

The Micro Times



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THIS MONTH'S FEATURE



By Bob Van Den Oever

VIRUS!! To the health professional this word conjures up images of colds, influenza, and even the deadly AIDS. The word also conjures up deadly images to the computer professional, images of contaminated data, programs that don't

work, crashed computer systems, and even erased hard disks. Computer viruses have been big news lately. Even the Sioux Falls Argus Leader has carried an article on computer viruses (July 17th).

What is a computer virus? Though they take a number of forms, they are essentially programs that copy themselves onto floppy disks and then onto hard disks and other floppy disks. This spreading through contact much like a human virus is what gives them their name. Spread in this manner they often sit dormant for some period or until some event and then activate themselves, often to do something malicious such as erasing your hard disk. Viruses are written by the current equivalent of the hackers who used to break into secure computer systems and do some damage; people who take a perverse pleasure in proving their computer sophistication by doing something damaging that's hard to stop or track. In some cases these people may also be modern terrorists with aims at specific targets.

There is a lot of current debate over how real

and widespread the threat of viruses are. There is, however, little doubt that viruses do exist and can be very damaging. Could a virus infect EDC? Yes, particularly if we do not take precautions to prevent them.

Most viruses get their start from PC bulletin board systems (these are computers you can dial into and download software from) where the contaminated program is made available. Once someone downloads that software their PC becomes infected and any floppies used on that PC become infected. These infected floppies then infect other PC's as the software is passed from friend to friend and co-worker to co-worker. Some companies have outlawed the downloading of software from bulletin boards and the use of shareware and freeware programs because of the threat of viruses. The movement of software and data between home computers and business computers can also be a source of contamination, since most home computers are loaded with potentially contaminated shareware and freeware. Another method used to slow the spread of viruses is to be very conscientious about using write protect tabs, especially on your boot floppy if you are using a floppy system. If they are used religiously a virus can be spread to a floppy only if the floppy is actually written to. Without the write protect tabs some viruses can infect any disk inserted into the PC, even if only to do a quick DIR.

Given this what can we at EDC do to protect ourselves? First stay away from bulletin boards and freeware and shareware unless they are well known and reputable. In particular stay away from games and utilities found on a

bulletin board or elsewhere that seem really neat but do not identify an author. Bulletin boards such as the PCMagNet (sponsored by PC Magazine) should be safe. The PC-SIG, which is available on CD-ROM in the Kulow Library, should also be safe. Get your shareware and freeware directly from the manufacturer if possible. (Even though the software you acquire is well known, the copy of it you get from your neighbor down the street could be contaminated!) We would encourage you to avoid bringing your home software to work. Illegal copies of commercial software are another favorite hiding place for viruses, so use only legal copies of commercial software. Finally use those write protect tabs! They may not only protect you from a computer virus but could protect you from your own mistakes as well.

There are also some things you can do to spot infected programs or reduce the damage they do. One type of a virus works by increasing the size

of your program every time you run it until finally the program size gets so large that running it causes the system to crash. These viruses are easy to spot if you take the time to watch the size of your programs and make sure they stay constant. Doing regular backups and making copies of your master diskettes may help you if a virus does damage your data.

If you would like to go beyond this level of protection, particularly for your home computer, there are a number of antiviral programs on the market today. They do a reasonable job of protecting you, though they will likely add to your irritability because of the extra steps they force you to take even when doing mundane PC tasks. For a review of several of these programs and a good technical explanation of viruses see the June 28, 1988 issue of PC Magazine which is available for checkout from the Micro Support Group in room 519.

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A CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST 1988

| MON TUE WED THU FRI | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|----|----|-------------------------------|----|----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 Presentation Graphics | 5 | |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 Norton Utilities | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |
| Tentative Lotus 123 Classes | | | | | | |

EDCEA ⁶
Picnic

Presentation Graphics: 8/4, 12:00 - 12:45, SAB classroom. Two graphic packages available for presentations or documentation charts will be demonstrated: EasyFlow for flow charts and Diagram-Master for Gantt and organization charts and for free drawing.

Norton Utilities: 8/18, 12:00 - 12:45, SAB classroom. A demonstration of some DOS type utilities that DOS never provided.

The Lotus 123 hands-on classes are tentatively scheduled to start the week of August 29th. Attendees will be notified of session times and location.

\ASK>**"ASK CURSOR" - ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS**

Cursor had it easy this month, no problems or questions, consequently there is no column this month. Cursor really would like something to do next month, so be sure to bring any questions

you might have to the Micro Support Group in room 519 and they will be sure to pass them on to him/her/it.

\ETC>**RANDOM NOTES OF INTEREST****FAULTY DISK error on CPT**

CPT Users: When a faulty disk error message is received, you may not be able to read any or all pages on the diskette. Call Mary Chmela (x6863) if this happens; she has some software that will restore the pages to another diskette.

Procomm stack overflow patch

Procomm version 2.42 when running on MS DOS 3.x will hang if CTRL-BREAK is pressed. The message "stack overflow" will be emitted as well as possibly some garbage before the computer "locks up". The following patch will fix the problem. This patch assumes procomm.exe is in the current directory and DOS's debug is loadable. The bold is what you type in.

```
C:\PROCOMM>ren procomm.exe procomm.bin
```

```
C:\PROCOMM>debug procomm.bin
```

```
-E 83D 90 90 90
```

```
-W
```

```
Writing 285B0 bytes
```

```
-Q
```

```
C:\PROCOMM>ren procomm.bin procomm.exe
```

```
C:\PROCOMM>
```

Thanks to Gordon W. Ross of The MITRE Corporation for this patch that was distributed via a DECUS tape. If you have any questions contact the Micro Support Group room 519.

This issue was published using WordPerfect version 4.2. The two newspaper column option and hyphenation was used. All printing was done on a Dataproducts LZR 1230 laser printer in HP LaserJet + emulation mode. Bob Van Den Oever's and Donna Scholz's images were scanned with The Complete Hand Scanner as were the EROS logo and the two PCs on the front page. The scanned images, the calendar, and all large lettering and line work were processed with Microsoft's Paintbrush. Unfortunately, because of the scaling that was done within Paintbrush, scanning color images with a scanner that only scans two tones, scanning at 200 dpi and printing at 300 dpi the scanned images do not show as well in this paper as the originals. Our apologies especially to Bob and Donna and to future writers of the \USER column, this is the only issue we will use scanned faces. It should be noted that this is the first issue that was not "cut-and-pasted" together for publication. We did print twice to a page, once with Paintbrush and once with WordPerfect. With a desktop publishing package this would all be done in one step. WordPerfect version 5.0 also has some desktop publishing capabilities.

\USER\



By Donna Scholz

The Science and Applications Branch has been tracking TGS and Government staff travel budgets using the Open Access (OA) integrated package of word processing, spreadsheet, data base, business graphics, calendar, and communications for three years. Specifically, the data base

is used for tracking individual trips, and the spreadsheet for developing travel statistics in terms of numbers of trips, staff, and dollars for each Section and the Branch as a whole. These numbers are then used in a "what if" scenario for budget building when staffing levels and available travel funding changes.

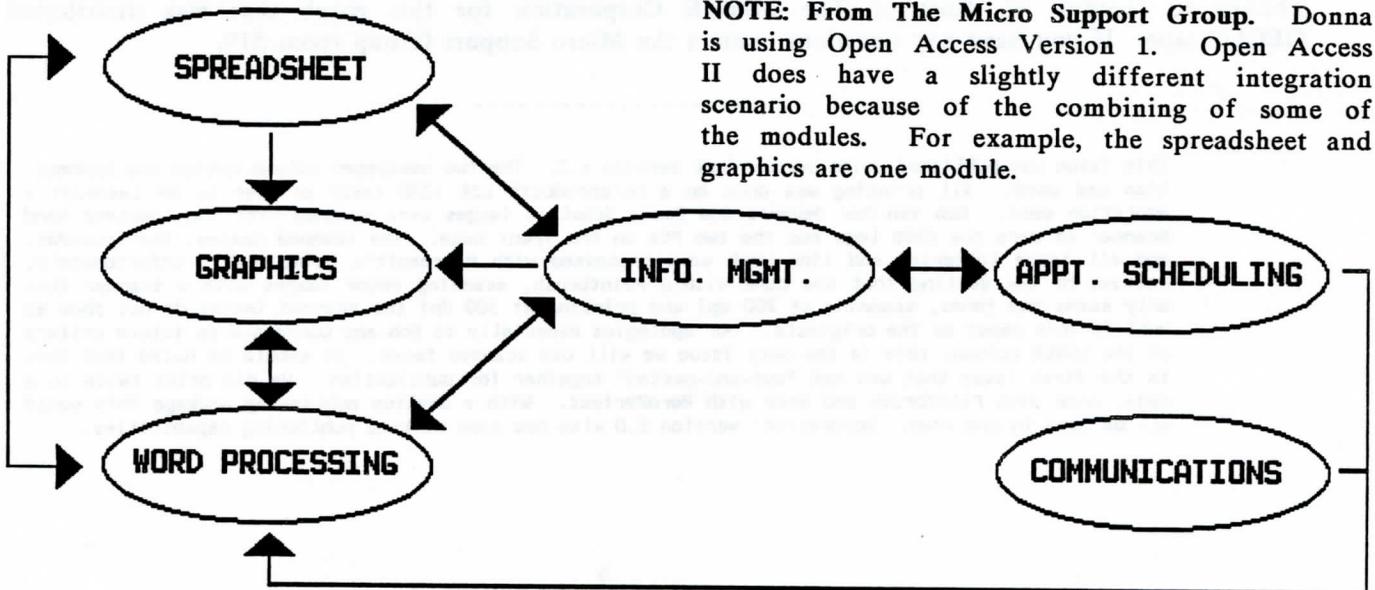
Three relational data base files are maintained, 1) for each Section's yearly budget and expenditures to-date, 2) staff names and Section affiliation and, 3) details on trips (including who, where, when, and how much was spent). The data are summarized each month and a report generated using the excellent report writing capability of OA. These data are extracted from the 3 joined relational files as required by Branch Management and passed automatically to the spreadsheet module for statistical summaries,

OF INTEREST FROM THE USERS

historical comparisons, and budget requirements forecasting.

The enjoyable aspect of the OA modules for me is that no matter which module you need to use to analyze or present your data, there's no reformatting or conversion involved. A simple keypress inside any module assembles the subset of data you've chosen, passes it to the module you want to use next, and opens up your screen to that new module with your data in place and waiting for you to proceed with your analysis. A graphic showing the links between the OA modules is shown below.

The data base module is very similar to the relational data base called RIM which is used in both Data Production and Distribution Branch and the Science and Applications Branch. The spreadsheet is very similar to LOTUS 1-2-3. What makes the OA implementation better is that as a user I didn't have to learn the RIM user language and then the LOTUS user language...the OA user interface looks the same no matter what module you're using. That, I think, is the real strength and time-saving feature of the OA integrated package. OA is available from the micro-software library in room 519. If you'd just like to try it out, it's on both Compaq Desk Pro's in the MicroLab and a really good tutorial is online to help you learn.



NOTE: From The Micro Support Group. Donna is using Open Access Version 1. Open Access II does have a slightly different integration scenario because of the combining of some of the modules. For example, the spreadsheet and graphics are one module.

OPEN ACCESS INTERNAL INTEGRATION