

Item 0720089 93/04/27 07:29
Subject: CD-ROM Review: Final revision

This is the final revision of my review. There are two sections, an introduction and the actual review. Each is posted seperately. You may use either of these however you see fit, but if you are going to use it, provide the entire article. I would do not want to be quoted out of context. But you may use it in anything else, without my permission, as long as the above applies.

Oh, and due to the nature of news on my system, these maybe ending up being posted by a friend of mine later today.

See you at the Expo!

Doug McClure

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NOVA

Walnut Creek CDROM 800-786-9907
1547 Palos Verdes, Suite 260510-947-5996
Walnut Creek, CA, 94596-2228510-947-1644 fax
Price: \$39.95info@cdrom.com

GENERAL

Walnut Creek is one of the latest entrants into the NeXT CD-ROM world. With their introduction of Nova, they bring several years of experience in publishing CD-ROMs for other platforms and software products, most notably the X11R5 and GNU distribution CD. Focusing on an archive format, Nova offers some unique features of its own.

For those looking for a NeXT CD-ROM, a GNU disk, UNIX source code, and possibly a MSDOS disk for those who have SoftPC or will have NS/FIP, Walnut Creek can serve all your needs. They will even create a custom CD-ROM for you, at a fairly attractive price.

All this support for different platforms is great, but can also make you wonder how much they concentrate on the NeXT product. Shortly after Nova was released, I contacted Walnut Creek to inquire if Nova was just a rehashing of monoLib. At that time, I received a message from someone there, who knew of no other CD-ROM products for

the NeXT. However, there were at least four other products out on the market before Nova, and two of them had been out for quite awhile.

This made me question how much they knew, or rather didn't know, about the NeXT market. Overall, I think they are a good company, and that I just talked to someone who was not as informed.

The update policy for any CD-ROM product from Walnut Creek is based on demand, with greater demand bringing more frequent updates. Currently, Nova can probably expect to see updates once or twice a year. A Nova disk for NS/FIP users is also in the works. This disk will be very much like the current Nova offering, but will have the programs compiled for Intel machines.

LAYOUT

The layout of Nova is fairly good. Moving around the disk is not a problem. There are two application directories, one for demonstration programs, and another for everything else. Nova has one of the highest number of subdivisions of the Apps directory. This is great for picking out exactly one type of application. The Demos directory is organized completely different from the regular apps directory, concentrating on commercial software divisions.

The source code directory is strictly limited to Objective-C classes, IB palettes, tutorials, and other source code to aid programmers. I found this division quite to my liking; however, it could use further subdividing into Palettes, Classes, and Misc directories.

One notable aspect I found was in the Fonts directory. All fonts, both free and shareware, are unarchived in one place, making it very easy to copy any ones that you want off the disk.

In other places, the layout is less than satisfactory. I especially disliked that the Utilities directory was divided into three subdirectories. It would be easier to use if those subdirectories were part of the Apps directory.

With all the experience Walnut Creek has had making CDs, you would expect things to be organized very well; but for the most part, they were no better or worse than anyone else. I was especially surprised at their handling of NeXT Package files. They were all placed in one directory, Packages. I would prefer to see them in the regular categories in the Apps directories. Even if they are not immediately accessible, at least when I look for a program, I do not have to worry about whether the program is packaged. There are very few programs which I am going to actually run off of a CD-ROM, so it matters more to me how easy it is to find something on a disk, versus whether or not I can actually run it right then or have to unpack it first. I would actually prefer to see the Apps and Demos directories eliminated and move their subdirectories to the top level. This would make for a flatter, and much quicker disk to browse through.

As far as the CDD goes, Nova had the second best average, at 4.2, but they scored the second worst for maximum CDD at 9.

INDEXES

One feature Nova excels at is indexing. Walnut Creek went to a fair amount of work on this part of the CD. Each directory containing actual applications or files, and not just directories, has both a file list in 'ls -lR' format and, what really counts, an index file listing all the programs or files, along with a brief 2-3 line sentence describing it. For programs, the index file also tells whether source code is included or not. Unique to Nova, these indexes are found everywhere on the disk, even in the directories that just contain sound files.

Nova also has all the index and file lists indexed with Librarian. This makes it extremely convenient to quickly locate a program using a name, or a match for part of its description. Unfortunately, since there is only one index file per directory, and that file contains the descriptions of all the programs, it is impossible to use Librarian for complex searches, since it will match for any program in that file. Searching for 'jpeg' and 'source' might reveal a match, but does not mean that they refer to the same program. There is no main file list at the root that is 'grep'able, nor are any of the index or file lists.

The index files are great for reading before trying all the programs or other files in a directory. They certainly aid in helping the user find only what he wants, instead of having to look through every file.

Nova also includes some indexing for a couple of the Documents directories, which is useful when using those files.

CONTENTS

Nova stands out in some of the content provided. In particular, Nova has a PC directory which contains various public domain programs for PC's which can be used with SoftPC. This is a great addition, and hopefully will be showing up on all the other CD-ROM products in the near future. The inclusion of high quality, very useful PC programs, which are not available on the NeXT, will probably become a necessity. I did not think the PC programs on the Nova CD were all that great, though. Most of the programs could already be found on, or for, the NeXT. Unless you really hate the NeXT options, or have booted your NeXT-Intel machine into DOS, I do not see much need for many of the programs. The idea is great, but I felt like the PC directory was mainly a teaser without any really worthwhile programs. One redeeming quality is the inclusion

of virus checking software.

There are also two Genie directories. The first, in the root directory of the CD, contains various information on how to become a Genie member, how to use the Genie services, etc. The second is in the Newsletters directory, and contains all the Genie Unix News. This is more of a roundtable format. Although I did not search through it very much, I imagine it might be useful.

The Newsletters directory, unfortunately, carried very little in the way of usergroup newsletters. Only the Nugget newsletter was represented strongly. Only six other newsletters were represented, and none of those had more than three issues. There was also no USENET news coverage. I have found this to be very important lately, and consider it to be a serious omission.

The product catalog, which Walnut Creek included, also mentioned the largest collection of NeXTSTEP games. After some investigating, I found this to be true, but just barely. Personally, I would have preferred to see the games deleted, and the USENET news and all the newsletters that are on the archives included instead. The games also do not make up for the complete lack of any non-game GNU software. While I expected to see GNU software, especially since they make a GNU disk, there was none, other than the GNU GO boardgame. If you are looking for some entertainment for your NeXT, then Nova does offer a very good selection of software.

Nova was the second smallest disk that I reviewed, at least in terms of sheer number of files. The disk does provide good coverage of NeXT programs. A couple of areas in which Nova did very well include a large collection of PostScript images and 'mod' sound files.

One feature that I had not realized about Nova, but learned from the author, is that all the programs on the Nova disk have been compiled for 3.0. In addition, any 2.x source directories have been converted to work with ProjectBuilder. This means, for the developer, that you will not need to spend time converting the program to a 3.0 format. This is definitely something that is nice to see.

SUMMARY

Nova earns some marks of distinction for its PC and GENIE coverage. The good indexing support throughout the disk is also a definite plus. However, the lack of USENET news, newsletters, and GNU software really hurts. Anyone looking for entertainment programs will be rewarded with one of the best collections available on this product.

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