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RUNNING DELTA ON APPLE MACINTOSH

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I was introduced to DELTA by associates working at the Western Australian Herbarium. Wow! I thought what a package and so I attended my first DELTA workshop. It was here I learnt the abhorrent fact that “DELTA does not run on a Mac”. “Oh no!” I cried, “I only know how to run a Mac: PC’s, DOS and command lines, these are all beyond me”. I did work at it and learned to use DELTA on the PC but I longed to be able to run DELTA on the Mac since I had in the interim purchased a laptop computer (Powerbook Duo). In conversation with Alex Chapman I learned that there was software written for the Mac called SoftPC, which allowed the Mac to run DOS-based software. I enquired of this programme and received various reports: “Yes its a saviour”, “No its a dog”, but undeterred I decided to ask for a demo of the software. I found that you can run DOS programmes on a Mac but you have to run them just as you do on a DOS-based machine, that is without Microsoft Windows, unless you are prepared to spend more cash on memory upgrades (see below).

The software is written by Insignia Solutions, an American company, whose “mission is simple - to provide quality, high-performance solutions which bridge the barriers to compatibility”. Insignia offers four products. Universal Soft PC runs on a Macintosh Classic or better with System 6.0 or later, requires 2(preferably 4) Mb of memory with System 6 or 4(5) Mb with System 7, only provides CGA or EGA graphics mode and takes up 5 Mb hard disk space. Soft PC Professional runs on any Macintosh with 68020-40 processors, System 6.0 or later, requires 8 Mb of Macintosh memory and supports VGA graphics. It takes up 6 Mb of hard disc space, but also will not run Windows. SoftPC With Windows comes pre-installed with Microsoft Windows but be warned it takes a lot of memory and apparently runs Windows applications very slowly. SoftWindows is a new version designed to run Windows on the PowerPC platform and claims to run DOS and Windows applications at the speed of a 486 PC.

I use Universal SoftPC to run DELTA and Norton Commander, a DOS file management package with inbuilt editor. The latter fails if the files that need editing are too large, but there are other editors around. The keyboard of a PC is set up differently to the Macintosh and so when using any DOS applications a list of keyboard differences must be near (eg. the option key on the Duo is the Alt key on a DOS PC). I admit this can become frustrating and is the most maddening thing I have found using SoftPC on the Mac. My use of DELTA with the Mac is at times when a PC is not available eg. out in the field. For this reason I have not concerned myself overly that the VGA graphics are not available when using Universal SoftPC but for those of you who wish to use your Mac with SoftPC Professional there appears to be no barrier to getting good graphics. I notice very little difference in the speed of DELTA using the Mac setup I have and a 286 PC. PC users accustomed to a 486 would notice a difference. Inevitably, DOS software will run more slowly on a Mac emulating DOS than on a DOS PC given comparably configured hardware.

In conclusion, most Mac users are put off by the plain DOS interface and naturally find the Windows environment much more friendly, but will have to pay for this functionality in terms of added memory and lost hard disk space, as well as dollars.* Personally, as a user of Mac’s and PC’s I can report being totally happy with running DELTA in both environments. An added advantage is that I have access to other DOS applications such as Hennig 86 and can run them anywhere I have my Mac.

*Editors comment. In the short term, until most DELTA software is available as MS Windows applications, this is not an issue, as no one in their right mind would burden their machine with emulating DOS and Windows just to run a DOS-only program. Current trends towards enhanced PC hardware and operating systems should alleviate performance issues in the longer term.