

VbReader User's Manual
V1.4

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1.0 Introduction

VbReader is an off-line reader program written in Visual Basic and intended to provide a simple and reliable off-line reader for the average user, in a Windows 3.1 environment.

The program processes mail packets conforming to the Quick Mail format.

It incorporates the features needed to unpack mail packets, read the messages, write replies and generate a mail packet containing the replies. The interface was designed to be simple and easy to understand and use.

Users of this program will require a communication program to perform the download and upload of mail packets to the bulletin board of their choice.

This program is "Freeware". Registration is not required. The author would like that users send him Email at the following address, to comment on the program, suggest improvements, etc. The author intends to be very responsive to user requests.

Send Email to:

daniel.page@canrem.com

or

Daniel Page, user at Canada Remote Systems BBS

1.1 Requirements

The user requires the following:

- Windows 3.1
- PKZIP and PKUNZIP data compression software
- Communication program
- VGA or better video monitor (800x600 resolution preferred)
- Although the program will run on a 286, a 386 is preferred

2.0 Installation

2.1 Unzipping the distribution kit:

-Create a directory on your hard drive. Name it READER or some other appropriate name. For example:

```
md c:\reader
```

-Copy the reader14.zip file to this directory. Make this directory your current Directory. Unzip the distribution file: (PKUNZIP must be in your path)

```
copy a:\reader14.zip c:\reader  
cd \reader  
PKUNZIP *.zip
```

2.1.1 Contents of the Distribution Kit

The distribution file contains the following files:

reader.exe	; VbReader Program
vbrun200.dll	; Visual Basic Dynamic Link Library
vbreader.dll	; Custom Dynamic Link Library
threed.vbx	; 3d Controls VB extensions
news.bat	; Batch file to display bbs news bulletins
news.pif	; Pif file to display bbs news bulletins
welcome.bat	; Batch file to display the bbs welcome screen
welcome.pif	; pif file to display the welcome screen
explode.pif	; pif file to launch PKUNZIP via explode.bat
explode.bat	; batch file launched by the explode.pif file
compress.pif	; pif file to launch pkzip
compress.bat	; batch file launched by the compress.pif file.
8514oem.fon	; Large Terminal Font
vgaoem.fon	; Small Terminal Font

2.1.2 Additional Files:

services.pif ; Sample Pif file to display the services data
files.pif ; Sample Pif file used to launch the files display editor
editor.pif ; Sample Pif file used to launch a DOS editor.
tagfile.txt ; text file containing tag lines

2.2 Font Installation

Invoke the Windows Fonts installation program from the Windows Control Panel. Choose the **Add** option. Direct the program to search in the **reader** directory. It will display the following: **Terminal font for the IBM 8514** and **Terminal [US] [Set #6]**. Click on the two fonts to select them, then click the **OK** button. The fonts will be installed. If the fonts are already installed in your system, windows will display a message to that effect. You may then cancel the installation of the new font.

NOTE: In order to function properly, the program requires that **BOTH** fonts be installed.

2.3 Dynamic Link Libraries and Visual Basic Extensions

The program uses two Dynamic Link Libraries:

-VBRUN200.DLL
-VBREADER.DLL

The program also uses a Visual Basic Extension file

-THREED.VBX

Copy the *.DLL files to your **Windows\system** directory. Assuming this is on drive **C:**

copy c:\reader*.dll c:\windows\system

Copy the **THREED.VBX** file to your **Windows\system** directory.

copy c:\reader*.vbx c:\windows\system

Make sure that this is the only copy of the program on your system. If you have used other Visual Basic programs before, it is possible that an older version of this file has been installed previously. **You must use the new version of the THREED.VBX file, as distributed with the kit.**

2.4 ANSI.SYS

- In order to properly display the ANSI graphics that are usually included in the Bulletins files from the BBS, you must load the ANSI driver provided with your DOS operating system. This is done by editing your **config.sys** file. Add the following line:

device=c:\dos\ansi.sys

2.4 PKZIP/PKUNZIP

VbReader uses PKZIP and PKUNZIP to compress and expand messages. The program was designed to use version 1.10 of the zip utilities.

Following the release of the new PKZIP (**PKZIP204C**), some difficulties were encountered. The result is that the mechanism to invoke the new archive program has changed somewhat.

Originally, the archiver was invoked directly through a **PIF** file, with VbReader passing the appropriate parameters. As the new PKZIP proved too unstable to be used in this manner, the PIF files (COMPRESS.PIF and EXPLODE.PIF) have been changed to invoke BAT files (COMPRESS.BAT and EXPLODE.BAT). The contents are explained below:

2.4.1 Compress.bat

When creating a mail packet, the new PKZIP was found to be overzealous. It not only deleted the old replies after compression, but also deleted the REPLIES directory. In order to correct this, the batch file changes the Current Directory to the replies directory. In addition, **DPMI** support had to be disabled by including the **-)** switch. You may need to edit this file to match your installation. Here is the code:

```
rem *****Compress.Bat*****
rem Set Current Drive to the drive containing the replies directory
rem Substitute your own drive letter
c:
rem Set Current Directory to the replies Directory
rem Substitute you own directory structure
cd\reader\replies
rem Invoke PKZIP and pass parameters
rem Substitute your PKZIP path.
c:\pkz2\pkzip -) %1 %2 %3
rem If using PKZIP 1.10, remove the -) switch
rem*****End of Compress.BAT*****
```

2.4.2 Explode.Bat

When expanding a QWK packet, the new PKZIP proved unstable. The batch file provides a means of disabling **DPMI** support.

```
rem*****Explode.Bat*****
rem Substitute your own path
c:\pkz2\pkunzip -) %1 %2
rem If using the older pkzip110, remove the -) switch
rem*****End of Explode.Bat*****
```

While I am aware that the present method of invoking the archiver may seem somewhat crude, it works. This method allows the greatest amount of flexibility in terms of modifying parameters which may be required to make the new PKZIP reliable on any system. A later release of VbReader will hopefully be able to include a more streamlined method of launching the archiver, but until the verdict is totally in regarding PKZIP204C, this is the safest method.

2.5 Program Manager Setup

Using the File Manager, drag the program **reader.exe** to a program group of your choice.

2.6 Last Installation Step

- If you edited your **config.sys** or **autoexec.bat** files, reboot your system to allow the changes to take effect.

3.0 Initial StartUp of VbReader

To start VbReader, you may double-click on **reader.exe** with the file manager, or double click on the **reader** icon in a program group.

3.1 Initial Configuration

When the program is first started, it will look for a configuration file (**reader.ini**). Initially, this file will not exist. The program will then invoke the configuration menu. The following options should be verified and adjusted to your needs:

3.1.1 Paths and Directories

Examine the Directories listed. The defaults provided should be adequate. If you have specific upload and download directories for your communication program, you should change the uploads and download paths to those

directories so that VbReader will be able to access mail packets directly from the communication program's directories.

Once you have configured the options, click the **Done** button. The program will proceed to create the required directories listed in the configuration menu. The program will notify you for every directory created. Just click the OK button until the mail screen is displayed. We are now ready to open a mail packet. **However, before we do, you should invoke the second configuration menu.**

3.2 Complete Configuration

Click on the **Quick Configuration** menu item. The first option listed is **Screen Options**. Select this option.

3.2.1 Screen Options Menu

3.2.1.1 Font Name, Font Size and Font Style

The Font Name list box allows you to choose the fonts that will be used in the main view screen, as well as the personal signature text box. Clicking on the button on the right side of the box will display the font names installed in your system. Click on the font you wish to use to read and write messages.

Note that you can also alter the appearance of the font by clicking the Font Style radio buttons to make the font **Bold** or **Normal**. In addition, the Font Size text box allows you to select the size of the font.

As you select a new font or modify a font characteristic, the text box at the bottom right of the menu screen will display the result. Choose the font and font style which most appeals to you.

3.2.1.2 Screen Colors

You can choose the foreground and background colors used in the main reader screen by clicking on the desired colored boxes in the two frames at the bottom left of the menu screen.

The result is again displayed on the sample text box.

3.2.1.3 Opening Size

This option determines if the program will open in full screen mode or in normal mode when it is invoked.

3.2.1.4 Line Length

This option determines where a line wrap will occur when a reply or new message is entered. While you type a message, the lines will wrap when the text reaches the right edge of the edit screen. However, because the fonts used

and their sizes can be selected by the user, this wrap may not be at a desirable location. The line may be too long or too short. For this reason, the final line wraps are inserted by the message processing algorithms when a message is saved. This field determines at what character the wrap occurs. The default number of 76 is recommended.

3.2.1.5 Quote Width

When the text of a message is inserted in a reply, this field determines at what character position the quoted text will be truncated or wrapped. This field should always be equal or smaller than the chosen Line Length. When this field is smaller than the Line Length, the resulting text will be centered in the edit screen.

3.2.1.6 Quote Mode

When inserting quoted text in a reply, this option determines whether quoted lines that exceed the Quote Width should be truncated or wrapped to a new line.

Generally, the Truncate option with a Quote Width of 76 results in text that is better formatted. The wrap option works better if the Quote Width is around 40 characters.

3.2.2 TagLines Menu

The third option listed in the **Quick Configuration** menu item is the **TagLine** menu. Clicking on this option will invoke the second configuration menu. This menu allows you to modify the following options:

3.2.2.1 Your Name:

This option sets your user name. This is used when entering replies or new messages.

3.2.2.2 Your Tag Line:

This is your default tag line.

3.2.2.3 Tag File Name:

The name of a file containing tag lines. This file must reside in the directory listed in the first configuration menu. VbReader comes with a file containing 4500 tag lines. This file should be moved in the DataFile directory. By default, the file name is Tagfile.txt. You may change this to any name you wish. Just make sure that you tell VbReader the correct location and name of the tag file, via the configuration menus.

3.2.2.4 Your Signature Lines:

This text box contains the signature text which will be appended to the end of

the messages you write. Note that the font used in this text box is the same as the main read screen font. Should you wish to make "boxes" or other patterns, make sure that you use a fixed pitch font to preserve the required spacing. Three such fonts are available : Terminal, 8514oem, and Fixedsys. Once your pattern has been entered, you may revert to any desired font. Your pattern spatial characteristics will be distorted, but when your message is read by the recipient, it will be correct, as most other off-line readers use fixed pitch fonts.

3.2.2.5 Default BBS ID:

Finally, this box allows you to specify a default BBS name. Once you have read a mail packet, this field will contain the BBS identity code of that BBS.

After having set those options, click **Done** and the program returns you to the main screen.

3.2.3 Editor Selections

Now select the third item in the **Quick Configuration** menu, **Editor Selections**. The following options are displayed:

3.2.3.1 Files List Editor:

This option allows you to select the editor which will be used to display the new files list downloaded from the BBS. The default is the **WRITE** program shipped with windows. You may specify your favorite editor. If this editor is a Windows based editor, you need only specify the program name. If the editor is not in your path, you must include the full path.

ex: deskedit.exe
 or
 c:\ndw\deskedit.exe

If the editor is a DOS application, it is best to insert the name of a PIF file which will supply the required parameters to Windows in order to launch the editor. Normally, this pif file will contain the name of the editor and will launch the editor in Windowed mode. See the example pif files provided (**files.pif** and **services.pif**).

3.2.3.2 Services Editor:

This editor selection is used to display the services data files downloaded from the BBS. See the **files editor** selection above for details in configuring this option.

Note: Services are not supported in this version of the program.
Should a service packet be received, you will be able to see a

listing of it's contents via the View Items menu. In order to see the contents you will have to use an external program.

Now return to the main configuration menu.

3.2.3 FidoMode:

The fifth item in the Quick Configuration menu is Fido Mode.

This option changes the tear line characters to a string of character which FIDO BBS systems will allow. When this option is OFF (unchecked) the reader is PC Board mode, the normal mode.

3.2.4 Mode Français

This mode will change the quote line used when replying to a message. When it is checked, the quote line is in French. To change the Keyboard to French mode, use the Control Panel, International option.

3.2.5 Saving the Configuration

We are done with the configuration. Do not forget to click the last option, **Save Configuration to Disk**.

4.0 A Quick Tour of the Program

4.1 Opening a Mail Packet

Click on the File menu. At this point, a number of items are enabled: **Open Mail Packet, Delete Mail Packet, Create Replies Packet, Printer Config and Cleanup and Exit**. Click on the Open Mail Packet item. The program will look in the work directory for existing data. If you previously had opened a mail packet, the work directory would contain files. At this point the program would ask you if you wished to purge the directory. However, since at this time you do not have any data in the work directory, the program will directly invoke a file dialog box. The box will display the contents of the download directory. Select a mail packet.

Once a mail packet is selected, the program will launch PKUNZIP in a DOS window. The packet will be expanded and the files installed in the work directory. Once the expansion process is complete, you may read the messages.

4.2 Reading Messages

Click on the View Items menu option. A list of options appear.

4.2.1 Personal Mail

Clicking on this option will cause the program to search for personal messages. If any exist, a list will appear, listing the message dates, originator, destination

(you) and the subject. Double-click on the desired message to view it. Or use the Arrow keys or Page Down or Page Up keys to select a message and press Enter to view it.

4.2.2 Join Conference

Clicking on this item will cause a list of conferences to be displayed. The program will display only conferences in which there are messages to read. The list also displays the number of messages in each conference. Double-click on the desired conference. At this point, a list showing the available messages is displayed. Like the Personal Messages list, it displays the Subject, Message Number, Originator, Destination and the message index number. Double Click on a message to view it., or use the Arrow Keys, Page Down or Page Up Keys followed by ENTER.

4.2.3 New Files

This menu item will cause the program to invoke the editor program selected in the **Files Editor** configuration option. The default is Write.exe, the editor bundled with windows. The editor will then display the list of new files which is usually included in your mail packet. While in the editor, you may search for topics, edit the file, and generally use normal editor functions.

4.2.4 BBS News

This option will launch a DOS window and will cause the BBS News file to be displayed in this window. If the news file contains ANSI colors and graphics, those will be displayed, provided that **ANSI.SYS** is loaded in your config.sys file. At any time, you may interrupt the display by typing **cntrl-c**.

4.2.5 Services

If services were include in the packet, a list will appear listing the services included in the mail packet. You will then have to manually launch an editor, and/or PKUNZIP to process the service. A future version of the program will process services fully.

4.2.6 Welcome Screen

Like the BBS News menu, this option launches a DOS window and displays the BBS welcome screen, if this screen was included with your mail packet. Again, you must have ANSI.SYS loaded to allow colors to be displayed. After the screen is displayed, type **<enter>** to close the window.

4.2.7 Good-bye Screen

Like the BBS News menu, this option launches a DOS window and displays the BBS good-bye screen, if this screen was included with your mail packet. Again, you must have ANSI.SYS loaded to allow colors to be displayed. After the

screen is displayed, type <enter> to close the window.

4.3 Managing the Reader Screen

Once in the read screen, you may select messages to view by one of two methods, mouse or keys.

4.3.1 Mouse Method

First, you may use the horizontal scroll bar at the bottom right of the screen. Clicking on the buttons at either end will select the next or previous message in the conference. Clicking on the scroll bar will increment or decrement the message pointer by larger amounts (total number of messages / 10). You may also click on the "thumb button" and drag it left or right, thereby selecting messages.

4.3.2 Keys

For faster control of the screen, you may use the arrow keys. The up and down arrow keys will scroll the view screen up and down by a full screen. The left and right arrows will select the previous and next message respectively.

Note that for the keys to function as expected, the scroll bar must have the focus. Should the keys cease to function as expected, use the mouse and click on the scroll bar to restore the focus to that control.

Note that all controls displayed in the reader screen have ALT Keys assigned to them. Each control has an underlined letter in it's caption. To activate a control, press the ALT key and the underlined letter.

4.4 The Message List

The Message list will appear once you select a conference from the Conference list. While reading messages, you may view the message list once more by clicking on the **Message List** button bar under the message scroll bar at the bottom right of the reader screen. You may also use the **ALT M** key combination.

While viewing the message list, the Up and Down arrows will move the selection bar up or down by one message. PageUp and PageDown will move the selection bar for an entire screen. You may read a selected message by double clicking on it, or by pressing the ENTER key.

5.0 Entering a Reply

5.1 Starting the Process

While reading messages, you may enter a reply by clicking on the **Reply** button. At this point, the program will ask if you wish to include the message in your reply.

If you answer yes, the program will copy the message to the edit screen and include quote marks and a quote announcement at the top of the message. Otherwise, the reply screen will be shown empty.

5.2 Controlling the reply destination

Normally, the reply is automatically addressed to the person whose name appears in the **From:** field at the bottom right of the read screen. In most cases, this is adequate. However, in some cases, you may wish to address your reply to the person who started the subject thread. In such cases, you may re-direct the reply by doing the following:

Before pressing the **Reply** button, use the mouse and select the name of the person in the **TO:** field at the bottom right of the reader screen. Like all windows programs, you select the name by a "Click and Drag" operation on the field. Once the name is selected, copy it to the clipboard by typing **<cntrl Insert>**. Invoke the reply screen and paste the new destination over the **TO:** field by selecting the name (Click and Drag) and typing **<Shift Insert>**. You may also need to modify the quote line at the top of the message, depending on the context.

Should you wish to send this reply to a person whose name is not displayed anywhere, just type the correct name in the **TO:** field.

5.3 Setting the message security

The message you enter may be either **Private** or **Public**. When private, only the recipient may read it. When public, anyone in the conference will be able to read it. The security level is set by clicking on the appropriate radio button control at the bottom of the screen.

5.4 Other Displays

At the bottom of the reply screen you will note a number of display fields. They are used to display information about your message. This includes the conference number, the time and date of your message, and the message number of the message you are replying to.

5.5 Editing Commands

The editor is not very complex but quite functional. You may use the mouse to move the cursor to any insertion point in the text. The mouse will also allow you to select text by doing a Click and Drag operation.

Once text is selected, you may delete by using the **delete** key, or cut or copy it to the clipboard by using the **Edit** menu. Once text is in the clipboard, you may paste it to another location. As a short cut, you may use the **cntrl Insert** and **shift Insert** key strokes to copy text to the clipboard and to paste it back in your

message. The clipboard mechanism also allows text to be transferred to and from other applications.

The text will automatically wrap at the right edge of the screen. Using the **ENTER** key will move the insertion point immediately to the next line. While typing new text, do not use the ENTER key at the end of each line. This inserts a "hard" newline character. This is unnecessary as the program will automatically format your message when it is saved. The reason is that you may be using proportional fonts, in which case line lengths will vary for a given number of characters. Pressing the **ENTER** key will insert a hard newline character, probably at the wrong place. Use the **ENTER** key only to terminate a paragraph. VbReader functions very much like a word processor.

Even if a line of text appears overly long, **do not type ENTER**. Let the program wrap it on screen, and format it when the message is saved.

Should you wish to verify the formatting, use the **Your Replies** menu item. This will allow you to view and re-edit your replies. At this point the message has been formatted for display in a standard DOS editor screen (i.e.: the line length is adjusted to fit in a 80 character DOS editor screen).

Should the editing process (for a previously entered reply) involve changing the length of a line, delete the CRLF characters at the end of the line (restore the basic reader screen wrap). When the message is saved, it will be reformatted properly.

Tabs are inserted by typing the **cntrl Tab** key sequence. That is because the Tab keystroke is used to navigate between screen objects and controls.

5.6 Editor File Commands

While in the editor window, you may save the displayed text or insert a text file in the editor window by selecting the appropriate option in the **File** menu in the menu bar.

5.7 Tag Line Selection

Once your message is complete, you may wish to select an appropriate tag line. At the bottom center of the screen, you will see a button marked **Tag Line**. Clicking on this button will invoke the tag selection window. This consists of a drop-down list box. When first invoked, the list box displays the current tag line. Clicking on the arrow button on the right of the text box will cause a list of tag lines to be displayed. If the number of tag lines exceeds the area available to display them, a scroll bar will also appear. Select the desired tag line by clicking on it. Click on the **OK** button to return to the edit screen. Note that the list box

can only display the first 1000 tag lines in you tag file. Also Note that the tag line is not displayed in the edit screen. It is appended to the end of your message when you save it.

5.8 Saving the message

When you are done with the editing, click on the **Save** button. A dialog box will appear asking you to confirm. If you confirm that you wish to save the message, the message will be appended to the reply file in the **replies** directory. If you select **Cancel**, you will be returned to the edit screen. Clicking the **NO** button will delete the reply and return you to the read screen.

6.0 Entering a New Message

You would use this option when you wish to enter a new message, not linked to any particular message in a conference. The procedure is very similar to the **Reply** procedure except for the following:

6.1 Selecting a Message Conference

When entering a new message, you may explicitly declare which conference your message is intended for. You may either type the conference number in the appropriate field at the bottom left of the editor screen, or you may pick a conference from a list that is displayed when you click the **View Lists** menu item in the menu bar at the top of the screen.

When the list is displayed, select a conference by clicking on it. Note that the list will only display the first 3000 conferences listed in the mail packet control file.

6.2 Selecting a Recipient

To address the message to a recipient, simply type the person's name in the **TO:** field at the bottom right of the edit screen.

7.0 Editing Your Replies

Before sending your replies to the BBS for everyone to read, you may wish to read them and perhaps edit them. This can be accomplished with the **Your Replies** menu option.

Clicking this option will bring up a list of your replies. Double-click on the reply you wish to read. It will be displayed in the Read window. The Replies feature works in the same manner as the Read Messages mode.

When the editing of replies is complete, pressing the **DONE** button will cause the old replies to be erased and a new reply file created with the newly edited replies.

8.0 Creating a Replies Packet

Select the **Create Replies Packet** option of the Files menu. This will launch the compression program which will compress your replies and move the resulting file to the uploads directory. You will be asked if you wish to delete the old replies (the ones that are now being processed). If a mail packet exists in the upload directory, the program will ask whether you wish to continue. If you continue, the old replies packet will be overwritten.

Once your reply packet is created, launch your communication program and upload it.

9.0 Printing Messages

The program can print a single message at a time. The printing feature is not as complete as it could be in that there are no provisions for proper pagination of multipage messages, even though the program will print multipage messages. However, most messages will fit on a single page.

9.1 Printer Config

In the **File** menu item, you will find the **Printer Config...** item. Clicking on this item will bring up a dialog box containing printer configuration items relating to VbReader. You have control over the following options:

9.1.1 Printer Font

This is a combo box containing the available printer fonts for the printer presently selected. The current font is displayed in the text box portion of the combo box. Clicking the button on the right hand side of the box will expand the list to display all the available fonts. Click on the desired font to select it.

9.1.2 Font Size

Use this text box to select the printer font size. Type in the size that you wish to use. If this size is not available, Windows will substitute the closest match.

9.1.3 Left Margin

This is the width of the left margin in inches. 1 inch is usually a good choice.

9.1.4 Top Margin

This is of course the top margin spacing. For most single sheet dot matrix printers, set this to 0. For most other kinds of printers, set it to 1 inch.

10.0 The Twit Filter

Under the **Tools** menu, you will find the **Twit Filter** option. This will invoke a dialog box containing a Combo box, a check box and a couple of control buttons.. The

Combo box contains a list of names of message originators which you wish removed from all message lists. You can add names and remove them at will. When the program is terminated, all changes to the twit list are saved in a file called **TwitFile.txt** in the DataFile directory.

When the Twit Filter is activated via the check box, all messages bearing a author name included in the twit list are deleted from the message lists. Should you wish to see them, turn off the filter and re-select the conference you are interested in. As the message list is processed, messages previously filtered out will re-appear.

11.0 VbReader Limits:

Number of Conferences containing messages: 700
Number of Conferences listed in the View List menu: 3000
Maximum Conference Number 9999
Number of Messages per Conference 700
Number of Replies 700
Number of TagLines displayed in the list box 1000

12.0 Acknowledgments

This program would not have been possible without a small but indispensable document written by Patrick Y. Lee, listing the format of the QWK mail packets.

Secondly, a large number of improvements were suggested by my beta testers and other dedicated users. Some of their names are listed below, in no particular order.

Michael Livsey
David Anjo
Eugene Sunday
Wayne Husted
Colin Perkel

There are others, but since I lost my original BBS system files, their messages (and names) are no longer available to me. Sorry! In any case, those of you who have contributed know who you are and please be assured that your contribution and support were and are still valued tremendously!