

the last twenty words you've looked up, and makes them easily accessible through a menu choice called, appropriately enough, "History".

We'd like to see pronunciation guides to words added, and a larger dictionary (*Language Master* uses Webster's concise version, with just 80,000 words), but overall, *Language Master* is a capable tool for those without, those seeking more, or perfectionists.

Windows Express and FirstApps
hDC Computer Corporation

In spite of its great new powerful features, *Windows 3.0* isn't perfect. The old file extension association rules are still in effect, for example, and it's easy to undo hours of work customizing the interface with just a misplaced mouse click or two. hDC addresses these and other issues with their utility packages, *Express* and *FirstApps*.

Sold separately (and sharing some features; both packages have screen blanking utilities), the two products are aimed at anyone interested in making *Windows* easier to use, and more tamper-resistant. Both come with clearly worded, short documentation (about 100 pages each, with lots of illustrations), and are installed in a semi-automated fashion by included programs designed for that purpose. Fully implemented, *Express* occupies about 700 kilobytes of disk space, *FirstApps* just under two megabytes.

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Express is designed to be used as a system shell, replacing *Windows'* Program Manager. Alternately, it can be run like any other *Windows* application, but most of its utility is defeated when used in that way. Enacting a user interface faintly reminiscent of the Apple Macintosh "file folder" metaphor, users run all their programs by pointing and clicking on icons, titles, or a combination of the two that launch the appropriate application and optionally load a pre-specified file. Unlike using a Mac, folders are full screen objects, but they can contain an unlimited number of sub-folders, and can cross reference each other. The filing system is managed via use of a separate included program, *Express Editor*, and users can be kept from tampering with the interface that appears on their screens by installing only *Express*, one a suitable system has been designed.

Express Editor can be used to create and modify folders and their contents, create and edit icons (the program includes a library of 200, mostly application or company specific which, unfortunately can not be exported for use outside *Express*), assign passwords to the entire system, certain programs, or files, and even create customized help blurbs.

Reworking and expanding on an earlier generation product called *Windows Manager*, *FirstApps* is a collection of environment-tweaking and productivity tools. Nine separate such modules are included, plus a game called *Rocks* that illustrates *Windows's* excellent graphics capabilities - or at least you might think so at first look - one of the "micro apps" (*Desktop*) redefines the criteria for such an opinion with full motion animation. Courtesy of hDC, you can now have a cougar sprinting across your screen behind your open windows, or at the expense of considerable system resources (and perhaps some visual acuity), create a constantly changing fractal pattern. *Desktop* also allows you to customize a log-on sequence, or maintain a full-screen calendar for easy access.

A couple of the modules are more intriguing than useful; *Memory Viewer* displays a picture of your system's current condition with regard to available RAM and virtual memory, but under *Windows*, the limited information provided is of no great impact, and *Font Viewer* gives you a way to preview quickly all the character sets available to your system, both for screen and print (yes, *Windows'* control center **almost** does this). Others, though, are clear improvements. *Art Gallery* makes access to bitmaps and metafiles for implementation through the clipboard easy, and *Character Set* does the same for both ASCII and ANSI character sets (notably, the copyright and registered trademark symbols). *Auto Save* stores your work to disk after a user defined number of keystrokes have been entered or minute have passed, *Work Sets* automate the process of starting and closing down entire suites of applications, and *Alarm Clock* takes the *Windows* calendar concept and improves upon it: even out of a PC's tinny speaker, Beethoven sounds better than that annoying system chirp.

We take exception to the heavy handed implementation of both *Express* and *FirstApps*. For example, it sure would be nice to use the individual applications of *FirstApps* independent of the *Micromanager* shell (no, reducing its status to an icon instead of the menu bar imposition isn't good enough, and yes, we understand the storage issues addressed by this method), but under *Windows 3.0*, at least the implications to memory are minimized. Both packages are professionally done, easy to learn, and useful, however, and for the price, you really can't go wrong.

Personal Information Managers

Current

IBM Desktop Software

Your Way

PRISMA Software Corp.

When you look at much software as we do at *IYMSR*, you get a little jaded. To use a cliché, we were missing the forest for the trees when we started to review these two products, and about to give you a lot of statistical information on them. As we pointed out in our *Personal Information Manager* issue in May of this year, though,

the nature of the PIM is that selection of one is driven more by personal need than the technical specifications that affect most other software purchases. We owe a debt of gratitude to Guy Chiattello at