Word for Word

Step-Saving Utility Converts Among Six Word Processors

By John Lombardi Review Board

Converting documents from one word processing program format to another can be a pain in the neck. Word processors don't use common formatting codes, so translating a heavily formatted Wordstar 3.3 file so it can be read by, say, Volkswriter can be a lot of work. The common method is to strip out all the formatting, read the file into the other word processor, and spend an hour or two putting the formats back in.

There are other solutions, however. Some word processors offer their own conversions: Word Perfect, for example, will convert Wordstar files with most formatting codes preserved. Other programs support Document Content Architecture/Revisable Form Text (DCA/RFT), a format translation standard created by IBM. There are commercial firms that will convert documents from one system to another for you, and can handle more exotic files such as those from dedicated word processors.

Word for Word is a program that promises to convert among the six most popular PC word processors on the market today, retaining virtually all formatting. Our tests showed that Word for Word pretty much does its job of conversion — though it misfires on a few items like soft hyphens and centered text.

It also offers the useful capability of transferring formatted text files by modem.

FEATURES:

Word for Word converts documents between any of several formats. The current list (which will grow in subsequent releases, according to the vendor) consists of versions of six popular word processors: Wordstar 3.3 and 3.31, PFS Write Version C, IBM Writing Assistant, Word Perfect 3.0 and 4.1, Multimate 3.3, Volkswriter Deluxe 2.2, and Volkswriter 3, Version 1.0. In addition, it can convert to and from ASCII, EBCDIC, and a special communications format.

The function of this program couldn't be simpler — converting document files from one of these formats to any of the others. The program can run in a batch mode for multiple file conversions, or through an interactive system with helpful prompts and information screens. It will print an exception file that includes a coded list of all the features that could not be converted between the source and the target systems; these exceptions can also be flagged in the text of the converted document.

PERFORMANCE:

Word for Word is fast. The conversion process zips right along, and is faster than the conversion routines that make up a part of the Volkswriter 3 or Word Perfect 4.1 programs. Unfortunately, Word for Word did encounter difficulties while attempting to handle some complex formatting conversions.

We prepared a reasonably complicated document that included such items as print enhancements, a two-line header and footer, footnotes, centered lines, indented lines, decimal-aligned columns, justified text, hyphenation, and newspaper columns. Some of these features are specifically listed in the Word for Word documentation, which otherwise states that if a feature exists in both source and target word processor, the converted document will be a mirror image of the original.

We prepared the text file in Word

REPORT CARD

SOFTWARE
WORD FOR WORD

6.5

	Unacceptable	Poor	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent
Performance	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐
Documentation	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Ease of Learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
Ease of Use	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐
Error Handling	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Support	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Value	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐

SUMMARY

Word for Word translates documents from one word processing format into another, keeping most of the formatting and print enhancements intact. Not copy-protected. For the IBM PC. *Pros:* Quick, handles unconvertible codes well, produces exceptional reports, can send formatted files by modem. *Cons:* All format codes don't transfer, so some cleanup still required.

PRODUCT DETAILS

List price, $149. Version tested (1.1) available for IBM PC, PC XT, PC AT, or compatibles running PC- or MS-DOS 2.0 or later. Requires 256K, two floppy drives. Mastersoft Inc., 4621 N. 16th St., Suite A-108, Phoenix, AZ 85016; (800) 624-6107 or (602) 277-0900 in Arizona.

Perfect 4.1, then we converted the Word Perfect document into Wordstar 3.31 format and Volkswriter 3 format to test how well this system worked. The results were reasonable.

The converted documents were perfectly editable in Wordstar and Volkswriter 3. Print-enhancement codes for bold, underline, super, subscript, and the like translated perfectly. Features not available in the target word processor were handled by Word for Word in various ways: footnotes, not available in Volkswriter, were not converted but left in the text. The first line of a two-line header in Word Perfect became a single-line header in both Volkswriter and Wordstar, which only do one-line headers; the second line translated as a text line. The same thing happened with a two-line footer. We had a decimal-aligned column in the Word Perfect document that was transferred without alignment into both documents, though both Volkswriter and Wordstar have decimal columns.

The main glitch in the Volkswriter test was the conversion of Word Perfect's hyphenation characters (soft hyphens) to hard dashes in Volkswriter 3, even though Volkswriter has a hyphenation facility. (The vendor claims this is a known problem that is fixed in Version 1.19, now shipping.)

The conversion from Word Perfect to Wordstar 3.31 did not convert the changing margins specified explicitly in the Word Perfect document, although Wordstar has a feature that allows a ruler line command to be embedded in the text. In this conversion, the hyphenation characters were simply removed, even though Wordstar 3.31 also has hyphenation characters. We had included an *n* with a tilde over it as a special character; Wordstar doesn't support this character, so the Wordstar version dropped the tilde and kept the *n*, a reasonable compromise. Formatting characteristics such as centering (which Wordstar has) and flush right (which Wordstar does not) were lost. (The vendor says the Wordstar centering and hyphenation problems are being fixed.) Changes in pitch were translated by the appropriate dot commands, and justification dot commands were also included.

In both the Volkswriter and Wordstar conversions, considerable cleanup was required to get the document to look exactly like the original Word Perfect document. The most annoying problem was the failure to handle soft hyphens properly. However, both converted documents were completely editable, and

the cleanup, while time-consuming, posed no significant problems.
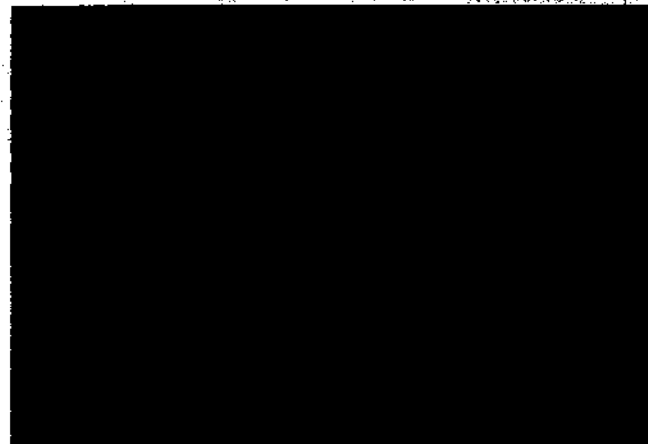
None of these difficulties should surprise any veteran user of word processing systems. Complete conversions are not really possible because word processing systems differ in the amount of information that is stored with the file. Many do not store page-size and page-length information with the document but rather apply settings from within the program. Similarly, features that exist in one word processing system but not in another (such as multiline headers) cannot be converted.

There are two other conversions of interest included in this package. The ASCII conversion takes a word processing file and strips out all the special characters that may have been inserted for formatting information. The result is a file that can be read into almost any word processing program, albeit without any formatting and print-enhancement information. When we converted an ASCII file back into Word Perfect, we found that all lines ended in hard end-of-line characters, which meant a lot of extra editing.

Word for Word also has a routine to convert files into the codes used by some IBM mainframe systems, called EBCDIC (Extended Binary-Coded Decimal Interchange Code), an alternative coding system to ASCII. For those who need such a conversion, this program will serve nicely.

Telecommunicating word processing files is a problem for many word processors, whose coded files often cause a modem to choke and quit; alternately, the communications software automatically strips out all special formats. Word for Word includes a special communications mode that solves this communications problem elegantly by converting the document into a file that can be sent by modem and then reconverted, with all its codes intact, at the other end of the transmission using a second copy of Word for Word.

Though Word for Word falls a little short in converting everything it could, it does a fairly good job of reducing the amount of posttranslation cleanup needed. The result is a program that can greatly reduce the work involved in moving documents among word processors. While there are other options available for performing this feat, Word for Word offers two less common bonuses: the EBCDIC translation and the useful communications format. For this reason, we rate Word for Word very good in performance.

To use Word for Word, select a source of the file to be converted from one file and the task to be completed from the other. The rest is automatic.

DOCUMENTATION:

The Word for Word manual is clear and easy to use. It has the basic information available, indicates enough technical details for a reasonably expert word processing user to understand what will and won't work, and explains the various ways of using the program.

We feel that the documentation overstates the completeness of the translations possible, and its remarks on the amount of work needed to get one complex document working on another word processing system are optimistic. This aside, the documentation warrants a satisfactory rating.

EASE OF LEARNING:

This program is almost trivially easy to learn. In the interactive mode, the menus and instructions are very clear. Online help explains every step. We rate this program excellent in ease of learning.

EASE OF USE:

Word for Word is also very easy to use. The option to use batch commands that automate multiple document conver-

sions is helpful, and the menu system for interactive conversions is very easy to use. Access to different directories and disks is easy. The Exceptions file that includes a list of unconverted features is somewhat difficult to decipher without some careful reference to the translations in the manual, but it does flag the locations of unconverted special features.

Although some posttranslation cleanup is required, Word for Word still earns a very good in ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING:

The program recovers from simple errors such as mistyped filenames file names and path names without any difficulties and with no lost information.

If you mistype the drive letter or leave a drive door open, the program simply gives you the "Abort, Retry Ignore" message from DOS, and if you can't correct the situation, it dumps you back to the operating system. Fortunately, no damage is done to files because no files are open at the time.

Word for Word will overwrite an existing file in the interactive mode

without querying the user. We think there should be a warning.

Nevertheless, the product does not pose a danger to the original file. We rate error handling as satisfactory.

SUPPORT:
In the version we tested, several major word processing programs are not supported. The vendor told us that Version 2 will be available at the beginning of the new year and will support more word processors, as well as DCA. The upgrade will be free to registered owners of Version 1. Future upgrades will be available to existing owners at a nominal cost. Planned for future upgrades is support for Xywrite, the Leading Edge Word Processor, and Samna Word, the vendor said.

The program is not copy-protected, and no specific warranty appears in the documentation. However, the vendor said the product has the usual 90-day media-only warranty. The quality of the phone support was fine: We got through, and we got good information.

Because of the lack of copy protection, the competent technical support, and the good upgrade policy, we rate support as satisfactory.

VALUE:
At $149, this product will be considered by those with a professional need for regular document conversions. There are alternatives for some conversions: For example, Word Perfect and Volkswriter both convert to and from Wordstar and DCA/RFT. Other systems convert to and from Wordstar, DCA/RFT, and some others. Free public domain programs convert files into ASCII.

However, these alternatives are not always superior. Word Perfect's Wordstar conversion routine produces cleaner results, but it is slower, and DCA has its own quirks and dropped formats.

As a conversion utility, Word for Word does a fine job at a fair price. We rate its value as satisfactory.

John Lombardi is a professor of history and author of five books. He has been working with computers since 1967.

Word Finder
Updated Thesaurus Includes Larger Index, More Synonyms

By Tom A. Summers Review Board

When we last reviewed Word Finder, an on-line thesaurus, we criticized it because its main index was too small and because we didn't always find its synonyms helpful. The new version contains an index that's more than half larger than the old one. And with a new synonym dictionary of 220,000 words, Word Finder now locates twice as many synonyms for each word as it did before. Also stimulating interest in Word Finder is the fact that it is now bundled with Wordstar Professional and Microsoft Word.

Word Finder still has rough spots, though. Although Word Finder is about as fast as other thesauruses, some competitors are more versatile and can index more words. And with such a panoply of words available, users will still have to watch the appropriateness of synonyms that Word Finder suggests.

FEATURES:
Word Finder is a RAM-resident program that finds synonyms for some 15,000 words and comes with two synonym dictionaries: a smaller one with 90,000 words for floppy drive systems and a larger one with 220,000 words for hard disk drives or RAM disks. In contrast, Webster's New World On-line Thesaurus (see "Synonym Finder Works Well Without Sacrificing Speed," November 10, 1986) has a smaller dictionary (120,000 synonyms) but indexes more words (20,000).

A two-keystroke command activates the program, which then finds synonyms for the word at the cursor position. Synonyms appear in a window at the bottom of the screen. You can select one of the synonyms to replace the word in your document automatically. As with most thesauruses we've seen, Word Finder will automatically capitalize the replacement word if the original word is also capitalized.

Like Turbo Lightning, Word Finder will display a list of similarly spelled words when it can't find a reference for the word you specify.

PERFORMANCE:
Word Finder requires 33K of RAM above that used by your word processor and other utilities. It works with Sidekick and Polywindows Desk with no problem, and you can configure it for any of 24 word processors, including Word Perfect, Microsoft Word, Displaywrite, Easy, PFS Write, and Multimate. Because you can specify which keystrokes will activate the thesaurus, there's no problem of conflict with your word processor.

As you would imagine, Word Finder is faster with the smaller dictionary, edging Borland's Turbo Lightning by just a bit. Turbo Lightning is faster, though, when you use Word Finder's larger dictionary.

But we found Webster's to be more agile. For example, when you choose a synonym with Webster's, it will put the synonym into the same grammatical form as the original word, thus matching adverbs with adverbs and so on. Webster's will also change an article from *a* to *an* if the synonym requires such a change.

You can chain through Word Finder's list of synonyms, in effect deriving synonyms for the synonyms. But since the words are extensively cross-referenced to one another, this chaining won't give you many new choices.

Word Finder's speed is about the same as the competition. The program's fewer capabilities are balanced by the larger synonym list, earning a satisfactory rating for performance.

DOCUMENTATION:
Word Finder comes with a stapled, 47-page brochure for a manual. It explains installation, setup, and basic use of the program, but it includes only a very brief, two-page reference section. It does offer instructions for using the program with DOS or with word processors that require a slightly different setup. A separate Quick Start card tells experienced users how to install and start the program without reading the manual.

Word Finder has no on-line help screens, but since the program has only one command, none are necessary. We rate the documentation as satisfactory.

EASE OF LEARNING:
A simple installation program makes it easy to configure Word Finder for use with your word processor and system. Once you've figured out where to put the cursor, which keys to press to activate the program, and how to replace a word with a synonym, there's nothing left to do. Nearly everyone will be able to pick up this program and be doing everything it offers in just several minutes.

Because things couldn't be much

> **Although Word Finder is about as fast as other thesauruses, some competitors are more versatile and can index more words.**

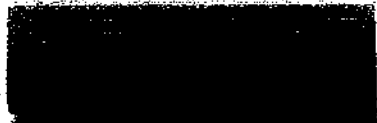easier — largely because the program is simpler than competing products — we rate ease of learning as excellent.

EASE OF USE:
Since Word Finder has really only one command, it's eminently easy to use. Again, because it is simpler than its competition, it is easier to use. We rate it as excellent for ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING:
We couldn't get Word Finder to crash by pressing wrong keys. It either ignores your mistakes or simply beeps. However, the program makes no effort to help users with floppy-based systems keep track of which disk is in the drive, a feature offered by Webster's. We tested Word Finder with Sidekick (Version 1.11c), and there were no problems. We rate Word Finder's error handling as satisfactory.

The latest version of Word Finder includes a 220,000-word synonym dictionary. Synonyms for a particular word appear in a window at the bottom of the screen.