Impression Publisher

Publish and be praised. At long last
Richard Grant has got his hands on
Computer Concepts magnum opus, and is

Hopefully 1994 is going to be a momentous year for Acorn and its software suppliers. A new computer always stimulates the release of new software. Computer Concepts is no exception to this axiom, releasing several upgrades for its range of products to take advantage of new facilities in the new machine, whilst at the same time retaining compatibility with the older machines. I reviewed Impression Style in RISC User 7:3, when I raved about its new facilities and this spring saw the release of its brother,

Impression Publisher which I am looking at here.

But first, a quick recap on the relative positioning of these two products. The old Impression II we knew and loved is now superseded by a pair of parallel products, Style and Publisher. Style was always intended to be an upgrade for Impression II, but in its metamorphosis it has become a sophisticated word processor with many of the facilities with which users of word processing programs on the PC platform are familiar, such as an online Thesaurus and Dictionary.

Publisher, on the other hand, takes a slightly different approach by extending Style s existing facilities with additional features which are probably better described as being in the realms of desktop publishing, rather than simply word processing. To this end are included colour separation and provision
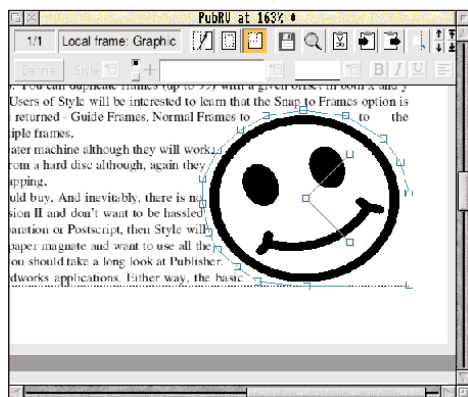

Figure 1.
A rather contrived irregular frame showing text flow

for the output of output of Postscript files, irregular frame outlines, multiple rulers associated with paragraphs and extended mail merge, and more.

The copy of Publisher that I was supplied with was an early pre-release version, with several known bugs and faults. However, Computer Concepts is a company that is known for fully ironing out problems before release, but because of these problems I was able to fully test only some of the new features. And in the best traditions of all reviews, this one is being written in the product being reviewed.

MAKING IT IRREGULAR

The first major improvement that all DTP workers will enjoy will be the ability to create irregular outlines for graphics frames - something that was long overdue - through a new sub-item in the Frame menu called Make Irregular. Clicking on this changes the familiar green frame outline to a blue one which at first glance looks identical in all other respects. However, you can pick up a frame handle and move it as in Draw, with the frame outline rubber-banding to the new position as you move. Alternatively, and more usefully, you can move the pointer over the frame outline, when it changes into a little square, and pick up the outline itself, whereupon a new handle will be created automatically. By strategically placing a few extra

handles, a good approximation to a curve can be made, with any repelled text outside reformatting instantly to the new shape (see figure 1). Magic!

To remove an additional handle, you pick it up and drop it over an existing handle and it disappears. Computer Concepts has intentionally made this interface similar to ArtWorks, so those who already use this should have no difficulty in adapting. Nevertheless, despite the undoubted usefulness of irregular frames of this type, generating a smooth curve can be time consuming; perhaps we can hope for the ability to use Bezier curves in frames in a future version. Additionally, further options allow you to show the bounding box of the irregular shape (see
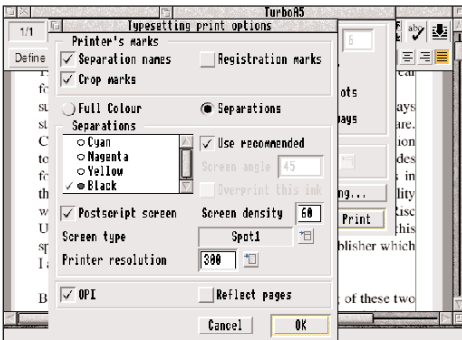

Figure 2.
Setting printer output parameters

below) and, if you want, to reconvert the irregular frame back to a regular one when a warning box tells you that the irregular information will be lost.

The graphics tool which I described in my review of Style is also present, allowing rotation, positioning and sizing of the graphic in real time. An additional feature, which wasn t implemented on the version I received, will allow frames to be selected by dragging and/or selecting all frames on a page. Computer Concepts claims that reformatting of text around frames has been speeded up by a factor of over thirty, but I wasn t able to verify this.

Two modes are available for manipulating irregular frames. Irregular Edit mode allows editing of the outline proper, inserting and deleting points as described above. Non-Irregular Edit mode shows the bounding box and allows resizing and scaling of the entire box just like a normal frame. With the advent of the irregular frame, the meaning of Repel Text

when referring to the four edges is lost, and this parameter is now labelled Offset when referring to such a frame.

COLOUR ME CMYK

Moving onto colours and graphics, there is now an option for colour separation on-screen, with separate sub-options for full colour, cyan, magenta, yellow or key (the black element of colour printing). These will also be available for outputting through the Print menu. Interestingly, these work separately on each document on-screen, so if you have two such documents, you can set one separation colour for one, and a different one for the other. And of course, both Style and Publisher support the full 24/32 bit new Acorn image format, just like ArtWorks 1.5. For the more advanced worker, perhaps outputting for imagesetting, there are editing boxes for altering graphic typesetting halftones for PostScript output with or without frame co-ordinates, colour mapping with division into upper, midtone and lower bands, each fully specifiable for RGB, HSV and CYMK, and an optional 10% clip (figure 2). I was unable to

Figure 3.
Upper frame shows normal text, lower frame shows tracking set to 150ems.

explore these complex facilities fully in the time available, but they will hopefully be covered in detail in future articles.

A colour map dialogue box now allows colours to be applied to sprites (except deep sprites), Draw files and ArtWorks files. This will allow the user to apply and edit graphics colours from within Publisher to give rise to some really weird and wacky effects.

On the text side, there will be an option, although it wasn t yet finished on my version, for loading and saving text in RTF, Rich Text Format. This new term may be unfamiliar to Acorn users, but it is the PC world s attempt to harmonise text file formats between different word processing and DTP software providers. Basically, if you can read or write
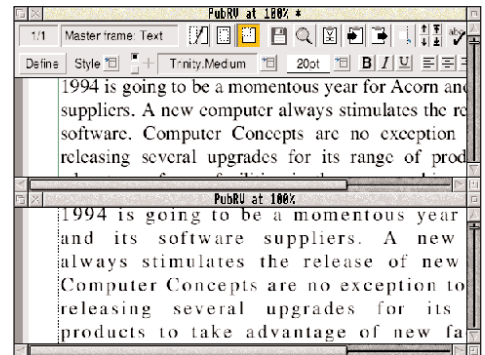
a disc for your alternative chosen platform, any text file saved in RTF can be loaded into another application with most of the essential formatting information intact. I can see many users with PCs at work and Acorns at home finding this very useful.

THE STYLE EDITOR

The Style Editor is broadly the same as in Impression Style. Tracking has now been added, both for a selected region and from within a style. Most users will now be familiar with kerning, both in its original rather primitive form in Impression II, where two characters could be individually kerned, and in RISC OS 3 where an automatic kerning option is available for applications which provide support. Tracking is a variation on this, and is used to space or compress characters within two given points. For simple tracking, a menu which toggles automatically between kerning and tracking depending on whether or not a region is selected, allows you to specify in ems, the amount of movement to be used. Globally, tracking can be set within a Style and applied in the usual way (see figure 3).

Tracking is probably of most use in a banner or headline where the individual letters of a word can be padded out to fill a given column width. A very useful improvement is an overwrite option, raised via a new dialogue box when loading Styles into the Style Editor. I was always annoyed when merging Styles to find, perhaps, a long, complex Style that has taken some time to assemble completely overwritten when adding another Style from another document. Previously, it was necessary to think in advance and rename a Style before loading. This new option gives you the choice of whether to overwrite or rename the original Styles.

A useful little touch is an option in Utilities to list all the fonts in a document, this being automatically assembled into a Publisher sub-document. With the number of fonts available for Acorn users reaching astronomical heights, and font management utilities becoming an essential extra, the ability to see what fonts are in a document in order to assemble the correct fonts into your Fonts directory is a very useful adjunct. I hope to cover the subject of font handling in a future article.

Another useful addition is automatic ruler indenting. Using this enables you to indent the current ruler by a set amount, or to the next tab so that subsections don t need the creation of a new ruler. Another new option allows the use of Tab (by using Shift-Tab) when within a leadering Style, to indent to a Tab without leadering (yes, read that again).

In an earlier article, I bemoaned the lack of ability to manipulate or edit the underline parameters. Well, now you can for both the thickness and position, and also for sub and superscript, by specifying the offset from default and size or thickness as appropriate. Other useful improvements include an option to specify the thickness and colour of a frame border, although this wasn t working in the version supplied to me.

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

Publisher also supplies many other, perhaps lesser, but equally useful improvements. You can duplicate frames (up to 99) with a given offset in both x and y axes. Computer Concepts suggests that this could be used for creating grids and forms, though at this stage I would have thought that using a Style within Publisher or alternatively, using Tablemate, might be more intuitive. Users of Style will be interested to learn that the Snap to Frames option is extended to specify which types of frames can be snapped to. Guide Frames have returned - Guide Frames, and Normal Frames to the text grid, The Snap to Grid option has also returned, but this time, cutting across multiple frames. Snap to Grid now actually shows a grid of dots on screen, rather in the manner of Draw.

Finally, bear in mind that both Style and Publisher are happiest residing in a 2Mb or greater machine, although they will work, with difficulty, in a 1Mb one. As always with complex software they benefit from a hard disc, although they can be used, albeit much more slowly, from floppies if

PRODUCT INFO	
Supplier	Computer Concepts Gaddesden Place Hemel Hempstead Herts HP2 6EX. Tel. 0442 63933
Product Price	Impression Publisher £169 ex. VAT Upgrade from Impression II £29 ex. VAT
Product	Impression Style Price £99 ex. VAT Upgrade from Impression II £29 ex. VAT Upgrade from third party package