EXHIBIT PAGE LAYOUT BY COMPUTER

by Allan N. Glennon

In this era of personal computers, more and more philatelic exhibitors are turning to their computers for page layout. Some, however, hesitate because they aren't sure which software to use, or they fear that it may be too complicated for them to master.

The introduction a couple of years ago of Windows 3.1 for IBM-compatible PCs made quality type and graphics available to PC-users at moderate cost, and began a new revolution in personal computing, featuring a new generation of easy-to-learn software with extensive, on-line help built in. Programs formerly dedicated exclusively to word processing, to graphics, or to page layout began converging into multi-function desktop publishing programs. Under Windows, such versatility is natural, because all Windows programs use the same basic techniques to accomplish their specialized purposes. In addition, all Windows programs share access to whatever fonts are installed in the PC.

In the paragraphs that follow, we will look at Ami Pro 3.0, a word processing program; Corel DRAW! 3.0, a graphics program; and Corel Ventura 4.2, a page layout program. Although the procedures for setting up a page differ among these programs, their final products can be identical.

A nice feature of Windows is that you don't need a laser printer in order to get sharp, crisp output--a dot matrix printer can produce very attractive pages under Windows. (Many people don't realize that the resolution on a 24-pin dot matrix printer can be as high as 360 dots per inch (dpi)--slightly finer-grain resolution than the 300 dpi produced by most office laser printers until the recent advent of 600-dpi lasers.)

The first step is the same for any program: do a rough design sketch for each page. This sketch should show all your text, plus the positions of everything that will be on the page. Whether you plan to use frame lines around the materials or not, you should draw the frames in, in the correct position, and show their dimensions. This step will assist you in placing the text on the page.

Ami Pro 3.0

Ami Pro is published by the Lotus Corporation. If "upgrading" from a previous version, or from a competitor's product, it costs around $100; non-upgrade purchase price will be around $250.

Ami Pro's greatest strengths are in its sophisticated handling of text. Each Ami Pro document has an associated "style sheet" that combines page configuration (margins, columns, orientation, headers and footers) and type characteristics (font, alignment, spacing, tabs, indents, and other features).

In exhibit layout (except for the title or synopsis pages), text is of secondary importance. Even so, Ami Pro can be used efficiently and effectively to create exhibit pages, by using its "frame" features. Dimensions of a frame and its position on the page can be specified to one one-hundredth of an inch (or its equivalent in centimeters, picas, or points). The frame outline thickness can be specified from hairline to several points, and various type of frame outlines are available. If you prefer, the outline can be left unprinted.

Information that is repeated on each exhibit page can be put into the page style sheet as headers or footers. Other headings, labels, and incidental text are best put into frames of their own. This gives the designer control over the positioning of each item on the page, while retaining control over the font and alignment of the next items. Problems can arise with text placed directly on the page (called "loose" text, hereafter). Because word processors flow text smoothly from page to page, editing of a page can cause loose text to be displaced from its desired position. Removal or addition of a frame, for example, or even using the Enter or Backspace key to move a line down or up can cause a loose label or heading to jump to the following page or slip to the previous page. If you have done a multi-page exhibit as a single document, and have placed all the text as loose text, a change in an early page can cause disruption throughout the rest of the exhibit. This will not happen if all the text is in frames.

For exhibit page layout, Ami Pro is straightforward if you use frames for both text and display items. It is, of course, possible to undergo considerable frustration during the learning process, before learning to make sure that the frame margins and the text alignment, indents, and line spacings are compatible with one another. When you specify a line of text as being centered, for example, and it's obviously not centered, it's possible that there's an indent specified for that text's style.

Style, whether for page, text, or frame, is instantly available. The text styles are available from a fly-up menu at the bottom of the screen, as are type faces and sizes. To modify a style, the item to be modified is selected by a click of the left-hand mouse button, and the style sheet can then be called either from the menu at the top of the screen, or with a click of the right-hand button.

Corel DRAW! 3.0

Corel DRAW! 3.0 is one of a family of products from the Corel Corporation of Ottawa, Canada. It is available both on floppy disks and on CD-ROM. The CD-ROM version usually sells for under $100, and the floppy disk version is around $120. If you have a CD-ROM, you probably already know that the CD version of any progrm usually has many more features than the floppy disk version, and is definitely much simpler to load into your computer.

Corel DRAW! 3.0 was Corel's top of the line product when it first came out. It retailed for several hundred dollars, and even the upgrade from previous versions was well over $100. When Corel DRAW! 4.0 was issued and, more recently, when version 5.0 was released, the Corel Corporation decided to keep version 3.0 on the market, at a reduced price, and promote it as an entry-level graphic program. It's entry level in price only; remember that, only a couple of years ago, it was state-of-the-art. Preparation of exhibit pages is, in effect, a trivial task for Corel DRAW! The program will be referred to simply as Corel from here on.

Corel is a superb program for type manipulation. You can stretch or extrude type, form it around odd shapes, distort individual characters, and do all sorts of other wonderful things (most of which aren't really appropriate for an exhibit page). But it handles type best in small quantities. It's great for individual exhibit pages, where type is at a minimum, but you'd be wise to use another program for your title page and synopsis, unless you have a very fast computer with a fast graphics accelerator card, and 8MB or more RAM.

Corel shines in its ability to position things exactly where you want them, in the size you want. To position an element, either graphic or text (which are the same to Corel), you can pull out a horizontal or vertical guideline from the top or side ruler, select it by clicking on it, and specify its position to a hundredth of an inch. Then, by selecting "Snap to Guideline," you can position any object's frame flush with any guideline. Another alignment feature allows you to align the top edges, bottom edges, sides, or centers of two or more objects.

A simple keyboard combination creates duplicates of any selected object. A frame, for example, that is the exact size you need, can be reproduced as many times as desired. In addition, a Preferences menu allows you to specify exactly where each duplicate will appear. If these

guidelines and alignment features aren't adequate, there is a "nudge" feature that uses the arrow keys to move any selected object. The distance that a single tap on an arrow key will move the is selected in the Preferences menu.

Corel is not well-adapted to producing multi-page documents–each page is a separate file. Once you've created a basic format, however, and saved it under whatever name you want to call it (say, XYZ1.CDR), you can use the identical format simply by saving it again under another name (such as XYZ2.CDR), then use the editing features to change the text and frames appropriate to your next page. This, of course, means that you'll create 160 files for a 10-frame exhibit, if you want to maintain a full set of pages in your computer. Alternatively, you can simply maintain your basic page as one file that you edit and print sequentially, retaining only the latest page as your file copy. This is not necessarily bad–after all, if you've been creating your exhibit pages manually, you probably have no file or backup copies of your pages at all.

If you want to maintain a computer file of every page in your exhibit, Corel can be unwieldy. If, however, you're happy just to keep a master copy of your exhibit page format, Corel works just fine.

Corel Ventura 4.2

Corel Ventura started out a few years back as Xerox Ventura Publisher. After a couple of incarnations, Ventura was bought by the Corel Corporation in the Fall of 1993. Corel Ventura 4.2 was published a few months later. The product sells for around $130 in CD-ROM format, and $170 on floppy disks. As a competitive upgrade, it may be available for considerably less.

Frames are the basic units in Ventura. Dialog boxes allow maximum flexibility in sizing and positioning the frames. Within the frames, text is governed by style sheets, as in Ami Pro. Also, as in the other applications, frame lines may be printed in various weights, or not at all. Any frame may have a caption box attached to it at top or bottom. These are well-suited to brief descriptive matter, such as color or performation data but, for a longer caption, you'd probably want to use a separate frame.

Since it is oriented toward multi-page documents, Ventura makes it easy to retain all your pages on disk, if you wish. If all your text is in separate frames, pages can be edited, redesigned, or reorganized without affecting the appearance of other pages.

Afterword

All three programs discussed here are available at computer superstores, or by mail order, at the approximate prices mentioned. For some home computer enthusiasts, those prices may seem a little steep. There are many other Windows-compatible programs in the stores at lower prices. Although these less expensive programs may not have all the features of the office-oriented programs discussed here, they may be more than adequate to the task of preparing exhibit pages. At the low end of the price scale, first preference should probably go to a publishing or a graphics program, as these programs will probably have better capability for placement of frames and brief pieces of text than a word processing program. Programs of this sort can be found for as little as $25 to $30.