



Add a dob of DAPIE

Terence Green considers Merlin, destined to include DAPIE which will allow cross-platform compatibility between OS/2 and Windows. There's good news from Lotus, too.

I recently listened in on a conversation between a research scientist and a journalist when the scientist explained why Windows 95 was better than OS/2 Warp.

"Just right-click on a Warp WorkPlace Shell object," said the scientist "and the menu offers the choices, 'Create Another' and 'Copy'. One creates a new object with default settings, the other makes a duplicate. But the user can't discern the difference!"

My colleague pointed out that by contrast with Windows 95 one had to press 'Start' in order to stop. The scientist hooted: "A detail! They misnamed it!"

On the surface, this seems to be a simple case of seeing what one wants to

see; which was my first impression. On reflection, however, the scientist may well have been saying that the WorkPlace Shell (WPS) is over-engineered for the purposes of the average user — and that's a valid viewpoint. The WPS is a superior interface, built using DSOM (IBM's Distributed System Object Model) object technology which allows applications to interact with the WPS both locally and across networks.

But superior technology is worthless unless it provides a genuine benefit to the user. General business applications which exploit Warp and the WPS are rare because IBM's courting of the developer community has been erratic to say the

least. The OS/2 flip-flop between home users and corporate users in 1995, when IBM suddenly figured that corporate users would be deterred by the thought of Warp as a home-user OS, didn't help either. These things are usually political so it's a good sign that IBM has come up with a form of words that covers the waterfront. OS/2 Warp is for "the connected user", so that's all sorted now.

Good news

In the next issue I'll provide a run-down on a bunch of new and updated Warp applications, but for now the good news is that Lotus has finally started to wrap up a new version of its applications suite which will

be called SmartSuite 96 for OS/2. If all goes to plan, SmartSuite will demonstrate to developers how it is possible to develop for Win32 and OS/2 simultaneously.

There's a sizeable OS/2 user-base around the world and we're getting tired of waiting for decent, native, OS/2 applications.

All of the Lotus SmartSuite 96 for OS/2 pieces won't be ready until later this year but WordPro 96 for OS/2 has gone into customer beta ready for a summer release. Freelance for OS/2 is almost ready for beta, while Approach and 1-2-3 are waiting on completion of the Windows 95 versions.

This delay hinges on Windows 95 versions because Lotus is using IBM's Developer API Extensions (sometimes abbreviated to DAPIE or DAX) in order to maintain a common core code set for both Windows and OS/2 versions of SmartSuite 96. This saves Lotus development money but means that OS/2 SmartSuite users can finally plan for feature parity with their Windows brethren.

Merlin

Lotus demonstrated WordPro and Freelance 96 for OS/2 at IBM's annual April developer gathering, where IBM also previewed the next version of Warp, Merlin (see *Figs 1, 2 and 3*).

At the time of writing: the Merlin beta won't be ready until June or July and will probably ship in August if all goes well; DAPIE was still being finalised by IBM, particularly the form in which it will ship. DAPIE will be part of Merlin but existing Warp users will have to add DAPIE support before being able to run any

Online locations

A reader complains that I haven't mentioned the most useful (to him) source of OS/2 help and assistance, the COMP.OS.OS2.* newsgroups — I thought I had, but there's no harm in mentioning them again. Be aware, however, that they are a wild and woolly read with lots of irrelevant chatter, too. There's certainly useful information in there but it's far quicker to ask a direct question than to search for the needle in a haystack. Remember, too, that there's little or no peer review on the Internet, so be sceptical.

For up-to-date information on OS/2 software happenings, try <http://www.software.ibm.com>

DAPIE applications. At the moment, users can only add DAPIE support to Warp 3.0 by installing FixPack #17 or later but adding an entire FixPack just for this reason is unwieldy. Lotus will simply add DAPIE support to its SmartSuite distribution.

But smaller companies can't afford to take that cost. One such company is MGI in Toronto, which is into image processing. It has ported its budget-priced PhotoWorks image processing software from Windows 95 to Warp using DAPIE.

MGI says a single developer took five days to port 200,000 lines of C++ code to Warp. MGI's OS/2 product, renamed as PhotoSuite, will be available when Merlin ships but IBM PSP vice-president, Wally Casey, would only say that they were "looking into" how DAPIE support for existing Warp users would be provided.

Wally Casey was also unable to answer

Fig 1 Merlin, with the Lotus-originated WarpCentre along the top, colourful new Properties dialogues, formerly known as Settings Notebooks, and the promise of speech control and dictation

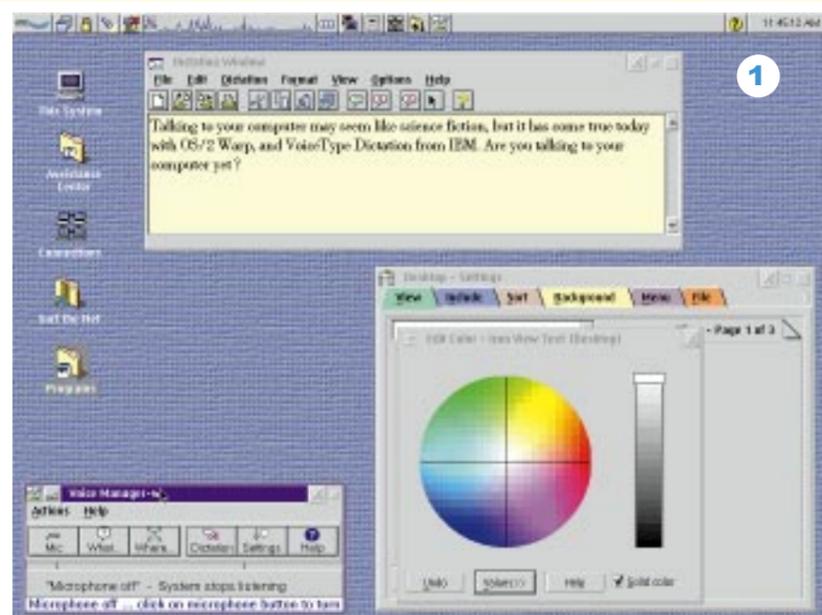


Fig 2 Merlin WarpCentre in action, showing drop-down menus which change dynamically to reflect the Desktop arrangement. The WarpCentre task bar can be placed anywhere on the desktop and LaunchPad is retained, in case you prefer that



Uploads

This month, I've decided to include FixPack #17 as the OS/2 column's contribution to the cover-mounted CD. A number of readers have expressed a need for it but have pointed out that it's a rather large download at nearly 12Mb.

There are eight FixPack #17 diskette images and one separate file called WKICKR.ZIP, containing ancillary files that you will need to create the FixPack diskettes and to install the FixPack.

Personally I don't recommend installing a FixPack unless you're absolutely sure you need it but if you want to experiment, here's your chance. Please read the instructions very carefully before going ahead — I've included them separately as README.1ST.

README.1ST can also be found on FixPack #17 diskette, once you have created it from the image file. You need LOADDSKF.EXE to create diskettes from the images. LOADDSKF.EXE is included on CD-ROM versions of Warp but it's also in the WKICKR.ZIP file.

If you get as far as starting service and discover only an option to service the multimedia support but not Warp itself you may have previously installed a third-party device driver which messed with the system level file. To work around this problem copy SYSLEVEL.OS2 from your original install Diskette 1 over the corresponding file in the X:\OS2\INSTALL subdirectory on your Warp system.

that other bugbear of image processing software users — when and how OS/2 would provide native scanner support for OS/2 sessions. Currently, users have to seek out one of the rare scanner software packages that supports OS/2, or set up a Win-OS/2 session, or even boot into DOS/Windows to scan images.

Casey was a little more helpful on the subject of device drivers in general. You know how Windows always seems to include drivers for hardware that OS/2 users have to track down in obscure FTP sites? Up until now, IBM has only shipped third-party device drivers that have been through a rigorous certification process (don't laugh!). Starting with Merlin, IBM will collate all those scattered drivers and ship them with the distribution CD.

Hopefully Merlin will be a marker showing that IBM has finally understood that it

needs to get its act together on device drivers, make installation and configuration even easier and stimulate applications development but Casey's April preview was short on detail, preferring to show off the new user interface and speech input. If Merlin turns out to be no more than another technology demonstration without the follow-through, pressing start in order to stop is a minor detail.

Wizard WARP

Merlin was shown at the IBM Technical Interchange in Nashville last April. The major new feature announced was support for speech navigation and dictation but the user interface has been given a complete work-over, too.

The user interface is looking pretty good. IBM hired a designer to come up with a new Warp system font which is

Tel's tips and tricks

- If you've ever wondered how to remove a desktop object that the shredder rejects, try picking it up and dropping it onto a floppy disk. Right-click on the object to open the pop-up menu and choose "Pickup". Drag it to the floppy disk and right-click for the menu again. Select Drop and then the Move option.
- If you delete or move Warp and end up with a drive with "WP ROOT . SF" and "EA DATA . SF" files that you can't delete (because of the blanks in the filename) try this: ATTRIB *.*?SF -R -S -H followed by DEL *.*?SF. *Don't do this on a working Warp system!* The wild card characters "*" and "?" get around the blank character problem and the ATTRIB command removes the hidden and read-only attributes that would prevent deletion.

much more legible, especially on mobile LCD screens, and there's some imaginative use of colour and 3D icons, too.

The Warp LaunchPad is superseded by the WarpCentre taskbar. This is a port of the Lotus SmartSuite SmartCentre. And guess what? Merlin has Wizards, er... I mean Warp Guides, to simplify configuration.

What was missing at the preview was detail on how the connected user will take advantage of Internet developments. Apparently there are at least three Internet-related announcements still to come regarding Merlin. The first was made a few days after the Technical Interchange when IBM announced that Java support would be included in the base operating system. The other two must be related to web browsing and email. UltiMail is dead so email support will have to come from Lotus, either cc:Mail or NotesMail — cc:Mail is a possibility as it is being withdrawn from SmartSuite OS/2 but I think a Notes desktop client with NotesMail is the likely choice for Merlin.

The browser situation is also up for grabs. According to Wally Casey, Merlin will have a state-of-the-art browser. IBM's Web Explorer was terrific when it first shipped, in December 1994, but is no longer state-of-the-art. It's possible that Web Explorer could leap a generation but the chances are that an OS/2 version of NetScape will be included instead.



Fig 3 A number of Web sites have started using Adobe's Acrobat format .PDF files. An OS/2 Acrobat reader can be downloaded from <http://www.adobe.com>. Look for the "Get Acrobat" page. If it has gone by the time you get there, hassle Adobe... they were asking how many people wanted an OS/2 version

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