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AlphaTracker 2.0

What it is

AlphaTracker is a new type of system extension made possible by Apple's System 7. It is a system extension, but it *is not* an "INIT." Rather, it is a faceless background application (FBA) that launches when you start or restart your Macintosh computer. Since it is an FBA, it need not include any provision for interaction with you, the user, so it can be a small file; because it is a true application and not an "INIT," it is very unlikely that it will conflict with other system extensions that do not also use the sound hardware.

What it does

The purpose of *AlphaTracker* is one that has traditionally been done by "INITs"—it plays a sound when you start up your Mac. *AlphaTracker* **requires** the new Sound Manager and the new File Manager in System 7. Since it is not an application in the traditional sense, you will find it hard to launch under previous systems, yet, even if you do manage to do so, *AlphaTracker* will politely check its operating environment and silently quit. *AlphaTracker* plays the sound asynchronously—that is, the sound plays while your Macintosh computer continues to do other tasks. *AlphaTracker* is so named because it plays the same kind of sound as *SoundTracker*, by Frank Seide. Such sounds are commonly known as "sound tracks" or as "MOD" files (from their Amiga file type).

If you install more than one sound track, *AlphaTracker* plays them in a random order.

If *AlphaTracker* can't access a soundtrack or has some other problem, it informs you with an alert box. If the alert comes up, and you don't respond to it, *AlphaTracker* assumes you're away from your Macintosh, and cancels the alert itself after 30 seconds.

Installation

To install *AlphaTracker*, drop it into your System Folder icon: the folder that looks like this— . Don't drop it into the open window of your System Folder.

AlphaTracker does not come with any sounds. You must provide sounds for it; they are readily available. If no sound is available when *AlphaTracker* looks for it, *AlphaTracker* will silently quit. *AlphaTracker* looks for *SoundTracker* documents in the Preferences folder.

Installing the Sounds in the Preferences folder

Drop one or more sound tracks into the Preferences folder, which is located *within* the System Folder.

Limitations and requirements

Because they both make use of the same hardware in the Macintosh, *AlphaTracker* and my other program *AlphaSound* are incompatible. If you are currently using *AlphaSound*, you should remove it from your Extensions folder before installing *AlphaTracker*.

AlphaTracker requires features that at present are available only in System 7 (this includes 7.0, 7.0.1, and 7.1). Although the new Sound Manager is a part of System 6.0.7 and System 6.0.8, *AlphaTracker*'s use of the Preferences folder requires a feature present only in System 7. In addition, Frank Seide's sound-track playing software requires that your Macintosh have a 68020 or higher; therefore, *AlphaTracker* does, too. If you install *AlphaTracker* on a Macintosh with a 68000, it will simply do nothing.

While the sound tracks are playing, your Macintosh operates more slowly than normal. The slower your Macintosh is, the more noticeable the slowing is. That is, it is more noticeable on a Macintosh II than on a Quadra.

AlphaTracker uses 512K of memory. You can't change this setting unless you are comfortable using a resource editor such as *ResEdit*. If a sound track is too large to read into memory, *AlphaTracker* just skips it.

AlphaTracker plays at the 22 kHz rate in monaural sound. There is no provision for changing the rate or for turning on stereo. Let me know if this is a problem.

AlphaTracker has been tested on a Macintosh II, a Macintosh IIcx, and a Macintosh PowerBook 100 (on which it silently quits, of course). It should work on any computer running System 7. It should play music on any 68020-, 68030-, or 68040-based Macintosh. If it doesn't, let me know.

AlphaTracker and *AlphaSound* should not both be installed at the same time.

ProcessWatcher 1.0 crashes when it gets info on *AlphaTracker*'s process. You can still use *ProcessWatcher* 1.0 to force *AlphaTracker* to quit (use the "Kill" command), however.

AlphaTracker can't access sound tracks that have been compressed with *AutoDoubler*. I don't know if it works with files compressed by other background data compression software. If you use *AutoDoubler*, use *DD Expand* to expand the sound tracks you use with *AlphaTracker*. I am investigating this limitation. Until a solution is found, you can work around the problem with *AutoDoubler* by placing aliases of your sound tracks into the Preferences folder instead of the originals.

Q&A

Q: Can't I just put sound tracks or a *SoundTracker* "program" in my Startup Items folder and let *SoundTracker* automatically play the sounds that way?

A: Yes, but you'll have to quit from *SoundTracker* manually. Also, *SoundTracker* is shareware, while *AlphaTracker* is free!

Technical information

Some of the code in this program originated with Frank Seide. The PSyn and STRl resources in *AlphaTracker* are Copyright © 1992 Frank Seide, Koolbarg 39d, D-2000 Hamburg 74, Germany. Herr Seide has graciously allowed Macintosh programmers the use of this software.

Because sound tracks usually originate from non-Macintosh systems, some may not have the correct "type" and "creator" signatures. To work with *AlphaTracker*, sound tracks must have their type and creator both set to STRk. If you do not understand this paragraph, find someone who knows how to operate *ResEdit*.

Distribution and disclaimer

AlphaTracker and this documentation are Copyright © 1992, 1993 by Fred Condo, Ph.D. All rights reserved.

AlphaTracker may be distributed without payment to the author under the following conditions:

- This program is offered free for the benefit of the Macintosh user community. Therefore, no money may be charged for *AlphaTracker*. This software may not be made part of any compilation for which a fee is charged. The limitations in this paragraph do not apply to reasonable fees charged by non-profit Macintosh User Groups.
- *AlphaTracker* may be distributed only unmodified and only if accompanied by this document.
- If you like and use *AlphaTracker*, send me a fax or e-mail and tell me about your home town.

In consideration of the fact that *AlphaTracker* is a freebie, the author disclaims all responsibility for the program's failure. If it ever fails, let me know the circumstances of the failure by e-mail or fax, and I might fix it if I have the time.

That we need disclaimers on free software proves that we live in a sick society.

Version history

- 2.0 Changed obsolescent file management to use File Specifications. Looks for all sound track files or aliases in the Preferences folder, rather than just one with a specific name. Plays in random order. Heeds 'quit' Apple Event.
- 1.0.1 Replaced PBHSetVol call with OpenWD & CloseWD, as per IM-VI.
- 1.0 Initial release.