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Take Your Documents and Run

DataViz's Documents To Go eases file transfer and viewing on your Palm-based organizer.

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Palm-based organizers are great for checking appointments, to-do lists, and contacts. But the Palm OS won't let you read word processor or spreadsheet documents created on your PC or Macintosh; for that, you need a third-party file viewer. Most Palm file viewers are limited in their file format support, but DataViz's $40 Documents To Go 2.003 covers most of the bases: This simple yet effective program transforms documents created in a wide variety of popular PC and Macintosh applications, and includes some convenient features that make viewing large documents on a small screen easier.

Documents To Go works on any device running version 2.0 of the Palm OS, including the Pilot 1000 and 5000, the PalmPilot Personal and PalmPilot Professional, the Palm III series, the Palm V series, the Palm VII, the Handspring Visor series, and IBM's WorkPad.

I downloaded a fully operational trial version of the software from DataViz's Web site. The software took about 25 minutes to download and install over a 56-kilobits-per-second connection. If you prefer a CD-ROM, you can buy Documents to Go in retail stores, at online sites, and through catalogs. Once I rebooted the 400-MHz Pentium II notebook system, I completed a HotSync to install the software on a Palm IIIx.

Reading Documents in the Palm of Your Hand

Documents To Go loads three separate applications on your handheld: WordView, WordView+, and SheetView, requiring 35KB, 89KB, and 76KB, respectively. WordView is for reading plain-text documents; WordView+ supports formatting, such as tabs and font types; and SheetView is used to view spreadsheet documents. A fourth application resides on your PC, and is configured like Windows' Briefcase folder. To move documents to the Palm, I simply clicked on the Add button, found the desired files, and then completed a HotSync, which synchronized the Palm with the PC. You can also delete files, either through the handheld or via the PC application.

In addition to ASCII text, Documents To Go can read 13 file formats generated by popular Windows and Macintosh applications. On the PC side, the list includes current and recent versions of Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Lotus Word Pro, Lotus 1-2-3, Corel Quattro Pro, and Corel WordPerfect (2000 is not yet supported, although DataViz says it plans to support that in a future point-release). On the Macintosh side, the list of supported applications includes AppleWorks, ClarisWorks, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft Excel.

Load and Launch

I transferred a ten-page Word document and a 10KB Excel file to the Palm. The files were very readable, and all of the formatting, such as bold and italic type, was retained. But the Palm's small screen size forced quite a bit of scrolling--both up and down and side to side. You could simplify things by formatting the information in your documents into one or two columns; that way, you would need only to scroll up or down to view the information.

Documents To Go offers several conveniences I appreciated, particularly the ability to highlight and bookmark information by tapping the small bookmark triangle at the bottom of the screen. Saved bookmarks appear in a list, making them easily accessible. The powerful Find feature makes it easy to search across documents for a specific term or phrase. And the program takes measures to overcome the difficulties of viewing spreadsheets on a small display: By tapping the column headings, you can adjust the width of the cells, freeze the panes, or autofit the cells to conform with their data. A full-screen view expands the viewing area slightly, though it's clearly not the same as viewing a spreadsheet on a regular PC.

Documents To Go also lets you send documents to another Palm IIIx via the IR port, with formatting intact. I beamed a document along with the WordView application so the recipient could see the file. (To transfer documents to a PC or Macintosh for editing, the recipient must have Documents To Go installed.)

If you want a means of viewing and sharing desktop documents on your Palm, DataViz's Documents To Go for Palm Organizers is the answer. It's as simple to use as the smattering of other file viewers available for the Palm, but it has the added flexibility of supporting a variety of file formats.