

Compactor:

A new way of doing business.

In the beginning, the Mac Community was without file compression utilities. Then came PackIt. PackIt worked well. A few imitators came along, but they failed to work as well as PackIt. Next came StuffIt. A whole new door was opened to file compression. Not only were the compressed files smaller, but a self-decompression shell could be added, eliminating the need for all users to have StuffIt. And just as StuffIt goes commercial, Compactor appears on the scene, with a new way of doing business.

File compression is a method of taking a file, be it an application, desk accessory, graphic document, text document, etc., and reduce the size in bytes by looking at the code and figuring out how to make it smaller. For example, if the code has "A" repeated twenty times, the compressed file would list "20(A)", reducing the code from twenty characters down to five. The utility would see that there is supposed to be twenty A's, so when decompressing, twenty A's are placed in the code. There is a bit more involved, but this example helps to explain the process.

Now Showing

The difference between StuffIt and Compactor can be seen both on the screen and on the disk. StuffIt is a bit more Mac-ish with its dialog boxes whereas Compactor is much more practical. StuffIt has icons across the file listing dialog for the commands to Add, Extract, Rename and other commands. Compactor has no icons, just commands in the menus.

Both programs display the information much the same; the file size before and after compressing and percent of compressing. But when it comes to folders, Compactor does have an advantage. In both programs, a folder can be compressed with the files within and decompressed with the folder contents maintained. With StuffIt, the listing will show the folder name only. The entire folder must be extracted in order to get one file. In Compactor, the listing will allow the user to go into the folder and view the folder contents, extracting only the files the user wishes.

Compactor has a menu for how to list the files. Choices are either by Order Saved, Name, Date, or Size. StuffIt has no way to change the order of the listing is shown. This makes Compactor good for archiving and backing up files. View a Compactor archive by date to see when a file was last backed up and add the newest and remove the oldest.

How do I do that?

Ease of use of the programs depends on the use of the Mac interface and intuitive command keys. As mentioned, StuffIt has icons on screen for initiating some commands, along with command keys for each of these. Compactor lacks these icons, making a new user search the menus for the commands. Since the programs were created separately, command keys are dissimilar. Cmd S in StuffIt will select all of the files in the listing. In Compactor, Cmd S will Save the archive. In StuffIt, Cmd A will give the user an Open dialog box to select the file to add to the archive and compress the file. Cmd A in Compactor will add the file to the listing, but won't compress the file until the user Saves or Closes the archive. Both programs allows the user to add notes to the archive. StuffIt's icon for adding notes changes to designate this fact. Compactor users have to go the Note... command to view any notes.

But its the size that counts...

And size does count. What good is a compression utility if a reduction in file size cannot be achieved? I cannot show the complete story on how a file is compressed, but I can show the differences between a

Stuffit archive and a Compactor archive. I took a collection of files; an application, a MacPaint document, an Excel document, a Canvas document, a HyperCard stack (which Stuffit has a difficult time compressing), and a font and a desk accessory. The result is interesting.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Bytes</u>	<u>FileImprovement Reductionover Stuffitto</u>	<u>Time in Min. Download</u>
Address Book 2.5			
	104,568		10.46
Stuffed	67,983	34.99%	6.80
Compacted	46,804	55.24%20.25%	4.68
MacPaint Doc			
	17,541		1.75
Stuffed	13,979	20.31%	1.40
Compacted	12,835	26.83% 6.52%	1.28
Excel doc			
	17,721		1.75
Stuffed	6,248	64.74%	.62
Compacted	5,209	70.61% 5.86%	.52
Canvas doc			
	17,103		1.71
Stuffed	10,119	40.83%	1.01
Compacted	7,878	53.94%13.10%	.79
HyperCard Stack			
	95,694		9.57
Stuffed	62,749	34.43%	6.27
Compacted	43,430	54.62%20.19%	4..34
Font and DA			
	49,703		4.97
Stuffed	23,543	52.63%	2.35
Compacted	18,207	63.37%10.74%	1.82

Small, Secret and Self-Extracting

Both Stuffit and Compactor allow for encryption of the archives. This seems to be similar to both programs. Compactor User Guide says that passwords can be set for each file added to an archive. The method for encrypting isn't gone into in very much depth. Wouldn't be very secure if it did.

Segmentation of compressed files is allowed by Stuffit and Compactor. Segmenting means a file that is still too large to put on a floppy after compressing can be broken up and placed on two disks. Both disks will be asked for when extracting a

file. This operation is handled much the same.

An operation handled by both but is different is self-extraction. Self-extracting means the original program is not needed in order to decompress the file. Just double-click and the archive does the work. The archive holds within it the code necessary to perform the extraction of its contents. It does not allow for picking and choosing of the files to extract; everything inside is coming out. This means it is best to put the archive in its own folder before double-clicking as files with names same as files already existing may be replaced by the new file.

Compactor and Stuffit handle self-extracting differently. Stuffit has a separate program and 'shell' for adding the code for self-extracting. Compactor has a check box in the New dialog box to designate a self-extracting file. Stuffit's AutoUnStuffit adds 11 Kbytes to an archive, Compactor adds 16 Kbytes.

Both come with a separate extracting-only program; UnStuffit and Extractor respectively. And as Stuffit opened archives of the utility before it, Compactor will open Stuffit archives. A program is available for turning Stuffit files into Compactor files.

Last Word

All things considered, Compactor is a better product. Beyond the lack of command – icons and graphic display, Compactor works better. Files are smaller, access to compressed folders is allowed, files are displayed better. The reader should be reminded that only the shareware versions of Stuffit and Compactor have been discussed in this review. Stuffit Deluxe has not made it across my desk, so I am unsure of any changes made. Compactor is a shareware product with a price of

\$25 requested after 30 days of use.

Beyond the fact that these utilities are somewhat required for most all files downloaded off of bulletin boards across the nation as well as national Information Services, Stuffit and Compactor are good utilities to have around. Make use of them.