

RSG starts the DTP race once more

Gordon Woolf reviews a DTP program which wasn't in his list of "DTP contenders" in the September issue of PUPate. It wasn't included because it wasn't on the market for the PC -- yet it has been around for 20 years!

Way back in July 1986 when a new magazine called Desktop Publishing hit the newsstands in Australia, there were two programs considered worthy of serious consideration for producing publications -- PageMaker, and ReadySetGo.

Of the two, both at that time only available for the Mac, ReadySetGo was the best seller, and in a review Terry Ulick and Tony Webster said it was the "first page makeup program to reach the best seller list for Macintosh products".

They also went to some lengths to describe the way in which type and pictures were placed on the page by first drawing text or picture "blocks". Now, even PageMaker offers the near universal method of creating frames; it is just that ReadySetGo was the first. (Perhaps to add perspective, these were the days not only BQ, before Quark, but even before Illustrator; there are few familiar names on the magazines' pages other than PageMaker, Postscript, Apple and IBM).

(Ventura was just out in the US according to a news item in the same issue and was expected in Australia within a couple of months, using the GEM operating system on the IBM AT.)

Why worry PC users about such an ancient Mac program? There is a reason -- after 15 years, the total lifetime of "desktop publishing", ReadySetGo has yet again changed owners, become Ready,Set,Go!, and now is available in version one for the PC.

There's also a drop in price. Back on 1986 it cost \$269 in Australia, admittedly compared to PageMaker at \$895, but now it is a UK-published program and can be bought on line for US\$99 (a little under A\$200).

Dirwan Ltd in the UK may be the new owners but they have been involved with the development of RSG since its earliest days -- long before RSG was acquired by Letraset.

I've been playing with their 14-day 9MB demo and while I remain committed to PageMaker and to its successor, InDesign, I am impressed. For anyone who has a strict budget, this is well worth a trial.

Even in its earliest days, RSG was able to place objects with mathematical precision, and that continues with a "Block specification" palette for placement and sizing to a hundredth of a pica or centimetre or a ten-thousandth of an inch (the default measurement).

There are "style sheets" which are individual styles as used in Word or PageMaker but these styles are rigid in that to modify an individual instance you have to remove the application of the style sheet so that paragraph. This may take a little getting used to -- change a single crosshead by a point or two to make it fit and that crosshead will not be changed if you later change the crosshead style from Times to Arial.

The program can handle quite advanced print output, including separations, and the printing of individual separations. Spot colours are also simple, once one realises that all colours are defined as Process by default, and that one needs to double click a colour and define it as a Spot colour for it to appear in the separations dialog.

No doubt this is one of a number of "gotchas" that come with any program that has

been around since before the standards were set. What is amazing is that it set the standard for so many ways things are done, and so, if at first one thinks something is missing, persevere with the Help file, RSG can probably do what you want.

Those of you who have experienced asking a bureau if they can handle an MS Publisher file may also be in for a new experience. I'd expect it to be on the lines of "Is that still around?" Tell them you can write to a postscript file and the oldies will surely say: "Yes, we'll give it a go".

Exporting to HTML was also interesting. Page layout programs are notorious for creating poor approximations of the print page and/or excessively bloated code. RSG produced a poor approximation of the page (basically just a straight-down-the-page translation) but it did so with a small and readily editable file. I'd give it 5 out of 10 in an area where I'd score most with 3 or less.

And here's one to ask other layout program users: Can your program automatically insert the number of the next page or the previous page, and can your program insert the page number of the next or previous text block whatever page that is on? RSG can.

For more information see <<http://www.diwan.com/>>

Caption.

A screenful of palettes. There is plenty of control on objects in Ready,Set,Go!
(To obtain TIF file please email gordon@worsleypress.com)