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Software review: WordPerfect 5.1 for windows

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WordPerfect 5.1 for Windows
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WordPerfect Inc.'s entry into the Windows application marketplace has been long awaited. This version of WordPerfect 5.1 eliminates some of the less desirable characteristics of the DOS version, and adds a number of features which greatly enhance the program's ease of use and capabilities. All of the features of the DOS version of WordPerfect are available. Files can be moved back and forth from DOS WordPerfect to Windows WordPerfect with no loss of information or conversion necessary. In fact, the file format isn't only compatible, it's exactly the same. Also recognized are 20 word processor file formats, simplifying file conversion. WordPerfect for Windows uses the Common User Access (CUA) compatible keyboard as the default. This assigns keys that are similar to those used in other Windows applications. However, an optional keyboard driver allows you to use WordPerfect for Windows with the same keystrokes as the DOS version. This feature lessens the impact of those using a Windows application for the first time.

The WYSIWYG interface, which shows text features such as graphic images, font sizes, and characteristics such as boldfacing and italics, eliminates the "guess-what-the-document-will-look-like" aspect of the DOS version. Users can open and switch between as many as nine documents at a time, and the Windows interface allows users to switch to another application, such as a spreadsheet, generate a graph, create a graph file, and then switch back to the WordPerfect window and import the image into the current document. In addition, WordPerfect for Windows allows you to preview graphic images and fonts, on screen, before bringing them into the document. To import a spreadsheet all you have to do is click on Tools, Spreadsheet, and fill in a dialog box with the filename and range name of the file of interest. WordPerfect for Windows brings in the spreadsheet as a standard WordPerfect table, ready to be edited or modified.

The major features of this "trade-up" include a customizable "button bar" for point-and-click commands, a ruler (similar to that included with PageMaker) for easy formatting, editing modes for figures, drafts, and graphics, preretrieval views of text and graphic files, and a file manager for navigating among and manipulating files on storage media.

The "button bar" allows users to configure a set of frequently used commands (such as the command for changing fonts, engaging bold, italics, or underlining) so that they can be accessed by pointing and clicking on the buttons along the top or side of the document window. The ruler gives you immediate access to formatting tasks most frequently used, such as setting margins and tabs. The ruler also lets you rearrange column formats by pointing and dragging the column margins in the ruler to new locations. To make tables you click on the tables button on the ruler and indicate the number of rows and columns in the table. It immediately appears in your document, ready to be filled with text or data. Graphics selection, placement, and editing is simple and straightforward. To find a particular graphic, the Viewer lets you move through files in 16 formats, including PCX, TIFF, GEM, EPS, and BMP. The figure can then be chosen and immediately placed in the document, where it can be moved and manipulated by clicking and dragging. (Word-wrapping, however, is poorly implemented in this first Windows version.)

The File Manager allows you to search your entire disk for a specific file, show the attributes of all your documents, and preview a file before you retrieve it. You can use the File Manager to launch other Windows applications. In fact, the File Manager can be used as an improved replacement for the Windows' File Manager. In addition to the tasks listed above, the File Manager can be used to manage your hard drive. Deleting, renaming, and copying files is easily and efficiently handled. Files can be moved from directory to directory, even from one drive to another, simply by dragging the file with a mouse to the new location.

There are several areas where WordPerfect for Windows needs improvement, however. You are unable to create drawings or charts through integrated modules. You have to launch another Windows application and bring it into the document through the Windows Clipboard. Also, macros created in the DOS version cannot be used in WordPerfect for Windows. Macros in the Windows version record results of keystrokes, macros in the DOS version record actual keystrokes. Users with libraries of macros, especially large or complex macros, will find the move to Windows to be time-consuming. Although a macro converter is included in the Windows version, it is not adequate for converting complex macros.

WordPerfect for Windows requires a minimum of two megabytes of memory while the DOS version will run with 640k. Adding more memory will increase the number of applications you can run at the same time, and, in many cases, the speed at which the applications will run.

WordPerfect 5.1 for Windows is an excellent first effort at a Windows product. When subsequent updates improve upon this first effort, it will likely become the leading word processing software in the Windows market.