

How far can Norton go?

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The Norton Utilities for MS-DOS are legendary. For countless hackers, system operators, and DOS-level users, this collection of programs has recovered lost data, bypassed some of DOS's limitations, and generally served as an indispensable tool.

What more could Peter Norton and cohorts possibly do in their new Version 4.0? Not as much as they did in their new Advanced Edition version. Rather than update Version 3.0, Norton introduced two new versions, 4.0 for regular hackers and Advanced Edition for system managers and the like. Advanced Edition is actually Version 4.0 plus two more programs and a booklet on how hard disks work.

In both new versions, most of the programs have been improved by adding switches for both added functionality and for handling the peculiarities of some IBM PC clones. The user interface for the cornerstone program, NU (Norton Utilities), has been redone to be simpler and friendlier. And four programs have been added to 4.0 — plus another two to the Advanced Edition.

All the basic Norton programs have been enhanced. SI (System Informa-

tion), for example, now can check your I/O speed separate from your clock speed (many clones have faster I/O but the same clock speed as an IBM, but old versions of Norton didn't account for this when reporting performance). The only problem I found is that SI did not recognize my Leading Edge Model D or its built-in Hercules graphics, despite the manual's assertion that the Model D had been added to SI's list of computers. But it recognized everything else it was supposed to.

other utilities. Like all menus, it assumes you need a reminder of what's available (which is often true). But it also devotes two thirds of the screen to explanatory material. That involves a lot of screen repaint as you scroll through options, so avoid NI unless you're lost and the manual's not handy.

The nice new program is FI (File Info), which lets you append a 65-character description to each file. I have no use for such detail, but a lot of folks do.

Now for the great program. The best addition is Ask, a tool that fills the biggest hole in DOS's batch files: interactive responses. Batch files do not let you ask users to pick options. There are conditionals in batch files, but all rely on error conditions. What Norton has done is create a command that you can use in your batch files as if it were any other DOS command.

The Ask command outputs a question to the user and waits for a single-key response. It assigns the legal responses to error condition levels (for example, if legal answers are E, F, and Q, entering E returns error condition 1, F returns 2, and Q returns 3). You then use the batch file If statement to go to a subroutine based on the error condition (If Errorlevel 3 Goto Quit). This neat trick takes an internally used conditional and lets you use it externally.

NU now handles EBCDIC, unprintable ASCII, and European character sets. It's also faster when searching for files. DT (Disk Test) now lets you manually mark sectors as bad and can be told to move files in questionable areas and mark those areas as bad.

The added switches can be helpful, but they also bring some of the programs to the edge of overcomplexity. One of previous versions' hallmarks were their simplicity, and that virtue is strained in Version 4.0. Luckily, you can ignore most of the switches unless you have ill-behaved equipment or want to redirect output to the disk or printer.

I prefer the original NU interface over the new "easier" one, but I can live with the new one. Norton may have

Advanced Edition. As good as Version 4.0 is, the Advanced Edition is better. It's the version you should buy if you intend to upgrade from your current Norton version or to buy your first Norton Utilities. With the Advanced Edition's features, why would anyone settle for 4.0?

The two new programs are SD (Speed Disk) and FR (Format Recover), both very valuable additions.

SD reorganizes your hard disk to optimize speed, mostly by reducing the amount of pointers and unused blocks within the used portion of the disk. It's smart enough to recognize most copy-protection schemes and not touch protected files. I have to admit that a chill went through me as I used it on my hard disk. I have several copy-protected programs and some programs that are tough to install. Well, 15 minutes later, SD was done reorganizing my data. And all my programs work fine.

FR creates a file that it looks for later when you typed Format C: when you meant to type in Format A:. That file is stored in a part of the hard disk that is not affected by Format and contains the information needed to restore the file and directory structure to DOS's file access table. (The manual should be clearer that you must run FR's setup option before the accidental reformat

occurs; otherwise, the data it needs to recover your files won't exist.)

Despite SD's success, I never got up the nerve to test FR. I also didn't want to back up my 12M bytes of programs and files on to the 50 or so disks I'd need in case FR couldn't recover a reformat. I've set system my up so if I ever accidentally reformat my hard disk, I can use FR — but I'm going to trust Norton that it really works and not tempt fate. (However, while the setup worked on my Model D and on an IBM PC XT, it didn't work on my boss's AT. I got a message "Drive C: is not a hard disk." But it is.)

The Advanced Edition includes a great handbook on how a hard disk is set up — I only wish this were available in Version 4.0 because it's a must read for anyone who does more than select menu items.

Finally, this version's NU has several worthwhile additions: a mode to address sectors at the BIOS level (absolute address) rather than DOS level and editors for directory entries, file-access table, and partition table.

Both new versions of the Norton Utilities run on MS-DOS PCs (Versions 1.0 and up). Version 4.0 costs \$100; registered owners of previous versions can upgrade for \$25. The Advanced Edition costs \$150; registered owners of previous versions can upgrade for \$39. RS 18

Version 4.0. OK, so what's new? Of Version 4.0's new programs, one is great, one is nice, and two are just OK.

First the OK programs. One is NCD (Norton Change Directory), a fast way to change subdirectories without knowing the entire tree structure or even the entire name. NCD looks for the closest match to the subdirectory name you enter. Let's say you have a directory EDIT with subdirectories REPORT and RESUME, and you have a directory CALC with subdirectory BUDGET. You are at the DOS prompt C:\EDIT\REPORT> and want to go to C:\CALC\BUDGET. With DOS, you'd have to type CD

\CALC\BUDGET. With Norton, you could type just NCD BUD or NCD B.

And if you wanted to go back, you'd just type NCD R. "Aha!" you cry, "Where will it go, C:\EDIT\REPORT or C:\EDIT\RESUME?" It will go to whichever you created first. From there, typing NCD R (or NCD RE) will go to the one created next, and so on.

The other OK program is NI (Norton Integrator). It's a menu driver for the