

AmigaGuide™ 101

by Jerry Hartzler

NOTE: AmigaGuide™ is now available to developers on the 3.0 Workbench release, the CATS Developer CD and Commodore's closed Amiga developer listings area on BIX, CIX and ADSP. Developers with a Workbench or Includes License can amend their license to distribute AmigaGuide. Currently CATS is in the process of putting together an archive file that will be made available to the general public.

Compared to other platforms, Amiga-based utilities that display on-line documentation are relatively weak. Until 1991, Amiga users had to rely on basic text viewing utilities like *More*, which lack the navigational capabilities of hypertext programs. In a hypertext environment, when the user wants more information on a subject, the user simply clicks on a word and the hypertext utility automatically cross references the subject. No type of hypertext-like utility was available on the Amiga--that is, until *AmigaGuide* came along.

AmigaGuide can display plain ASCII text files and AmigaGuide databases. An AmigaGuide database is a single file that consists of a set of documents called *nodes*. If you were to convert a book into an AmigaGuide database, a convenient way to organize the database is to make each chapter of the book into a node. Each node may contain references to other nodes (chapters) or databases (other books), using a *link*. When a user selects a link--which usually appears in the form of a button within the text--*AmigaGuide* dereferences the link and displays its node. This makes it easier for the user to find the information he is looking for because the user no longer needs to search through a document. *AmigaGuide* already knows where the information is.

Buttons within *AmigaGuide* can do other actions as well, such as execute Shell or ARexx commands. An ARexx port is also built into *AmigaGuide* providing users the means to support and control the utility. Therefore, like a book, an AmigaGuide database can display illustrations. It can go a step beyond by playing sounds and music, and by being truly interactive with the user, able to ask questions and evaluate responses.

This article was written to familiarize you with *AmigaGuide* and the format of its databases.

Setting up AmigaGuide

AmigaGuide consists of the *AmigaGuide* utility and an Exec library called *amigaguide.library*. *AmigaGuide* should be placed in the *SYS:Utilities* drawer and *amigaguide.library* placed in the *Libs:* drawer. As of Release 3, the OS comes with a utility called *MultiView* that understands and displays *AmigaGuide* databases. *MultiView* requires *amigaguide.datatype* and *.datatypes.library* in order to display *AmigaGuide* databases.

AmigaGuide can run from the Workbench or the Shell. To run from Workbench, the default icon of an *AmigaGuide* database or text icon should be set to ``AmigaGuide''.

From the Shell, use the following command template:

```
AmigaGuide <my_DataBase>
```

where <my_DataBase> is the name of the *AmigaGuide* database or text file to display.

For example:

```
1> AmigaGuide Autodocs
```

attempts to open the ``Autodocs'' database. In its search for a database, *AmigaGuide* will first look in the current directory and then through the *AmigaGuide* path for the database.

The *AmigaGuide* path is a global environment variable. *AmigaGuide* stores its environment variables in the *ENV:AmigaGuide* directory assigned in RAM:.

The variable named ``path'' contains the list of directory names that *AmigaGuide* will search through when it attempts to open a database. Directory names are separated by a space. The *path* variable is set and stored in the *ENV:AmigaGuide* directory through the use of the *AmigaDOS SetEnv* command (Note that as of Release 3, if the *AmigaGuide* directory does not exist, *SetEnv* will not create it).

For example:

```
1> SetEnv AmigaGuide/Path "Workbench:Autodocs Workbench:Includes"
```

Of course all variables set in RAM: disappear once the computer is turned off. To prevent this, copy the file *ENV:AmigaGuide/Path* to the *ENVARC:AmigaGuide* directory. The system copies the *ENVARC:* directory to *ENV:* upon start-up.

The *MultiView* utility uses the *amigaguide.datatype* which uses this the environment variable as its path.

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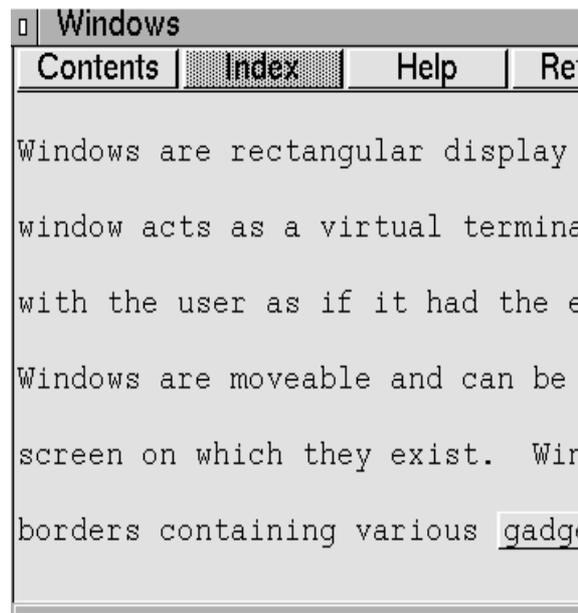
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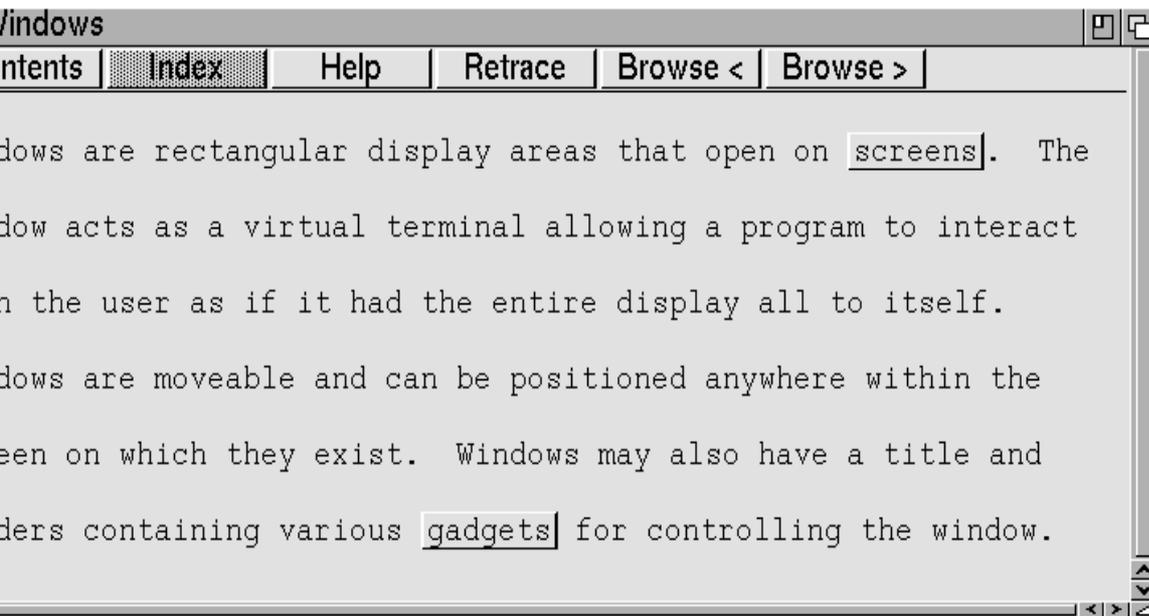
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A Sample AmigaGuide Window