

Executive Briefing System A Color Graphics Development System for the Apple II

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It takes a lot of time and effort—not to mention visual material—to plan, rehearse, and prepare an effective slide presentation. Ordinarily, you jot down your ideas, gather supporting material, and have the company graphics

department produce graphs, charts, and other visual aids to support your presentation. Depending on the material, you use bar and pie charts, progress charts, time-line charts, exams, or anything you can think of to get a message across. Most of the time

you wind up with a flip chart and velum transparencies of graphs for a projector.

The Executive Briefing System (EBS), a computerized version of these old-fashioned methods, is a faster, more flexible, and more professional alternative. Mitch Kapur and the wizards at Lotus Development Corporation have pulled off a great feat with this slick program. For \$199, you can prepare the greatest presentations of your career in short order. The EBS lets you make your own graphics presentations with an Apple II computer, a color or black-and-white monitor, and a printer. And that's not all—the system is even easy to use.

The EBS consists of a manual explaining methods and procedures, a master disk containing the basic EBS program as well as its attendant editor and utility programs, and a sample slide-type show disk called *The Great Conoco Auction*, which depicts the acquisition of the Continental Oil Company (Conoco) by Du Pont (see photo 1).

Your adventure in graphics begins with a sample slide show on the Auction disk. Once you have a feel for what the EBS can do, you take the Conoco show and modify it, using

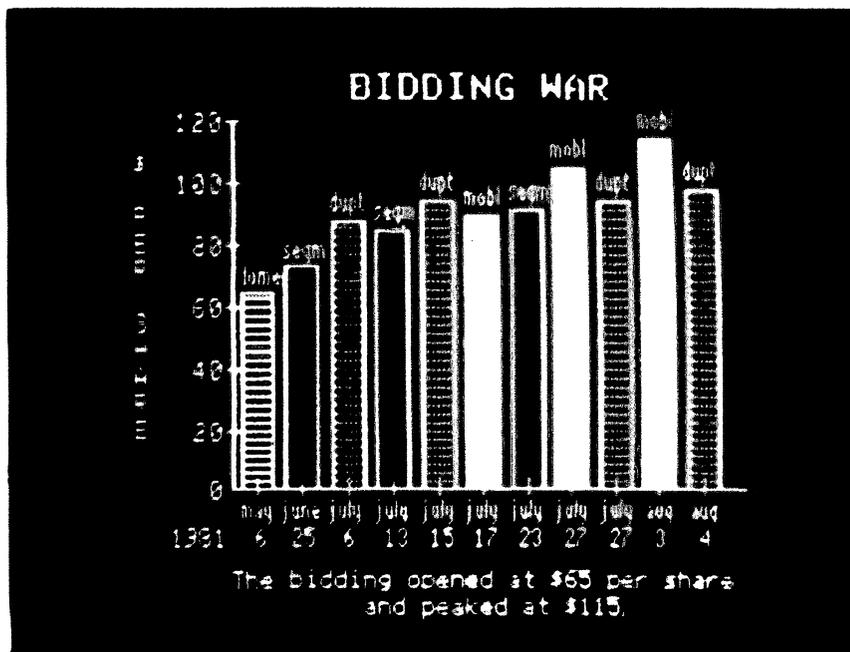


Photo 1: This sample slide included with the Executive Briefing System charts the bidding war between Du Pont and Seagram for a controlling interest in the Continental Oil Company (Conoco). You can modify it and other slides as you learn to use the system.

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Network Consulting has added many features that the professional programmer will find useful. These features are not available from any other sources.

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Figure 1: A printout of fonts (lettering styles) from an Epson MX-100, using the Executive Briefing System. Three other disks containing different font sets are available.

the editor on the master disk. When you have finished, you will have assembled your own slide show by changing existing slides and preparing your own. The EBS gives you the tools to prepare your own graphics, then lets you use those tools to fit your specific needs. Making your own displays is exciting when you realize how tailored they are to your needs. Instead of handing your materials over to an outside department, you can prepare attractive supporting graphics on your own.

Producing Graphics

To create your own presentation you use the initialization module on the main program and initialize a blank disk. You then have the option of creating your own graphics or "slides" from scratch or starting with an existing high-resolution picture from another disk. To prepare your own slide, you can use the editor function to draw borders by using the draw module. Two methods of drawing are available to you: one is based on the particular size of font you have loaded, and the other uses a micro-cursor, a one-dot pixel that draws

fine lines. You can draw elaborate or plain borders as you wish. Once you've placed a border or other rules inside the slide, you add your text by simply typing in whatever you wish. You may include several different styles of lettering (see figure 1) as well; you can change fonts at any time. You can choose any combination of normal or inverse text with color or black-and-white letters.

The other method of creating graphics involves transferring an existing slide onto your disk and then modifying it as you wish. You can use the draw function to modify the visual effects, change, add, or delete text. This is a real advantage if you have to use the same slides for different groups—all you need to do is change titles or other identifying data to tailor the slides to each particular group. That may be sneaky, but it's effective and saves time as well.

One of the most valuable aspects of EBS is the way it interfaces with other business programs like the Visicorp series. You can use the charts from Visiplot and incorporate the slides directly or modify them to suit your needs. Because many of us already collect our data on some sort of a

At a Glance

Name

Executive Briefing System

Type

Graphics presentation system

Manufacturer

Lotus Development Corporation
180 Franklin St.
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 492-7100

Price

\$199

Author

Mitchell Kapor

Language

6502 machine language and modified
Applesoft BASIC

Format

Two 5¼-inch floppy disks. Three other optional color font disks are available

Computer

Apple II or II Plus with 48K bytes of memory, one or two floppy-disk drives, and DOS 3.3

Documentation

Extensive three-part manual and one sample slide show

Audience

Professionals or others who need to present visual information to groups

Documentation

The EBS manual is somewhat different from the ones I'm used to. Basically, the first section is a tutorial containing several lessons. It starts with how to turn on the Apple Computer and finishes with how to polish your slide show. All of this is covered in the first 90-plus pages. It's important to pay attention to where information is located, because the tutorial is building-block style; you must go through A, B, and C before you can go to D. Making notes as you go will help, especially when you're first learning to use the program.

The next 50-odd pages contain a reference section that covers various aspects of the EBS and its use. The dictionary includes all the commands you will be using. The last section contains the appendixes. Appendix C is a quick reference guide to the control keys.

The only drawback to the manual is that it lacks a standard index. Whenever I ran into a moment of forgetfulness, I had to ferret out the information I needed. The table of contents will have to suffice, so look there first. Using a colored pen to mark key pages can be a real time saver.

The philosophy ostensibly behind the EBS manual is interesting. It gives you the information to do a job, takes you through a short apprenticeship, and finally sends you off on your own. For a change, you decide the best form for your application, an idea I find refreshing. If your job requires you to pass information on to a group of people, then you already know enough to use EBS to make your efforts pay the biggest dividends.

I spent several evenings just playing around drawing my own slides and modifying other existing Apple high-resolution graphics files, and I had a great time. The fact that you can have fun while using EBS makes it even more valuable. You don't have to fight to get the job done.

Conclusion

The Executive Briefing System is an outstanding new program for Apple computer users who need to present information to a group in the most ef-

"Visi" program, most of the difficult work is already done by the time we want to show it to someone. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, any high-resolution screen you can save on the Apple can serve as a source for slides; in other words, you can use a graphics tablet, a digitizer, or both as an input device.

The entire process of creating a slide from scratch took me roughly 40 minutes the first time and less as I became more familiar with the program. After an evening with the program, I found myself turning out slides from scratch in less than 10 minutes!

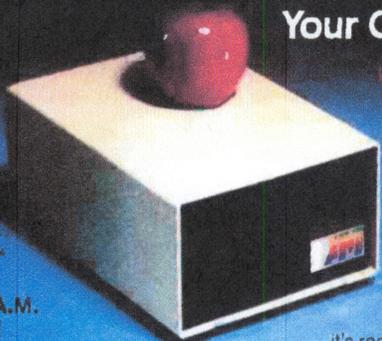
After all your slides are on the disk, you add the effects you want for the actual show. You can fade from one slide to another, make a spiral unwrap, move a curtain up or down, or make the display dissolve. You can use one specific effect or any combination of them. You can control the time between slides when you select the automatic slide show. Naturally, you have manual control over the show and can move forward or backward or halt as you desire. If you want to control the show manually, you can use either the Apple keyboard or a game paddle. The game paddle enables you to walk around during a presentation if you like. No other accessories are necessary.

Hard Copy

Once you've finished your slide show and you've saved it to the disk with the desired control and effect commands, you're done, right? Well, almost. Usually, the group wants a hard copy of the presentation for future reference. Once again, this poses no problem. The EBS has a set of printer drivers built in to accommodate most of the popular printers capable of reproducing the Apple graphics. You can also get color hard copy if you have an Integral Data Systems Prism Printer. You might want to keep your own hard copy as a reference library of slides, grouped by application, as well. The EBS is a real time-saver: you only need to spend time putting together a sophisticated slide show once. You can then reuse slides as the need arises and mix and match your set of stock slides.

For best results, you'll want to use a color display for your presentations. I have viewed various slide shows on ordinary color TVs, color monitors, and the newer RGB (red-green-blue) color monitors, and all are fine for the job. If I had a preference it would be to use the EBS with one of the wide-screen color sets (imagine a slide 7 feet wide!). You can modify both the size of the screen and the content of the presentation on the basis of the size of your audience and the material you are presenting.

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fective manner. It can be used as a visual aid or on its own.

The program lets you prepare slides from scratch or modify existing slides, which can come from a variety of sources. You may transfer slides from disk to disk as you like.

You can load an automatic set of operation files that will run the slide presentation automatically—without operator intervention—or manually, by using the Apple keyboard or game paddle. In addition, you can manually override the automatic slide show.

Several sets of fonts give you great latitude in tailoring the emphasis of your slide show. A choice of color or black-and-white slides adds another element of variety. A set of decorative fonts is available for special applications.

The hardware you need is minimal: an Apple computer, a color or black-and-white display, and one disk drive. You can also use several drives and disks to chain together a long slide show using a multidisk option. Because the first slide follows the last and will run until it's interrupted, the show can be set to run in an "endless" loop configuration.

The EBS documentation is tutorial in nature; it begins with turning on the computer and then leads you into the entire range of options available. The table of contents serves as the index for locating specific information.

One of the program's advantages is that it can interact with a large variety of existing programs like the Visicorp series. You will immediately notice menu prompts in the same style as those Mitch Kapur developed for the Visi-family of programs.

The EBS program belongs in your library of Apple programs. Children can use it for their own schoolwork to produce reports and presentations. Businesses, too, shouldn't be without the EBS. It has tremendous potential for improving sales, productivity, and the transmission of information.

Other uses for the EBS are practically limitless; I find a new one every time I sit down with it. I suspect the Executive Briefing System will soon be to graphic presentations what Visicalc has been to numerical manipulation on microcomputers. ■

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