

## Superb technical-document system

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Lotus Manuscript is fantastic. The document processor comes closer to desktop publishing than most self-named desktop-publishing programs? Why? Because it handles the technical-document publishing tasks of outlining, writing, indexing, formatting, and printing. It even has a WYSIWYG preview mode, a Troff-like equations-generation syntax, document comparison, and graphics import. The only thing it doesn't do is deal with typographic issues, leaving the output quality in the hands of the output device.

The preview mode has some neat features. The first window is a WYSIWYG picture of your page; the second is a magnifier that you can move through the page and set from 200 percent to 1000 percent magnification; and the third is a control panel that lets you change the background color of your page preview.

Manuscript was designed to handle many configurations, from the Epson FX80 dot matrix printer to the Apple Laserwriter and from nongraphic monochrome display to EGA color. Even nicer, you can change your setup without reformatting your document. (Of course, features available for the original output device but not the new one won't print correctly.)

I could wax ecstatic about the features, but that would get tedious. Suffice to say, I wish I had Manuscript when I was producing 300-page, indexed manuals a while back.

A problem with this program (actu-

ally a series of linked modules) is that it is very difficult to learn. In fact, I've never used more complicated PC software. So don't buy it thinking you can start using it instantly. You'll need time to learn how the various pieces interact before you can produce really good documentation. And don't buy this if all you need is a powerful word processor.

The documentation was a very pleasant surprise. Lotus obviously took care in designing its material: The reference manual is truly a reference manual — it's where you go for answers to knotty problems like cable configurations, equation formatting, printer DIP switch settings, and keyboard configurations — not the usual awkward tutorial-in-disguise. And the how-to manual really surprised me. Normally, I find tutorials to be more trouble than help, but this one was very helpful.

It's hard to find fault with the program. But I do have some small objections. The Lotus 1-2-3 interface isn't well-suited for editing, and I wish Lotus hadn't used it. Luckily, there are enough speed keys to keep use of the 1-2-3 interface to a minimum. The hardest thing to get used to is pressing the Ins key where most programs use Return (the Enter key on some machines) to execute a command or to accept parameters. Like Esc, Return is a sacred key in the MS-DOS world and shouldn't be fooled with.

The editor isn't the best I've used, but it's still better than most others. It has a feel similar to Word Perfect,

which, as a fan of Microsoft Word, I found to be slightly disquieting. While the speed within modules is fast, loading the various modules (like edit, preview, and print) takes too long. And the installation makes you copy the eight disks manually from the DOS prompt. I would have preferred a batch file to do it for me.

Manuscript does do badly in one area: document import. It accepts Lotus Symphony files and DCA-format files — two "who cares?" formats in the world of technical documents. Manuscript supports no powerful word-processor format — not Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, or XyWrite. It would be nice if it imported Runoff, Troff, Scribe, and Tex files as well, since Manuscript can easily be considered the PC's answer to these mainframe technical-document formatters.

You'll need a PC with a hard disk, 512K bytes of RAM, and MS-DOS 2.1 or higher to run Manuscript. I suggest you have Hercules monochrome graphics (color isn't necessary, but without graphics you can't use preview mode) and 640K bytes of RAM. Make sure you have plenty of room on your hard disk. The program modules and support files take 2M bytes. The software will give you the best output on a Postscript device, such as an Apple Laserwriter or a Postscript-capable Linotron typesetter. You can also output to Hewlett-Packard Laserjets and several dot matrix printers — but why?! \$695.