PowerBook File Assistant

New Utility from Apple

Apple has published a software utility for its PowerBooks; PowerBook File Assistant is primarily a file synchronization utility. I have a IIci at home, a IIci at work, and a PowerBook170 everywhere, and I thought I was so very, very clever that I did not need to worry about file synch. Wrong! It is a big problem when I can't remember which of my College Algebra grade sheets is the latest version. This happens mostly when I correct an error, because it is easy to see which has the latest test grades and which does not. I am pleased now to be able to direct my PowerBook to take care of automatically reconciling those files which I have asked it to keep track of whenever I plug it into AppleTalk with either IIci. The synch module will also work if I transfer with floppies or via SCSI. For System 7.1 users, specifying which files to check is as simple as drag and drop. What it cannot do, however, is rectify the most pernicious thing I do wrongly: make a change to a file on a IIci and a different change to the same file on the PowerBook. Then the software cannot perform the reconciliation, and I have to try to remember what I did to which copy of the file and when I did it so that I can manually change each to agree with the other. There is no software yet written to cure my devilish form of lack of order.

PowerBook File Assistant allows one to establish a self-restoring RAM disk which reloads what was in it when I shut down. That means that it saved its contents automatically (in the System Folder, actually), which is a nice thing to have happen. If you like to keep your applications in RAM, which conserves power and vastly increases PowerBook speed by obviating the necessity of spinning the hard drive up, then you pay for it with longer shutdowns. Here is the place to say that I found SoundMaster 1.7.3 by far the most useful PowerBook utility I have. The only sound I installed is for shutdown, so I know for a fact when the thing is off rather than asleep or dimmed or whatever else the cursed thing can do to stay on when I think it's off.

I am thinking of scrapping Word and Excel for routine tasks on the PowerBook in favor of ClarisWorks 2.0, and I will keep the entire application in RAM. If I did that with Word or Excel, both of which are hard drive access addicts, I would have no RAM for anything else, because they are also BIG applications. PowerBook File Assistant will make my life quicker and easier.

PowerBook File Assistant includes other utilities: delayed automatic laser printing (PrintMonitor will do that sufficiently well for me.), automatic screen dimming (What does it do that the System doesn't?), a one keystroke sleeping pill (It doesn't bother me to use the Special Menu's Sleep command.), an automatic remount feature (More useful if you connect habitually only to the same desktop or external hard drive via SCSI.), and an improved cursor display (Of no use to PowerBook170 and above users.).

List is $79.95. I paid $47.75. It was marked $53.25. Seeing that the main feature does not cure my worst offense and that I will make more use of the automatic-reload-RAM disk, which is not a main feature, I wonder if I could have done better elsewhere. In my opinion, Apple, influenced by the riches of Bill Gates, has begun to sell to the public features which should be an integral part of System Software, which, as you know, is also sold to the public. I suspect that we are going to see a lot more essential new things and refinements of features now part of the System marketed separately. I believe that the money is to be made in software, and it will be our money that is made!
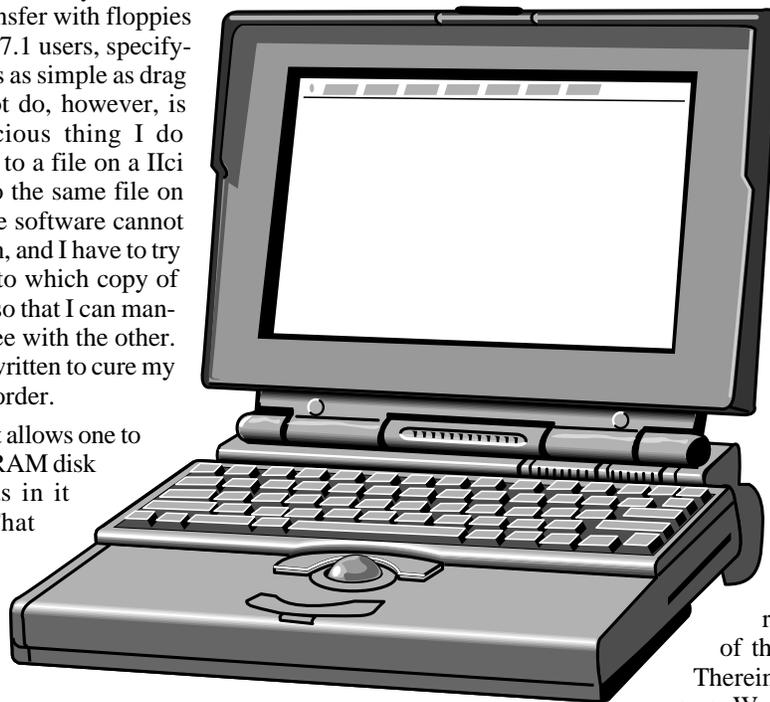
File Assistant should not be confused with Claris' Power To Go, which I have not tested. The latter seems to duplicate some of the features of the reviewed product as well as some of the PowerBook System software. Therein lies a problem for PowerBook users. We must take care not to (1) duplicate features when buying PowerBook-specific utility software, and (2) buy something for which the perceived need was created by advertising rather than our convenience or necessity.

I have a peeve to impart, too. I hope no applications (such as Word) and utility packages include a battery "thermometer." I can do quite well with the fifteen or so I now have, thank you very much. It's like having every option on your car have a built-in fuel gauge. I would still buy fuel after 400 miles anyway!

by Wayland Brown
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