

Software Reviews

To Warp or Not to Warp?

by [Scott MacDonald](#)



I'm sure by now you've heard about Win'95. You've seen the hype, commercials, and the posts on the Usenet. Your friends might even have it installed on their machines. You've also probably heard of the challenger to Microsoft's operating system, IBM OS/2 Warp. It has quietly entered the scene with humorous commercials, and a firm base of support in part of the Usenet. But is it right for you? This article will hopefully help you with decision as the time to upgrade comes around. This article is not meant as a comparison between Win'95 and OS/2 Warp, if you want that simply post a note on comp.os.os2. advocacy asking for one. You will have over 50 responses by the end of the day. Very biased responses, but responses none the less. The purpose of this review is to give an informative (yet

obviously opinionated) look at what OS/2 Warp is all about.

Q. How did you find out about OS/2 Warp?

It started when Windows 3.1 crashed on me for no apparent reason and I lost some code I was working on. I took a look over at my roommate who was running OS/2 2.1. He never had any crashes. And he seemed to be able to do a whole lot more than I could at once too. I asked him if we could try something. We installed Magic Carpet (A highly graphic intensive CD-ROM game), Tie Fighter, Adobe Premiere, and Doom on his computer. Then we ran them at the SAME TIME. I was shocked, not only did it run all of these stably, but it ran without too much slowdown. (And my roommate claimed the slowdown could be reduced by tweaking the settings of the games.) I wanted to buy a copy right away, but he told me to wait, Warp was coming. And so it did.

Q. I hear there are different versions of Warp, what are they?

There are 2 different flavors of Warp. One flavor is in the red box, and uses your existing Windows setup along with OS/2. I have no experience with this flavor so I will not comment on it much. The blue box signifies that Win-OS/2 code is included. This means that you get IBM's Window's code which is

recommended by many OS/2 users for its stability and speed. Also in both boxes is the new OS/2 Warp Connect. This version includes network software covering TCP/IP, LAN, and Peer to Peer. I currently use the Connect version with the TCP/IP activated, allowing me to FTP, telnet, ntalk, email, read news, and browse the web to and from my machine.

Q. What do I need to run Warp?

At least a 486 recommended. For memory it depends on what you plan to use. The basic package runs extremely well on only 4 Megs of RAM, but the Connect software will slow it down to a crawl. 8 Megs of RAM will gain you great performance on the basic package, and decent performance on the Connect software. 12 Megs and above will gain you great performance no matter what you use. A CD-ROM is definitely a plus for ease of installation. You also might need my roommate (or any veteran OS/2 user) -- I know I did. But I'll explain that below.

Q. How hard is installation?

There are two answers to this. Its either extremely easy or a definite pain. It all depends on your hardware. OS/2 will detect what hardware you have, and how it's setup. But if you don't have standard hardware, you might have some problems. For example, my CD-ROM was controlled by my sound card, which confused OS/2. This is where your OS/2 veteran comes in. On his advice I paid \$20 for a host adapter card for my CD-ROM.

After that things went smoothly. But others who had different sound cards controlling their CD-ROM had no problem at all. If you have very new hardware, the drivers might not be included in the installation disks, but might be available for download. You might also have to modify the installation file on the system diskette. All in all, it is a good idea to have an OS/2 veteran on your side, even though the manual gives good tips for those with problems installing.

A CD-ROM will make installation a piece of cake (if you have none of the above problems). After starting up on your two system diskettes which detect most of the stuff you have, it will just spin your CD-ROM for about 20 minutes and then you're finished! You will have to answer some basic questions, mostly confirming your system setup. Also, you can have it re-partition or format your hard drive. A HPFS (as opposed to the FAT) file system is recommended. It does not fragment much and provides for faster access. It is also more stable and is more efficient with your disk space.

Q. So how does it work?

OS/2 Warp is a powerful multi-tasking operating system. The Graphic User Interface (GUI) you will be working with is the Program Manager (PM) shell. Not to be confused with Window's Program Manager. The wonderful thing about this GUI is that EVERYTHING is an object. You can modify the way it looks, acts, and where it is. That includes folders, program objects, background, or the desktop in general. The really great thing is that the system to modify each object is mostly the same format. Click

with the right mouse button on anything, and a menu will appear. Select the 'SETTINGS' item and a notebook will appear which will allow you to modify the object. Your OS/2 veteran is a good person to show you all about this because unfortunately the manual does a pitiful job. It will show you basics, but will not go into much detail. There is on-line help though, and the answers you seek might be there. But if you don't want to customize stuff, or look at the inner workings, don't worry. It is not a necessary feature, only one that is very convenient (and even fun!).

Your desktop consists mostly of your 'LaunchPad' where you include your most commonly used programs. Your 'LaunchPad' also includes buttons for Shutdown, Lockup (a screensaver with password protection), and a Find button to search for files. You also will have a variety of folders which contain your Program Objects.

For Example:

System Folder - This contains objects dealing with your system setup and customization. It also contains a folder for programs to be activated on startup.

Multimedia Folder - This contains programs for different multimedia formats. Including sound, video and graphics.

TCP/IP Folder - For those who activate this feature with Warp Connect, this folder will contain Internet tools such as a Web Browser and FTP.

You can move these programs to the task bar, to different folders, or create your own folders with the greatest of ease.

One final feature I will mention is Templates. Lets say you have several different ways you like to setup a word processing document. For letters you like a certain font and margins, while for reports you like another. Instead of setting these options each time you load the program, you can create a template containing these options and use that to load the program. This not only works for word processing but for most applications. And setting up a template is very easy.

Look in the System Folder for the template section. But if you don't find one you want, don't worry, you can create your own template if one doesn't exist!

Q. What about stability?

Stability is a very important factor in an operating system. Fortunately, OS/2 Warp is one of the most stable ones you will find. In PC Magazine's stability tests, they could only crash it by going after a specific part of the memory. In other words, it will hardly, if ever, crash. Its multitasking is also protected, so if one program has a major problem, it won't crash the whole system.

Q. What about DOS?

Most of your DOS and Windows programs will work without problems under OS/2. There are some exceptions, and some of these programs can be made to run by modifying the settings (yes they get settings folders too). Some cannot be made to run at all. Origin's Privateer will not run because of the included memory manager in the game. A very nice thing is the multi-tasking with your DOS programs. You can run DOS programs in a window or a full screen session, and run many DOS programs side by side. Again, if there is a problem with one, it will NOT crash your system. That program will terminate and you can go about your way normally without rebooting.

Q. How is IBM's customer service?

Fantastic. If you have a problem, call their support line. You will most likely get help in five minutes or less. If the line is full, or you need higher level assistance which at the moment is not available they will take your phone number. That's right, they will CALL YOU BACK!

Q. How about support from software companies?

Software companies have been slow to support OS/2, but it is slowly gaining steam in the marketplace. What is fantastic is there is plenty of freeware, shareware, and IBM employee-written software on the Internet. A new company called Stardoc has produced Galactic Civilizations which takes full availability of OS/2's multitasking. They are currently working on a game that is rumored to be even better than Myst!

If you read the Usenet, you should subscribe to these groups:

- comp.os.os2.apps
- comp.os.os2.misc
- comp.os.os2.announce
- comp.os.os2.multimedia
- (optional of course) - comp.os.os2.games

Or look up these links on the World Wide Web.

- [The Warp Pharmacy](#)
- [Infonation OS/2](#)
- [OS/2 Must Have Utilities List](#)

Q. OK, anything else?

I have found OS/2 to be a wonderful operating system. It's reliable, stable, and reasonably fast. The

manuals are fair, but I wish they went into greater detail. I REALLY recommend having a veteran by your side to help you get comfortable. But once you get the basics, finding out the rest is easy. I have had my problems with installation and even a weird problem with my net card. But even after all that I still give this product my full support. IBM has done a remarkable job, and the Internet community has risen to support it. The freeware and shareware out there is excellent and I use much of it on my machine. Multi-tasking is a world I've entered and never want to leave. If you are looking for an alternative to Win'95, give Warp a try.