

Getting the best Resultz

Alan Highet examines Resultz, the new spreadsheet from Colton Software.

Resultz is the second part of Colton Software's Fireworkz series and as the name suggests, is a spreadsheet package. For many years now, Colton has dominated the Acorn spreadsheet field with the Pipedream series, culminating in Pipedream4 which I use on a daily basis. Whilst this is still a formidable package, it is not an easy piece of software to use to the full so I was eager to try Resultz. My main question was whether Colton could produce a stand-alone spreadsheet which still had all the functionality of Pipedream, but also the ease of use afforded by modern RISC OS software. I have to say that having used it for only a short time, my answer has to be yes.

THE PACKAGE

The software comes on two discs accompanied by three wire bound manuals. One disc contains the main program while the other contains many examples, a tutorial and a working example of all the functions. The software installs on the icon bar in the usual way and a click on the icon produces the default spreadsheet or the choice of any template files you have saved. Those of you who own Wordz,



Resultz, powerful presentation facilities

Colton's word processor, will be instantly at home with Resultz, as the screen layout and style are almost identical.

STYLES AND FUNCTIONS

Resultz uses styles in the same way as Wordz or Impression, and these styles may be layered one on top of the other and applied to any or all the cells, or even individual characters, giving you total control over colour, typeface, number style and cell protection. Any, or every, cell may have a line added to its border in a variety of styles, either individually or within a style. Another useful function is the ability to add regional grid lines in any colour, which can help in defining data entry points whilst not being printed. One of the most frequently used functions in a spreadsheet is the sum command and this is

The 12 categories and a few of the 181 functions

given its own icon. Select a column or row, including a blank cell, click on the sum icon,

and immediately the correct function is pasted into the empty cell. This will also work on multiple columns and rows, giving you a total at the end of each row, the bottom of each column and a grand total at the intersection.

Clicking on the main function icon displays a small menu giving access to the 181 built-in functions as well as custom functions and user defined names, more of which later. The 5 most used functions, sum, max, min, avg and f, are available on a quick menu, while all the functions may be chosen from 12 category headings or a full list. A double-click on the chosen function places it on the formula line with any parameters inserted and the first highlighted. A single-click on a cell will insert its reference, while dragging across a range will insert the correct expression, replacing the parameter with the actual reference (figure 1).

THE STATUS LINE

During every phase of setting up your spreadsheet, as much help as possible is given by the status line, which is almost an interactive help system. When you are selecting a function, the status line gives a brief description of the effects of each function, and once selected, you are given the meaning of each parameter in turn. The status line also gives information on row height and column width, along with information on each icon.

ABSOLUTELY WYSIWYG

Whilst Pipedream4 went a long way to being WYSIWYG, it didn't quite make it. The same cannot be said of Resultz, as every effort has been made to let you see exactly what is going to appear on the paper. This includes headers, footers and page numbers, along with page breaks both in the horizontal and vertical. When printing a spreadsheet, you will be told if the page or pages you want to print will fit on the page defined by the printer driver you have selected. If they won't, you can ask Resultz

to read the driver's settings, and the page will automatically be rescaled to fit. Total control is given over which page, or pages, to print, along with page numbering and placement of headers and footers.

The number of functions has increased, with most, if not all, of Pipedream's functions being retained. Several commands have been given additional parameters. My favourite is the age command, which has a built-in flattery element. Having just had a birthday it confirms that I'm not 40, as other people say, but only 39 years and 12 months (a mere child)!

CUSTOM FUNCTIONS

The Names option allows you to give a meaningful name to a cell, a range of cells or a calculation, with one obvious choice being VAT. Calculations are then carried out by using the name VAT rather than the actual figure. This means that when the rate changes only the name need be updated.

Custom functions are the part of Resultz that do the complicated calculations. They are entered in a template file, and are a lot easier to read and edit than their Pipedream equivalents. You can create and store as many template files as you like, and these are presented when you click on the icon bar or drop a file onto it. This facility allows frequently used sheets to be stored, with all the styles and formula set, all ready and waiting for the new data.

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

Charts are a major part of any spreadsheet package, and Resultz provides bar, line, pie, X-Y and overlay charts, although still no horizontal bar chart. Again selection is made from an icon and each selection has a further sub-section with varying styles of the chart, including 3D where appropriate. There is more control over axis labelling, the automatic generation of which is now handled quite intelligently. Once created, the chart is actually displayed in the spreadsheet, rather than in a separate window, with fairly comprehensive editing

facilities still available. Penguin graphics have also been retained; for those who are not familiar with Pipedream, this is the ability to use Draw files to fill bars rather than solid colour. The chart may also be used as a background. No matter where the chart is placed, it remains live and recalculates as the data is altered.

Sprites and Draw files may be added to the sheet, and these can be placed in front or behind the text, or used as a backdrop like a chart. You can thus use a scanned image of your pre-printed stationary as a backdrop, to help with page layout, but prevent it from printing out on the final copy (figure 2).

Charts or pictures can either be embedded in a document or referenced to save on disc space. This means that if you have a company logo, only one copy needs to be stored on disc and every document will reference that one copy.

One feature, to my knowledge unique to Resultz, is the ability to resize column width independently down a column, so cell A1 may be 6 characters wide while cell A2 may be 12 characters wide. Not unique, but still not common, is that text in a cell wraps round at the cell border, forcing the row depth to increase rather than overlapping the right hand edge. Both these properties give a much neater look to the screen and allow for a far more flexible page layout.

Resultz can export data in Lotus 123 format, which preserves formulae, and it can also export ASCII or CSV files, in which case the results are retained but not the formulae. The latest version of Wordz recognises Resultz files and displays them in chart form, but the data is fixed at the time of transfer.

HOW FAST IS IT?

Colton claims that Resultz recalculates faster than any other RISC OS spreadsheet, and provide results of a Liardet500 benchtest to

confirm this. My own figures, run on an existing real life spreadsheet in a comparison with Pipedream4, confirm this, and show roughly a 12% increase in recalculation speed. However, other figures are not as good. In loading and recalculating the same sheet, Resultz was 4 times slower in returning control to the user. To load a CSV file it was 9 times slower, and to convert a large file from numbers to text it was an astonishing 23 times slower. Now I appreciate that this is a seldom used function and my tests were not exhaustive but I do feel that there is a need to improve its overall speed.

I found the program very robust except when it ran out of memory and crashed with no warning. One major omission, in my view, is the search and replace command. There is no way to change formulae without changing each one individually, which can be very laborious. The other option is long winded and requires converting everything to text, exporting it to Wordz or a similar text processor, replacing the string and importing it back into Resultz. There is also no way of defining function keys, which is another useful attribute of Pipedream.

Product	Resultz
Supplier	Colton Software 2 Signet Court, Swanns Road, Cambridge CB5 8LA. Tel. 0223 311881 Fax 0223 312010
Price	£139.82 inc. VAT
Product	Eureka 2
Supplier	Longman Logotron 124 Cambridge Science Park, Milton Road, Cambridge CB4 4ZS. Tel. 0223 425558 Fax 0223 425349

