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rolier has been in the business of encyclopedias for years; first as a series of books and now on CD. Grolier seems to have gotten the dissemination of information down to an art form. This program is very close to the perfect piece of research software.

With a list of over 32,000 articles, Grolier's is easily as comprehensive as the other programs, but it has a host of outstanding features that lift it above the others. The downside was that there was a problem with installing it. Every time I started the program, it crashed. After a day of this I called tech support. On their automated answering system, they had a recording to cover just such a problem. Their solution fixed the crash and I never once had to talk to their people. Whether this is good or bad, you must judge for yourself.

[Install](#)

Grolier chose to use a drag install program. You run the installer and the program shows you

your drives and encyclopedia. You just drag the encyclopedia to your drive and the installer does the rest, right down to installing QuickTime if you need it. Grolier thought ahead and it shows in the fact that there are also instructions for a manual install, where the user does all the dragging and dropping him/her self. This is a great feature because it gives you the ultimate control over what goes on your hard drive.

Navigation

Navigation is handled through a three way mechanism. First there is the navigation bar which gives you control over the sections you wish to visit. You can navigate to the articles, the gallery (multimedia links), the atlas, timelines, pathmakers (quick little audio biographies of famous people), and the yearbook.

The second mode of navigation is the “file tabs” at the top of the article. These file tabs allow you to jump to the text of the article, an outline of the article, any related media, pictures, a fact box, and any related articles. These tabs make navigation, and more importantly, research, a snap.

Thirdly is the navigation buttons at the bottom of the articles. These buttons allow you to: print, copy, save, or mark the article; see the navigation pathway; see the related knowledge tree; or jump to the online component for more up-to-date information.

Search Engine

As sophisticated as Encarta’s search engine was, Grolier takes the search engine to the next level. Not only can you request an “and” search (this and that) but you can use other Boolean modifiers such as “or” and “not”. You can set filters for category and media type; and you can also set the engine to word proximity so you can find articles that contain words-within-words (a search for land in the word proximity search will find land, lands, landfill, landing, etc...)

The search engine also found articles we would never have thought of. Our search for “Hawkeye” found not only Iowa and James Fennimore Cooper, but it also found M*A*S*H, Donald Sutherland (who played Hawkeye in the movie MASH), Alan Alda (who played Hawkeye on the TV show MASH), Natty Bumppo (Cooper’s Hawkeye’s real name), and The Deerslayer (Hawkeye’s other nickname). After seeing this list, we were surprised; a) we never even considered any of these other choices, and b) Why did they miss “The Last of the Mohicans”?

The search for “constitution” came up with 765 articles containing the word. We read the article on the U.S. Constitution and noticed something not found in the other programs. Grolier’s article not only had the text of the Constitution but it also had commentary on the different parts by a political analyst. This was a pleasant surprise; not only did we get the text, but we also got an explanation of what the text meant. In addition to the commentary, the analyst gave some history of the amendments along with some insight into two amendments we did not even know about (they died in the House back in the early 80’s).

Multimedia

The video is high quality 1/4 screen QuickTime films, as well as documentary style footage (some of the documentary footage looks like it could have been on a “Discovery Channel” program). The animations range from 1/4 screen to a beautifully smooth 1/2 screen size and are also quite informative (definitely take a look at the World War II animations).

here are also 30 interactive animations that allow you to explore various subjects. The interactives are a bit limited, only allowing you to rotate around an object, go inside it, and see labels that name some different parts. Although some of the animations were quite pretty to look at, some were less than informative (The Eiffel Tower and Red Square being prime examples).

The music is a combination of high quality digitized sound as well as QuickTime MIDI. Although the MIDI does not sound as good as the real thing (when does it ever?), it sounds quite nice and you get to hear a much longer piece of the music (some pieces ran two to three minutes as opposed to 15 - 20 seconds).

Specials

There are a few specials that set Grolier's encyclopedia apart from the rest. First there is the on-line component. If you have a CompuServe account, you can click on the on-line button and the encyclopedia will launch CompuServe and bring you to a relevant location in the service. If you do not have CompuServe, the program will offer you a subscription. This allows you almost instant "updates" to the program and keeps your research up to date.

There is also a "Quickstart" movie that takes you on a tour of the program and points out some of its features. This tour is like an on-line tutor, showing you what you need to quickly begin your research.

The "pathmakers" is another section of the program that offers modern history makers' insights into certain topics. As an example, they have Paul MacCready (inventor of the first human powered aircraft) talking about aerodynamics, design principles and success. The "pathmakers" has links to video, audio, and a biography of the person, as well as access to a virtual "museum" of other pathmakers, both historic and modern. This virtual museum has

small audio biographies of these famous people (each biography being 15-30 seconds long) and there are hundreds to choose from (Gershwin, Buckminster Fuller, and Stephen Hawkings just to name a few).

The yearbook is a small section devoted to the time from January 1994 to June 1995 and contains snippets of news from each month. The timelines is the usual feature with an unusual twist. Each era of the time line has a video introduction to acquaint the user with the major happenings of the era. These videos were very high quality and looked like something off of a P.B.S. special.

Pros

- High quality video and sound
- Highly sophisticated search engine
- Commentary as well as facts
- Manual install option

Cons

- Some problems when program displays registration screen (easy to remedy)

Publisher Information

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If you are just looking for massive amounts of information, Infopedia is the mother of all reference sets. It contains, not only the 29 volume set of Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia, but a set of seven other books including; Webster's Biographical Dictionary, a World Almanac, the Hammond World Atlas, Roget's Thesaurus, Webster's Dictionary, the Merriam Webster Dictionary of Quotations, and the Merriam Webster Dictionary of English Usage (whew!).

Install

Infopedia has a simple installation plan. Double-click on the installer icon and away you go. There are no options, just a continue button. The program installs extensions to run the video and show the pictures. You then restart your computer and the program is ready to run. If you wish to install the program on your hard drive, you simply drag it to the preferred drive.

Navigation

Navigation is achieved through the use of a navigation panel on the left, a navigation bar on top of the article itself, and hyperlinks embedded in the articles.

The navigation panel allows you to select which types of articles you are looking for, which books you would like to search (using the book filter icons), and whether the panel is shown.

The navigation bar allows you access to media elements embedded in the article, move to the previous or next article, allows you to copy or print an article, and gives you access to recently viewed or marked articles.

Search Engine

With all the information that Future Visions crammed into Infopedia, something had to give. Unfortunately, one of the components that gave was the search engine. It is basic and it is SLOW. You can search for a word or with a Boolean modifier button search for a set of words. The modifier button may seem like a powerful tool but it is not. First of all you can only use two words; one as the main search word and one as a modifier. Second, the modifier button is a toggle allowing you access to only and, or, or but not. There is no way to use combinations.

When a search for Hawkeye was performed, the engine gave back Iowa: only Iowa. James Fennimore Cooper was not found. In fact when I found the article on James Fennimore Cooper, Hawkeye, his most famous creation, is not even mentioned. Strangely enough his most famous novel, The Last of the Mohicans, is not mentioned either.

ultimedia

The multimedia consists of animations, video clips, sound clips, photos, maps and flags.

While the maps and flags are relatively nice looking, the multi-purpose tool phenomena (It does a lot of jobs, but none of them particularly well) strikes again. The photos are grainy and the color seems to be off. The sound is digitized but recorded at an extremely low volume. The video and animation clips are small and jerky. All in all, the multimedia elements left something to be desired.

Specials

Infopedia's main strength is it's pure amount of reference material. With eight books at the tips of your fingers you are bound to find what you need. There are a few drawbacks to including this amount of information on the CD; the largest one being that other sections of the program suffer for it.

There are some strange hyperlinks. In the English Usage section, the My/Mine article had a single hyperlink...to the My/Mine article. (Kind of like the old joke about the dictionary: under redundant, see redundant)

Some of the articles were somewhat sophomoric and had obvious errors; the article about the history of movies had all occurrences of the word director hyphenated, whether it needed to be or not. Some articles had obvious omissions; The Last of the Mohicans being a prime example.

It seems to me that Future Visions tried too hard to make Infopedia all-encompassing and wound up with a programs that does a lot of things, just not too well.

Pros

- A lot of information
- Simple Install scheme
- Can be run directly off the CD

Cons

- Errors in some articles
- Over simple search engine
- Low quality multimedia
- Some errors in hyperlinks
- Some articles are very short

<http://www.microsoft.com>

ummary

All of the encyclopedias reviewed have their own strengths. They all have a great amount of information, and try to disseminate it in a palatable manner. When it comes down to it, you need to choose what features you want. If you want an all around massive reference set, then you should pick up Infopedia. For a powerful search engine and comprehensive articles, the choice is Grolier's. Compton's gives you some interesting features like a virtual workplace while Encarta has the yearbook updates that keep you informed of recent events.

Overall, the winner is Grolier's. It's slick interface, powerful search engine, and commentary on the articles makes it the first choice in electronic encyclopedias. The multimedia is top notch and with all the perks it comes with, there is just no other reference set that can compare.