

# Journal of International Information Management

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Volume 3 | Issue 2

Article 7

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1994

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### Recommended Citation

Wilson, Robert D. (1994) "Software review: Novell DOS 7," *Journal of International Information Management*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 7.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/jiim/vol3/iss2/7>

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# Software review: Novell DOS 7

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The claims that DOS is dead, like those regarding the health of COBOL, are still premature but gaining credence. Still, criticisms of DOS remain and are warranted. For example, it remains a 16-bit operating system, cannot provide true multitasking or protected-mode operation, nor does it provide any support for multithreading. Some of these criticisms are addressed in the latest incarnation of the former DRDOS6 from Digital Research, Inc., now owned by Novell, Inc. When Novell purchased Digital Research (DR), it acquired DR's DOS compatible operating system. I have been running DR's various versions for several years. Now, as bundled from Novell, it is a good product made even better.

The now standard utilities such as backup, disk compression and optimization, and memory management utilities offered by Microsoft's MS-DOS are all present in Novell DOS 7 (ND7). What sets it apart is the inclusion of a multitasking kernel and built-in copies of Personal NetWare (Novell's peer-to-peer operating system) and Universal NetWare Client. This ensures support for all NetWare servers and virtually any network card available. ND7 includes both DOS and Windows versions of their third-party backup and antivirus utilities. Running on 286 or 386 machines, ND7 can use DOS Protected Mode Services (DPMS) and run well-behaved drivers either partially or fully in protected mode. You will load the DPMS driver when you are using the disk compression, caching program, and/or the Personal NetWare server. In so doing you can run these programs outside of conventional memory.

If you have at least a 386, multitasking is available. You can allocate the amount of time the CPU allocates to the foreground and background tasks. If you elect to load the multitasking software, both the Multi switch and DOS Protected Mode Interface (DPMI) are added automatically to your CONFIG.SYS file. ND7 provides this multitasking by creating virtual 8086 machines. This causes your applications to behave as though they each had their own CPU. To do this you must use the EMM386 memory manager. The Task Switching Only is also available as an option. Here the program running in the background is suspended. This is aimed primarily at the 286 machines.

If you prefer, the multitasking or task switching software can be loaded from the command line. The manual provides very good support for troubleshooting.

As would be expected, the network software is implemented seamlessly. The manual provides step by step instructions to set up a peer-to-peer network as well as software enabling you to use your machine as a client. While the manual may not turn you into a network administrator, it will certainly give you a clear understanding of networks and allow you to set up your own.

The printed manual is complete and logically laid out. There is also a complete on-line manual, called DOSBook. By typing DOSBook at the command level you are provided with detailed information about all of the ND7 command set and other aspects of the operating system. Here you can search for text or use a menuing system to obtain answers to questions you may have. Once in the section of interest, tabbing to the highlighted keywords and pressing enter takes you to an explanation or description of that topic. You may also print the current displayed screen or the entire section (chapter) if you wish.

While I have had no compatibility problems with either DOS or Windows programs, there was one glitch encountered after installation. I had augmented my 350MB hard disk with the "Plus Hardcard" 100 MB disk. When I attempted to access it, the system reported that the drive was 'write protected' and showed no files. A call to technical support (which is courteous and exceptionally capable) explained how to resolve the problem. I would suspect that this and any other 'bugs' will be corrected in future releases.

If you are looking to replace your current version of MS-DOS or PC-DOS, ND7 provides an excellent alternative.