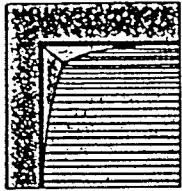


Evaluating microcomputer communications software

A step-by-step walk through two communications packages that offer access ranging from simple dial-up to sophisticated file transfer.



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very communications program designed for use on microcomputers has its own set of limitations, constraints, and operational capabilities. Although some of these properties can be discerned from examining the program's documentation and marketing literature, the best way to decide whether a program suits a particular need is to use it. However, networking managers may not have time to test a number of programs. To convey a sense of what they might look like to a user, this article examines two communications programs: a general-purpose package and one with a more sophisticated file transfer.

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How to 'blast' a file

While such simple programs as PFS:Access serve the day-to-day communications needs of many microcomputer users, others may prefer a more powerful program. One such package is Blast (blocked asynchronous transmission), marketed by the Communications Research Group of Baton Rouge, La. One key feature that separates this program from the majority of microcomputer communications programs currently marketed is its efficiency in conducting file transfer operations. Blast is further distinguished by the fact that numerous versions of the program operate on a wide variety of microcomputers, minicomputers, and mainframes.

Other machines

Its architecture enables Blast to provide file transfer capability to more than 85 computers and 20 operating systems. The range of computers on which Blast operates reads like a "who's who" listing of the computer industry. In fact, it is difficult to find a machine not supported. In addition to operating on the IBM PC series and compatible microcomputers, versions of Blast are available for use under a variety of IBM and DEC (Digital Equipment Corp.) operating environments. Other versions work with the AT&T and Berkeley Unix operating systems, Apple DOS 3.3, CP/M (control program for microcomputers), and more.

File transfer operations

If Blast were a U. S. marshal instead of a communications program, it would probably be known as the fastest gun in the country. Of course, numerous variables affect the overall throughput of a file transfer operation, such as the workload on a remote computer and the quality of a dial-up circuit. However, several tests conducted by the author verified laboratory and government agency reports concerning the transmission efficiency of the Blast program.

Transmitting a specially created file three times under Blast showed the program to be from 32 to 57 percent quicker than four other programs used by the author in the same trial.



For fast and efficient file transfers, Blast is probably the premier communications program. In addition, because of the comprehensive set of microcomputers, minicomputers, and mainframes for which versions of Blast are available, the program might represent a way out of the incompatibility problems that are faced by many businesses with a diverse mix of computers. ■

This is the first of a two-part article examining the use of microcomputer communications programs.

Gilbert Held, director of 4-Degree Consulting, is the recipient of the 1984 Karp award and the 1983 American Association of Publishers award for writing "the most outstanding microcomputer software program in the science/humanities category."