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MS-DOS 6.0 - Feature Packed, but Dangerous; Technology Alert, June 1993

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MS-DOS 6.0 — FEATURE PACKED, BUT DANGEROUS

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Microsoft's newest version of DOS, version 6.0, is packed with new features. These sorts of features, heretofore, have required the user to buy costly add-on products.

Memory Management — The "MEMMAKER" function optimizes conventional and high memory, and competes effectively with add-on products such as QEMM and 386Max. In casual testing, it was able to free up more memory than QEMM.

Disk Compression — Perhaps the most compelling reason to upgrade to 6.0 is the superior integrated disk compression. "Double Space" creates compressed logical drives and optionally puts all or just some of your files on the compressed drives. It works with both hard drives and diskettes. It knows about certain files that cannot be compressed, such as the hidden BIOS files and the Windows Swap file, and automatically puts them on the uncompressed drive. It competes well with both Stacker and Double Disk.

Backup — Both the DOS and Windows-based version of the backup system can be installed. Microsoft has integrated Symantec's backup system within DOS. It is both fast and compresses data onto the target backup media. Its performance is comparable to programs like PC Backup and Fastback. However, *it does not back up to tape drives*. Only disks and diskettes are in its repertoire.

Antivirus — Both the DOS and Windows-based version of the antivirus system can be installed. The system is an adaption of Central Point's antivirus program. It performs well, but is not as thorough as McAfee Associates' ViruScan, Symantec's The Norton AntiVirus, and products from others.

Undelete — Like the Antivirus and Backup system, both the DOS and Windows-based version of Undelete can be installed. Like Antivirus, the system is an adaption of Central Point's Undelete program.

Defragmentation — "DEFRAG" reorganizes your hard disk and removes any fragmentation within files, speeding up disk access and reducing head wear. It also sorts all files within a directory on criteria of your choice. It performs much like PC Tools or ORG. It is an adaption of Symantec's defragmentation tool.

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File Transfer — "Interlink" allows hot file transfer from one computer to another. With it, one computer's disks actually become logical drives to the other computer. Only one computer even has to have DOS 6.0. It performs much like PC Hooker or LapLink.

Multiple Configuration Files — For those of us who have to use more than one configuration depending upon the components we want to optimize and for those of us who have to maintain those multiple configuration files manually, DOS 6.0 has some excellent features. DOS 6.0 displays a menu that allows you to choose the configuration file you want. In addition, it allows you to select whether or not you want to run your AUTOEXEC.BAT file at all. This is especially useful when you have added statements that are hanging up the system.

Enhanced Help — By typing "Help xxxxx" where xxxxx is any DOS component or program, you can get an explanation on that component.

Enhanced Directory Manipulation — You can now "deltree" to delete an entire directory, without having to first empty it. You can also "move" files from one directory to another instead of having to copy, then delete, them.

Installation — Installation is made quite easy, to the point of being a "no-brainer." Many users have installed it with no trouble at all.

The Dangers

Please note, however, that some early installers of 6.0 have experienced problems. Most of the problems relate to disk compression. These problems can be as minor as certain programs not working properly because some of their files cannot be compressed and have to be moved to an uncompressed disk. Some users have experienced major problems such as their computers not being able to boot up after installation. Microsoft is working on these problems. As a "bailout," the DOS 6.0 installation process includes the creation of an "uninstall" disk that allows you to reverse the 6.0 installation process. There have been some comments about the thoroughness of the uninstall. It apparently leaves some 6.0 files on your disk.

Users are advised to proceed with caution. You must rigorously follow the installation guide. If you have a questionable disk drive, you should not opt for disk compression. CHKDSK/F must be run before installation to assure that you have no lost clusters in your File Attribute Table. If you have multiple computers, install and test 6.0 on one computer before proceeding to the next. Report any problems to Microsoft.

Should you buy DOS 6.0? If you need the features, DOS 6.0 is certainly a cost-effective way to get them. However, if you already have purchased add-on programs to obtain these features, DOS 6.0 may be of limited value to you.