

Great Utility, but How Does it Work?

By Dave Calhoun

The Random House Encyclopedia by Microlytics provides instant information for reports and general information, but getting at the information is like pulling teeth. The poorly designed interface clouds the usefulness of an excellent utility. What other company has put an encyclopedia in five megabytes of disk space at a price a student can afford?

To access the encyclopedia you must use a Desk Accessory called InfoDesk. It is designed to help you find information quickly and efficiently. It provides an Outline View, a Graphic View, and a Reverse Dictionary as well as a simple Find function. All of these views are simply different ways to access information depending on your needs.

The InfoDesk program uses Core Technology, and unfortunately it shows its ugly face quite frequently. Core Technology is the use of common programming code on two platforms (usually MAC and IBM). The interface is still programmed separately, but the two programs usually look and work very much alike. If the program is made to look like the typical Macintosh program then everyone is happy. Unfortunately InfoDesk looks like a typical DOS program. Difficult and confusing to use.

The Microlytics interface lacks the clear and obvious interface of most Macintosh programs. The most offensive aberration is the incorrect implementation of the Copy command. To copy an entry in the Encyclopedia you must use the menu option *Copy Definition* instead of the usual *Copy* command. It is annoying and difficult to remember this oddball command. Fortunately Microlytics has indicated that they are working to improve their interface.

An encyclopedia's purpose is to provide information. I worried that a low cost program wouldn't have much to offer. Most encyclopaedia's that I have seen come on CD ROM. How could this little program compete? I found that although the program uses only five megabytes of disk space it had ample articles. I used it constantly for school work in history and art at a college level and it rarely failed me.

Another plus is the efficient use of screen space (something many Mac owners can appreciate). Most screen space is used to view articles and subject titles while only a small portion of the screen is used to show articles. Articles are displayed in a small 3 line area until you find the article you are looking for. Again, InfoDesk fails the graphic interface test. To display the full article you must select the menu option *Display Article*. To return the article to its smaller size you must select the menu option *Outline View*. This is hardly Macintosh like and not very understandable. *Normal* Macintosh windows have a zoom box and a close box. Why didn't Microlytics use this simple and available feature instead of a clunky DOS-like interface?

The Random House Encyclopedia by Microlytics has a clunky interface, but is still an excellent tool for research. Any student in College or High School should appreciate its usefulness.

Copyright 1991

If you use this article please send

a copy of the publication to:

Dave Calhoun

1906 Browne Ave.

Yakima, WA 98902