Pro Audio Spectrum & MPC Digest

Volume 1 - Number 10

December 1992

Published by Jim Rooney

Edited By Karen Goehner-Rooney

Dedicated to PAS and MPC Users

Publishers Corner

Welcome to Pro AudioSpectrum & MPC Digest. We made a big decision here this month... since we always seem to get behind and get the issue of that month published on the last day, we wondered if we should just change this one to January... the more we thought about it, though, the more we figured we should just leave it as it is... so from now on, all issues will be due out on the last day of the month they are for. BIG decision, eh?

We were going to write about some of the poor companies we have had to deal with in the past 10 months in the Compliments/Complaints section this month, but our policy has always been to just leave 'em alone. Like those that simply won't send product for review or those who treat their customers badly, etc. Although we feel you should know about these folks, there just haven't been any THAT bad that they deserve bad publicity! Admittedly, some are on the borderline. In fact, some simply shouldn't be in the retail or manufacturing business at all, but ... well, I guess we're just not in the complaining mood this month. If the readers of this magazine would like to see a section on those companies who either make things hard on their customers or have bizarre policies, be sure to write in and we will take some space and let you know about them.

Be sure to check out the reader feedback this month for a really good letter sent in by one of our subscribers... and speaking of subscribing... there IS a form at the end of this magazine for that purpose... you might even save money with that method depending on how much your long distance bills are. Plus, we always throw in a couple of MIDI files for those who subscribe. Anyway, it's something to think about.

Now... On With The Show!!

Now, to get through all the legal gobbledygook…

REVIEWS

We have 6 reviews this month. 2 games, which are The Games, Summer Challenge and Waxworks, both from Accolade. The 2 hardware reviews are the AudioPort from Media Vision and the Lantastic 10Mbs AE2 Starter Kit. We also have 2 Windows reviews... Publisher from Microsoft and Stacker 3.0 from Stac Electronics. The Stacker falls into the Windows category at this point as it now has some utilities that are accessible from that environment.

Here is the rating system we use for games...

Very Poor - not fit for human consumption
Poor - use it if you have to
Good - average
Very Good - above average
Excellent - expertly done
Outstanding - reserved for above & beyond the call of duty

Game Reviews
WaxWorks

Waxworks is the newest release from Accolade and is made by HorrorSoft, the same company that made Elvira and Elvira II. If you have played either of these two games you will know that this new one is a quality product.

Here's the story... Uncle Boris has just died and left you his Dodge and his prized possession, the WaxWorks. It took him years to create his collection of evil looking wax figures. This is not a normal wax museum full of icons of royalty, pop stars, and current celebrities. Uncle Boris chose to mold dark treacherous beings from his imagination, as well as duplicate criminals, witches and monsters from film and history. Your first temptation is to destroy the waxworks and its dreadful occupants... yet something beckons you to the old Victorian house that serves as the host to the collection. You are drawn into the fearsome scenes depicted in wax. You find yourself searching for your missing brother throughout the labyrinth waxworks, in ancient Egypt, 19th century England, in a dark, musty mineshaft and in a creepy, haunted cemetery.

So, now that you know the story, you know what you have to do... find your brother and discover the secret of the waxworks and lift the curse of Ixona that plagues your family. In keeping with the quality of previous HorrorSoft games, Accolade has again released a winner. This game will provide hundreds of hours of entertainment... and all with a VERY intuitive interface much like Elvira II. Since it is completely icon driven, all you have to do to play this game is point and click. The one big help in this game is Uncle Boris himself... when you enter the waxworks, the butler gives you a crystal ball which allows you to communicate with Uncle Boris. Sure... he's dead... that's what makes it

fun... be careful, though. Too much communication with the dead lowers your strength.

There are basically 5 worlds in this game which I will briefly explain... all are long and winding mazes that take time to negotiate...

Pyramid waxwork is just that... an ancient Egyptian pyramid. It has six levels and although I haven't done it, I would assume the idea is to get to the top... at least Boris says to go up! The mazes in the pyramid are very confusing. You just have to have patience and a good memory to make the correct turns or you will probably just go in circles. Along the way, you will run into guards that you have to fight but they're not very tough.

The second waxwork you might run into is Jack the Ripper. Set in 18th century London, the basic idea here is to... well, I really do not know what the basic idea is here... I DO know that you have to stay away from the Policemen or you will be taken and hanged immediately. The waxwork starts out with a dead girl in front of you. Again, and like all the other waxworks, this is a very difficult maze in which you can get lost very easily. The maze that you are going through is a whole bunch of streets and alleys. I haven't quite figured out what one is supposed to do in here, but I will.

The Mine waxwork is a living plant infested, nearly abandoned mine. This thing is full of plant people and vines who would rather rip your head off than look at you. Between the mutants, vines, pods and mine carts trying to kill you, it offers quite a challenge.

The Cemetery waxwork is actually the worse of all as far as confusion goes... I haven't been able to even come close to finding my way around this one... but there IS a way and the reward will obviously be tremendous.

The fifth and final waxwork is the waxworks itself... I haven't really figured this one out either, but again, that's all part of the fun.

PAS 16 Support - None (SB mode) - very good
Graphics - excellent
Interface - excellent

Value- excellent
Enjoyment - excellent
Playability - very good
Digitizing - none
Overall - very good

Note: This game would have received an excellent rating if it supported the PAS 16 or Plus. How 'bout it Accolade... any PAS support in the near future? Until then, could you please remove the "supports all major sound cards" line from the label since PAS 16 IS a major sound card?

Available from most retailers or Accolade at 1-800-245-7744

List price is $59.95

Requires IBM AT or compatible or higher, VGA
Recommended - 386/SX 16

The Games - Summer Challenge

A few months ago we reviewed The Games - Winter Challenge from Accolade which was basically a winter Olympics game. Now they have this one, which is much like the summer games.
All one needs to do to install this program is put the disk in the floppy drive and type install. Then just tell the program what drive and directory to use and away we go. The progress meter is rather cute on this one... a guy on a bike going from start to finish. The introduction is pretty good too... I won't tell you about it though... I don't want to ruin it for you.
As you might recall, I wasn't exactly overwhelmed with the difficulty level in the Winter Challenge... Guess I just thought it was either too easy or too hard, so I was expecting the same thing here. Well, I was pleasantly surprised! The Summer Challenge games are VERY well done and the

difficulty is about right.

Let me list each of the eight events and tell you what I thought...

The first event is Kayaking... the idea is to paddle the kayak through a treacherous river course in the least amount of time possible. If you go too fast, you won't be able to make the gates... if too slow, it's hard to steer. AND most of all, STAY AWAY FROM THE BANK.

Archery is one of the two events that I thought was just a little lame. You have to pull back the arrow in the bow and then line up the target and shoot. I guess maybe lame isn't exactly the word here... maybe unrealistic is more like it. Still kinda fun though.

The 400M hurdles pits you against the clock and stamina. You have to repeatedly hit the enter key to gain speed and then push the space bar and hold it down until the jump is over. Go too soon and you will probably knock the hurdle over... too late and you will fall flat on your face. Good action that takes a definite amount of practice and, at least, keyboard skill.

The high jump is just like the real event in that you have to run as fast as possible and then jump over a bar of a certain height with your back to the bar. Again, this takes a bit of practice and a good eye to know when to jump. One of the advantages of this game is that you are allowed to raise and lower the bar to your own preferences.

The javelin throw is my favorite. You have to run as fast as possible (enter key) and then throw the javelin at the proper angle (double space bar). If you go too far, you will not score because of a foot foul... not far enough and the javelin won't go far enough and the crowd will probably boo you. The angle is the most important concept, however.

Cycling is the other event that I thought was just too easy.

Working the left and right keys to stay on the track was just not any challenge at all.

Equestrian is the horse jumping event. You have to negotiate an 800m course leaping over barriers and walls. Timing is again critical. While staying on the course is almost too difficult, it DOES add some challenge to it.

Pole-vaulting is the last event. Running with a big pole as fast as you can and then placing the pole at the proper spot provides enough difficulty to make this one my second favorite.

So, all in all, I was quite a bit more impressed with this than the Winter Challenge, but then I guess I'm just a summer kind of guy. Certainly the big advantage of this is you get 8 games in one and have both a train and a tournament mode. PLUS... you get the advantage of instant replay with frame by frame slo-mo if you want.
Keep in mind that I tested this game with the keyboard... you can also use a joystick if you are more comfortable with that method.

Available from retailers or Accolade. Requires an AT compatible or better with VGA or better.

PAS16 support - none (SB Mode) - very good
Graphics - very good
Interface - very good
Originality - very good
Value - excellent
Enjoyment - excellent
Playability - excellent
Digitizing - excellent
Overall - very good/excellent

Windows Reviews

Microsoft Publisher

By Chuck Devos

So you want to publish a newsletter, but you really want to catch people's eye with it. What kinds of things do you need? First, you need originality. Second, you need to catch people's eye. Third, you need to have something to say.

The first and last of those three things are totally up to you. The second one - you need to catch people's eye - is something that this review might be able to help you with. In order to catch people's eye, you need to produce a newsletter that is a quality publication. There are several products on the market that will allow you to do that, and Microsoft Publisher v. 1.0 is one of the best for the money.

Sure, Aldus Pagemaker and Xerox Ventura will do incredible things, but you will pay between $600 and $900 for those packages. Microsoft Publisher retails for $200 (with a street price of around $130-$150), and will perform about any task you'll ever want to do with a desktop publisher.

Incorporated into Publisher are templates and page wizards that will help you with most tasks. The page wizards are pre-configured set-ups that allow you to input information, and then it creates the form for you. Quite original, and handy when you're in a hurry.

When you have the time, however, creating an original document is as easy as "point and shoot." Bring up a blank page (portrait or landscape), draw a text box and input your text. Publisher uses True Type Fonts, and so you can put in that bold headline or that small byline. When you've said what you want to say, draw a picture box and import some art to "spice up" the product. Publisher imports most graphics formats (.tif, .pcx, .wmf, .bmp, and more). Size the picture to your liking and take a look.

Need something more? Draw a Word Art box and then get creative with several new fonts (available only in the Word Art function), and several new way of arranging text (uphill, downhill, expanded, etc.). When you're finished, re-size the box to fit your document and print.

With any kind of a quality printer, you'll be amazed at how your document turned out.

The only negative thing I might say about Publisher, is that when you are working with a large graphics file (1 meg or more), the screen re-draws (which generally are not a problem), take a little longer to complete. But that is understandable, considering the size of the graphic being used.

The only real competition (that this writer knows about) in this market is Power Up! Software's Express Publisher for Windows. However, from what I've observed and read (Power Up! refuses to send evaluation copies to writers for review), Publisher beats them hands down. (NOTE: Power Up!, if you think your product is better, send me a copy and I'll check it out. Be glad to print it too - if it is really better.)

I have used Publisher to design Business Letterhead, Business Cards, Bulletins, Posters, Sign-Up sheets, Invitations, Event Tickets, Newspaper Ads and much more. If you're looking for an inexpensive Windows publisher, take a close look at publisher. It is inexpensive, easy to use, fully Windows compatible and, all-in-all, an exceptional product.

If you're a small business owner, looking into desktop publishing for flyers, posters, business cards, or anything of that nature. Look no further. Pick up a copy of Microsoft Publisher (also available on CD-ROM), and see what it can do for you. I believe you'll be quite impressed!

Stacker 3.0

Seems a bit strange having a review of Stacker in the Windows area, but since most functions are now supported in Windows, we felt it was only fair. In case you do not know what Stacker is, let me explain. Stacker is an on-the-fly disk compression utility that doubles your disk space in most cases. All you have to do is put the disk in the floppy and go through a short installation process which is mostly answering questions that you SHOULD know about your system and the program does the rest. When it's all done, you should have about twice the amount of space as before... so... before you go out and spend 2-3 dollars per meg on a new hard drive, check this out first. For those of you that store a lot of already compressed files on your drive, such as .ZIP or .LZH, you won't get the same results because these files are already about as small as they're going to get.

Stacker is not only for hard drives, however. It works equally well for floppies and any removable media... and the best part of all is that Stacker does not have to be installed on a computer that needs to read the disk... it is all self contained on the floppy.

Now to the Windows features. By calling up the Stacker icon, you can open Stacometer, which tells you what your compression ratio, disk space and fragmentation level is. Another option from the stacker window is the Tuner in which you can change the level of compression. High compression means less speed... less compression means faster uncompress. Something you need to keep in mind here is that Stacker creates a very small performance hit... so small that it is not really noticeable but if you notice too much of a hit, you can use the Tuner to change it.

Stac Electronics also makes available a co-processor which speeds up the on-the-fly compression/decompression. I have the AT/16 card and although it made a difference in all speed index tests, it wasn't enough to warrant the extra cost as far as I'm concerned. BUT... if you have a system that is already a bit on the slow side, it could make a big difference.

The bottom line here is twice as much disk space than you already have. The performance hit is negligible, which is what most folks seem to be concerned about. Don't be worried... or at least give it a try... The best news of all is that Stacker 3.0 can be removed!

Available from all retailers or Stac at 619-431-7474

Hardware Reviews

AudioPort

The AudioPort from Media Vision is, as far as I'm concerned, a feat of magic. Measuring only 2.25" X 4.375" X .5", this little thing packs quite a punch. What is it? It's a sound device that hooks up to your parallel port. It will play MIDI files, WAV files just like the PAS line of sound devices, only not quite as well... but then, it wasn't intended to replace that line. It is made primarily for laptop and notebook computers so one can use its capabilities for presentations and such.

AudioPort is packaged with a driver that allows software compatible with ThunderBoard, Adlib, and SoundBlaster to work with the device... and the installation is a breeze. Just plug it into your parallel port, hook up the 6 volt adapter or install 4 AAA batteries, put in the install disk and it's all done for you. It is Windows 3.1 compatible making it the ideal audio device.

It features 8 bit sound through either the built in speaker or headphones or an amplifier hooked to the headphone jack. There is also a mic input so if you are giving a presentation, you need not have another sound system to talk at the same time. There is also a volume control on the unit itself so you don't have to fool with software controls.

So, if you plan to go on the road as a salesman giving a sales pitch, or a corporate executive trying to show something important to the boss, this unit will add the missing link to your presentations. Sound can mean the difference between a successful presentation and a bad one.

Available from most hardware retailers or Media Vision at 1-800-348-7116.

Suggested retail price is $199.00 so expect street price to be around $129.00.

Lantastic AE2 Network

Although I received this network starter kit about 4 months ago, I just wasn't able to get it in the magazine until now. My sincerest apologies go out to all the nice folks at Artisoft for all their help and patience.

The Lantastic AE2 starter kit from Artisoft is a 16 bit peer to peer network. All necessary items are included in the kit which includes 2 16 bit Ethernet adapters (proprietary), 1 25 foot cheapernet coaxial cable, 2 terminators and the software and manuals.

The installation of this program is fairly simple. As with most programs in this day and age, all you have to do is put the floppy in the drive and type install. It will then come up with a screen for configuration. The basic things you need to know is if you are going to use the node as a server or workstation, and whether or not you want to modify config.sys. The default directories and such should be left as they are unless you have a good reason to change them. After you get the configuration correct, and you will have to read the install section of the manual to do it right, the install program copies the files over and creates a startnet.bat file. This file is the one that starts the network each time you want to use it. I actually ended up combining it with my autoexec.bat just to make it easier. At any rate, the startnet.bat file will be fine if you didn't change the address or IRQ for your cards... if you did, then you'd have to manually change that in the startnet.bat file. I think Artisoft could make this a little easier, but it isn't that bad.

This version of Lantastic network OS (operating system) supports Windows. You can access net manager for changing accounts and such right from your Windows environment.

I had a really weird problem with the Windows part of the program and Artisoft Tech Support worked feverishly to resolve the problem to no avail... but before you think this is a problem, it isn't. For some odd reason, while not using the network for about 3 weeks while Artisoft engineering worked on it, the problem disappeared, Because of cosmic forces, change in software or whatever, it just plain fixed itself. Now, I'm not a real strong believer of cosmic forces, so evidently in that three weeks I had removed the problem without knowing it... and it hasn't cropped up since then. I DO want to hand it to Dave in Windows tech support for putting up with all my questions and problems with all the grace and diplomacy of a saint. Thanks, Dave, and I will send you a surprise as soon as I figure out how to keep it from spoiling during shipping.

Something else I need to mention is about Lantastic A/I, which is their adapter independent software. I have recently added a third node to the network which uses a completely different network card. With Lantastic A/I, the installation was just as easy and I can communicate with the other two machines, which have proprietary cards in them without a hitch. GREAT job Artisoft. Keep up the good work.

All artisoft products are available from Artisoft authorized dealers or from Artisoft at 1-800-846-9726.

UPGRADES AND FUTURE PRODUCTS

Access Software...
December 15,1992... Access Software today released the first of at lease 7 super VGA courses for Links 386 Pro. Mauna Key, a Hawaiian golf course that comes to you in brilliant super vga and will also work with Microsoft Golf and the regular version of Links. Suggested retail is $29.95.

Accolade...
Tinseltown, Ca... October 12, 1992... The entertainment world was rocked today with the announcement that wildlife sensation Bubsy Bobcat has signed a megabuck video game contract with Accolade, one of the country's leading Super Nintendo Entertainment System and Sega Genesis publishers. Accolade is getting ready to release Bubsy's blockbuster first video game, Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind.

MacroMedia...
October 27, 1992... Macromedia today announced Macromedia Action! 2.5, a new version of the leading instant multimedia presentation tool that incorporates digital video. This new video savvy version will be sent to all registered owners of Action! 2.0 at no charge.

The Software Toolworks...
December 1, 1992... The Software Toolworks has announced it will offer a series of new multimedia CD-ROM products featuring video and film footage spanning significant events and people from the entire 20th century, based on the largest interactive multimedia videodisk archive in the world. One of the products will be called "The Video Encyclopedia of the 20th Century (R).

Reader Feedback

I received your latest digest the other day, and all I can say is it looks good and sounds good ! I really enjoy the presentations each month.
I would like to make a few suggestions if I may.

1. Could you enclose new Windows drivers for the Pro AudioSpectrum 16 sound board with the digest as they become available, or if this is not possible, at least announce that they are available on Media Vision's BBS for downloading.
2. Could you occasionally rate shareware programs (like WinJammer) or at least mention that they exist. I downloaded WinJammer from a BBS a few weeks ago and am considering registration, but I would like to know if there are better programs available.
3. Would it be possible to include a .MOD file from time to time. My kids (and I) like the Trak Blaster program.

Thanks for your time, and again let me say that I really like the PAS & MPC Digest.

Robert W. Hicks - Plumsteadville, PA

Thanks for the letter Robert. In answer to your questions I would first like to point out that the reason we do not include drivers or .MODs is because of size. Since a lot of our readers get the publication from bbs's, and the multimedia version already tops half a meg, we hate to add any more to that. We do try to keep you informed of driver updates in the General Information/Tech Notes section. We did not mention the 1.43 drivers as they were real buggy. You will notice the announcement of the 1.44 drivers in that section this month. For you .MOD fanatics, be sure to check the bbs listings... most of these bbs's carry lots of those type of files.
Your point on shareware is well taken. We have not reviewed any yet, but look for next month's issue in which we WILL

include a review of the exact program you referred to. We, too, have had this program for about a month and it is indeed worth a review. Please keep in mind, though, that we will NOT review any crippled shareware. If the author does not abide by ASP regulations, even though they may not belong to that organization, we will not recommend it. You might have noticed that we have NEVER published a review of a poor product. The reason is simple... if a program doesn't meet the criteria of fitness for a particular purpose, we won't even touch it. All reviews in this magazine are basically recommendations so if a program just doesn't work right, we won't recommend it.   -pub

General Information & Tech Notes

The Windows drivers ver 1.44 are done and on-line at the Media Vision bbs. They are also available on the PAS & MPC Digest support bbs. The file name is WIN144.ZIP. These will be available to P A S logons, too.

A lot of folks are having problems understanding how to retain Windows mixer settings upon exit. A lot of you set the Pro Mixer or Pocket Mixer and then exit Windows and when you load Windows again, your settings are lost. Here's the solution... Double Click on Control Panel in the "Main" window. Double click on "Drivers". Single click on "Pro AudioSpectrum Mixer" and then on "Setup". Notice the box titled "Mixer Exit"? Be sure both boxes are checked... if not, just click on the box. You may also want to make sure the "Inherit DOS settings" box is unchecked. Now click OK and then Close and you should be set. Go ahead and exit Windows and then start up again... your settings should be the way you left them.

Many of you have been complaining about a problem when trying to play MIDI files that they just don't sound right. Please keep in mind that the PAS products are *BASE LEVEL* MIDI devices and therefore use channel 16 for the percussion. If you try to use a general MIDI song, you will get notes instead of percussion as general MIDI or *EXTENDED LEVEL* MIDI uses channel 10 for percussion. The only clear way to fix the problem is to change the channel using SP Spectrum or any other sequencer.

When installing Norton Desktop for Windows, it is changing a line in your SYSTEM.INI file which needs to be changed back for proper PAS operation... look for the Device=VDMADX.386 line, comment it out with a semi-colon and add the line Device=*VDMAD below it.

If you want to write to PAS & MPC Digest, here is the address:

PAS & MPC Digest
23217 NE 10th Pl.
Redmond, WA 98053-6520
Voice - 206-868-0950 - 9am to 9pm Pacific Time - NO CALLS AFTER 9!!
Fax - 206-868-2257 or if no answer - 206-556-1723

You may also upload your comments to:

The Neighborhood BBS

206-641-3908 - running PCBboard - 1200/2400
206-957-1112 - Node 2 - 12/24/96/19.2
206-747-6095 - Node 3 - 1200/2400
You can log on under the name P A S (be sure to use the spaces) and a password of MPC. This name and password will only allow you to upload files and download this monthly newsletter. If you become a subscriber to PAS & MPC Digest, you will also get full access to this bbs on all three nodes.

You can check for the digest using a Z ippy directory scan for PAS. That will list all issues.

To contact Media Vision:

Media Vision Inc.
3185 Laurelview CT.
Fremont, CA 94538
Technical Support - 800-638-2807
BBS - 510-770-0968 or 510-770-1661
FAX - 510-770-9592
Main Number - 510-770-8600

BBS Listings

The Neighborhood BBS - 206-641-3908 - 1200/2400 - PAS & MPC support bbs
The Neighborhood BBS - 206-957-1112 - 12/24/96 - Node 2

   This is where you will find the latest edition of this magazine.

Media Vision BBS - 510-770-0968 - 12/24/96 - Manufacturer BBS
SysOp is Brett Stewart.

    You can check here for upgrades that are not on Neighborhood bbs or leave technical questions for tech support.

VGER Control BBS - 714-371-6482 - 12/24/96/14.4 - Alternate Media Vision Support
SysOp - Bob Altenberger

The National PC & MIDI Databank - 708-593-8703 - 12/24/96 -
MIDI files - Sound Card files - Multimedia - SysOp is Duane Antor

Lighthouse BBS - 207-255-3700 - 12/24/96 - LOTS of .ROL and MIDI files

Ultimate BBS - 803-895-5836 - 12/24/96 - .ROL and MIDI files

National MIDI - 708-593-8724 - 12/24/96 - LOTS of MIDI files

If you want to add your bbs to this list, please write or call the bbs and supply the information. We will be happy to add it.

Looks like that's it for Pro AudioSpectrum & MPC Digest for this month. Hope you enjoyed it. If there is anything you would like to see included in future issues don't hesitate to write. Until next time... Have a good month!

PS... If you didn't already notice, there are 3 formats of the publication. You will get MUCH better results if you use one of these files for printing as I use a lot of different fonts to make it look better. Here are the formats...

PASWR#X.DOC - Printed in Windows Write format.

PASASC#X.DOC - Printed in straight ASCII format.

PASMMXX.ZIP - The multimedia version available from the support bbs.

Subscription Form

NAME:_____

Address:_____

City, State, ZIP:_____

Phone Number:_____

Diskette (circle one)   3.5"   5.25"   or   hard copy

Mail this form with $22.00 for floppy or $30.00 for hard copy or $40.00 for multimedia version per year to:

PAS & MPC Digest
23217 NE 10th Pl.
Redmond, WA 98053-6520

Thanks for your subscription and you can access the support bbs's second node with contributor access at 206-957-1112.