

hDC chose to write a manual addendum instead of redesigning the documentation. Those three programs let you redefine the two most commonly used input devices to perform specific tasks, either system-wide or in specific applications, and create customizable button palettes to run *Power Launcher's* "enhanced commands", again, applicable to the tasks you deem appropriate. They do their respective jobs as well as any similar utilities available, and you'll want to explore them.

As we said in our last review, *Power Launcher's* strength is its ability to carry out tasks using enhanced commands. For example, "wp.pif: initdir=e:\iym\iymsr, icon=(moricons.dll,92), caption='Article in Progress'" launched the DOS-based word processing session in which this article was created, called a .PIF file for the word processor, named a working directory, selected an icon buried in one of the Dynamic Link Libraries that accompanies *Windows 3.1*, and customized the window's caption. It looks hard, but it isn't; everything except the icon designation can be specified using near-self-explanatory prompts, and everything takes place in a dialog box.

*Power Launcher* launches multiple documents with a single command, is smart enough to launch a new instance of a *Windows* program that has reached its limit on open windows (but needs to be told to launch a new instance of any DOS programs already running), and includes a very respectable virtual-desktop tool. If you've upgraded to *Windows 3.1* you can construct commands that work with drag-and-drop, and with the new Action Editor, you can create enhanced commands that embed in documents from applications equipped to act as servers for Object Linking and Embedding.

*Power Launcher 2.0* includes a few tweaks designed to make it work better, but their documentation needs work. For example, there are now two parameters that control how *Power Launcher* handles sounds, but they are ignored entirely. Further, although you'll find the statement "default=env=full" in the HDC.INI file that is created in your *Windows* directory, only through considerable poking around will you learn that its effect is to automatically provide a larger environment space to DOS applications—which needed to be done manually in *Power Launcher 1.0*. On-line documentation has been improved, and the tutorial is a great example of what you can accomplish with *Power Launcher*, but a package of this nature simply needs better explanatory aid.

The most unique feature in *Power Launcher 2.0* is the new PowerBar. It's very useful, and highly customizable, but it's a real love-it-or-hate-it item. As delivered, it consists of a "Launch Box", removable buttons with which you can instantly access a current-directory instance of File Manager, system information, and the virtual desktop, and a series of smaller icons set to invoke various enhanced commands (see figure). The Launch Box is used to type *Windows*, a subset of DOS, and enhanced commands directly. Since PowerBar can be set to always force its way to the top of your *Windows* desktop, or be accessed instantly with a hot-key combination, the need to launch DOS sessions is largely obviated. Arguably, it also does away with the need to spend very much time navigating the nested menu structure that *Power Launcher* lets you set up.

Unfortunately, PowerBar is possessed of several annoying flaws. The automatic-complete feature, which looks at your twenty most recent commands plus the contents of the default directory, is terrific, but the arrow-key-based command recall system works in a way opposite that of almost every similar utility you've probably seen; the most recent command is accessed with the <DOWN> key, not <UP>. Many will expand the area of the PowerBar used to access user-defined commands by removing the default items, but then realize that the non-sizable buttons are too small to comfortably accept

standard icons. Finally, the red hDC logo, which can be disabled elsewhere in *Power Launcher* and in other products from this vendor, is a fixture on PowerBar.

In spite of a noticeably longer load process (yes, even slower than *Norton Desktop for Windows*—a reversal from *Power Launcher 1.0*), lack of support for the SPEAKER.DRV sound driver, and an inability to maintain accurate icon depictions for multiple DOS programs, *Power Launcher* is the shell of choice in our offices, and yes, we've gone to version two—the benefits simply outweigh the annoyances. Remember, though, that “hidden” applications are accessible only from *Power Launcher's* Task List (*Windows'* Task Manager doesn't show them and there's still no way to substitute the former for the latter). Also, housekeeping fanatics should make note of the contents of their SYSTEM directories both before and after installing *Power Launcher*, because it copies two identical .DLL files over what it finds there, and redates one of them.

Power Launcher 2.0  
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