Countdown Cracker

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Countdown is an Armand Jammot Game

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Introduction

Countdown was conceived by Armand Jammot, the game is known in France as *Des Chiffres et des Lettres* and has been featured on television for the past 25 years.

In the United Kingdom, Countdown has been running on Channel 4 television since its service launch in the early 1980's. Countdown has an avid following of fans and attracts a daily audience of over 5 million viewers.

The format for this game show consists of 6 rounds of a letters game, 2 rounds of a numbers game and finally a conundrum.

The Letters Game

A total of 9 letters are drawn at random from two piles - one of consonants, the other vowels. The two players have 30 seconds to make the longest word possible. To be valid, words must be included in the current edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary.

Scoring : 1 point per letter - except for 9-letter words which score double (18 points).
If more than one person is playing then only the longest word scores.

Letter Distribution :

Consonants				Vowels
B - 2	J - 1	Q - 1	X - 1	A - 15
C - 2	K - 1	R - 7	Y - 2	E - 20
D - 4	L - 5	S - 8	Z - 1	I - 14
F - 2	M - 3	T - 7		O - 11
G - 4	N - 5	V - 2		U - 5
H - 2	P - 3	W - 2		

The Numbers Game

A player selects 6 random numbers, 4 of these random numbers range from 1 - 10. The final 2 other numbers can be selected from a set of higher numbers - 25, 50, 75, 100 - or from the range 1 - 10. A final target number is generated at random and this number ranges from 100 - 999. Players are given 30 seconds to try to achieve the target figure by using any or all of the six numbers without using any number more than once. Only the four basic arithmetical operators of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division can be used. *(Powers, factorials, etc. are not allowed).*

Scoring : 10 points for reaching the target
7 points for being within 5 of the target
5 points for being within 10 of the target
If more than one person is playing then only the nearest to the target scores.

The Conundrum

9 letters are revealed that form a word. Players have 30 seconds to find the word.

Scoring : 10 points for finding the word
Only the first person who correctly identifies the word scores..

Letter Rack

Letter Rack is a traditional, educational and challenging word game with lots of new 'bells and whistles' - including 7 language dictionaries. This is also the first true Windows 95 / 98 / NT version and SoftSpot Software consider Letter Rack to be the best implementation of this game yet produced - maybe we're biased !

Features

- **1 - 4 Players (Computer or Human)**
- **125 Computer Player Skill Levels**
- **7 Language Dictionaries :-**
  Official(US/UK) ***English(UK)*** ***English(US)*** ***French***
  German ***Portuguese*** ***Spanish***
- **Game Save and Load**
- **Puzzle Solving**
- **Board Layout Designer**
- **Dictionary Revision**
- **Best Play 'Hint' Option**
- **Blank Swapping Variation**
- **Player Time Option**
- **Selectable Backgrounds**
- **Anagram Generator**

What's Up

What's Up is a novel and vertically challenging new word game - including 3 dictionaries. As far as we know, this is the only version of this game available as a computer programme.

What's Up brings a 3rd dimension to board word games !

Features

- **1 - 4 Players (Computer or Human)**
- **125 Computer Player Skill Levels**
- **3 Language Dictionaries :-**
  Official(US/UK) ***English(UK)*** ***English(US)***
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- **Puzzle Solving**
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Word Blitz

Word Blitz is a great new fun game of scrambled letters. All you have to do is spell words faster than your computer opponent - it's that easy - but beware it's so addictive that you'll be up all night playing this challenging game ! It`s great for improving vocabulary, spelling and stretches the brain - how can such an educational game be so much fun ?

There are so many options to select, starting from a simple anagram challenge through to restricted word pattern searches. You can select the number of available letters, set the word length and lots of other options.

Features

- **11,000 Word English Dictionary**
- **'Blitz' or 'Duplicate Words**
- **3 Game Modes :-**
  - ***Anagram (0 - 3 Key Letters)*** ***Tree*** ***Snake***
- ***Dictionary Revision***
- ***Configurable Player Grid***
- ***Selectable Backgrounds***
- ***Sound Effects***

Master Mind

Master Mind - the original challenging game - faithfully reproduced in beautiful 3D rendered graphics.

Features

- **Selectable Colored Pegs (4 - 10)**
- **Duplicate Colors Option**
- **Blank / Vacant Option**
- **Sound Effects**
- **Background Music**

ForeWord

ForeWord is a lexical analysis tool and generates anagram and missing letter lists. ForeWord uses a unique set of powerful search algorithms to perform word analysis using a 190,000+ word dictionary.

ForeWord is an essential program for devotees of Countdown, crosswords and other word puzzle games.

Foreword is freeware - it costs absolutely nothing ! It is only available from our website and can not be ordered directly from ourselves.

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Name :

Address :

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Fax :

e-mail :

The prices are quoted in US Dollars and Sterling. SoftSpot Software can accept cheques in any currency - just send in a cheque based on current exchange rates on the US Dollar pricing.

Letter Rack	US$25.50	£15.99
What's Up	US$25.50	£15.99
Word Blitz	US$20.00	£12.00
Master Mind	US$15.00	£10.00
Countdown Cracker	US$15.00	£10.00

Prices include all delivery charges **Total**

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Any Comments :

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SoftSpot Software
214, Chorley New Road
Bolton
Lancashire

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Thank you for your interest in our products.

Introduction

SoftSpot Software have a great enthusiasm for intellectual word and number games and puzzles. The Countdown numbers game has provided great mental stimulation and it gave us a real challenge - to derive a computer program that could solve this puzzle.

The simplicity of this number challenge was the attraction - how to combine up to six randomly selected numbers to reach a target number, using only four basic mathematical operators - plus, minus, multiply and divide ? A computer solution appeared equally straightforward but the algorithm remained elusive.

After months of research, it was evident that little work had been done in the field of computer numerical analysis that related to this problem - plenty of combinatorial, permutations and other algorithms but none of relevance to Countdown.

Finally, after a sudden inspirational idea, Countdown Cracker was developed. Countdown Cracker embodies a wonderful and unique recursive algorithm at its core - conceived and developed by SoftSpot Software. This algorithm proved to be so flexible and can be used to analyse lots of other related numerical puzzles.

We hope that you will be as impressed as us at the performance and abilities of Countdown Cracker - it still surprises us !

SoftSpot Software Products

SoftSpot Software is a specialist software development company who possess an avid and insatiable interest in intellectual word games and puzzles.

SoftSpot Software was founded in 1994, at that time based in Scotland but now located in Manchester. Our business is software consultancy and our services include turnkey software production.

Games production is very much a sideline interest, originating from our mania for Scrabble™ type games. ***'Letter Rack'*** was the first game produced by us in 1996 followed by ***'ForeWord'*** in 1997 and ***'What's Up'***, ***'Word Blitz'***, ***'Master Mind'*** and ***'Countdown Cracker'*** in 1998.

Our policy has been to produce very challenging games, attractively packaged, but without the unnecessary graphical interfaces that other companies use - we believe in playing the game - not playing with the game ! Our games are compact too - they don't hog Megabytes of disk storage.

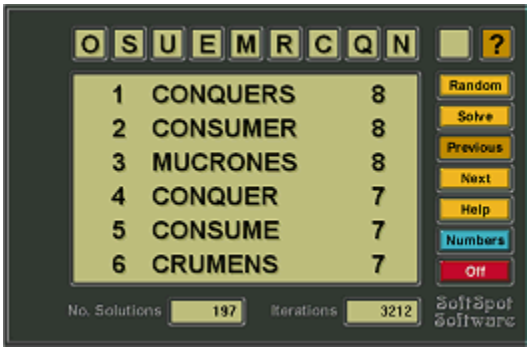
Operation

The screens below are those of the Letters Game and Number Game. Selecting a specific area of interest with the mouse will give a full description of that area and any relevant controls.

The window can be moved by dragging the border with the mouse.

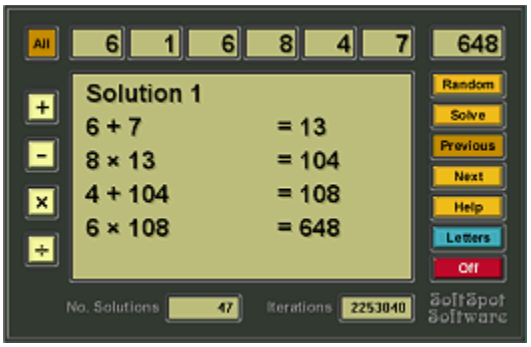
The Letters Game

(Select an area of the screen for help)



The Numbers Game

(Select an area of the screen for help)



Results Screen Display

The results from a game analysis are displayed in this window.
(The maximum number of results shown is restricted to 50.)
This window can be scrolled by dragging the mouse over the screen.
Alternatively, pressing the <Previous / Next> buttons or the keyboard <Up / Down> and <Previous / Next Page> keys will scroll this window. The <Home / End> keys scroll the display to the start or end.

Number of Solutions

This panel displays the total number of solutions found. Note that the screen display only shows the 'best' 50 results. If a search is abandoned, by pressing the <Escape> key, then the text 'Aborted' will be shown.

Number of Iterations

This panel displays the total number of valid permutations that were analysed. Typically, a letter analysis will only require approximately 2,000 to 3,000 iterations whereas the numbers game requires several million !

Chosen Letters / Numbers

These are the selected letters or numbers for analysis. They can be randomised by pressing the <Random> button - this will initiate a 30 second countdown period as shown by the clock.

The letters or numbers can be preset by dragging the mouse over the selected panel. Alternatively, with the mouse over a panel, the letter or number can be entered directly from the keyboard.

In the numbers game, the mouse will only permit the number range 1..10, 25, 50, 75 and 100 to be entered. Whereas keyboard entry allows the entire range 1..999 to be entered. Note that zero is permissible but is shown as '....' - essentially this digit will be ignored if set to zero.

Word Key Letter

This letter must be present in all solution words. Although not part of the Countdown challenge, this variation allows the traditional 'Target' problem.

If the Conundrum button is enabled, then pressing the <Random> button will automatically generate a nine letter word anagram including a key letter.

Conundrum Button

If this button is enabled (Up), then pressing the <Random> button will produce a nine letter anagram and a key letter.

Target Number

This is the target number that has to be achieved using a combination of the other displayed numbers and mathematical operators.
This number is automatically generated by pressing the <Random> button.
This number can be changed by dragging the mouse over the panel. Vertical mouse movement will alter the tens and units - horizontal movement alters the thousands and hundreds. Alternatively the number can be entered directly from the keyboard if the mouse is positioned over this panel.
In the game, this number is constrained to the range 100..999 but can be manually set over the range 0..9999.

Random Button

Pressing the <Random> button will generate a random problem and initiate a 30 second countdown time, after which the solution will be shown.

Solve Button

Pressing the <Solve> button will start the analysis process. This analysis can be interrupted by pressing the <Escape> key and the 'best' solutions found will be displayed. The number of solutions panel will display 'Aborted' indicating that the search was abandoned and that the results shown may not give the optimal solution.

Previous / Next Buttons

If enabled, these buttons scroll the results screen display up or down.
Alternatively the keyboard <Page Up / Page Down> keys can be used.

Help Button

Displays this help file !

Letters / Numbers Game Button

This button toggles between the letters game and the numbers game.

Off Button

Press this button to close Countdown Cracker.

About Countdown Cracker

Only displays the Countdown Cracker 'splash' screen.

Contact Us

SoftSpot Software are keen to hear from you - any comments are always gratefully received - either to help us in our constant desire to improve our existing products, or you may even have new ideas that can become our products of the future !

All of our products are available, in demonstration mode, from our web site at :-

http://wkweb4.cableinet.co.uk/softspot.com/

Keep an eye out for new products, we've got lots of new exciting ideas for new games !

Our e-mail address is :-

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And you can always mail us at :-

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Mathematical Operator Buttons

By excluding mathematical operators, the numbers puzzle can be made significantly more difficult. Any depressed button will not be used as an operator during analysis.

If the multiplication operator is disabled, the <Random> function will ensure that the sum of all the digits is greater than the target number.

All Numbers Button

Many people think that the numbers game in Countdown should use all of the randomly chosen digits. Well, if this button is in the 'Up' position, then Countdown Cracker will do just that !

Be aware that the total number of solutions, should it exceed 50, will be inaccurate. Some solutions are duplicates but beyond 50 it is not possible to tell. That is why there can be a discrepancy when comparing the number of solutions in these two modes of operation.