

First Page

Reviewed by Mike
Williams

First Page is a new desktop publishing package from Longman Logotron. According to the publicity provided with the package, it is an ideal DTP tool for beginners yet it is also claimed to be a DTP program that does everything (their italics)! At a single user price of just £49 that's a tall order, so how well does First Page match up to these claims? And how does it compare with more expensive packages like Ovation and Impression?

appearance, yet amounting to just 50 pages containing a twelve page tutorial and a thirty-four page reference section. Despite its quality appearance, I have a few reservations about the accuracy of the manual, particularly in the all important tutorial section.

The software is supplied on two discs; the first contains First Page itself, a separate configuration program, two fonts (Swanmore and Waltham), plus directories of borders, templates and clipart. The second disc contains more clipart (all in Draw file format) plus files used in the tutorial section of the manual. The two fonts are both sans serif, Waltham, a slightly bolder version of Helvetica (Homerton) and Swanmore, much chunkier - something like Frutiger. While Longman Logotron says these are



can be created by clicking as expected on the First Page icon, and selecting Open in the dialogue box which then appears. First Page keeps a record of current documents. Closing a document window does not lose the document, it merely closes the window. Reference to the icon bar menu allows a known document to be removed from memory or re-opened.

First Page provides two toolbars, plus a ruler, at the head of a document window, and a further status bar at its foot. Thus most functions are immediately available without recourse to a menu system. This exists as well, and is commendably short with just seven top-level entries.

When faced with new software for review, I like to work through the tutorial section. This should provide a useful overview of the main features, but also tests how good the manual is. There are a number of mostly minor inaccuracies in this one which might nonpluss some readers. For example, page three of the tutorial tells you to lock your document page to a grid set at 10mm intervals, and then to create a frame 35mm deep! There are also some potentially confusing entries which do not make clear whether single or double clicking is needed,

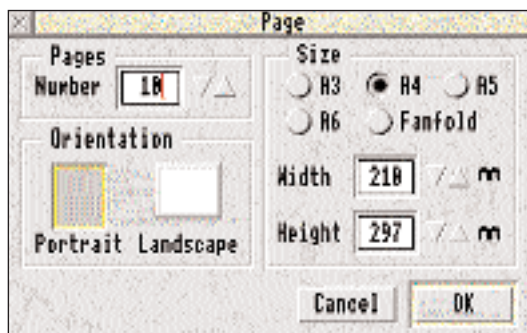


Figure 1.
Changing page
size and orientation

Longman Logotron's reputation has been established primarily within the educational market, so any review of First Page should take account of this market for the product. This is underlined by the manual, which is in typical Longman Logotron style: A4 sized on good quality paper and highly visual in

appearance, yet amounting to just 50 pages containing a twelve page tutorial and a thirty-four page reference section. Despite its quality appearance, I have a few reservations about the accuracy of the manual, particularly in the all important tutorial section.

Getting Started

Once loaded, a new document

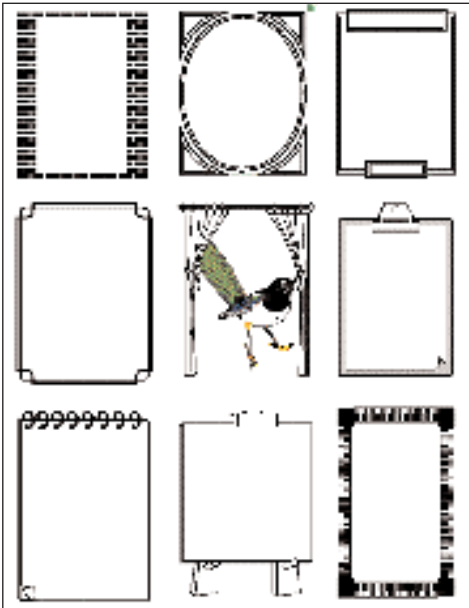


Figure 2.
A selection of First Page borders

all information which I fed back to Longman Logotron.

The Main Features

First Page (FP for short) differs from other DTP packages in a number of ways. It does not use master pages as do other packages, but templates. A template is simply any FP document which has been saved into the Templates directory supplied with First Page. There is a built-in default template called Fresh start which is always available. However, this is entirely blank - you cannot type anything into it as it stands. There is no default text frame at all, although other templates, with text frames, can be readily selected from a menu.

Assuming you have a completely blank page, you can use the Page dialogue box (figure 1) to change its size (A2, A3, A4 or whatever you fancy) and orientation (portrait or landscape). You also specify how many pages there are to be. The number can always be changed later, but you can't get rid of pages unless they have been cleaned of all text and graphics first.

The merits of this approach need careful consideration, but remember that FP is aimed at an educational market (Primary). Features like this will avoid much otherwise wasted effort, though it is a system which lacks the flexibility of more expensive packages.

Text Frames

Creating a text frame is very simple - you just do it by dragging, starting at any empty point on a page. You don't have to select a tool, or go through a menu system. If

you want to place one frame over another, then the second must be started from a blank area of the page, and then moved over the first. Clicking inside a frame will select it, and dragging inside a frame (with Select) will move it. Dragging inside a frame with Adjust will move its edges to change its size/proportions.

To enter text into a frame, you need to double-click within the frame so that the caret appears. In this state the frame is temporarily fixed. It can also be more permanently locked into place as well.

Graphic Frames

Drop a graphic onto a page and it is automatically given a frame - no frame needs to be created beforehand. As a consequence the graphic always appears size for size, so any enlargement or reduction must be done afterwards by resizing the frame - the graphic is always rescaled to fully fit the new size of

frame. Holding down the Shift key allows the graphic to be resized at constant proportions. And a graphic can be rotated, by dragging an ear on the frame, or through the menu system (90, 180 or 270).

Other Frame Attributes

Frames can be transparent (default) or with a coloured backdrop (in one of the sixteen desktop colours), and a sprite or Draw file can also be imported as a backdrop. Frames can be given a simple border with choice of thickness. FP also comes supplied with some twenty more exotic borders in Draw file format which can be used as a frame backdrop, or positioned in a graphic frame over another graphic or text frame (figure 2). As they don't function as borders in the usual way, it can be a little tricky using them to



Figure 3.
The Type style dialogue box

achieve the desired effect. On the other hand, the range of borders supplied is much more interesting and imaginative than those supplied with most packages.

Text Matters

All the usual text editing features are available. Text can be highlighted, by dragging or through the menu system, and a marked

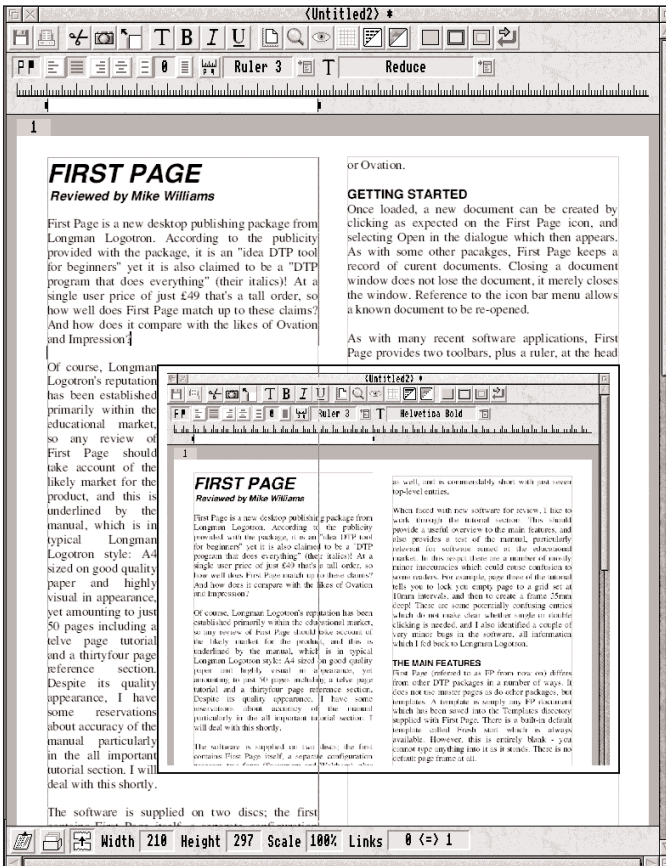


Figure 4.
Sample document created with First Page

block can be cut or copied to a clipboard to be pasted elsewhere. Marked text can also be moved or copied directly to a new position. Using the toolbar, text can be justified as required, and marked text can be set to bold, italic or underline.

FP also employs Type styles. A type style determines the choice and weight of font as well as its style. There appears to be some confusion of terminology here as italic can appear as a weight or as a style, or as both, dependent on the choice of font. Type style also controls colour, size (in points), height and aspect of text, and thickness of any underline (figure 3). Other attributes could be controlled in the same way (leading for example) but not here. This leads

to simplicity with FP type styles coping with most requirements, but not the more sophisticated attributes found in some other packages. What is good is the Try option which lets you see what your type style definition looks like on a standard piece of text (FirstPage, what else). Type styles can only be applied to marked text, and do not automatically function as paragraph styles as such.

Text frames can be easily linked together, and given the fact that in effect all frames are user defined, this is essential. Text frames can also be converted into graphics frames, and then rotated and resized just as for a graphic - a useful feature.

Every text frame has at least one ruler associated with it, and the current ruler is visible at the head of the screen when the caret is visible in a text frame. Rulers control left and right margins, which can be used for insetting text within a frame. There is a left tab (but no centre, right or decimal tab), and a left indent. Line spacing or leading is controlled by a separate tool on the toolbar. However, it works only in absolute terms, being specified in points, and applies to all lines controlled by the currently active ruler. Most DTP packages use relative leading as a default as this ensures that text will always be spaced proportionally regardless of size. Here you have no choice.

Comment

Clearly, much thought has gone into First Page in order to ensure that both text and graphic frames can be created, accessed and modified very directly. You do not need to go through a menu system to create a frame. Graphics have frames allocated automatically. But there are also features whose operation I would question, or which lead to more work than should be necessary.

Look at figure 4. This shows a draft version of this review as a First Page document, including an illustration (an imported sprite) which is itself part of the same page before the graphic was inserted. To create the page I used a two-column template, one of those supplied.

The two column frames were not pre-linked - this had to be added. My text needed more than the one page specified, but increasing the number of pages did not replicate the two-column layout. Existing columns had to be repeated on the extra pages and then linked as required.

Note the blank area below the graphic in the second column. A graphic repels text, but FP cannot apparently continue the text from the

top of the column into the area below the graphic. It continues on the next page. The problem could be overcome by inserting and linking an additional text frame below the graphic, but that's extra work which shouldn't be needed.

Look again at the graphic. FP allows you to specify a frame margin, and even set this differently at top, bottom, left and right. The manual says that this allows for a gutter between the contents of the frame and adjacent text. Fine, but put a border round the frame, and that's where it goes - the margin is wasted, for this purpose at least. There are many good effects which can be achieved with frame margins, but sensibly repelling text around a frame is not one.

I also found it difficult to make fine adjustments to spacing and sizing, adjustments which are useful in avoiding problems like the tail end of a paragraph, as at the foot of column one, appearing at the head of the next column.

Conclusions

I don't wish to labour any criticisms (which were all discussed with Longman Logotron), but reviewing is about assessing a package in relation to its aims in the context of the reviewer's experience of other similar software. Longman

Logotron has a deserved reputation for its products, and I have weighed my views carefully regarding First Page.

The claim that First Page does everything is clearly optimistic, though it does depend on who defines everything. The user interface has undoubtedly been carefully designed to appeal to the beginner, and to be direct and easy to use. But despite its many excellent and indeed innovative features, I feel that it does not always cope adequately with some of the typical problems which often arise in DTP.

Yes, FP is cheap, but cheapness

PRODUCT: First Page

Product	First Page
Supplier	Longman Logotron 124 Cambridge Science Park Milton Road Cambridge CB4 4ZS
Price	£49 ex. VAT Primary site licence £140 ex. VAT Secondary site licence £190 ex. VAT

should not be the overriding factor in any choice. First Page takes a different approach to many DTP functions compared with other packages, and its style of operation may not appeal to all. If you are a beginner, or are seeking to advise a beginner, First Page may well provide a good introduction to DTP, but there are other packages (some of which cost little more) which are better and still easy to use, and which the beginner will almost certainly need in due course.

If you are in a school, cheapness may well be a

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FONTS DISC 1

Font disc 1 also includes Acom's Outline Font Manager plus the following applications:

ShowFonts - displays or prints outline fonts

DrawFont - converts outline fonts for use in Draw

FontSwap - allows font substitution

FontCtrl - allows easy tuning of font configuration

FontRead - downloads font definitions to PostScript printers

FONTS DISC 2

FONTS DISC 3

Both Fonts Discs 2 and 3 contain the following additional applications:

FontSpace - allows change of character spacing

Kern - allows you to kern text (RISC OS 3)

ShowFonts - displays or prints outline fonts for reference

Ligature - allows easy incorporation of ligatures, smart quotes and dashes in your text (RISC OS 3 only)

PDF1a Fonts Disc 1 8.47 ex. VAT

BEETLE Fonts Disc 2 8.47 ex. VAT

PDF3a Fonts Disc 3 8.47 ex. VAT

Herts AL1 4JS. Tel. 0727 840303

Each disc contains ten high quality outline fonts (all available exclusively from BEETLE) in a variety of different faces. Each disc also contains a number of applications for further processing and manipulation of outline fonts. The fonts and applications are supplied on a single disc with a comprehensive menu system.

Atlantis
Austin
Blacklet

Chancellor
Classroom
Gangster

Italian
Mercury
MILITARY
Wessex

Buick
EXTREMITY
Hudson
JOPPA

Marti
NEWTOWN
OLDTOWN

Salisbury
SLAB
Rob_Roy

Citril
Crikey
Curtis
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