Shields at maximum

Tim Nott warns to be careful of Word attachments and mourns the loss of wildcard spelling lookup.

Viruses are a hideous manifestation of human perversity – the modern equivalent of dropping dead dogs into a communal well. Almost as irritating are the phony virus scares that arrive in your mailbox with the tell-tale, all-uppercase injunction NOT TO READ ANY MAIL MESSAGE WITH FREE HOLIDAY IN THE TITLE. The latter you can simply ignore, but not so Word macro viruses or 'prank macros' as Microsoft spin-doctors named them when they surfaced in 1995.

Since then, their propagation has been made easier by the advent of VBA, which allows macros to be embedded in a document, not just a template. Despite the cutesy 'prank' label, malicious macro code can be just as nasty as any other virus.

Every version of Word since then has had some method of protection against unknown macros, and the safeguards in Word 2000 are fairly comprehensive.

However, I employ an extra line of defence and delete Word documents that arrive as email attachments without opening them. Any that I send – including this column – are first saved as RTF, which can't contain macros.

FIG 1

WordBasic crossword helper

```
Sub MAIN
Dim result$(100)
source$ = InputBox$("Enter the partial word, using * and ? ↙
as wild cards", "Wildcard Word Finder")
ToolsOptionsSpelling .SuggestFromMainDictOnly = 0
totalfound = ToolsGetSpelling(result$(), source$, "", "", 1)
'The empty quotes can hold alternative main and custom dictionaries
If totalfound > 0 Then
Begin Dialog UserDialog 220, 180, "Possible words"
       ListBox 20, 20, 180, 118, result$(), .choice
       OKButton 60, 148, 100, 22
End Dialog
Dim dlg As UserDialog
Dialog dlg
Else
       MsgBox "No luck with " + ↙
source$
EndIf
End Sub
Ends
```

(*Key:* ↙ *code string continues*)

Tentative suggestions

Niel Ackerman offers an improvement to the tent card solution in March's column, namely 'creating a single row, two-column table and setting the Text Direction in the two cells in opposite directions. If you did this you could use merge fields and create all the cards you needed from your mailing database instantaneously'. Now there's a thought.

Turning the tables – another solution for tent cards

Here's an obscure tip. You can use Word 2000's Search dialog to find Unicode characters by specifying their decimal value preceded by ^u. For example, entering ^u8482 in the Search box finds the trademark symbol, and ^u0937 finds a capital Omega.

Wild thing?

Five years ago I wrote a little WordBasic macro to help solve crossword clues by using wildcards in the spelling checker. Although you could look up words using wildcards (? for a single letter and * for one or more) in the spelling checker, my macro overcame certain limitations: it returned up to 100 hits and overcame the failing that a wildcard was ignored at the beginning or end of a word.

For the sake of nostalgia I show the code in Fig 1 above. Bear in mind this is WordBasic not VisualBasic. And those of you watching in Word 2000 can weep and gnash their teeth, as this feature has been discontinued – you can no longer use wildcards in a spelling look-up.

With 75 per cent of Office sales coming from corporate clients, doubtless Microsoft is confident it can continue to remove features users want and add ones they don't, safe in the knowledge that changing horses on a corporate level is not a course lightly taken.

A few years ago WordPerfect was the blue-screen queen and then Windows came along. Now, the rules are changing again – StarOffice has comparable muscle to the MS product and is available free, and WordPerfect is poised to make a comeback on the Unix platform.

CONTACTS

Tim Nott welcomes your comments on the Word Processing column. Contact him via the *PCW* editorial office or email: **wp@pcw.co.uk**. Please do not send unsolicited file attachments.

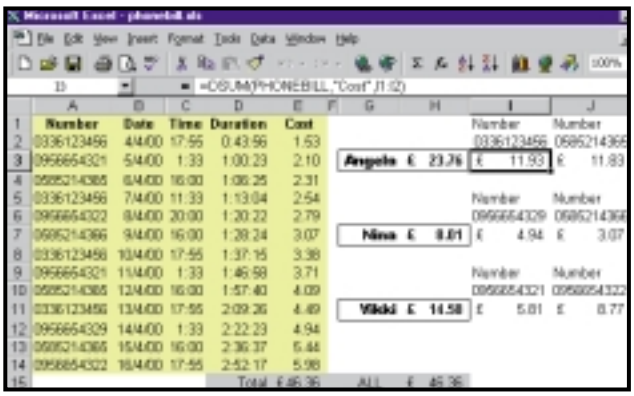
It's good to talk

Stephen Wells has a solution to sort out that age-old cause of family break-ups: the phone bill.

David O'Doherty emailed me asking for help allocating the calls on the family phone bill between his three teenage daughters. He scans the details into Excel 95 and knows which daughter is most likely to have called which number.

Excel offers many features which could be used for this, but I suggested he use the DSUM function. Screenshot 1 shows a typical layout. The phone numbers, costs and girls' names are fictional and it's a short bill, but it illustrates this solution.

The phone numbers in column A are formatted as text (although Excel will read them as numbers). DSUM uses three arguments: a Database, a Field and a Criteria. Here the database consists of the scanned-in bill details in the range A1:E14. This has been named PHONEBILL. The Field to be summed is Cost and the Label for it is entered in the formula in quotes. The Criteria is made up of two cells such as I1 and I2 here. I1 has the Field Label, Number in it. I2 has a phone number to look for. Cells such as I2 have the Custom format "0"#########, so that the DSUM function can treat the data as a number, but the leading zero is displayed. The formula in I3 is:
=DSUM(PHONEBILL,"Cost",I1:I2)



Screenshot 1: One way to total the cost of phone calls for each member of the family using Excel

Creating flowcharts

If you have Office 97 or 2000 installed, you can draw simple flowcharts with Excel. Access the Drawing toolbar via the Drawing icon on the Standard toolbar – or right-click on any toolbar and select Drawing from the shortcut menu. Also display the Formatting toolbar.

On a new sheet, click the Select All button. This is the grey area where the row and column headings meet. Draw the join between column headings A and B slowly to the left until the column width is reduced to 2.00. The cell borders will now offer a grid for aligning AutoShapes. Click on the sheet to release the Select All button.

Choose Text Box on the Drawing toolbar and draw a rectangle on the sheet. Enter text in the box. You can centre the text or change the font colour by highlighting it, clicking the 'Center' button and then using the 'Font Color' tool on the Formatting toolbar.

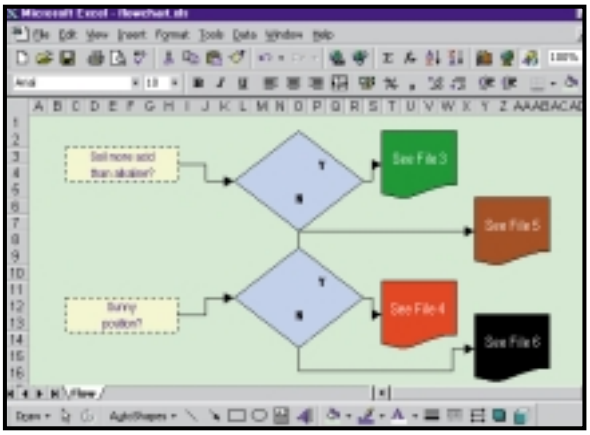
Select this new box at any time by left-clicking on it. Deselect it by clicking elsewhere on the sheet. If you hold Alt as you drag to resize the box it will snap into the grid. Similarly, hold down Alt as you drag the box to reposition it.

To clone the box, left-click on it, then right-click and choose Copy. Click on the worksheet, right-click and choose Paste. Now you can edit the second box.

To add a decision shape, click on AutoShapes, Flowchart, Flowchart: Decision. Draw on the sheet, holding down Alt to snap to grid. Tap on the Space Bar to move the cursor across the decision diamond and then enter Y, and press Enter twice. Then enter N, press Esc and click the formatting Center button. Click on the formatting perimeter of the AutoShape, right-click, and choose Colors and Line, Fill Color and then you can select a new tint for the Decision Diamond.

Drawing the connecting lines is just as easy. First, click on AutoShapes, Connectors and choose one. Next, hover over any AutoShape and four blue dots will appear. Click your chosen starting point. Now, hover over the second shape and click the arrival point for the line. Click elsewhere on the sheet and the connection will be made.

To create a plain background, choose Tools, Options, and uncheck the Gridlines box. To colour the background, click the Select All button and click the Fill Color button on the Drawing toolbar. With a little practice you can easily create simple flowcharts like the one in screenshot 2 in a couple of minutes.



Screenshot 2: You can use all the OfficeArt tools in Excel to create simple flowcharts easily

CONTACTS

Stephen Wells welcomes your comments on the Spreadsheets column. Contact him via the *PCW* editorial office or email **spreadsheets@pcw.co.uk**. Please don't send attached files until requested.