Queries and Comments

Thanks to all who have responded to any of the previous issues of The Disc! with questions, comments, complaints, and/or congrats. And for those of you who are new to CD-ROM Today and its companion Disc!, please note that we are eager to receive your feedback.

We simply do not have the personnel resources required to respond to each individual query, but be assured that we read every message and use your ideas, suggestions, complaints, and questions to try to make both the magazine and The Disc! a package that you'll look forward to receiving.

In each Disc!, we'll address a number of general and individual issues that are raised by readers and users of the magazine and disc.

1. Why doesn't (fill in the blank) work on my system?

We receive many letters and messages complimenting us on the fact that everything on The Disc! works well, and yet others say that various demos or samples or our user interface on The Disc! fail to work at all -- or only with tweaking. With thousands of variations in memory configurations, sound cards, video cards, CD-ROM drives and drive speeds, and other variables, it's not surprising that our wide-ranging selection of demos, samples, and programs produce different results on different systems. These inconsistencies are a very real part of the world of multimedia computing right now.

We test the software on as many different hardware setups as possible to try to locate problems or special challenges that will confront our readers. And the software publishers also try to give us programs to run that are tested and tweaked so that users have a positive experience. However, while we want to provide readers with software samples that are as easy to use as possible, we also want to bring to you the best of what's being published. And some of that pushes the limits of hardware systems.

We'll try to provide as much information as possible via README files, information on the Disc! pages, and in every other way to give you as much troubleshooting advice as possible. And where we see potential problems, we'll signal our readers about them.

2. Why do I have to leave your Disc! interface and Windows to run so many game and education programs and demos?

In the PC world, the truth is that most of the very best entertainment packages and educational programs use every scrap of available memory. And that means that some of the RAM memory that's assigned to Windows -- which our Disc! interface uses -- can rob the game of the space it needs to run. While we'd prefer to launch everything from our Windows interface, to do that would mean that readers don't get some of the hottest software available.

We're pleased to report that planning is underway to produce a custom user interface for DOS and another one for our many Macintosh readers in addition to our Windows interface. We'll try to make sure that no matter what you're using that you have an easy-to-use, intuitive environment in which to operate.

3. Why can't I get some customer/technical support from you about problems I encounter in running parts of The Disc!?

We'd love to be able to handle such calls on an individual basis, but the volume and range of queries on virtually every multimedia subject and challenge is far too great for us to handle at this time. We do try, and will increase our efforts even more, to anticipate and document areas where we think readers will have particular problems. In fact, CD-ROM Today's stories on troubleshooting multimedia are, in part, a response to the individual questions we received about The Disc!.

CD-ROM computing is a rapidly evolving arena, and until the era of true plug-and-play emerges there will be more questions than immediate answers.

4. Could you put more information in the Disc! pages of the magazine about how to run particular programs?

You'll now find more detailed information in our Disc! pages about what the program is, how you use it, and how to have some fun with it. We'll also try to put into the READ ME files on The Disc! as much troubleshooting material as possible.

5. Could your Disc! have caused a virus on my computer?

Our disc duplicator, Disctronics, is one of the finest CD-ROM manufacturers and duplicators in the industry -- producing millions of discs each year. Their virus checking procedures are top-notch, and we can guarantee that each one of our CD-ROM discs is certified virus-free immediately before it is pressed.

6. Why does the magazine's polywrap packaging occasionally say that a particular demo, program, or sample is on The Disc! when it isn't?

Software developers and publishers are always trying to push their products to be the most innovative, exciting, and compelling titles on the market. This inevitably leads to missed deadlines and late arrivals as they work to stay on the cutting edge while solving a host of new challenges and problems. And that also has an effect on when we can get demos, samples, limited-use versions, etc.

Our pledge to you, our readers, is to deliver far more on each issue of The Disc! than we promise! And if one or two programs or samples fall out of an issue, we'll make sure that we more than make up for it with even better items.

7. Why does the Macintosh side of The Disc! have programs that are different from the PC side?

Wherever possible, we like to use programs on The Disc! that are accessible by both Mac and PC users.

In many cases, however, programs and demos are not available for both systems at the same time. What we try to do is to provide readers with the most compelling material for each system -- and to offer as much of it as we can possibly squeeze onto each disc.

8. I've tried to reach your Customer Service line, but (a) it's always busy, (b) the voice mailbox is full, or (c) no one responds.

We do apologize to all of you who may have experienced frustration at not being able to reach our Customer Service line. The overwhelming response to the first three discs accompanying the magazine has been very gratifying but has also resulted in our not being as quick to respond as we would like.

However, we're in the process of expanding our operations and upgrading our customer service response rate. Please note that the new Customer Service phone number is 415-696-1661.

We are not able to handle individual queries about items on the Disc!, but we do want to help straighten out any circulation problems you may have.

9. Occasionally, I get stuck inside a program or demo on The Disc! and can't find a way out. Are there any standard exit commands?

Different publishers approach this question in varying ways. There's no universal exit other than turning off your computer and turning it back on. Our goal is to provide quick exit commands on any program or demo on The Disc! that's not an clear menu choice or is not directly pointed out.

There are some fairly common command usages, such as using the F1 key for Help files and Alt-X or Alt-Q or Ctrl-Q as exits. But the variations are so great that

it's impossible to provide a universal solution.

10. On Disc! #2, I couldn't get the Theme Park limited-use sample to work properly. What gives?

While we generally refrain from suggesting that our readers tweak their computer systems in order to run a demo or program that's not working out, Theme Park has a fairly standard solution. So, here goes. But, please note: We cannot be responsible for any changes to your system that you may initiate in order to optimize a particular program on The Disc!.

If you've only got four megabytes of RAM and are using the EMM386 memory manager, you will run into a problem loading the game. There are two ways to remedy this. The first method is the easiest, but you'll need DOS 6.0 or later on your system.

You reboot your PC and hit the F8 function key after the computer runs through its memory check. This will prompt you to confirm each line in your CONFIG.SYS file. Type N for the line with DEVICE=C:\DOS\EMM386.EXE, and Y for all other lines.

If your system has an earlier version of DOS, you can edit your CONFIG.SYS file and REM out the line dealing with EMM386. But, you'll need to be familiar with using a text editor or word processor to change the file. And if you're not comfortable doing that -- leave well enough alone.

11. Why does the sound for some programs and demos seem crackle and hiss on my system?

When the music and sound effects of a program or demo are audible yet plagued with crackles and hisses, it's usually due to a sound card specification conflict. The major conflict is between 16 or 32-bit sound and an 8-bit sound card. Trying to run 16 or 32-bit sound through an 8-bit sound card is like trying to squeeze five people into a VW Bug--it's possible, but definitely not comfortable! The best way to avoid this problem is to purchase a 16 or 32-bit sound card so that you may enjoy the many new programs that incorporate higher sound quality.

12. What causes the colors of some demos and programs to blur while in Windows?

Unfortunately, some authoring packages used to produce many of today's leading demos and programs are quite finnicky when it comes to the way in which they handle color. Consequently, those products require that the colors are set 'just so' during operation in Windows (and they are not always careful to restore things to way they were when you exit either). One method of restoring the true colors, or palette, of a program or demo is to merely minimize the window in which it is displayed. The colors should ring true once the window is maximized again. Occasionally, a more complicated color-handling issue crops up and a Windows restart is required.