

REVIEWS

SOFT PC

Reviewed by Mike Ledgerwood
Rhodes College

If your campus is still fighting the IBM/Macintosh wars you might be interested in reading about different types of software and hardware that can help one platform use applications and materials from the other platform. I will talk here about our experience with one of these programs at Rhodes College in Memphis, TN.

When I installed our new language center last fall I went with a lab that is primarily computer and interactive video. Since our campus has decided to become exclusively Macintosh I knew that my lab would have to Macintosh as well. Otherwise I would not have the support necessary from our computer staff. At first I did not regret this necessity since after conversations at IALL and MWALL with other lab directors and vendors I believed that I would not have great difficulty finding interactive video applications for the heavily-subscribed languages that we teach.

However, after nine months with our new center I became frustrated with my inability to find material in Spanish and German on the Mac. This frustration only increased when I discovered that PICS, the major research project in interactive video based at the University of Iowa, had de-

ecided that they could not develop Macintosh materials and would only have IBM material available. Therefore I decided to try out some of the programs that would allow the Macintosh to act as an IBM PC.

After discussions with my computer staff and reading articles in MacWorld, I decided to buy a copy of the program entitled "Universal Soft PC" for around \$200. This is entirely a software program. What it does is create one or more than one IBM-formatted phantom hard drives on the Mac. Then, assuming your Mac is new enough to have one of the "super drives" as its floppy drive, the new IBM hard drives can have material read into them from your Mac's floppy "super" drive or can copy material out to the floppy drive. I found installing the program on my Mac to be extremely easy and the directions to be quite clear. Having "grown up" with DOS and IBM it was funny actually returning to that format, especially on a Macintosh screen. However, I found that using the MS-DOS 3.3 that comes with Universal Soft PC to be straight-forward for me as someone familiar with DOS's commands.

I found no problem using some regular IBM material I have and have assumed that

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I can print out material using the IBM fonts that come as part of the software by following the directions contained in the manual. My real acid test, though, was going to be trying out PICS material to see if my new "IBM PC" could control a laserdisc player. I loaded the PICS IBM software into my new IBM hard drive and then typed "autoexec." The first time it didn't work. However, after typing in autoexec again at the C: prompt, miracle of miracles, the program suddenly worked! The PICS program went through its paces exactly as I had seen it demonstrated at IALL. My elation and the elation of the Spanish and German staff here knew no bounds. We all figured that if our IBM/Mac could control a laserdisc player that it could run the vast majority of IBM

programs as well. Even the computer staff here became excited about the possibilities and have ordered Soft PC for their own computer labs and I eventually got a small grant for \$1450 from them to buy a 10 pack of Soft PC for my lab so that all of my computers could be IBM usable. I am pleased with this product and find that it solved a major problem for me.

P.S. Soft PC is available in three main versions from Insignia Software. Prices and information on the versions is available from Insignia and from Macintosh mail order vendors.

P.P.S. One caveat: Soft-PC is SLOW...

VIDEONICS VIDEO TITLEMAKER

Reviewed by Irene Starr
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Anyone needing clear and attractive titles, subtitles, or other on-screen text for video productions should consider the Videonics Video Titlemaker. Its striking array of crisp fonts, colors, and effects, including the characters for most European languages, is available for less than \$500. The simple installation requires plugging a video source into the back of the unit and then connecting the output to a VCR or video editing system using either conventional RCA or S-video Y/C connectors. Connecting it directly to a monitor instead creates an effective "billboard."

The Titlemaker uses digital technology (based on the Motorola 68000 with a custom integrated circuit) to create letters, backgrounds, outlines, borders and shadows in many sizes, colors, styles, and patterns. Scrolls, crawls, superimpositions, cuts, fades, and wipes are all easily set. These features are applied from on-screen menus and by using a set of clearly marked, special keys that are well laid out around the perimeter of the QWERTY-style keyboard. Keys such as *command*, *accent*, *mark*, *copy*, *move*, *undo*, *new line*, *new page*, *delete*, *position*, *cap lock*, *play*, *undo*, and *arrows* and their combinations are either similar to familiar computer ones or are relatively intuitive. The unit is the size of a small notebook computer with small, non-clicking keys. A long-life lithium battery holds many pages in memory. PAL versions are also available, according to the manufacturer.

The brief, well-written manual has a three page quick intro and a 33 page detailed section including summaries. However, it's hardly necessary to read even the quick section since punching keys for a few minutes is enough to begin creating and displaying pages. The manual does however contain details as well as useful tips that apply to the Titlemaker and to video in general such as the tendency of the color red to bleed. Pressing the *demo* key provides many examples (more than five minutes worth) of the possibilities. Moreover the settings of the demo pages can be copied and reused.

Special and accented characters are created by using the *accent* key in combination with one or two other keys. For example, the key for the number 4 has the *umlaut* in addition to the traditional \$ symbol. Pressing the *accent* and *umlaut* followed by a vowel creates the desired result. Accidental mistakes are unlikely since the *umlaut* is not allowed for a consonant.

To give an example of how easily the Titlemaker is operated, consider the following title. After pressing *play*, it slowly fades up with left justified white letters, blue background, and light grey bars as underlines. After a specified time it fades out.

Welcome to the
Foreign Language
Resource Center.

Irene Starr is Director of the Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

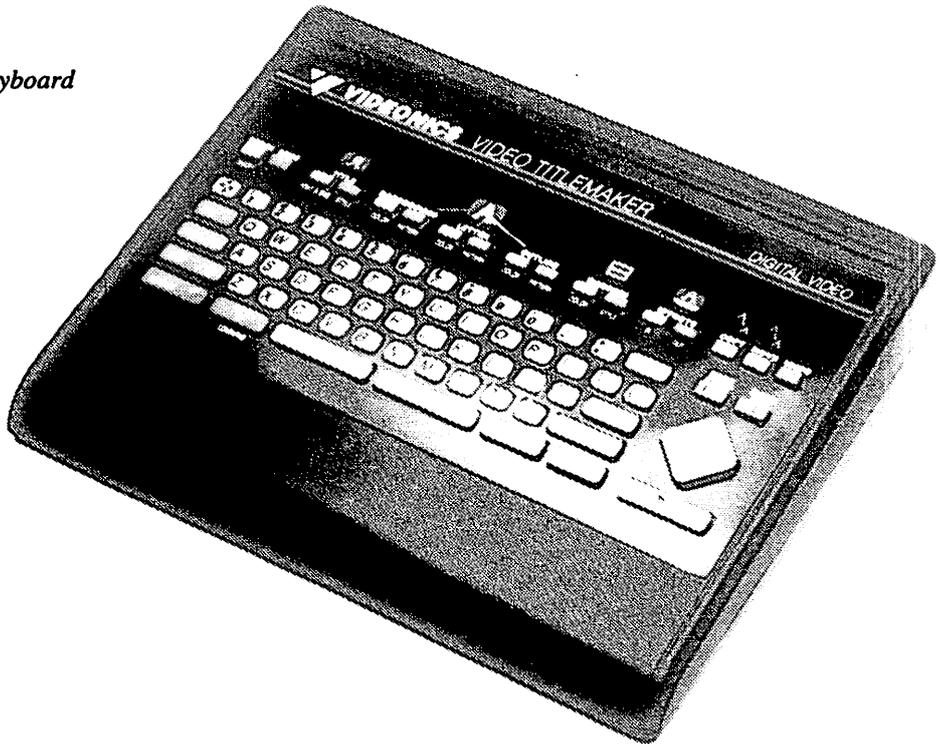
Figure 1. The character set

The TitleMaker Character Set

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 1234567890
!@#\$%^&*()° - — = _ + “”{}|;:’” ,.<>/?¢£¥®™©•
çÇæÆœœŒøØåÅß§«»¡¿ ← → ↑ ↓
´ áéíóúÁÉÍÓÚ
` àèìòùÀÈÌÒÙ
" äëïöüÄËÏÖÜ
~ ãõñÃÕÑ
^ âêîôûÂÊÎÔÛ

Note: Available characters will vary from font to font.

Figure 2. The keyboard



The left justification requires pressing the *position* key and then the left arrow. The *title* and *letter* keys are pressed to pull up the menus that offer the font, size, style, and color choices. Pressing the *background* key presents a menu with an extensive palette including solid colors (such as the blue in the above example), a video source, or even pulsating patterns or tinted video. The *arrow* and *enter* keys respectively move to and select the desired choices.

Moreover, each of the above selections can be modified for hue, brightness, and, in the case of patterns, design variations. These settings have specific numbers so that desirable choices are reproducible. The underline bars are chosen from the style and color keys of the *borders* menu. Other border styles are boxes or lines above the text. The border colors have the same options as the background colors. The fade in and out options along with the speed and duration of the fade are chosen from the *effects* menus. Outlining is especially useful when lettering is superimposed over video as is common in subtitles. Changes to any of the above features are applied to one or many pages by *marking* the portion to be changed. The combination of the *mark start* and *mark end* keys are the equivalent of highlighting.

In spite of the mind-boggling array of choices, the Titlemaker does not offer the flexibility of a computer. Programming a set of flipped, growing, or shrinking animated titles is not possible. However, the *copy* key would make it easy to create relatively interesting animations from several almost similar pages. The line is the smallest unit which can be affected by choices of font, size, and style of letters. Thus emphasizing a single word, in a multi-word line, by underlining or style or color choice is not possible. Similarly, background and border choices affect the entire page. Word processing features such

as word-wrap, proportional spacing, replace, or search are unavailable.

The memory limitations are more serious. The Titlemaker will hold up to 8000 characters of text which can be all in one "page" or divided into many pages. In a multiple-user environment, each user or project could be assigned a certain portion of the titler's memory but because pages are not numbered, each user would have to scan through the pages to find his or her section of memory. And because there is no easy way to save or restore the memory to an external device, the possibility exists that a user may need to recreate titles if they are lost. However, frequently used titles such as a countdown or facility credits could be copied to videotape for future use.

(Note: Videonics says it would be possible to write a program and wire a cable to interface an external computer to the Titlemaker's "CONTROL" port. This would allow a user to save and restore the contents of the unit's memory as a computer file. The company can supply an application note that describes the port in technical detail, but emphasizes that the port is not officially supported, so this solution is strictly for the technically adept.)

There are a few other problems. The manual states that there are both left and right quote marks, but in fact the left quote does not exist. Also there is a wait for the product since the company is not able to meet the demand.

However, these are minor quibbles considering how much is packed into a compact, quickly learned, and inexpensive device with high video quality and special and accented characters. Overall the Titlemaker is an excellent product which will allow smaller facilities to create more useful and attractive educational video materials, especially those emphasizing languages.

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Figure 3. Sample titles



LOOK AT THIS!
THESE ARE
UNRETOUCHED PHOTOS
OF ACTUAL TV
SCREENS.

VIDEONICS
Video-TitleMaker
HIGH RESOLUTION
VIDEO TITLES
In more than a
MILLION
COLORS