

# Finally, a PC version of the DEC editor

*Galen Gruman,  
Contributing Editor*

I'll admit I was quite prejudiced when Boston Business Computing's spokeswoman called about an IBM PC version of the Digital Equipment Corp. standard workhorse editor, VAX EDT. "Great!" I exclaimed. "I'd love to try it out."

Warm memories of using EDT on a VAX/VMS system came back (how often can you say that about software?). The EDT editor is the VAX version of the DEC line editor that comes with all of DEC's computers. On PDPs, it's known as the K52 and KED editors. The editor has two modes, a line mode (like the IBM PC's Edlin editor) and a full-screen mode that DEC calls the change mode. It's the change mode that shines, with its VT keypad-based commands, redefinable function-to-key definitions, and multiple text buffers (as many as 80).

All implementations are essentially the same, except that more powerful systems have more powerful features, and the type of keyboard—VT52, VT100, or VT2xx—unfortunately changes the positions of some of the keypad commands.

The PC/EDT translation of VAX EDT appears flawless. I took old macro assignments written for the VAX and tried them on PC/EDT. No problem! Functionally, it acts just like the VAX version. Some enhancements were made to take care of PC abilities: color monitor support, DOS-level command execution from the command line, and Alt-keypad access to the extended ASCII character set (or you can still use EDT's special insert function).

The major hurdle in translating from the DEC version to the IBM one was transferring the key-dependent commands to the IBM layout. The DEC terminals have an 18-key numeric keypad and four separate cursor keys. The IBM PC XT has a 15-key numeric keypad (which includes the cursors!) and 10 function keys.

PC/EDT remaps the IBM numeric keypad to emulate the DEC VT100 keypad. The three functions displaced by the XT's smaller keypad are put on function keys. So are the cursors. (On the PC AT, which has an 18-key numeric keypad, the key layout matches the VT100 layout.) The cursors are mapped to function keys.

Moving the cursors to function keys turns out to be a blessing in disguise. On the DEC layout, the cursors are on the top of the board between the alphanumeric keys and the numeric keypad,

forcing you to use your right hand for both movement and commands. On the PC/EDT layout, you can devote your right hand to commands and your left to movement. It's like comparing touch typing to hunt-and-peck: two hands move faster than one.

I tried PC/EDT on three machines: the IBM PC XT, PC AT, and the Leading Edge D Machine (an XT clone). It works best on the AT because of the comparable key layouts. I noticed on the D Machine that I needed to hold down the function keys slightly longer than on the IBM PCs. However, I lost no functionality.

So why would you want a PC version of a VAX editor? Well, the beauty of EDT is that you can remap your functions and add new ones with DEC's EDT command language. The commands are stored in a file that you refer to in the initialization file; this file is loaded into one of your buffers. You can have several such files, so you can emu-

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late not only VAX EDT, but the PDP-11 KED and K52—handy if you work as I do on both DEC minicomputers and IBM micros.

But even non-DEC users should take a look at its functions: the editor is a powerful text editor. You can insert any ASCII character, set your own line wrapping, edit among multiple full-screen buffers (not tiny windows), change case of defined blocks, set up command repetition, resequence lines, search and replace, access decent on-line help, read in and write to external files, and print while editing.

Three caveats: First, PC/EDT comes with minimal documentation because its producers expect you to use DEC's own VAX EDT documentation (which they will sell you). Two, there is no terminal emulation or file transfer mode so you will need to use some other program to upload and download your files. Third, PC/EDT's price is high at \$250 (even with DEC's basic documentation).

Boston Business Computing's address is 360 Merrimack St., Lawrence, MA 01843; (617) 683-7920.

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