormsFile, and there are more than 140 templates for creating your own forms.

Yes, there is some overlap with different versions of the same basic form and no, this is not a drawing program. It prints forms using your printer's graphics capabilities. It does not type on the forms or fill in the blanks for you. It is a stockroom full of your blank forms. It prints your personal or company name and address on each form. You can customize existing forms by changing the descriptive text. For example, I changed a box on an order form to read amount instead of date.

The layout and contents of each form are well thought out. Some forms reminded me of things I might have overlooked if I was working from scratch. Some of them would be good templates if you expect to design custom forms. Overall appearance is

good when printed on any of our Epson printers. The Canadian list price is \$89. In forms? Where would you store 100 boxes of forms? How much would they weigh? How often do you use a form? Occasionally? FormsFile is worth the price even if you use it only to produce internal forms.

### Grid Designer

Grid Designer is closely related to FormsFile. It uses your printer in graphics mode to produce different types of lined paper. No description except for a two line header and/or footer. It doesn't sound very exciting, but do you have more than 200 different types of lined paper in your office?

As an accountant I'm used to buying columnar paper and would think it foolish to start printing my own. However, I frequently need a few sheets of paper of a particular type. I have paper sitting around that I'm using at the rate of 10 sheets a year or less. Think of Grid Designer as an efficient stationery supplier on a disk. Pads of paper are inexpensive, but have you ever run out of the one you needed on the weekend.

Grid Designer produces both vertical and horizontal lines, normally or sideways. Lines can be dotted, dashed, single, double or bold. Reproduction is as good as most in house printing departments produce.

It allows you to produce custom paper with lines where you want them. Designing a custom page is as easy as setting tabs for your word processor (easier in many instances). Even so, I would have preferred the ability to edit some of the existing templates or copies of them. Grid designer allows you to use one of three underlying

scales: 1/10 inch, 1/12 inch and 1/16 inch. It requires the same scale on the vertical and horizontal axis (a weakness I hope the next version corrects).

Channelmark describes this as 'A handy pen and ruler on disk'. Personally I sometimes have difficulty drawing straight lines with a ruler. Grid Designer does a better job for me. Canadian list price is \$59.

### Conclusion

My personal computer philosophy is to use magnetic media whenever possible and paper as little as possible. A personal computer is a tool to be exploited.

When you must use paper: forms and specialized papers eliminate costly errors. These programs fill very specialized needs. I recommend them to the small business man, the professional and even for internal use in larger offices. Producing forms in large quantities may require photocopying to be time efficient as graphics modes on printers can be slow.

### PostScript

Sigh! Unfortunately these programs have forced me to deal with reality. I have always wanted a program that would not just draw forms on my printer but would also fill in the boxes at the same time, preferably from a data base. The sad truth is that it would have to use a printer in graphics mode for quality output and would be too slow on a dot matrix printer to be practical.

# Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group

3 Thatcher Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2G 1S6

## Membership renewal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print or type clearly)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please include complete mailing address: Apt. number, street, road, crescent,

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 (DOMs) service which entitles the subscriber to 10 consecutive DOMs. Please make cheques payable to the OPCUG and mail to the address at the top of this form.

### Check one:

New: ☐

Renewal: ☐

### Membership fees:

Membership: \$20.00

Disk subscription: \$25.00