MicroReview
David L. Hannum/AT&T Information Systems

Three for Christmas

Here are three solid products well worth the software buyer's consideration. All three are priced right, and all three have received reasonably good reviews in the computer press.

Mirror. This data communications program is at least acts like a clone of Crosstalk XVI and therefore could come under fire as a result of recent court rulings. (See MicroLaw, p. 76, for comments on pending court action involving Mirror.—Ed.) In the meantime, we should enjoy having a reasonably priced PC software package that not only looks and acts like the de facto leader but improves on it.

Mirror has all the features of Crosstalk plus several Crosstalk does not provide. Mirror can run as a background program, allowing a user to run an application while sending large files to a host. It can answer calls—serve as a bulletin board, for example—while the user is working. It enhances the XMODEM protocol.

As far as I am concerned, the capability to run as a background program and the XMODEM enhancements are the primary reasons one should consider this program.

Mirror runs well, is easy to learn and use (no learning required at all if the user already knows Crosstalk), and handles errors well. Mirror's developers have done a good job with the manual—I found it easy to learn how to do a good VT100 emulation, for example.

I give this product a 9+. It's worth a look—at $49.95, it provides higher performance for price than anything else on the market.

Mirror is available from SoftKlone, 1210 East Park Ave., Tallahassee, FL 32301; (904) 878-8564.

RAM-Resident Printmerge. This is a very specialized piece of software, strictly for HP LaserJet users. It allows the sophisticated user to take advantage of some of the capabilities built into the printer but not available through normal applications. It supports line drawing and boxing of text and allows graphics, charts, and tables to be mixed with text. And since it is a RAM-resident program, it sits in the background until it is needed.

RAM-Resident Printmerge is easy to load, learn, and use, and its manual is adequate for those who already understand both the LaserJet and their PC. It is a "must have" utility for anyone running a PC/LaserJet combo, and at $124 it is not overpriced, given its capabilities.

Programs that hide in RAM and emerge when needed are quite useful, but they should make us consider what they are doing to the system.

RAM-Resident Printmerge is available from Polaris Software, PO Box 28789, San Diego, CA 92128; (619) 489-8243.

Referee. Programs that hide in RAM and emerge when needed are quite useful, but they should make us consider what they are doing to the system. Unlike programs in ROM or on disk, they need constant attention or they may seriously degrade the service a PC provides. RAM-resident programs take computer resources, particularly processor time. This means there may be a fight (collision) between the application a user is running and a RAM-resident program, or even between two or more RAM-resident programs. This possibility calls for the services of a "referee," a program that can tell other programs when to play ball (activate) and when to leave the game (deactivate). One such package, appropriately named Referee, does this efficiently for some but not all RAM-resident packages.

Referee is not a beginner's tool. While it works well with Prokey and Sidekick, it does not function well with certain other programs and may even cause what its user wants to prevent, data losses and system crashes. One must be aware of its quirks. Used knowledgeably, Referee is a good package. Its manual is more than adequate for the type of user who should be running the program. I give Referee a solid 7 with the above reservations.

Referee is available for $69.95 from Persoft Inc., 465 Science Drive, Madison, WI 53711-9380; (608) 273-6000.

Next issue. Look for a review of two new graphics packages for the IBM PC and compatibles—Concorde and Picture Perfect. With the next issue, my term as MicroReview editor expires. I have enjoyed evaluating micro products, services, and books with you and receiving your cards and letters. I welcome my successors, editorial board members Richard Mateosian and Kenneth Majithia. I am sure they will value your suggestions and comments, as I did.

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