eview by Marc Messer

Title: RealPC
Version: 1.0
Developer: Insignia Solutions
Price: $79
Contact Info: http://www.insignia.com/
Genre: DOS Emulator
System Requirements: Power Mac, System 7.1.2, 16 MB RAM, 40 MB disk space

nitial Thoughts and Reactions

I was extremely excited when I first heard about RealPC. Insignia Solutions, the makers of RealPC, promised that I'd be able to "Run PC games shockingly fast on my Power Mac." Unfortunately, I didn't get the performance that I had hoped for when I tried RealPC out on my Power Mac. Whether RealPC is right for you depends on what you're looking for in terms of required resources, interface, expandability, and performance. My test system was a PowerMac 6500/300 (300MHz 603ev processor, 64 MB RAM, 512K L2 Cache, MacOS 8).

Resources Needed

Insignia states that you need a Power Mac (180 MHz 603 or 100 MHz 604 and up are recommended), 16 MB RAM (24 MB recommended), 40 MB free disk space, and System 7.1.2 or later (including Blue Box). My advice is to get as fast a Mac as you can with as much RAM and L2 Cache as possible. Emulating anything requires a lot of resources, so don't expect a direct correlation in performance between your Mac and an equivalent PC. Also, RealPC comes with MS-DOS 6.22. Installing Windows 3.x/95 will require more resources to perform at appropriate and "worthy" speeds.

nterface

ealPC as an application is relatively easy to use. Its setup window allows you to easily adjust just about everything to tweak performance on your computer. It includes the ability to decide how to emulate sound (Sound Blaster 16 or Sound Blaster Pro, etc.), processor (with or without MMX, etc.), drive setup, RAM allocation between the applications and emulator, and more. This was a highlight for the application — adding some of the Mac's ease of use to a PC emulator. However, not all of the options are obviously good or bad, so you may have to do research or use the trial and error method to determine the best setup.

xpandability

RealPC is very responsive to changes in your Mac and it expands itself easily. RealPC uses your existing hardware to emulate PC hardware. Therefore, if you get a faster modem, RealPC will give you increased performance on its end, too. The only problem with RealPC and hardware is that it cannot directly take advantage of a card like a 3D accelerator. Even though many of today's PCI cards are identical to their PC counterparts, RealPC must go through the Mac, and in many cases, the card cannot be used at all. There was no word as to whether or not future versions of RealPC will be able to use these cards.

Expandability from within RealPC is a snap. RealPC comes with instructions

on how to install Windows 3.x and Windows 95. That's a big plus! However, Insignia Solutions will not support OS/2, NextStep, Windows NT or any x86 operating system other than Windows 3.x and 95. That doesn't mean that it's not possible, but unlike VirtualPC (by Connectix), Insignia doesn't claim that any other OS will work.

erformance

For me, performance is the most important factor when it comes to PC emulation, because the only PC applications not available for the Mac that I am interested in are PC games (marketed as a RealPC strength). RealPC comes with a CD of demos of various PC games from the last 5 years. It includes demos of Doom, Descent, Dark Forces, and Rise of the Triad, to name a few. Now, while all of these games were playable, I found Doom and Dark Forces to be rather choppy. I believe that all of these games require 386 and 486 processors, so I gather by the gameplay that my test Mac was emulating in that range.

Emulating less demanding applications was better, but since many of today's applications require Windows, you will need to spend the money for that too, since RealPC only includes MS-DOS 6.22. Windows itself runs OK, although sometimes it, too, is slow to respond. All in all, running older games and applications which aren't resource-heavy are the best choices for RealPC. If you can stick to DOS applications, which are lower in requirements, that's even better.

verall Impression

RealPC, while a bargain at $79, may not be worth it unless you absolutely must run a PC application on your Mac. Newer apps, like Carmageddon and Quake, are virtually unplayable (around 1 frame/2 seconds), and I would venture to assume that even with a brand new 750 system or a multi-processor machine, the slowdown would still be quite noticeable. I've heard that there are AppleScripts out there which kill the finder to free up more resources and improve performance considerably, but I didn't try that myself.

The good news about RealPC is that it offers a lot when it comes to compatibility on emulation. RealPC supports MMX, DirectX, Sound Blaster Pro, Mac printers, external SCSI devices, etc. Insignia's website, located at

http://www.insignia.com/, contains overviews of features, compatibility, and comparisons to other emulators on the market. Decide what you personally need, and determine for yourself if RealPC is right for you.

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http://www.applewizards.net/