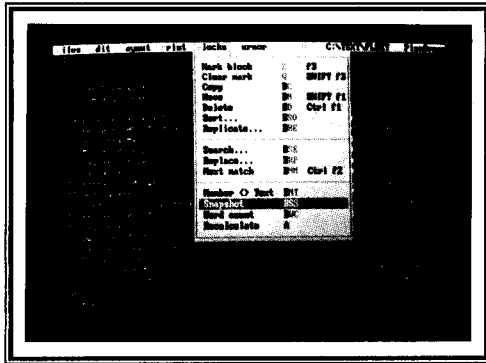# MORE THAN A PIPEDREAM

Mike Williams takes a look at a unique product which provides the user with a word processor, spreadsheet and database all at the same time.

If you have not previously encountered the likes of PipeDream then you may be in for something of a shock. We have all heard of integrated word processors, spreadsheets and databases which allow data to be transferred from one to the other. Computer Concepts' Inter-ROM series of applications for the BBC micro is just such an example. But that is clumsy compared with PipeDream.

On loading, PipeDream presents a typical spreadsheet layout of rows and columns creating a matrix of cells. And of course you can use it for just that purpose, as a spreadsheet. But don't be put off - if you want to use it as a word processor, just go ahead. The spreadsheet layout is just as amenable to word processing as to spreadsheet use. If you want to embed a small spreadsheet in your text just do it, or if you want to refer in your text to values elsewhere in a spreadsheet it is just as easy. Not only that, but text and numeric data may just as easily be treated as records within a database for retrieval as required.

HISTORY

PipeDream is an evolutionary product. Its origins lie in View, Acorn's word processor for the BBC micro and Master series, and it is written by the same author, Mark Colton. PipeDream as a concept first appeared as View Professional for the BBC micro, and subsequently was adopted and bundled in with the Cambridge Computer Z88 where it has won high praise. More recently PipeDream has been released for the IBM PC and compatibles (that version will run on the Archimedes under the PC emulator), and now a dedicated ARM version is available.

PipeDream for the Arc consists of a disc and 325 page manual supplied in a less than sturdy cardboard box complete with dinky metal hinges. The production of the manual is to a high standard, and the whole appearance, apart from the collapsed box, is that of a quality product.

USING PIPEDREAM

It is best to think of PipeDream as a sheet on which text, spreadsheets and databases may all be set up. A menu bar at the head of the screen gives access to to six pull-down menus. Any of these may be accessed by pressing the Alt key and the initial letter of the menu name. A scrolling bar in each menu is then used to select any option, and a good many of these generate a further dialogue box.

But that's not all. All the menu options can be selected by direct keyboard input, and many may also be selected using the function keys. Indeed, users of View will find strong echoes of that software in PipeDream's function key layout.

WORKING WITH TEXT

The first step in using PipeDream is learning how to move about the sheet, up, down left and right. Text may be entered starting in any column and will extend to the right till the right-hand margin for that column is reached. Multiple column format is easily achieved with separate right-hand margins for each column.

All the expected word processing operations are catered for and work well. Blocks of text are highlighted by moving to the start and the end, and may then be moved, copied or deleted. Text can also be surrounded by special markers to indicate the use of bold, italics etc on printing.

You cannot set tab stops and use Tab in the accepted way, as the Tab key is used to move

over the underlying grid. The columns can be used as a substitute, but indenting the start of paragraphs is impossible other than by using spaces. On the plus side, PipeDream has the facility to recover accidentally deleted text using the Paste command, and the same facility may be used deliberately to provide a cut and paste function.

Apart from tabs, I find that using PipeDream as a word processor offers much the same facilities as my favourite View. But altering column widths to set up a table is not as convenient as editing a ruler, and the way PipeDream handles word wrap in relation to columns takes some getting used to. I also feel a built-in spelling checker is almost essential for any self-respecting word processor these days, if not a thesaurus too. However, the former at least is said to be on the way.

WORKING WITH NUMBERS

Numbers and expressions, including a wide range of special functions, may be entered into any slot if first designated as an expression slot (this can also be set up as a default). Expressions may consist of numbers, dates, functions, conditions, strings, ranges, lists and slot references (a range is a consecutive set of cells, a list of individual cells). These may be entered individually or combined using various mathematical and conditional operators. Fourteen mathematical functions are provided, plus 11 financial functions (e.g. loan repayment, cashflow etc.), 13 general functions and 9 database functions.

I set up a spreadsheet application duplicating one I use regularly with another package. Entering expressions of various kinds was reasonably straightforward, as was the replication of formulae with correct adjustment of cell references. These references can be entered into expressions by moving the cursor to the appropriate cell, but this is not as automatic as in Logistix for example, and requires an extra key depression (Ctrl-f6).

Recalculation is automatic whenever an expression is modified, and quite fast enough in the application I tried. Single cells and blocks of cells may be formatted as required (number of decimal places for example), and a useful

feature enables leading or trailing characters (such as £ and % signs) to be added to blocks of cells automatically.

I have used Logistix (see review in RISC User Issue 3) quite extensively on the Archimedes, and in my view PipeDream is neither quite as convenient to use for spreadsheet work nor as powerful. But then Logistix does not have PipeDream's integration of word processor and spreadsheet facilities.

DATABASE FUNCTIONS

Any data may be inserted in rows and columns to form a database. Values may be sorted or matched, and some nine special functions will perform tasks such as totalling and locating maximum and minimum values. The facilities are a long way short of any full-blown database system, but useful none the less in the context.

OTHER FEATURES

The menu system works well and provides a wealth of functions. Page layouts are readily created with headers and footers as required with good control over printing including various highlights such as italic and underlined text. Printer drivers are supplied for the Juki 6100 and Epson FX80, but other drivers are readily created by editing the files supplied using PipeDream itself. There are also facilities to enable files to be transferred between PipeDream and Lotus 1-2-3, and of course there is complete compatibility between the Archimedes version of PipeDream and those running on the PC or Z88.

CONCLUSIONS

PipeDream has much to commend it, not least an excellent manual. There may be word processors or spreadsheets which offer more in their respective applications, but for its unique combination of talents PipeDream has much going for it.

Product	PipeDream
Supplier	Colton Software,
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	149-151 St Neots Road,
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Price	£113.85 inc. VAT.

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