

ATARI!

INTERFACE

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DC Desktop



San Jose World of Atari Show
Down with Shareware!
Piracy in El Paso
Preventing Data Loss
The Fuji Zone
Me and My Eight Bit
Experiences with APAC Mode
String Handling in GFA Basic



Regular Features

Right on Target by David Plotkin
A-T-A-R-I Basics of BASIC
dBMAN TipSTer

Reviews

Turbo-16 Instant Graphics
Federation Blitz Copier
Word Quest & Word Quest 2

DC Desktop—The Desktop Enhancement

Bill Rayl (WAUG)

If you're one of those unlucky souls still using the plain, old ST desktop, you should take a look at Double Click's second commercial software release—DC Desktop.

Billed as "a unique extension/enhancement to the GEM desktop," DC Desktop is the equivalent of a \$1,200 tailor-made suit for your ST. Actually, it's more like a whole new wardrobe! And, with a retail price of only \$39.95, it's like buying that expensive wardrobe at wholesale.

Dressed for Success

The DC Desktop package consists of the DC Desktop "master" program and a handful of useful modular desktop enhancements. The modular design gives you great flexibility in "designing" your very own ST desktop. The modules add such features as viewing pictures and viewing/extracting

ARChive contents, replacing the desktop background with a picture or fill pattern, installing a handy print buffer, adding keyboard equivalents to the GEM desktop's menu commands (such as FORMAT) and lots more.

The "master" program itself gives you a recoverable trashcan, unique customizable program and drive icons, the ability to place program icons on the desktop and execute them from the desktop or via a "hotkey" and an excellent "Cabinet" feature. DC Desktop works in all resolutions and all the "normal" GEM desktop functions work as usual (including Show as Text).

Closer Inspection

Since DC Desktop has far more to offer than I have space to write about, I'll try to cover a few of the things I feel really make this product shine.

First, let's look at those nifty Cabinets. This is one of those "what a great idea, why hasn't this

ever been done before" kind of features. Here's how it works: DC Desktop supports a "virtual disk drive" called a Cabinet. You can copy program icons from various drives/folders into a Cabinet and run these programs from the Cabinet rather than hunting all over for them.

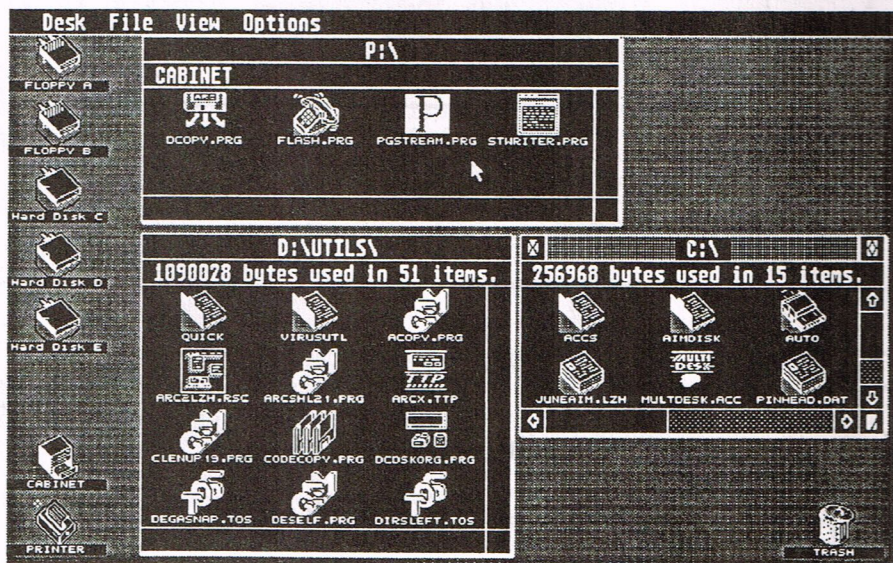
This is a very handy feature for hard drive owners, especially users who frequently use a number of programs for specific somewhat related tasks. For instance, desktop publishers can set up a DTP Cabinet containing icons for their DTP package, word processor, graphics converter/paint programs and other tools of the trade.

The Cabinets are treated just like any other disk drive—you can create folders in a Cabinet, delete file icons from a Cabinet, etc. Since the actual program files do not get moved to the Cabinet, blowing away a Cabinet's contents will not affect the actual files themselves. Up to 11 different Cabinets can be set up, and DC Desktop allows you to load/save Cabinets with a single keystroke combination.

Showing Off

Three of the DC Desktop modules—DC Show, DC Show Pics and DC Show ARC—give added flexibility to the desktop SHOW routine. DC Show works on text files, allowing you to scroll/page up and down through text, search for character strings and even print files while viewing them.

DC Show Pics is a versatile picture viewer that can show Neochrome, Degas, Tiny, Art Director, Spectrum (SPC, SPU and SPS format!) and even IMG pictures. Other than Spectrum, all formats



can be viewed in any resolution. Monochrome high res pictures are displayed with a "psuedo-gray- scale" on color monitors, while color pictures on a mono monitor are shown using true gray scaling. All that and big screen monitor support, too!

DC Show ARC allows you to get a verbose listing of an ARC file's contents or to extract those contents. When extracting, DC Show ARC can automatically create a folder with the same name as the ARC and place the ARC contents into this folder.

As memory resident programs (i.e., run from the AUTO folder), these modules automatically take over when you double-click a given file type and select SHOW from GEM's SHOW/PRINT/CANCEL dialog box. If you don't want to constantly use your system memory for any or all of these features, these programs can also be used directly from the desktop. That's a very nice feature of DC Desktop—you can still use the modules not permanently installed.

Icons Galore

Probably the most visual feature of DC Desktop is the display of unique file and drive icons. These icons are contained in the DCDSKTOP.ICE file and are fully editable using the provided DC ICE Icon Editor.

Individual floppy disks can contain their own different icon files that will automatically load when you insert the disk in a drive. This feature allows companies and PD/Shareware authors to create "official" DC Desktop icons for their products.

Literally thousands of icons are already available for DC Desktop. Many of these have been ported from the Macintosh world thanks to Wizworks' Multi-Viewer Graphica. These icons are available on the online services or from Double Click's very own BBS.

With the DC Icon Installer, you can place from one

to 25 of these program icons directly onto the desktop and assign a hotkey to the program. Once installed, you can run the program by either double-clicking the icon or by pressing the hotkey combination.

Adding to the Ensemble DC Desktop offers all these features and more. The 40+ page manual is, at times, a bit confusing because it jumps back and forth between topics. Nonetheless, the manual is well-written, easy to read and very thoroughly describes all that DC Desktop currently has to offer. The manual also gives a good deal of technical info programmers can use to create their own modules for DC Desktop. The good folks at Double Click have created an open-ended package and provided programmers/users a means to make their own additions to the software.


Overall, I have experienced no problems using DC Desktop on both an ST with TOS 1.4 and Atari's new STe. The only "quirk" I found was an incompatibility with one of my many other AUTO folder programs that caused DC Desk Drop not to install a picture on the desktop the first time I tried it. After rearranging the boot sequence of the files, everything worked fine.

When first released, there was an incompatibility with SofTrek's Turbo ST 1.8 and DC Desktop. Basically, the custom icons would revert back to normal when selected. A patch to Turbo ST was promptly uploaded to the online services.

Enough, Already!

Flexibility is the buzzword here. No other product gives you so many options for tailoring your ST desktop to your own needs. If you're tired of the standard ST desktop, yearning to add a little spice or power to your system or looking for a customizable, flexible desktop enhancement, DC Desktop should suit you perfectly.

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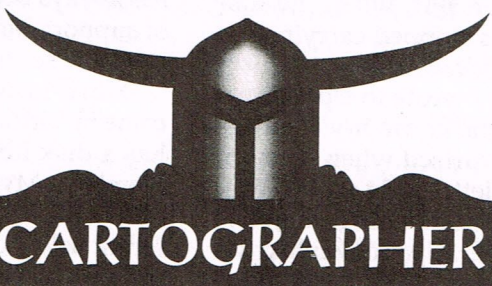


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