PipeDream – The Ultimate in Integration?

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The claim for PipeDream is that "No other integrated software gives you the power to blend text and numbers so completely". The more I use PipeDream the more I have come to believe this claim of Colton Software. There is no need to create text in one window and carry out calculations in another. No need for special "listing documents" in order to read the fields of a database. All the features of the software, wordprocessor, spreadsheet and database can be on the screen at the same time, in the same document, without the need to cut and paste, exactly as they will be printed. PipeDream files do not discriminate between WP, spreadsheet or database. At £113.85 PipeDream is a bargain.

How Easy is it to Get Started?

You must make a copy of the disc before you do anything else. Then follow the simple instructions given in the first 18 pages of the manual, which explain how to install the software on your machine. Type PD /12 to load PipeDream then press the <Alt> key to gain access to the easy-to-use pull down menus and you are away. Beginners will have few, if any, problems.

The Word Processor

When you start up PipeDream you will see the ....A........B etc of a spreadsheet where you might expect to see a ruler. You will find row numbers appearing as you type in text. However, unlike a spreadsheet, your text is not limited to the width of the spreadsheet column – you can use the whole width of the page. Nevertheless, so far as the sheet is concerned you are in column A, right up to the place where you set your right margin, default 71.

Using PipeDream simply as a wordprocessor, you will find you have the usual standard features expected of a modern powerful WP package. They are available from the function keys, the <Alt> key and from pull down menus. The novice will probably find the pull down menus most useful whereas the more experienced will quickly learn to use the <Alt> key sequences. These include block copy, search and replace, case changes etc. together with a paragraph reformat function. I found the best way of varying the left margin within a document was to set column A to a suitable width and then <Tab> to column B for the inset material. Column B appears to the user as a semi-transparent overlay of column A which becomes opaque only when text is typed into B over the top of text placed in A. Text in multiple columns

is easily achieved with facilities such as individual column reformat, individual right margin settings and block copy between columns. You can add a document, or even part of a document to one already in memory. By fixing rows, you can hold part of a document on the screen while the rest is scrolled by. This is useful if you need to copy parts of one document into another. I found it easier than using the multiple windows offered by some other WP packages.

Printing

Printer Drivers are supplied for the Juki 6100 daisywheel and the Epson FX80. About a dozen pages of the 325 page manual are devoted to the subject of creating printer drivers. If, for example, your printer supports microspacing, foreign characters, bold, underline, italics, superscripts, etc. then you might need to study this section to get the best out of the package. However, you can probably use one of the printer drivers supplied to start with. The output is truly WYSIWYG with a good screen representation of bold, underline, etc.

The Spreadsheet

As a spreadsheet, PipeDream uses the ....A...........B etc. columns, which can be individually set to any width. It contains all the usual operations such as insert or delete row and column, number format settings, manual or auto recalculate as well as a comprehensive replicate. Snapshot replaces a slot expression with its current value; text can be converted into expressions, and vice-versa with a single keystroke. The range of expressions include the usual arithmetic ones, trigonometrical, business and statistical functions. In addition, there are facilities for using logical operators, conditional expressions, lookup tables and for reading from and writing to files. Rows or columns from one spreadsheet can be merged with another held in memory. Rows or columns can be "fixed" whilst the rest of the sheet is scrolled past the fixed slots; this makes the copy option simplicity itself. Dates can be entered in UK or American format. Although the spreadsheet area is quoted as 536,870,912 (yes, half a billion!) each way, in reality it will be limited by the memory of the machine. Leading or trailing characters, such as £ or % signs can be added to any slot without affecting calculability. Files from Lotus 123 can be exchanged with PipeDream. Perhaps the feature that users of other spreadsheets will notice more than anything else is the speed, but what else would you expect? – It is an Archimedes, after all!

The Database
The spreadsheet columns double as fields for the database so you can have up to half a billion fields per record and, maybe, half a billion records per file! Of course it is limited by the amount of memory in your machine. The sort facility is elegant if simple. The sort can be numeric, alphabetic or chronological. In conjunction with the option to save selected rows as a file, sort provides a powerful file splitting feature. Search and replace "borrowed" from the WP or Replicate from the spreadsheet can be used on any database field. Columns can be interchanged with a block move and the result printed as it appears on the screen. Free text can be added in separate rows to annotate the fields or even as comments between sets of records. A database file, when saved in a suitable format, will provide data fields which can be merged with a form letter for mail shots or invoicing.

Integration
What is outstanding about PipeDream is the degree to which the WP, spreadsheet and database are integrated. It is true that you can not see the join. The reason is that there is none to find! This is not just another integrated package consisting of three separate programs. All the features of the software are available whether you are dealing with text fields, numeric fields, mathematical expressions, free text or, quite often, all of these within the same document. For example, you can introduce any of the "spreadsheet" expressions into the middle of a paragraph of free text. Of course, with this degree of integration, you would expect and indeed get a printout of exactly what you see on the screen.

For the Expert
The expert will soon become familiar with the <Alt> key commands, but PipeDream also offers customisation. The experienced user can redefine the keyboard, reconfigure the printer driver and, with macro files saved to and read from disc, execute a sequence of commands as if they were entered from the keyboard.

File Compatibility
PipeDream is available for the Z88 portable and for MS-DOS machines (PCs). The files are compatible with those of View Professional. I borrowed a Z88 and transferred a few Z88 PipeDream files. File transfer worked perfectly and the Z88 owner was most impressed by the speed of the Archimedes spreadsheet. I was so impressed by the way PipeDream works on the Z88 I might even buy one! We hear a lot these days about making one machine accept software designed to run on another machine. The PC Emulator for the Archimedes is only one of many such emulations. However, what the user is interested in is applications, not operating systems. Someone who has learned how to use PipeDream on a PC will be able to use the Archimedes or Z88 version immediately and transfer files between them with no messy conversions.

Instead of printing out a PipeDream file from the Archimedes, output can be directed to a file. This review was created in PipeDream and then (because I know Paul Beverley likes it) directed to a file which I loaded into Wordwise. The problems were trivial (e.g. the sign for pounds "£"). Lotus files can be interchanged, Lotus macros are preserved by PipeDream and can be sent back to Lotus unchanged but they are not usable within PipeDream. I spooled out a large data file from ViewSheet, the monthly employment statistics for about 30 years, loaded it into PipeDream and set up the usual time series spreadsheet with 12 month moving averages and seasonal variation. The whole exercise took about ten minutes and worked beautifully. I then added some heading text and selected the portion I wanted to print. I had no problems at all!

Limitations
What is missing? Well, if I have to find something, it is the inability to insert graphics within the text in the way that say Graphics Writer will. A 'phone call to Colton Software confirmed what I suspected: they are working on this upgrade but it might be a little while before it comes on the market.

Summary
Colton Software have produced a software package which fulfils all the requirements of a fast spreadsheet, easy to use database and powerful wordprocessor. We need a new word to describe this degree of integration: there is only one type of file, a document containing text, data, numbers and expressions, the commands usually peculiar to one type of field can be used on any other. The beginner will find it easy to get started and the experienced will be able to use the advanced features to customise or get even more speed. The document files are transportable to the Z88 and to PCs since, on these other machines the same applications software is also available. ◢