
COMPUTER SOFTWARE REVIEWS

Xerox Desktop Publishing Series—Ventura Publisher Edition (Version 1.1)

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Picture this scenario. You have been asked to supply a chapter and serve as the editor of a technical compendium containing 10 chapters assigned to different authors. All have IBM-compatible computers but do not use the same word processor. Some of the chapters contain line art. One contains a number of halftone pictures that will require cropping. Your responsibility is to prepare a number of alternate typographic formats for consideration by your editorial board and to produce camera-ready pages. The work involves issuing keyboarding instructions to the authors, receiving carefully edited chapters and artwork on disk, performing some minor last-minute corrections, inserting, cropping, and captioning the art, and adding the specialized instructions to conform with the agreed-upon format and style. You will also be required to prepare a table of contents, a list of illustrations, an index and, finally, camera-ready pages.

With a PC or MS DOS computer (an AT, XT, even a PC) having a hard disk, a laser printer, and Ventura Publisher (VP), you can do the whole job in your own office without a light table or waxing machine. In which case, I trust that modesty would dissuade you from acknowledging yourself as book designer, typographer, typesetter, and compositor—though those are, indeed, functions that diligence and proficiency in the use of Ventura Publisher would allow you to perform effectively. There would still be left the opportunity, if you were so inclined, to acknowledge the platemaker, the paper and press on which the book was printed, and the name of the bindery. Furthermore, if you take seriously the advertisements that bad-mouth pages set on laser printers at 300 dots/in., VP can also drive a number of higher resolution typesetters. In that case, the laser output can serve as page proof. At the other end of the resolution and color spectrum, the program can also drive dot matrix and color printers.

The word *publisher* in the title of this package was aptly chosen. The program has all the tools required to carry out the tasks normally performed by professionals in the design and art departments, typesetting shop, and composing room of a publishing house. Yet, one need not be a publications specialist or journeyman printer to apply this package to less ambitious projects. This program is equally effective for in-house preparation of smaller documents such as newsletters, financial reports, sales brochures, telephone directories, product lists or descriptions, invoices, statements, and other business forms, even correspondence on a letterhead of your very own design. The completion of these smaller projects is almost routine because VP provides a choice of style sheets for them.

Ventura Publisher is a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) system that runs under Graphics Environment Manager (GEM) to display full pages on standard hardware with one of a number of the more ubiquitous graphics cards and a compatible display. A 10-MB hard disk, a mouse, and 512 kB of memory are required (though 640 kB is recommended).

The program is listed at \$895 and is heavily discounted. Registered users have thus far received program corrections on four disks marked Patch 2. Six months of so-called Basic (warranty) Support is free. After that, there is a triplet of customer support plans for an annual fee of \$50 or \$150 for individuals and a corporate plan for \$2000. Subscribers to these support plans will receive patches automatically. Unfortunately, other registered owners of the program must request patches after being notified by Xerox that they exist. All registered users receive an informative newsletter called *The Fifth Mode*.

The 11-disk program package contains screen fonts and drivers for various (14) graphics cards, a driver disk for the Page Description language, a disk containing fonts and driver for an Epson printer, a driver disk and font disk for the Xerox 4045 printer, a driver disk and font disk for the HP Laserjet, and three disks containing applications, utilities, and examples. The last contains two dozen sample documents (book chapters, multicolumn newsletters, telephone directories, sales brochures, product descriptions, mailing list, etc.) and their associated style sheets. These are used in an excellent tutorial sequence contained in a 250-page training guide—one of the three manuals that are supplied with the system. A 54-page spiral-bound quick reference booklet printed on card stock (laminated for durability, and earmarked for quick reference) is a valuable tool for the novice as well as the expert.

VP accepts input of ASCII text files or those produced by the more popular word processors; graphics data files produced by literally hundreds of systems compatible with AUTOCAD, Paintbrush, and other drawing programs; files in CGM, HPGL, DPE, PICT, and DXF format; and image files produced by a number of commercial scanners. Text files imported in one of the above formats are processed into pages after the selection of an appropriate style sheet (much like a script), which controls page orientation and composition and a host of typographic details.

Ventura Publisher operations are divided into four major modes (frame setting, paragraph tagging, text editing, and graphics drawing) selected from the side bar or from the keyboard. Each has its own distinctive cursor—there are, in fact, 11 different cursors that help to remind the user which operation is currently selected.

The text editing mode provides for entering, deleting, copying, or moving text as well as for assigning text attributes to single characters, to words, or to blocks of text. In this mode, the side bar shows 11 text attributes that, when selected by the cursor, are applied to the highlighted text. The attributes are normal, bold, italics, small caps, superscript, subscript, underline, double underline, strike through, overcore, and all upper case. The text mode provides for entering text as well as for moving and deleting highlighted blocks of text via *cut* (using the delete key) and *paste* (using the insert key). There is, however, no search or global replace facility,

nor a spelling checker; those operations, if still necessary, must be performed prior to entering VP or by saving the file in the proper format for reentering a supported word processor—any typographic information that had been added to the file notwithstanding.

The paragraph tagging mode is used to assign typographic attributes to an entire document, to an individual page or paragraph, or to a hierarchy of heading lines (as many as 10) for chapters, sections, subsections, etc.

The frame setting mode provides for delineation of boxes on a page into which text, pictures, or graphics can be placed. It is this mode that is used to establish the width or widths of multicolumn material for magazine articles and newsletters. Once specified, frames and their contents can be moved, copied, resized, or deleted. The frames can be displayed on the screen but are not shown in the printed page.

The graphics drawing mode enables the drawing of lines, circles, ellipses, rectangles, and rectangles with rounded corners, in a variety of thicknesses. The closed curves can be filled with a variety of patterns and superimposed to create attractive designs. The selection from the side bar of *box text* facilitates the preparation of callout boxes, tabular data displays, and intricate forms.

Ventura Publisher operations are controlled via appropriate style sheets and parameters set in dialogue boxes associated with the eight drop-down menus in which the options appear either in gray or black face depending upon their relevance to the operation of the moment. They are selectable only when in dark face. The options menu is available at all times and contains 13 items; some are on-off switches controlling the display of pictures, column guides, loose lines, etc. The selection of others results in the display of a dialogue box allowing for setting printer options and program parameters, adding or changing fonts, or setting horizontal and vertical rulers on the screen in inches, centimeters, or picas. Single pages can be displayed in three modes: normal (1X), enlarged (2X), and reduced mode. There is also an option for displaying facing pages.

One would expect such a program to provide for handling widows and orphans, for keeping two or more paragraphs on the same page, for dropping footnotes on the proper page, and for control of line widths and spacing. VP does much more. It gives the user control of word spacing, character spacing, and even more specialized letter spacing called kerning, where certain letter pairs, VA, AW, We, etc., are set closer than normal. Kerning is, however, achieved on the printed page only when the necessary kerning information is contained in

the font tables, as it is in the case of PostScript fonts.

Anyone who has experienced the frustrating delays and expense resulting from a seemingly minor breakdown of communication with any typesetting system (manual or automated) will appreciate—even marvel—at the way VP sets, resets, and rehyphenates a document before one's eyes, from a one-column to a two- or three-column format. There are, in fact, six hyphenation algorithms: two for American English (one fast, one exhaustive and hence slower), and one each for U.K. English, French, Italian, and Spanish. The algorithms are backed up by a small built-in dictionary, and provision is made for building a user hyphenation dictionary to handle acronyms and other exceptions. An especially troublesome word can always be hyphenated by the hand of the offended purist.

Ventura Publisher is such a full-featured system that even a long list of its features would be inadequate. It is sufficient to say that it is difficult to envision a layout too complicated for it to handle adequately—even handily. If the resulting product does not win a design award, it will not be the fault of Ventura Publisher.

As is now to be expected, a successful computer product soon stimulates a number of enterprises from third-party vendors, and this program is no exception. There are already five books¹⁻⁵ devoted to and produced via VP, a dozen or so local and two nationwide Ventura Publisher User Groups,^{6,7} and a disk⁸ containing 50 new style sheets produced by the author of those contained in the Ventura Publisher package. Furthermore, the customer base for Ventura Publisher is now large enough for computer magazines to start carrying feature articles⁹ and for *TYPEWORLD* to carry a regular column called "Ventura World".

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Within the past three years a new class of document-processing programs for personal computers (PC) of increasing importance to chemists has appeared on the market. These programs are usually categorized as desktop publishing (DTP).

How do desktop publishing programs compare to ordinary word-processing (WP) programs? Why are they important for chemists? DTP programs do not replace WP programs. DTP programs can be considered as fancy printing tools that allow graphics to be merged to a word-processed document.

Three classes of document-processing programs can be considered relevant for chemists:

(1) Ordinary WP programs such as Wordstar, WordPerfect, and MS-Word can handle ordinary text including superscripts, subscripts, boldface, underline, etc. They usually do not allow graphics to be merged. Most of them also do not contain a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) feature; i.e., you cannot review the final page layout on your PC screen. WP programs usually support a wide variety of laser and dot