North Texas PC NEWS

February 1984

Vol 3 North Texas IBM Personal Computer Users Group No. 2

Special Interest Programs

Programmers

The PC family's royal members, the XT/370 and the 3270 PC, were among the many topics discussed at the Programmers' Special Interest Group meeting in January. Interest is also being shown in starting a beginners assembly language course.

Jill David will present a Pascal cross-reference generator program at the February meeting. This programmer's tool is designed from the syntax diagram of the Pascal language. General discussion can be expected to include comments on the new PC-DOS version, 2.1, and the extension of the PC family software market to the Adam via a plug-in module announced by Coleco at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

Dick Gall

Engineers and Scientists

Bob Russell will discuss the IEEE 488 standard instrumentation bus during the Engineer's and Scientist's SIG meeting this month. This standard, developed by Hewlett-Packard and adopted around the world as a practical common interface for instrumentation automation, is available as a third party add-in board for both IBM and Apple computers. The system is useful and easily programmed for data collection, test, and control applications. We anticipate that many of the SIG members will contribute by discussing their applications.

Bob Russell

Other Special Interest Groups

Volunteer reporters are needed from each of the active SIG's to report on Group happenings and plans for publication in this column. Send names to the Editor. Format, mailing address and deadline appear on page 2. Thanks.

Ed.

Agenda

The general order of business will be:

1. Club Business
2. Hilda Hanson, Dow Jones, will give a presentation on Dow Jones News/Retrieval and Investment Software.
3. John Sehnert, Insource Corp, will tell us more about the many services of Insource Videotex.
4. Kelvin Settle, Western Union, will talk about EasyLink, an electronic mail service that enables most PCs to talk with the world wide Telex network.
5. Vendor Announcements
   Club Professional Members
6. Specialty Group Agendas for Next Hour (Each SIG Chairman makes 1-minute announcement)

See room assignments on pg 2.

Chris

IBM PC User Group Support

This month IBM announced a series of support programs for IBM PC User Groups. These include user group telephone line, bulletin board and newsletter. Later they will provide presentation materials, guest speakers and assistance in exchange of IBM PC public-domain software.

More later... John

Next Meeting February 11, 1984

Jesuit College Preparatory School
12345 Inwood Road, Dallas, Texas
(See map on page 2)
9:30 to 12:00

North Texas PC NEWS

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Deadlines:
All material for publication in PC NEWS (articles and ads) must be received by the NEWS staff no later than the fourth Friday of the month prior to publication.

Articles:
Column width is 56 characters. Article submission is preferred by modem or SSDD disk (ASCII format). Typewritten copy is acceptable.

North Texas IBM Personal Computer Users Group

A non-profit, independent group, not associated with IBM Corporation. The Group meets on the second Saturday of each month. See page 1 for meeting time and place.

Officials:

President	Alan Elliott	(214)941-8475
Program Chairman	Chris Morgan	(214)446-0484
Treasurer	Bill Hood	(214)350-9784
Secretary	Charles Kroboth	(214)699-8088

Special Interest Groups:

Beginners	Mike Durbin	(214)271-8779
Business Applic.	Dick Barr	(214)692-2605
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Programmers	Neil Bennett	(214)238-7650
BASIC Applications	(open)	
Comm & Networking	(open)	

Telephone (during business hours) (214)361-0304
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Dues:
Professional Membership - $36.00 year
Regular Membership - $24.00 year
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Payable in January. Dues are prorated for balance of year when applicant joins after January. Mail dues to: Treasurer, NT IBM PC UG, 10400 N. Central Expwy #210, Dallas, TX 75231

SIG Notes:
BASIC Applications and Communications & Networking Groups are looking for leaders. If you're interested in heading up, or in co-chairing, one of these SIGs, contact Alan Elliott for details.

Room Assignments

9:30am - 11:00am

Auditorium General Meeting

11:00am - 12 Noon

Room 105	Beginners Group
Room 106	Advanced Programmers
Room 107	BASIC Applications
Room 111	Business Applications

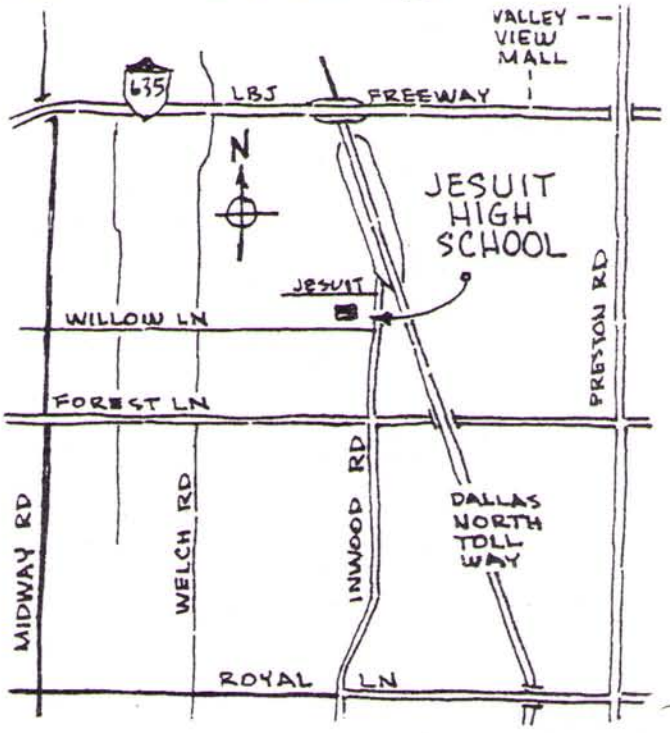
12 Noon - 1:00pm

Room 111 Engr & Scientific (w/Apple)

1:00pm - 2:00pm

Room 107 Ham Radio/Modem/Comm (w/Apple)

Next Meeting:



Newsletter Exchange

Pipe Dreams and Filters

by Chuck Harrington

Athens (Ohio) Area IBM-PC User's Club

Have you ever been annoyed when using the DIR command to list the directory of a diskette only to sit and watch the filenames scroll off the screen? Me to. The simple answer is to use the pause option with the command to permit DOS to take a break while you view a single screen full. The precise command is DIR/P. When you want another screenfull simply strike any key.

Have you ever wished there was a similar command that can be used to pause the screen when listing a text file on the console? Well, sure you could use the CTL/NUM-LOCK, but what a pain! You also need to keep one eye on the screen and both hands on the keyboard.

There's some good news and some bad news. Try the external DOS command MORE. You will find the usual terse IBM description of it on page 10-18 of the DOS 2.0 manual.

Suppose you wish to type the text file called PC-WRITE on your console. Make sure the DOS utility program called MORE.COM is on the disk or available to the system. Simply enter the command line MORE<PC-WRITE.DOC.

More will list a single page of text on your console and display the message --MORE--. When you depress any key you get another screen. Great, huh? Well, yeh but--- you can wreck your whole day with this command if you enter the wrong logical character. NOTE that the MORE filter command requires "<" and NOT ">". If you enter the wrong one you will destroy your text file. Make a backup of a small text file and try it! The effect will be that the console apparently locks up. As you try entering keystrokes they are sent to the text file to replace your original text. The old CTRL/BREAK key to regain control of your machine sends an end of file to the text file and returns you to the DOS prompt.

This little obscure finding can be used to advantage though. I hate to use the COPY CON: and F6 method of creating batch files. Try using the MORE filter command with the ">" and end the session with F6. Works just like the more familiar way of creating batch files from DOS without a text editor.

Don't let this little inconvenience stop you from using the very useful MORE filter command to view your long text files on the console. But remember, be careful with the two characters "<" and ">". One solution would be to create a batch file with everything but the text file name which you pass as a parameter to the batch file. Try it!

Chuck Harrington

DISK OF THE MONTH

by Doug Windham

(Editor's Note: Doug has been abed with a fever and has not been able to put the Disk description together for this month. He will announce full disk details at the general meeting.)

FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTS

Included in the Disk this month will be Jim Button's new communications program, ONE RINGY-DINGY. Among the other "goodies" will be a math tutor, written in BASIC for children in grades 1 - 6.

DISK DETAILS

Price: $5.00 Available at the meeting, in the cafeteria at a specially marked table, before and after the general meetings. Media: SSDD 5 1/4" diskettes formatted without DOS (160k). Public domain software only, standard full disclaimers. Call disk of the month chairman Doug Windham at 271-5727 evenings before 9pm to submit material and programs for future Disk of the Month issues. All back issues will be available at the meeting.

Complimentary Memberships

The Club offers complimentary memberships to members who submit original articles for publication in PC NEWS.

GROUND RULES

Subject Matter. Articles may cover any aspect of the IBM Personal Computer (or work-alike) world. Main criteria is that they be of interest to members of our group. Some typical subjects include: Hands-on review or personal experience with new software, hardware or techniques... Peripheral interconnection problems and solutions... How-to articles on furniture, diskette storage, printer paper control... A standard "tree" structure for the average hard disk user... etc, etc

Number and Length of Articles Required. Four or more articles during one membership year. Each article must be a minimum of 400 words.

Format. Standard one-column width is 56 characters; two column max is 120 characters. Copy in ASCII format on disk or transmitted by modem whenever possible. (Sorry, no double sided disks at this time - we're still operating single sided...) DOS 1.0 or 2.0.

Notify Treasurer. In January, eligible members provide a listing of their published articles to the treasurer in lieu of cash for next year's dues.

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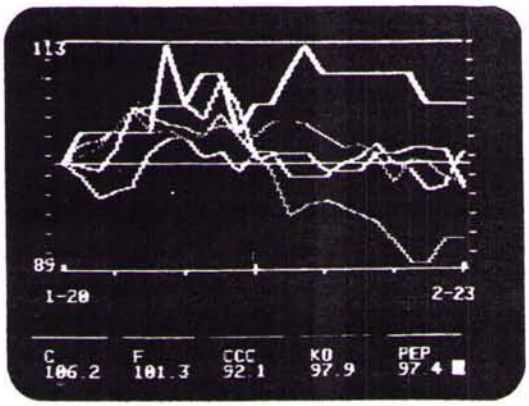

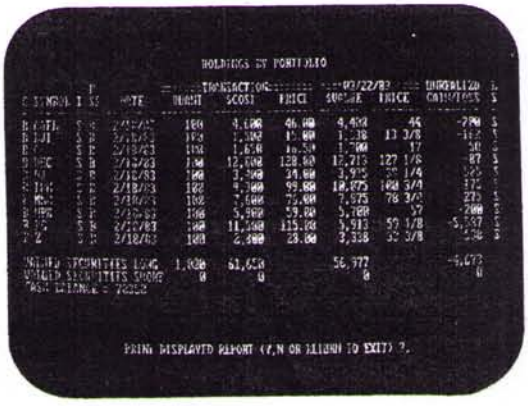

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Newsletter Exchange

IBM-PC Newsletters Galore

Three meetings ago, the suggestion was made to begin a newsletter exchange program with other PC groups across the country. This sounded like one of those opportunities where a little effort could go a long way, so I volunteered to get this started. I would like to report to you the results of this effort.

My initial mailing list contained over 100 clubs, obtained from the list published in the November, 1983 edition of PC World. I composed a one page introductory letter proposing a newsletter exchange of complementary issues. A few others not on the initial list have been added since we have received similar proposals from other groups.

The results were fantastic! To date, over thirty have responded with their offerings. There are big ones (over 50 pages/issue) and little ones (1 page/issue). Other cities and towns also contain knowledgable and dedicated people who have a common interest, and are ready to share their successes and horror stories with others.

The question before us now is how can we disseminate this wonderful information to our membership? One answer is to reprint the best in this newsletter on the months when contributions from our own members tend to sag. This policy begins with this issue. But this only broadcasts a microscopic portion of the information. To date, I have ordered these by state, and will put them in some kind of binder and bring them to our February meeting for your perusal at the club booth. But, I fear this too will be insufficient because there are literally hours of good informative reading. I will be interested in suggestions from our membership as to how we can further distribute this information. See you next month.

Tom Prickett

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The Extended Batch Language

/* The following is written by Ken Goosens, and is a reprint from the January 1984 issue of Capital PC Monitor */

Two Kinds of Products.

When you buy most commercially successful products like the IBM PC itself, the Hayes 1200 smartmodem, the spreadsheet 123, or the word processor WordStar, you usually stagger away thinking that even though these heavy hitters are worth it, they slam you for every penny they can get. Big-ticket manufacturers often change their copy protection every few months, sue other firms for ripping off their designs, come with two pages of fine print disclaiming all implications that their product does absolutely anything, and face a floor of compatibles. Then there are products which, while every bit as impressive as these, are priced at a fraction of their true worth. The best known example is PC-TALK. These products have few serious rivals, because they work beautifully, satisfy needs, and are priced below the cost of what it takes to develop alternatives. You skip down the street with them feeling like you just found a $50 bill on the sidewalk. They are people products in the best sense: they enrich our computer standard of living rather than some corporate coffers. Because the source code is usually released, you can modify a feature you don't like or add a new capability you need, rather than call some long distance number for support manned by a displaced liberal arts major paid $3.50 per hour to listen to 50 people bitch. The author makes a dollar, but the take is too low to support the usual armada of sales persons, programmers, corporate executives, and lawyers.

A Newcomer - The Extended Batch Language (EBL).

EBL is an incredibly powerful product that you can have for $5, or $30 if you want paper documentation, support, and updates. It is also available on some ▷

Extended Batch (continued)

bulletin boards. It is being marketed under the Freeware concept, so you can copy the program and freely give it away. It allows you to write "drivers" for your machine, so that you can configure how your software is going to interact with you. Putting up menus and prompts is a snap. From it, you can run nearly all applications, so that you can integrate all those programs you have that were never designed to work together into one environment. You can pass data from one program to another. You can make programs that run automatically without any input from you, by passing stored keystrokes to it. When programs give you messages on the screen to which you react, the extended batch facility can read these messages and be programmed to react accordingly. The extended batch language doesn't just drive other programs: you can program in it, for example, to design interactive online tutorials.

Power versus Ease.

The only single product I know that gives you more total control over your machine is Assembly language, which the extended batch facility is written in. Despite this power, all the features of the extended batch language can be summarized on a single screen (which you can get anytime by typing "BAT" at the DOS level). You can interactively test the commands one at a time. There is an online, complete tutorial written in the extended batch language, of course, which you can finish in 20 minutes. Within an hour of starting, you can develop applications that work. Persons familiar with the IBM operating system VM will see strong resemblances to the command procedures it uses. Other features resemble BASIC. Persons knowing these products will be able to assimilate EBL very rapidly. For persons who don't have any idea what the DOS batch facility is, EBL is an excellent vehicle for learning, and is one of the easiest products to learn, compared to its power.

Complete novices to computers should understand that EBL is a programming language; to use it fully, you will have to understand the concepts of input-output, assignments, conditionals, and looping. What makes EBL unusually easy to learn, however, is that it has only a few commands. One can very quickly put together simple programs which are useful, and its basic building block is the familiar DOS command.

What EBL Requires to Run.

The extended batch language works with all versions of DOS. It runs with room to spare on machines with 64K memories. It will lower the amount of memory available to your applications by 512 bytes (or none, if you want, or more if you need it). On a disk, it occupies almost 10K of space.

Comparable Commercial Products.

The commercial products which are comparable to EBL are VisiOn, DesQ, and StarBurst. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent developing these other products. Only StarBurst has been released as of mid-November, 1983. They will no doubt have full-page color, glossy advertisements; require 256K of memory; may or may not require special versions of software to run with them; will come with umpteen gee-whiz features (like multiple windows and interfaces for mice), umpty-squat bugs, and a list price of an arm and a leg; and take you for every penny they can get. Meanwhile, out of a backroom in Florida comes EBL, combining elements of Prokey, menu generators, the batch facility built into DOS, and numerous utilities.

The Basic Idea in EBL.

To understand how EBL can combine power, simplicity, and compatibility, you must start with the idea of a command to the operating system. DOS, the operating system, gives you a prompt (e.g., A>) that is ready to process you command, which you type in. For example, you type "DIR" (followed by Return) to get a directory of files on a disk, or "SC2" to invoke SuperCalc 2. You can collect individual DOS commands together and submit them as a "batch" by typing them into a text file whose name ends with the extension "BAT". For example, if the file MAKENEW.BAT contains

```
FORMAT B:/S
COMP AUTOEXEC.BAT B:
COMP ASTCLOCK.COM B:
COPY SDIR.COM B:
COPY MYEDITOR.EXE B:
```

then just by typing "MAKENEW," we could create a new bootable disk with all our favorite utilities on it.

EBL files, first of all, are batch files ending with BAT as extension. Technically, EBL consists of only a series of DOS commands. EBL adds to the commands, which can be invoked, and this is why it is an "extended batch language". With the keyword BAT in a batch file, the operating system looks for a program whose suffix is BAT. The code for EBL is in a file called BAT.COM, so that DOS then passes control to BAT.COM. Following the BAT on a line, we put the commands which BAT.COM then interprets and executes. In effect, BAT.COM adds commands to the DOS batch facility. For example, "bat type HELLO" puts "HELLO" on a line on the screen, and "bat cls beep" clears the screen and causes the speaker to beep.

The Power of EBL.

The critical capabilities that EBL adds to DOS commands are the ability to

1. Write lines/blocks of lines to the screen
2. Read and store responses from the keyboard and screen

▷

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Extended Batch (continued)

3. Test expressions for truth and falsity
4. Conditioally execute commands
5. Send control to other commands
6. Redirect keyboard requests to a stack of responses it created

In support of these critical capabilities, EBL can

7. Beep
8. Clear the screen
9. Control the attributes of text on the screen (blinking, intensity, reverse video, color)
10. Exit to DOS anytime
11. Read the keyboard with or without echo.
12. Go to labeled command
13. Skip a specified number of lines of commands
14. Invoke subroutines by name (block of DOS commands between a name and a return statement) with control passing to statement after invoking statement
15. Search for named files on drives (except wildcards)
16. Show or not show on the screen the commands as they execute
17. Put multiple commands on the same line
18. Assign values to variables
19. Perform integer arithmetic
20. Perform string/substring operations
21. Share variable assignments with the DOS batch facility
22. Retain values of global variables between executions of batch files
23. Detect the default drive
24. Build pauses in the keyboard stack

EBL is not only powerful, but runs very fast. The online tutorial, for example, occupies 40K on a disk, but takes less than 2 seconds to get to any screen. The dialing driver listed below gets into PC-TALK in a fraction of a second.

One of the beautiful features of EBL is that it is an open system to which you can add commands. Because it is a regular batch file, any DOS command can be used within it. For example, you might want to invoke utilities to advance the printer a page between reports, set the color of the border, or sound an alert to warn the user of a potential disaster.

Some Small Applications.

To make the computer easy and fast to use, you want to put up a menu of one-keystroke commands. The first major step is to toss a block of text describing the options and what to type to get them. Here's a very simple example, which clears the screen, throws up a block of text offering a menu of options, takes in the response, beeps leaving the cursor still until a valid response is given, then executes the requested choice.

```
bat -menu cls begtype
     TYPE              TO

     1                 Execute SuperCalc 2
     2                 Execute 123
     3                 Execute PC-TALK


ENTER desired choice (1,...3, 0 to QUIT) ===

end
bat -getans inkey %0
bat if %0=0 exit
bat if %0 <> 1 skip 2
     sc2
     goto -menu
bat if %0 <> 2 skip 2
     lotus
     goto -menu
bat if %0 <> 3 skip 2
     pc-talk
     goto -menu
bat beep goto -getans
```

Suppose you want to compile your source code, link it if there are no errors, and execute it if it successfully links. The compiler and linker report "0 errors" as the last message the the screen if there are no errors. You create a file CLG.BAT, which you invoke by "CLG <filename>". The key to this procedure is to read the screen (not the keyboard) for a 0, so that the basic structure looks like

```
compile %1
bat readscrn
bat readscrn %2
bat if %2 = 0 exit
link %1
bat readscrn
bat readscrn %2
bat if %2 = 0 exit
%1
```

The screen reads from the bottom of the screen up from the cursor, and parses lines into words, which stores in the desired variables. A readscrn basically takes in a line. The extra screen read is to get over the DOS prompt you are dropped into after executing a compile or link.

You want to invoke PC-TALK-either dialing a special number that you give or selecting a number from the numbered list that PC-TALK stores. Moreover, you want the option to have a number dialed repeatedly until you get an answer. The key here is to store the keystrokes that PC-TALK needs in a stack, which PC-TALK will then read. You are then simply dropped into PC-TALK at the point where the number is being dialed. You create a bat file called DIAL.BAT which is invoked by "DIAL n m", where n is a number in the list, if it is two digits, or ▷

Extended Batch (continued)

is a special number to dial, and m is "R" to dial repeatedly and blank for a single try. The series of keystrokes one would interactively enter would be

```
PC-TALK    <invokes program>
<return>   <gets over copyright message>
<alt-D>    <dial>
```

Then one gets to the page of numbers that one wants to call and selects the list number (1/60), or enters "M" for manual dial followed by the special unlisted number to dial. To get the number automatically repeated until answered, we would use alt-Q in PC-TALK after unsuccessfully dialing once. A fancy detailed program would be as follows:

```
bat cls
bat begtype
    Dialing driver for PC-TALK. Format: Dial # R
    (R=repeatedly)
end
bat if.%1=.call -getnumber ! * if not passed, get
                                dialing info
bat %3 = %1 # ! * get length of string
bat if %3 < 3 call -validate ! * if menu #, validate
bat * insert into keyboard stack a carriage return, line
  feed, alt-D
bat begstack
end
bat if %3 > 2 stack M ! skip 2 ! * if special #,insert M
    bat %4 = %1-1/%4=%4/15 ! * else calculate #
                               menus to jump
    bat call -getmenu ! * position on right menu
bat stack %1 ! * insert # to dial
bat if %2=R call -rptmode !* if requested, put in repeat
                            dial mode PC-TALK
bat exit !* exit to DOS after exit PC-TALK

bat **** subroutines ***

bat -getnumber
    bat type ! read Please enter # to dial: %1
    bat type ! inkey DIAL R(epeatedly until answered)
        ...1(time)=<Rtn>(R,1):%2
```

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Extended Batch (continued)

```
    bat -chk if %2<>KEYOOD if %2<>R if %2<>1
      beep ! inkey %2 ! goto -chk
    bat if %2 = KEYOOD %2 = 1
    bat type %2
bat return

bat -validate
    bat if %1 > 0 ! if %1 < 60 return
        bat cls beep type in your intry if %1 is an
        bat read.INVALID menu #: please RE-ENTER
        (1-60): %1
bat goto -validate

bat -getmenu
    bat if %4 < 1 return
    bat %4 = %4 - 1
    bat stack F
bat goto -getmenu

bat -rptmode
bat * insert slight delay, K to stop dial, alt-Q to
      make repeat
bat begstack
\ff\02K\00\10;
end
bat return
```

As you can see, EBL has a string length operator (#), a statement divider (!), supports comments (*), and can substitute values for variables in a STACK command. The stack is first-in first-out. The basic idea is to stack up the keystrokes and let PC-TALK read them off the stack. When the stack is empty, keystrokes are taken from the keyboard. Since there is no way to type "holding down alt while pressing a key", EBL uses the literal keyboard code, which one must look up in a manual (hex digits are used). The operator "inkey" used in subroutine getnumber does not echo. That routine shows how to hold the cursor in the same position until a valid response is given.

Finally, suppose you want to automatically load the date into your system upon booting, keeping the date to pass in a stack to various programs. Piece of cake, assuming you have a clock on your system. Just get the date displayed on your screen and read it into a global variable. Here's one that works on systems with an AST expansion board. ▷

Vendors:

January 1, 1984

TO: Vendors
FROM: Bob Roe, Program Chairman
SUBJECT: Changes in Exhibition Regulations

1. Current member of the Apple Corps of Dallas or the North Texas PC Users Group.
2. Exhibits limited to computer related items; Corps reserves the right of judgement on displays and items displayed.
3. Display tables to be furnished by the Exhibitor.
4. Power extension cords to be furnished by the Exhibitor.
5. Displays must be wholly confined within the Exhibitor's table area and shall not obstruct the clear view of nearby exhibits or aisles or exits.
6. There shall be at least one person in attendance at your table at all times.
7. Please keep any sound coming from your displayed material at a nominal level.
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13. The space along the wall on the north side of the cafeteria is reserved for the DOMS.
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Extended Batch (continued)

```
bat * routine to get date *
astclock
bat
bat readscrn ! * skip over dos prompt left on screen
bat readscrn ! * skip over blank line
bat readscrn ! * skip current time is xxxxxx
bat readscrn %0 %1 %2 %d ! * toss away first three
                             variables
bat type current date is %d
bat read Press return to accent or enter desired date:%9
bat if .%9<>.%d=%9
```

Readscrn inputs a line, and parses the words into the variables. On the fourth line up will be "Current date is mm/dd/yy," so we read up to get the right line and make %d the fourth variable. Note that we allow the operator to override the date on the system clock.

Weaknesses of EBL.

Nothing is perfect, but for a product as fine as this, the complaints are minor. The use of hex values may make the assembler programming easier, but to most users, the hex will seem to be arbitrary and needlessly technical. Here the manual insufficiently educates the user on how to control the screen and put in special characters. As always, one can think up useful extensions and new features. But these are piddle diddle points. The program is powerful and simple, and works as stated. As you might expect, this program can be tricky to use with others that mess with the code controlling the keyboard processing, such as Prokey, and some other programs that I have never got working with the keyboard stack, such as 123 and ASCOM. These, I suspect, discard any characters in the keyboard buffer. You will have to check out your particular applications as in every other program.

How to Order EBL.

Send your payment to Seaware Corporation, P.O. Box 1656, Delray Beach, Florida 33444. For the giveaway price of $5 you get a disk with the executable code, on-line documentation, and some demo files. For $30 you get not only the diskette, but BBS support, free updates, printed documentation, and the satisfaction of having encouraged the author and others to provide similar fine products.

Summary.

EBL is a superb product worth far more than is being charged by the author, Frank Canova. Like PC-TALK, it is a tribute to the concept of user-supported software. Get it and wonder how you ever did without it.

Ken Goosens

shop swap

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