

# **CURRENT NOTES**

*Your Monitor on the World of Atari*

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\$3.95

**Alternate**

In this issue:

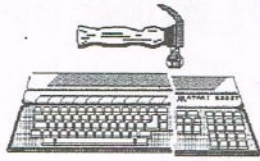
**The MegaSTE**

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**MyDOS vs SpartaDOS**





by J. Andrzej Wrotniak

# Standardize Your Keyboard Commands

## New DC DesKey Makes the Job Easy

Every time I start using another word processor or text editor (including those with programming language systems), I suffer. The keyboard sequences assigned to various operations differ greatly from program to program. Thus, for example, a Control-Y combination may delete a line in one program, delete the part of the line to the right of the cursor in another, or cut a marked block of text in yet another.

Having to memorize the keyboard commands for each text program we use is a pain. Wouldn't it be nice if your BASIC shell could be customized to use the same sequences as your favorite word processor?

Unfortunately, the designer/programmers of word processors and/or text editors lack imagination. These guys would never suspect that you may be switching between their program and anything else. Believe me, designing a word processor so that its keyboard functions can be re-assigned (for example, with a small stand-alone utility), does not take much work at all. Why is it that only *Tempus II* allows us to do that?

*StartKey*, published a few years ago by the *ST* magazine, is a small memory-resident utility, sitting on top of the operating system, intercepting your keystrokes, and translating them appropriately for various editors. This program, however, was never quite finished: it was rather buggy, crashing from time to time, and not too convenient to use.

### DC DesKey—A Small Program That Is Hard to Live Without

Then the people from Double Click Software included a similar program, *DC DesKey*, into their *DC Utilities*. Unfortunately, the original release would not work under *NeoDesk*, and if something does not work under *NeoDesk*, then I do not touch it. Fortunately, a new version of *DC Utilities* has been just released, with the compatibility problem fixed, and, for just one dollar, I was able to update my disk.

The new *DC DesKey* Version 3.0 does, indeed, work with *NeoDesk*, and it works quite nicely. All you need to do is to put it together with your other desktop accessories and reboot your computer. Then, while in the editor or word processor you want to customize, call *DC DesKey* from the Desk menu. A dialogue box will show up, from where (in addition to some other options) you may switch to keyboard remapping, or to assigning keystrokes to menu entries.

Remapping the keyboard is simple and straightforward. Just click on the "from" box and, when asked to, press the key combination you want to use when running the program. Then click on the "to" box and enter the key combination into which the original one will be translated. Thus, for example, if your program uses a Control-Y to delete a line, and you would rather use Control-Delete, then enter the Control-Delete as "from," and Control-Y as "to"—it couldn't be easier. Repeat as necessary.

Assigning keystrokes to menu entries is equally easy (although, I think, it required more technical ingenuity from Mr. Michael B. Vederman who wrote the program). *DC DesKey* will roam the computer memory until it finds the menu of the application you are customizing (and currently running). This menu will be presented as a part of another dialogue box. Click on a menu entry, then enter the key combination you want to assign to it. Neat and simple.

The very first night of using the program I remapped the basic editor functions for *Word Writer*, *First Word Plus*, *Prospero Workbench* and *Publisher ST*. What a relief—all these programs now respond to my keystrokes in a similar fashion (provided they have the function, that is). I have been using *DC DesKey* for more than two weeks now, and the darned thing seems to work fine—with just a few glitches (see below).

Mr. Vederman has also thrown in a couple of other, maybe less important but equally nice, features:

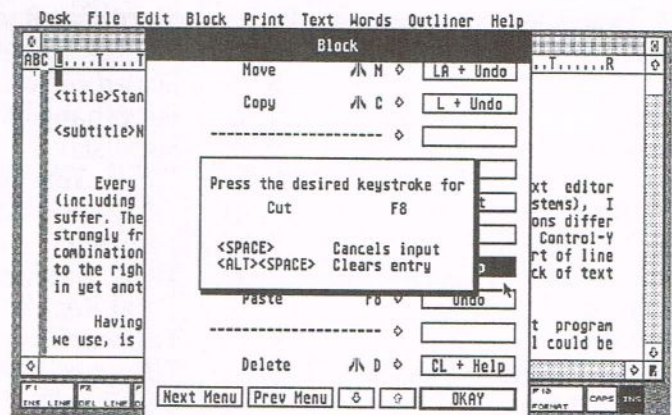


Figure 1. Here is the dialogue you use to translate keystrokes into menu operations for the program you are currently in. Convenient and easy.



a command can be executed automatically each time an application is entered, and another one (as, for example, "save to disk") at fixed time intervals.

What I like about *DC DesKey* is that it performs the keystroke translation only when inside the program for which a given translation table was designed. You do not have to activate it manually before running an application and de-activate after returning to the desktop. *DC DesKey* will automatically check whether the program you are running has its own translation table, and, if it does, the table will be loaded and used while in that program.

The translation tables are stored (as files with a .DK3 extension) in two possible places: either in one indicated directory or each table together with its corresponding application. The second solution is a virtual necessity when working on a floppy-based installation, while the first one seems to be more convenient for hard drive users.

### Complaints? Yes, of Course!

One of my complaints (and a mild one, indeed) is related to the last feature: when storing my .DK3 files together with the programs they relate to, everything is just fine until an application executes another one (like, for example, running a program under development from a compiler shell, or calling a de-archiver from a terminal program). If the child program is in a directory different than that of its parent, then after its completion (returning to the parent, that is), *DC DesKey* will not find the parent's .DK3 file. As these files cannot be reloaded manually, the only option is to exit to the desktop and to execute the parent again, which is a mildly annoying procedure. Luckily, if you have a hard drive, then you will usually store all the .DK3 files in their own directory, so the problem will become entirely irrelevant.

My second complaint is related to a puzzling and irritating misbehavior: sometimes *DC DesKey* will insist on inverting your screen colors (in monochrome at least, and under *NeoDesk*) every time you leave any program. By "sometimes" I mean in some boot-up configurations. I was not able to identify a single desktop accessory (or other memory-resident program) with which it happens: if with a given combination of accessories the problem does not occur, then chances are that adding any accessory will cause the effect to show up. Then, again, removing any accessory from the set-up will give a better than 50/50 chance to bring things back to normal. Note: this is nothing critical, just annoying, and may be something limited to my version of TOS (1.4), but still.

A somewhat peculiar, but less frequent glitch of the same kind: sometimes *DC DesKey* will not register at all as an accessory in the Desk menu. Probably some timing-critical feature, usually a simple re-boot will correct the situation.

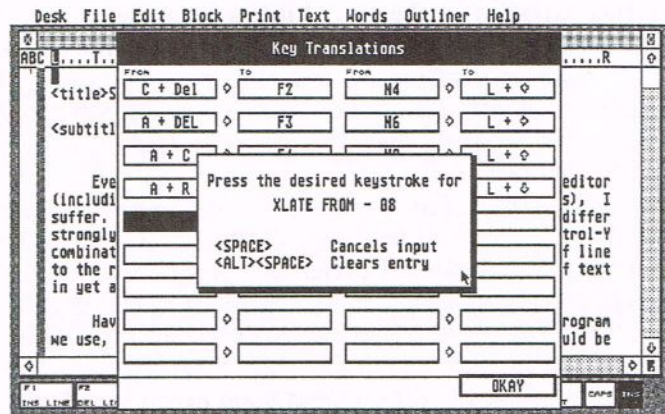


Figure 2. Keystroke-to-keystroke conversions are equally easy to define. Yes, I would like to see double keystroke sequences on the right-hand side, too, and I hope DC Software will include this in the next version.

Last, but not least, both *Uniterm* and *Interlink* started crashing when working with *DC DesKey* installed (as a matter of fact, *Interlink* would never go beyond the initial password entry). As much as I like and use *Uniterm*, the program seems to be quite picky about whom it co-resides with in the memory, so this is nothing new, but this is the first case I experienced with *InterLink* flatly refusing to work with a desk accessory (and yes, I have tried some).

### More Pros than Cons

As I have already stated, the program is designed nicely around a well-defined task. However, I would be happier with *DC DesKey* if it allowed me to translate single key combinations into sequences of two (maybe even three) keystrokes: many editors use two-key combinations for some of the functions (for example, Alt-B and then K to mark a block end). This would not, I believe, complicate the program too much, while increasing its usefulness considerably. In a similar fashion, it would be nice to have an option to translate keystrokes into some basic GEM events (like clicking on the window scroll bar) other than menu messages; the *STartKey* accessory does it, and I found this feature quite useful with some programs.

Do not let me mislead you. I like *DC DesKey* as it is now, and I find it really useful, as it fills a small but painful gap in my utility library. The list of complaints and enhancements presented above is quite short. The program is doing what it is supposed to do, and it does it quite well.

Taking into consideration that *DC DesKey* comes as a part of *DC Utilities* (\$40, usually sold for less), with some other programs deserving your consideration included into the package, those of us who use more than one editor and/or word processor will find it a very handy accessory.



## Other Goodies in the DC Utilities Package

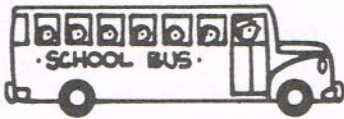
I already wrote about some other programs in the *DC Utilities* package in the January, 1990 issue of *Current Notes*. The following, depending on your needs and working habits, may range from useful to absolutely necessary:

**DC Xtract Plus**—a fast and easy to use archiver and dearchiver. Handles .ARC, .LZH, .ZIP and .ZOO formats, and, indeed, I prefer this program to its PD/shareware competition.

**DC Squish**—compresses your programs and accessories on disk (significant space savings!) so that they automatically decompress upon execution. Again, better and more reliable than any comparable freeware programs. I consider this one a must.

**DC Freeze Frame**—a snapshot utility (this new version handles properly the compressed Degas formats).

Together with *DC DesKey*, the price-to-performance ratio of *DC Utilities* makes the package quite difficult to resist.



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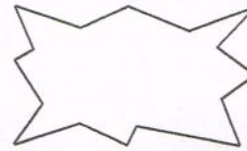
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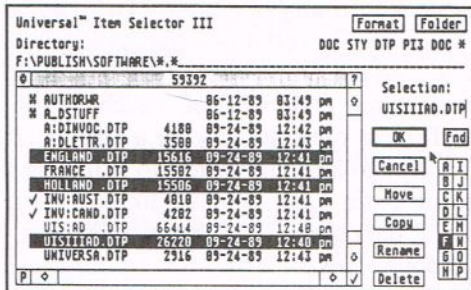
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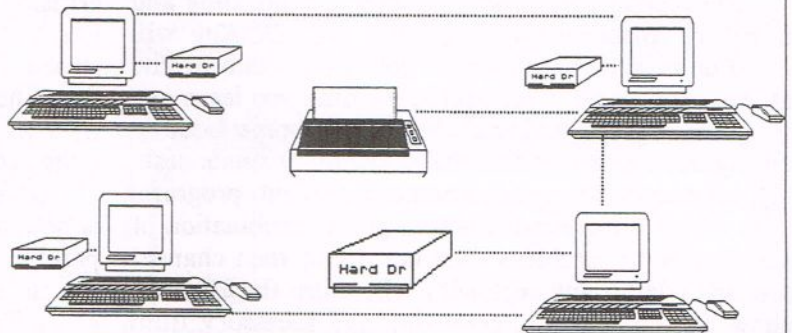
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