

Gerald's Column *by Gerald Fitton*

My regular monthly column in Archive was not always known as “Gerald’s Column”. Originally it was “PipeLine” and then “PipeLineZ” but, for a short period between “PipeLineZ” and “Gerald’s Column” it was called the “Document Production Column”. This month my article is about document production – but first I must deal with last month’s correspondence.

Phoebe

I have been taken to task for my negative comments last month about Phoebe. Before you add to the weight of my snail mail and email please give me a chance to clarify my views.

My main point was that the specification released about a month before the ‘bad news’ broke did not represent a sufficient advance on the StrongArm Risc PC to attract me and perhaps others. Nevertheless it was a step in the right direction.

There are more than a few of my correspondents who say that they are potential buyers of the first available version of Phoebe. However, even these people tell me that they need to be reassured that this first version can be upgraded to a much better machine. They say that they want their Phoebe to be able to use a whole host of “third party standard products”. I don’t wish to enter into a long drawn out dialogue about the merits of various interfaces but, as examples, my correspondents would like to see an AGP graphics slot, they would like to be able to plug in (and make use of) 100 Mhz SDRAM, they want to use more PCI slots and need to be reassured about the later addition of PCIMA slots, about the compatibility of ultra wide scsi and Ultra DMA hard drives.

Let me tell you what I would like to see developed. I would like to be able to buy a standard midi tower with a standard power supply. I would like to fit a Phoebe type motherboard and plug into it a StrongArm (or better) processor and RISC OS chips. I would like to be able to use standard 168 pin SDRAM (100 Mhz preferred). I would like to see all the usual ‘modern’ sockets on the motherboard such as IDE, AGP graphics, sound cards, and suitable PCI slots which will accept standard scsi, scanner, video, etc, cards. All these peripherals (such as AGP graphics and sound cards) are available from third parties and represent good value for money. The part which is unique is the motherboard complete with StrongArm CPU and RISC OS operating system.

I hope that those who are intent on rescuing Phoebe will improve its specification before releasing the product. I hope that they will concentrate on the motherboard, the CPU and RISC OS rather than pursue the colour of the cusomised case fitted with a non standard power supply.

Ideally

Now to the subject of document production.

For most of what I want to do my ideal package would be one which has many standard DTP features. Ideally I want a frame based rather than slot based package and I want

material to flow from one frame to another chosen frame. However, I need many spreadsheet features as well and I need them to be 'live' (so that I can change the values and the sheet changes) and I need 'live' charts linked to the 'live' sheet.

My ideal document production package would have the frames of a DTP but, unlike any DTP I know of, it would allow frames to contain live spreadsheets and frames containing linked live charts. So far as I know there is nothing on the market for either RISC, Mac nor Windows which has this degree of integration.

Compromise

So, like everything in life, I have to compromise.

One compromise which suits many people is to use OLE (Object Linking and Embedding) such as that between TableMate and Impression. This allows you to insert into an Impression frame a table which, although 'dead' whilst in Impression, can be brought back to life with the OLE command. I use this combination when it is appropriate and I suggest to you that it is a good one. This month I shall describe how this OLE combination works.

Another compromise is a Spreadsheet with many of the features of a Word Processor. It is no secret that my favourites of this type are PipeDream and Fireworkz. PipeDream is better for most of what I do because of its charting package and because of the flexible way it handles import and export. Printing (using the printers own fonts) is fast. Nevertheless, for the purposes of many users, Fireworkz is better because the page layout is more visible and the Styles feature is much more versatile. Neither PipeDream nor Fireworkz is frame based; they are slot based and so should not be called DTP packages.

I shall discuss this spreadsheet/word processor compromise on another occasion.

Overselling

Now a digression. Dave Symes wrote to me:

“Impression Junior is Free... and while it may be quite a simple DTP application in view of what we have now, I used it for many years to good effect, for simple letters, business stationary and basic DTP work. I know from two personal experiences, purchasing just a WP is a waste of time and money, when paying a little extra will get you a substantially more versatile application. Of course it you want to keep your writing that simple... use a Biro.”

One of the “two personal experiences” of “just a WP” to which Dave refers is Fireworkz. He was most disappointed with Fireworkz because the DTP features he expected and needs for what he does are not in there. In a phrase, he needs a frame based package.

There is a serious danger that in overselling a product you will alienate your customer for life. I believe that Wordz, the word processing element of Fireworkz, was oversold – it was hyped as a DTP. As a result, there were many disappointed Wordz customers such as Dave, who vowed never to buy a Colton Software product again. We shall never know how many sales of Resultz, the excellent spreadsheet element of Fireworkz, Colton Software lost to Eureka or Schema because they oversold Wordz – but there is no doubt

that it was considerable.

As I said last month, I believe that Phoebe, at least in its original form, was oversold and, after a honeymoon period, it would have received much adverse publicity from many of the early buyers. If that had been the case it wouldn't matter if the facility to upgrade was included in later versions – it would have been too late.

TableMate

Back to spreadsheets in Impression.

One of the free pieces of software which is 'bundled' with Impression is a utility for creating tables called !TableMate. I have version 4.05a but, for this article I shall describe version 1.10g dated 21 Feb 1994 which came bundled with Impression. In another article I shall describe how it has been improved.

Who's Software is it?

Version 1.10g is dated 21 Feb 1994. In the box I received with Impression Style is a 'Voucher' said to be worth "up to £15" and exhorting me to "Take care of it." The Voucher entitled me to a 50% discount of "up to £15" on TableMate II. The leaflet says that "TableMate II will be available from Dalriada Data technology."

What Does it Do?

On the Archive monthly disc, on the Abacus Training web site and, as a last resort from me, you'll find six files relating to this article. They are [CSV_File] (in CSV format), [DDF] (in text format), [DrawTable] (in TblMate format), [ImpBlank] (in ImpDoc format), [ImpTable] (in ImpDoc format) and [ImpText] (also in ImpDoc format).

There are two routes through this maze of six files. Both start with a CSV file such as the file [CSV_File] (but you don't have to have a CSV file—you can start with a blank table). The first route takes us via [DrawTable] to [ImpTable]; the other route takes us via [DDF] to [ImpText].

Many spreadsheet packages including PipeDream and Fireworkz allow you to load a CSV file directly and have a look at it. I saved the file called [CSV_File] from PipeDream.

[ImpTable]

If you have Impression then I suggest that you load [ImpTable] and have a look at it. Part of the table is shown in the screenshot below.

| | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|---------|-------|
| A Bible Who's Who | | | |
| by Roger M King | | | |
| Person | Book | Chapter | Verse |
| AARON | EXODUS | 4 | 14 |
| ABAGTHA | ESTHER | 1 | 10 |
| ABEDNEGO | DANIEL | 1 | 7 |
| ABEL | GENESIS | 4 | 2 |
| ABI | 2 KINGS | 18 | 2 |
| ABIATHAR | 1 SAMUEL | 22 | 20 |
| ABIDAN | NUMBERS | 1 | 11 |
| ABIGAIL | 1 SAMUEL | 25 | 3 |
| ABIMELECH | JUDGES | 8 | 31 |
| ABISHAG | 1 KINGS | 1 | 3 |
| ABNER | 1 SAMUEL | 14 | 50 |
| ABRAM (ABRAHAM) | GENESIS | 11 | 26 |
| ABSALOM | 2 SAMUEL | 3 | 3 |
| ACHAICUS | 1 CORINTHIANS | 16 | 17 |
| ACHAN | JOSHUA | 7 | 1 |
| ACHISH | 1 SAMUEL | 21 | 10 |
| ACHSAH | JOSHUA | 15 | 16 |
| ADAH | GENESIS | 4 | 19 |
| ADAM | GENESIS | 3 | 17 |
| ADMATHA | ESTHER | 1 | 14 |
| ADNAH | 2 CHRONICLES | 17 | 14 |

Computer Concepts recommend this format as the preferred format rather than the DDF format. The CSV file has been converted to something which, in Impression, looks and behaves like a graphic. You can scale and even rotate the table as you would any graphic. You can Save it from Impression as a DrawFile.

[ImpText]

The table in the [ImpText] file is not a graphic. TableMate has created two new Styles 'Standard' and 'No lines' which are used within the table. You can edit the table using all the usual facilities of Impression. I have moved the tabs, the vertical lines and I've changed the Style slightly so that the line spacing is reduced.

From [CSV_File] to [DrawTable]

If you have the !TableMate package then install it on the icon bar in the usual way and drag the [CSV_File] to the icon. As if by magic the table shown below appears.

The screenshot shows a window titled "TableMate 1" with a ruler at the top. The table contains the following data:

| Person | Book | Chapter | Verse |
|-----------------|---------------|---------|-------|
| AARON | EXODUS | 4 | 14 |
| ABAGTHA | ESTHER | 1 | 10 |
| ABEDNEGO | DANIEL | 1 | 7 |
| ABEL | GENESIS | 4 | 2 |
| ABI | 2 KINGS | 18 | 2 |
| ABIATHAR | 1 SAMUEL | 22 | 20 |
| ABIDAN | NUMBERS | 1 | 11 |
| ABIGAIL | 1 SAMUEL | 25 | 3 |
| ABIMELECH | JUDGES | 8 | 31 |
| ABISHAG | 1 KINGS | 1 | 3 |
| ABNER | 1 SAMUEL | 14 | 50 |
| ABRAM (ABRAHAM) | GENESIS | 11 | 26 |
| ABSALOM | 2 SAMUEL | 3 | 3 |
| ACHAICUS | 1 CORINTHIANS | 16 | 17 |

You will see that the numbers in the third and fourth columns are left aligned and it would look much better if they were right aligned. What we need to do is to change the left align tabs to right align tabs. Here's how to do it. At the top of the TableMate window, on the left, you'll find a small tab icon (it is a small five sided figure, point down, with a dot in the middle). Drag this tab icon to the TableMate ruler bar and release it approximately at 10 cm (at the right hand end of the third column). Repeat this procedure with column four. The result is the screenshot below.

The screenshot shows a window titled "DrawTable" with the same table as above, but with the numbers in the Chapter and Verse columns right-aligned. The table contains the following data:

| Person | Book | Chap | Ver |
|----------|----------|------|-----|
| AARON | EXODUS | 4 | 14 |
| ABAGTHA | ESTHER | 1 | 10 |
| ABEDNEGO | DANIEL | 1 | 7 |
| ABEL | GENESIS | 4 | 2 |
| ABI | 2 KINGS | 18 | 2 |
| ABIATHAR | 1 SAMUEL | 22 | 20 |

Now click the mouse <menu> (middle) button and execute – File – Save table – and Save the file into a convenient directory by dragging the icon to the directory window. I saved the file by its default name, [DrawTable].

From [DrawTable] to [ImpTable]

Load a suitable Impression template. I used the file [ImpBlank] which you will find on the Archive monthly disc and elsewhere. Drag the file [DrawTable] into the opened [ImpBlank] document. The result should be exactly the same as that which I achieved and which I Saved as [ImpTable].

Object Linking and Embedding (OLE)

The biggest single advantage of using the DrawTable format for the table is that you can make all your amendments using the TableMate package rather than ‘messaging about’ with rulers and Styles in Impression and hoping that you can move bits and pieces around to where you want them.

You can load the graphic from [ImpTable] back into TableMate using OLE as follows:

Click on the graphic in [ImpTable] to select it. Hold down the <Ctrl> key and double click on the graphic. The table will load back into TableMate with the name [ImpOLE1] (the number at the end indexes as you load different graphics back into TableMate).

You can then make amendments to the table using all the facilities of TableMate and, when you come to Save the file again, it will load back into the Impression file, [ImpTable], in exactly the same place as the original graphic.

In Conclusion

TableMate is a utility provided with Impression Style and Publisher. Although I have described only the basic TableMate, a much upgraded version is available now.

Those of you who’ve written to me about the use of Impression to create tables without using TableMate (or something similar) have come to grief all too often. The few of you have used TableMate are filled with praise for the ease with which it allows you to enter and then modify tables for use within Impression.

Finally

Please write to me at the Abacus Training address which you’ll find in Paul’s Fact File at the back of Archive. That Fact File includes email and fax addresses. I would prefer that you don’t telephone. If you have anything of more substance than a few lines I would like a copy of the file on disc or as an email attachment particularly if you are having a problem. An example file is so much easier for me than a description in words which I might misunderstand. If you write rather than email me then please include return postage if you want a reply. A self addressed sticky label is helpful.