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# Software review: OS/2 2.0

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Since I don't write advertising copy, what you read here may be different from what the few others who do write about IBM's new operating system OS/2 have had to say. You may have noticed that more ink has been devoted to an operating system, I'll leave it unnamed, that has yet to be retailed than to OS/2 which has been on the desk for more than a year.

Let me get several of the technical issues out of the way. As most computer users know, OS/2 is a preemptive multitasking, multithreading operating system. The system supports massive amounts of physical RAM. It provides a DOS emulator (the equivalent of DOS 5) and provides for compatibility with Windows 2.x and 3.0 in either standard or real mode. OS/2 also gives both DOS and Windows applications the support provided by EMS, XMS and DPMI (extended and expanded memory services). It has 32 bit programming interfaces and the ability to set up multiple booting mechanisms. An installable high performance file system is incorporated as is a batch oriented programming language, REXX. Disk caching is built in and there is no need to purchase separate memory managers since those types of services are provided directly by OS/2. The system comes bundled with a number of other productivity tools, schedulers, calendars, built-in spreadsheet, word processing program, editors and of course some recreational (games) programs.

What this all means to the more casual users among us is that you really can have a number of applications running simultaneously. Each application has access to as much as 730K memory. While it is possible to have more than 200 DOS windows open (the windows would be tiny indeed), I have rarely run more than three. For example, certain projects require selecting specific records from the database for use in another program. At the same time I have had to prepare forecasts with my spreadsheet program while editing a word processing file. With OS/2 I have started each of the programs in their own session, issued the appropriate commands and then returned to the Workplace Shell to print a file while the other applications run in the background. Sometimes, just to monitor the progress of each application, I run them in DOS windows. Since each of the applications is separate from the others any problems don't affect the system or the other programs. Note too that you can configure each of the sessions differently if required by the application being run.

The object oriented Workplace Shell invites use by those who dislike command line driven operating systems. Open a DOS or OS/2 window though and you can be at the command line level. Being object oriented, you are able to run applications, print files, configure sessions without menus in the Workplace Shell. Depending on how you set up your Workplace Shell, the objects control and coordinate all of the tasks for you. You, if you want, see only

the results of the tasks. One example is where you wish to change something in an article you are writing. You would just click on the folder icon, maybe called Great Articles, and then click on whichever article you wish to edit. This causes whatever word processing program you are using to come up with that article already loaded. Had you been in the middle of sorting a 10,000 record database when the inspiration hit to edit your article, the sorting would continue in the background. However, should you feel lost without menus you simply click on an icon to invoke a context-sensitive menu.

On the other hand, you should believe what you may have read about installation: At worst, it is tedious. OS/2 is very sensitive to fragmented disks (not a problem if you use the high performance file system) which can cause problems at boot up time. Version 2.0 is a single user system and does not include LAN Requester (bundled with the earlier version) although it is available separately. There are bugs in the system but with diligence you can obtain what IBM calls Corrective Service Diskettes. Documentation is on-line but this can be frustrating when you don't know what question to ask. Printed manuals are rudimentary and really only enough to get you started. The tutorial (on-line) is very well done and you would be wise to use it. Despite what you will read from IBM about hardware requirements, to have the system run up to your expectations I believe the hardware I'm using may be the minimum acceptable requirements. My system is a 486DX, 33 Mhz unit with 8 MB of RAM and a 300 MB hard disk. Although you can operate OS/2 from the keyboard, a mouse is definitely recommended.

If you move between the worlds of DOS and Windows and have at least an occasional need to work with two or more applications at the same time, then OS/2 is worth the time and cost to install.

NOTE: Version 2.1 is now available. However, I have not yet purchased the product. I understand that most, if not all, of the glitches in version 2.0 have been corrected with this release.