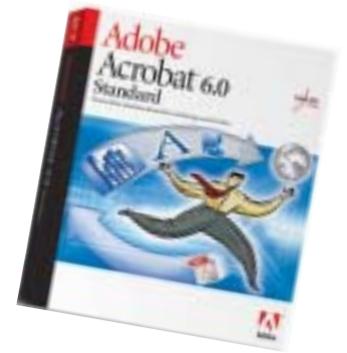


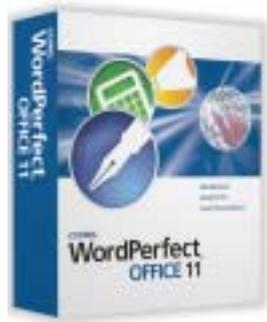
tools of the trade



Adobe Acrobat 6.0

New Writing, Publishing, and Reporting Software

WordPerfect Office 11 from Corel has enhanced compatibility with other file formats, ability to publish to XML and PDF, access to Microsoft Outlook® Address book, multilingual writing tools for more than 30 languages, RealTime preview, and a wealth of specific helps like the Pleading Wizard for creating legal documents, a Pocket Oxford™ Dictionary, thesaurus, and Grammatik® grammar check. The office suite features quite a few upgrades and one fascinating flashback. There is a built-in switch that lets you open your word processing workspace in the old blue screen of WP 5.1. It's called the WordPerfect Classic Mode, and with it you can keep your hands on the keyboard (see Tech Forum). Office 11 includes WordPerfect® word processing with the classic



WordPerfect Office 11

strengths of file sharing, and the Reveal Codes function that displays all formatting, along with enhanced document mapping, multiple placeholders, and improved outlines. The spreadsheet in the suite is Quattro Pro®. It's compatible with Microsoft Excel 2000 and 2002 spreadsheets, can publish to and import XML files, and has a new ZIM SMS utility that is a wireless office tool designed to extend key Quattro Pro and Outlook functions to cellular phones via one- and two-way SMS text messaging. Presentations™ creates Web-ready slide shows, multimedia presentations, and interactive

demos and can share PowerPoint® files. Paradox® is the relational database program in the Professional and Educational editions of Office 11. www.corel.com/wordperfect

PDF (Portable Document Format) is the standard for producing documents that can be read by anyone, anywhere who has the free Adobe Reader software. In business, PDF documents have a number of advantages over paper while sharing some of the strengths of hard copy: PDF files are searchable, easily stored, can be accessed on PDAs, can be digitally signed or authorized for only some readers, and display in the same way on all conventional platforms. **Adobe's new Acrobat 6.0 Standard** program offers one-button PDF creation from Internet Explorer, improved electronic review and commenting tools, ability to capture paper and website con-

tent, and digital signatures. With it you can archive complete projects as a single PDF document. A new Acrobat 6.0 Professional version has also been released. For a study from IDC on ROI and how three large companies use Adobe Acrobat ("Getting Your Money's Worth"), go to www.adobe.com/products/acrobatstd/main.html.

Sageworks, Inc. has released **ValueCents**, a financial analytic tool that uses a tier-one feed from the SEC's EDGAR database to produce reports that evaluate the operating performance of nearly every publicly traded company in the U.S. The Web-based application automatically converts balance sheet and income statement data into narrative, plain-language assessments of business health compared to industry peers. The underlying technology is Sageworks' FIND™, an expert system

Escaping the Catch ◆ Michael Castelluccio, Editor

■ ONE OF THE DRAWBACKS of looking at new software and hardware on a regular basis is that, over time, you tend to develop the misguided mind-set that whatever's next is likely to be better. You forget that the latest version could actually be a step backwards. If it's new, it's surely "new and improved" because, after all, we live in a culture where "progress is our most important product."

In truth, the basic meaning of progress is "forward movement toward a destination." Now that could be very good for, say, those involved in promising clinical research, but not so good for those hovering over Lakehurst, N.J., waiting to land in the largest aircraft (dirigible) at that time

ever to fly (1937). Progress is, in and of itself, neutral—just a step forward. But in our society, we (or the marketing forces around us) have endowed it with a promise. Just show up, and tomorrow will be a better day.

Feature Creep

In a similar way, all of us have been conditioned to look forward to the next version of whatever we buy with an anticipatory lean. This is especially true for tech items.

What we forget is the problem that creates for producers. Who will be the next buyer if the current offering is a whiz-bang, top-of-the-line, ultimate high-tech offering? If it works

continued on next page

that uses a set of more than 5,000 metrics (based on proprietary industry benchmarking data) that trigger specific sections of text from a database that exceeds 10,000 single-spaced pages. Reports measure and graph liquidity, profits and profit margin, borrowing, assets, raw data, and financial indicators. You can view sample reports or try the system at www.valuecents.com. Sageworks also offers a sis-

ter product called Profit-Cents that's used to evaluate the financial health of private companies.

HandSpring PDAs accept Springboard Modules that plug in the back. Early on, there were just a couple of modules, but now there are six general categories for Springboards, including communications and navigation (mobile phones, wireless modems, GPS), games, multimedia



HandSpring Plug-in Massager and GPS System

(MP3, digital recorders, cameras), healthcare and wellness (diagnosis, medical manuals, massage and fitness), books and reference, memory and storage, and education. One of the more exotic plug-ins is the Raycom™ Personal Massager™. Using basic EMS (Electronic Muscles Stimulation) principles, the Raycom delivers stimulation through two electronic pads that you attach to your shoulders, back, or legs. If it's not going to make you more tense, you

can continue reading your e-mail on the screen as the Massager delivers charges that feel like a tap, squeeze, or even a chop. The HandyGPS Pro module includes Rand McNally's StreetFinder Deluxe 2001. When you plug it in, a digital map shows your location including local shops, restaurants, and points of interest along with address-to-address directions plotted in map and text form.

www.handspring.com/products/sbmodules/index.jhtml



Sageworks ValueCents

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great and one size fits all—that’s all anybody should need. What used to work for auto manufacturers—planned obsolescence (a five-year, 50,000-mile life expectancy)—ultimately failed as imports offered cars that stayed on the road until their doors rusted off. Technology that works on electron flows can last even longer (nothing to rust or maybe not even to wear out). I own an amplifier and set of speakers from a now-defunct electronics manufacturer that still sound good 30 years after purchase. They’re hooked up to a device that spins 4 1/2-inch discs above a laser rather than the original turntable for 12-inch black vinyl. The company made excellent components, but, unfortunately, is no longer around. Makes you wonder whether they were so good they eliminated their own repeat customers.

So what do you do if your gizmo works great and creates nothing but satisfied customers? When the market’s saturated, do you open up a repair shop and fade away? Or do you do what the toaster people do? Make a good toaster and then an iron, electric can opener, shoe-buffer, and so on. Or do you just add new features and/or redesign the look and hope you can convince some that they can’t live without what the product will now do, or hope others

start to look upon those with last year’s model with a mixture of pity and disdain?

But feature creep can be a catch-22. Adding features to software or hardware usually adds complexity and sometimes interferes with performance or compatibility with other related technologies. It’s no accident that the elegance of the most brilliant technologies rests in their simplicity. If what is added on to a device or program is a list of features not essential to what the device or program does, it should make you stop and think. After all, would you buy a shirt that has four extra pockets sewn on the back and a few extra sleeves on the side?

It looks like there is a deep contradiction pervasively structured into the plan. Create the perfect product, and you’re done for. Likewise, if you keep adding new features just to sell another round, you risk damaging or making irrelevant what already works in your product. Sort of calls to mind Yossarian’s response in the book: “That’s some catch, that Catch-22.”

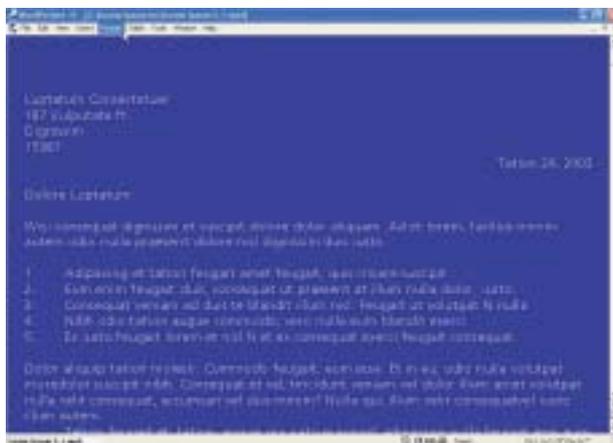
Looking Backward

There is one solution we haven’t considered yet. Why not go backward instead of forward and strip away some of the clutter in the next version? Progress forward by reversing

your direction. Actually, it’s done in business and education all the time. There, people call it a “return to basics.”

One of the products reviewed in this month’s Tools is Corel’s WordPerfect Office Suite. WordPerfect has always had a well-deserved reputation as a writer’s word processor. The latest iteration does have a list of new features, but one of the best is a way to recover the Classic WP Blue Screen of version 5.1. By installing the software time-machine switch included with the package, you can leave the conventional screen (view on the right, below) and open a blank (blue) page that encourages you to focus on the words on the page, not the toolbars, rulers, jumble of icons, dancing paper clip mess that is typical of the attention-deficit-disorder word processor workspace of today. You need to write something? Here’s a piece of paper and a pen. Pay attention to what you’re doing. Back to basics.

The other classic piece of the WordPerfect program is the Reveal Codes function that remains unchanged—and unchallenged by other writing programs. All in all, it remains a premier writing program, and now it’s new and improved by recovering some of its past. ■



WordPerfect Classic Blue Screen



Conventional Workspace with Reveal Codes Open