@KICKER = MANUALS ON DISK
@HEADLINE 1 = CONSULTANTS PREPARE FOR NEXT TREND IN DOCUMENTATION
The next trend in documentation, says Ferd Murphy of Automated Doc Design of Toronto is the move towards manuals that can be loaded on a PC's hard disk and accessed from within a software application. Murphy cites the new trend as a natural progression as users move towards more sophisticated computing, like multi-tasking and high resolution displays.
<169>Now that displays are more easily read and programs more accessible,<170> says Murphy, <169>there is no reason to thumb through the manual to find what you need.<170> Indeed, information access should be increased through typical indexing schemes that allow the user to approach a topic through a series of menus.
The information is better indexed than any paper-based manual and the information can be more quickly accessed.
Murphy claims it also eliminates one of the biggest problems in accessing documentation - the disappearing manual.
<169>This has to be the greatest productivity problem in corporate software use. You've installed software on your hard disk, but someone in another department has kept the manual to bone up on some finer points.<170>
Now the manual can be installed on the same hard disk with the software and accessed through a few quick keystrokes.
From the main menu you can browse documentation topics. Murphy states that the next phase is the use of <169>hypertext<170> based documentation to jump from, for example, a discussion of the DOS ATTRIB command to an explanation of password procedures. You spot a reference to passwords in the ATTRIB <169>card.<170> You highlight the word <169>password<170> with the arrow key and press ENTER to be whisked to an entirely new <169>card<170> explaining password protection.
Could anything be simpler? Murphy points out that with the new phase will, of course, come the need to instruct people and consult in documentation technologies.
Actually, database documentation isn't exactly a new idea. It's been around since about the time database technology started to develop. And several systems have been in use for a decade or more.
But the notion of unleashing the concept on the business and scientific community at large is a relatively recent concept. The problem is that most database technique have been either difficult to conceive or the sorting and selection of information has been too difficult for the average user. With that, display devices have been lacking both in resolution and the <169>pizzazz<170> that make the screen design attractive for a typical end user.
And that's not a problem that has been entirely overcome yet. As long as eye strain associated with video display terminals is a problem, the notion of the documentation on disk is very much in question for the average user.
The software techniques, that will allow both easy construction and access to the documentation, exists already. And video technology is ever forging ahead.
<169>What we really need<170>, says Murphy, <169>is a multi-tasking computer that weighs about 3 pounds and kind of looks like a book. When we have that, we'll really see a lot of advances in the kind of software that allows you to index just about any piece of documentation you can think of.<170>
Murphy and his group are well aware of the consulting opportunities resulting from this emerging technology. They argue that this type of documentation should ultimately cut down on

the need for training and consulting.
<169> It's hard to say where the user will require more or less support for this type of documentation. We should not forget the myth about the paperless office before we start making predictions. Basically, you won't need to use the paper manual, but you will need to hire a consultant to show everyone how to use the arrow keys and to press ENTER. It's a natural development...I guess it's human nature.<170>
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