

them from one location to another, and if there are more in a presentation than will fit on screen, or you don't want to wait for repeated screen draws of the newly ordered show, you can do the same trick by moving names in a list, again by simple point and click. **DON'T OVERLOOK THIS FEATURE.**

Detractors will say that *PowerPoint* is best suited to presentations that use a lot of text and clip art (where have you heard that before?), but stop and think about the last fifty or so presentations you've either sat through or created, and what they were made up of. *PowerPoint* earns its keep, and its check rating.

Guide

Owl International, Inc.

Guide belongs to a breed of program with roots in both the simplest and most esoteric recesses of PC usage. The primary idea is to provide a medium in which large amounts of information are made (readily) available to even the least computer-literate in a way that makes them forget they're "using the one-eyed monster". Owl International calls it "hypermedia", others call a subset of it "hypertext"; the phrase most commonly applied lately has been "multimedia".

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Using such a term invites controversy. What we've seen recently is that the idea of bringing together text, pictures, and sound is sufficiently arcane to prevent a standard methodology from emerging. *Guide* takes an approach that allows for great flexibility in all regards, but only if you possess a strong background in structured programming. In spite of running under *Windows* and affording the means to link text and pictures from the menu driven structure that Microsoft's environment provides, taking full advantage requires that you leave the friendly graphical confines and **write code**. Those with experience in a language such as Pascal will do well; if "function MAIN(), begin, end" means something to you (or someone(s) working for you) and you want to develop hypermedia under *Windows*, look no farther; *Guide* makes the job easy. If you want your company's employee handbook computerized and plan on giving the job to even the smartest employee hired into an administrative or sales position, hold up.

The culprit is *Guide*'s documentation. While it makes a terrific reference guide, providing quick, well organized access to information on any command available from the *Windows* interface or *Guide*'s LOGiiX programming language, no attempt is made to provide detailed instructions for producing *Guide* documents. Further, the sample documents distributed with the package are not well utilized. So, although a short but lucid chapter explains how to create links between "objects" (passages of text, pictures, etc.), the objects' need to pre-exist in a readily assimilated form is not mentioned at all. It's a lot like expecting an inexperienced programmer to produce useful work without the benefit of some systems analysis experience.

If all of the above has left you undaunted and you decide to try *Guide*, you're in for a treat. Occupying under 1.5 megabytes of disk space, *Guide* works by providing links between objects with action attributes determined by your choice among the four available link types. You represent the links by creating "buttons" or defining areas of your documents that, when the cursor passes through them, cause it to change shape. The environment can be customized either for all documents or particular ones by altering colors (chosen from the basic palette provided under *Windows*), disabling *Windows*'s menus, and assigning behavior/appearance attributes to objects; whether a chosen object continues to appear on screen after you select it, its location, when (if) it blinks, and font changes are all easily customized, so that once you create supporting documents and miscellaneous objects, linking them consists of little more than picking the type of button to use.

Your four choices in that regard are "note" (temporarily providing expanded explanations for an object), "reference" (a more permanent and usually more quantitative note), "expansion" (typically used to provide two way links between objects), and "command", which pass instructions externally from *Guide*. For the last type, interpreters for launching other programs, manipulating other documents, and controlling serial ports are included with *Guide*, so if you want to have Beethoven's Fifth Symphony played back by software controlling a sound board when you choose a particular button, you can. You have the choice of making objects such as graphics (*Windows* bitmaps and metafiles, plus .PCX, .TIF, and .PCC formats supported) part of *Guide* documents or accessing them externally. The former provides for better response times at the expense of disk space, the latter allows you to reference an object that might change from time to time, and have the changes automatically reflected by *Guide*.

There are various tools included to simplify use of the product. Manual navigation among "frames" of a document is made easy by a slew of hot key combinations and *Windows*' menu-based commands, simple or complex (multi-conditional) user customizable searches can be conducted to locate words, letter combinations, wildcard characters, links and objects, and *Guide* includes a glossary feature that enables you to store often used command sequences for fast retrieval. You can print documents as pure text or to mimic on screen formatting, and both password and document protection may be imposed.

To their credit, officials at Owl International acknowledge the documentation problems, and we're satisfied with their intent to revise *Guide*'s accompanying manuscript; this could happen as soon as November. Meanwhile, if you have the

expertise outlined above to make you productive now, and see a need in your organization to computerize documentation used internally, look at *Guide*. If you think it sounds difficult, though, it almost certainly will be, and for the time being, you should limit yourself to reading documents created by others.