From jonre Thu Apr 25 15:14:44 1991
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Subject: PC Week WP Shootout
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I spent the last two days at PC Week's word processing shootout. The
shootout included Ami Pro, DOS WordPerfect, Legacy, Describe, and SPC
Pro Write. The good news, we did better than Ami Pro. The bad news is,
SPC won! This came as quite a shock to all involved, perhaps most
notably the SPC and Ami Pro people. Sort of like Microsoft Write
beating out Mac Word. Here's what happened:

The shootout is a 2-day affair. There have been seven shootouts before
word processing, including spreadsheets (which we won), Desktop
Publishing (I think Ventura), etc. Sam Whitmore described this as
filling a niche for reviews that let the people who know the products
best show them off in a real-world situation. At least for this shoot-
out, I think the reality fell short of the vision.

The scenario as described by PC Week was as follows:
"Universal Enterprises, a Fortune 500 company, is in need of a solution
for assembling a complex document including tables, charts, and
illustrations. Since this is a mission-critical application for a
company such as Universal, which is involved in the financial services
industry, driven by rapid customer response, this solution is not
limited to any particular platform. The cost of the application and its
hardware will be jointly considered in assessing the best value, as well
as the top overall performance without regard to cost."

"The goal is to design a template that guides the users through creating
the document, and the document should be able to automatically update
data elements on demand. The data will be stored on a Lan Man server.
The criteria for judging the overall solution are: 1) ease of use
for end users; 2) Flexibility of the product to make last minute changes
quickly and accurately; 3) Quality of the printed output; 4) Time
required to print the document; 5) Accuracy of the final product in
relation to the specification; 6) The ability to standardize procedures
and create templates."

Well, this description turned out to be pure B.S. Michel Girard and I
created a completely automated system which automatically imported the
ASCII text, replaced all formatting tags with appropriate styles and
formatting, imported all charts and data automatically, and positioned
them appropriately in the document. Completely automatic, completely
easy to use (via 3 "buttons" placed at the top of the screen), with
great looking output. Ami Pro's solution was almost as slick as ours,
in some ways more impressive in terms of sheer technology as they were
able to place macros on their icon bar which in turn automatically put a
new menu on the screen — two things we can't do. Ami's document looked
better than ours because they have more formatting capabilities
(paragraph and cell shading, various line rule weights). Ami also could
print their document in about HALF the amount of time we did (on a HP
IIIsi under postscript). I thought Ami Pro would end up winning unless
the judges were willing to weigh the turnkey nature of our solution
heavily.

Unfortunately, the judges didn't seem to understand the scenario. In
addition, the judges were quite unsophisticated "regular users", and
they only spent about 15 minutes with each product. Worse, only 2 of
the three judges saw a given product (except Ami Pro and SPC Write, who
had all three judges. The amount of time the judges spent examining Win
Word was way too short, and one of the two judges we had was heavily
biased against customized solutions and wouldn't listen to arguments
that we had designed a solution to the given scenario.

Ultimately, the judges seemed to pick SPC Write because their demo was
so simple to follow and was geared to the end-user who would create the
document from scratch out of the box, with no customization involved. I
think it was the only solution they could completely understand. Ami
Pro and we both had extensive customization in our solutions, and
frankly both demos were extremely sexy. SPC's didn't really demo
anything, they just showed how you could import ASCII files into the
product and how frames worked. They also showed the email export
feature, which the judges seemed to like. It was absolutely astounding
that the judges chose Pro Write over Ami Pro, as Ami has all the same
features and also has tables and customizability. I think this really
indicts the credibility of this particular shootout.

Overall, I was glad we lost to Pro Write instead of Ami Pro, as it makes the shootout results seen questionable. If the products had been evaluated by the criteria and scenario stated up front, I think we would have had a decent chance of winning, although Ami really beat us on output and speed of printing, and pretty much matched us in all other regards.

We should make sure that we print faster with documents that have lots of PCX images and metafiles in Spiff, because it was really amazingly slow under 1.1. I think other than that, the features we're adding in Spiff should improve our overall ease of use and output capabilities so we can be competitive with Ami Pro.