Lenny Bailes short reviews

Quick Contents

Printer Reviews

WinList summary blurb	
WinList justification (why it made the list or didn't)	good functionality in all features: printer (good NLQ, good image quality, fax (300+dpi reception, smart answer, scanner 300 /4800 emulated, copier (panel button or software -- standard copier options for # of copies, size reduction, light-dark adjustment, etc.) + batch processing from printed control sheet.

==============QUICK VIEW============
Compaq All-In-One
Price $399
Pros: Good performance in multiple function areas (print/fax/scan/copy) Excellent NLQ text, very good image quality and color matching, versatile front-panel controls & supporting software applications,

Cons: Slow output speed, short-life cartridges (compared to H-P and Epson) bug in driver currently prevents 1200 dpi output with most paper media settings. No Windows NT drivers.

Compaq's A900 All-in-One printer is a truly useful multifunction device. It combines photo-quality color output and excellent NLQ text with a full-featured fax console, dedicated paper copying, and a 24-bit 300/4800 dpi scanner.

The A900 has three paper feed mechanisms, a 100-sheet automatic tray, a single-sheet feeder for stationery and envelopes, and a 100-sheet copy/scan sleeve that accommodates envelopes or checks, photos, and standard/legal/A4 paper.

As a color inkjet printer, the A900 holds its own in comparison to mid-list Epson and H-P products. Its NLQ output at 600 dpi is better than most inkjets on plain paper. There are no dots or visible jaggies. On better laser bond stock, text output approaches true laser quality

With an optional photo-ink cartridge, the A900's 1200 dpi color output on photo glossy paper is also excellent. Although the machine's hardware specs permit 1200x1200 dpi printing on plain paper, a bug in the current driver necessitated that we use the photo-glossy media setting for all of our high-resolution tests. The driver has real-time cartridge monitor that estimates cartridge-life and reports the number

of pages/days left before you need a refill. The only flaw in the ointment is that this gauge announces the Compaq ink cartridges as comparatively short-lived. With an estimated 600 black/300 color page capacity upon installation, the indicator jumped to 200/50 after we had printed about 100 pages.

We timed the printer's normal-mode text-page output at 2.3 pages per minute, a bit slower than competing high-end inkjet models.

As a fax machine, the A900 supports a superfine 300x300 receive resolution through WinFax Basic and includes speed dial and onhook dialing features. You can hook up an answering machine to its pass-through RJ11 port and enable smart ring recognition. In DRPD mode, the fax can be trained to answer a specific ring type.

As a scanner, the unit supports up to 300-true and 4800-emulated dpi resolutions. The paper copier function runs from 1 to 99. Simple black and white copies can be done through software or without a computer through a front panel button . For greyscale & color, the A900 invokes Pagis Scanworks which offers a series of scan-enhancing algorithms and OCR. through Xerox Textbridge.

The A900 also offers a useful control sheet feature. Users can print out job control sheets, mark fax or copy options in pencil and feed the sheet into the machine to initiate specified operations.

The bottom line: Setting aside the minor driver glitch (which Compaq is currently addressing), and an apparent hungriness for ink, the All-in-One A900 is a real gem. Its above-average output quality and multifunction fax/scan/copier flexibility should be valuable additions to any small business.

PRODUCT INFO	(duplicate this table for each product reviewed)
Name/Version	QMS magicolor-2 DeskLaser
Notes	Includes Ethernet port & Monitor software. Big footprint, heavy, fast (13p/m text), lots of consumables, but long-life paper cycle
WINLIST	
Makes the WinList? (yes/no)	I'd say no, but possibly. How are its Tektronic competitors?
New or replaces what?	
WinList summary blurb	
WinList justification (why it made the list or didn't)	600 dpi color graphics not as sharp as 1200dpi inkjets -- best use is as output device for bulk business reports, rather than DTP proofing

==============QUICK VIEW============
QMS magicolor-2 DeskLaser
Price $1299
Bottom Line: high-speed workhorse for b&w output, economical color (est. $.11/p at 5% saturation) Good color 600 dpi, not as fine as newer 1200 dpi inkjets
Platforms: Win 95/98, Windows NT 4.x
Suggested requirements: Pentium CPU, 16MB RAM (NT4 - 32MB)

Pros: fast b&w text/graphic output. Good 600dpi color output on plain paper. Cost effective as bulk business output device or low-res proofing tool, Upgradable to Postscript-2, 2400x600 unit.

Cons: Big and heavy, lack of sophisticated printing features in driver (autoduplex, 2up/4up) minimal support for high res photo/image processing (no bundled application software), minor bug in airbrush halftone settings. Hardcopy documentation includes only Setup Guide. User guide is .PDF disk file.

The QMS magicolor-2 DeskLaser is an industrial strength, workgroup printer. Its robust performance, crisp 600x600 dpi mono/color output, and long-lived ink cartridges are well-suited to a business production environment. We were impressed by the printer's 13 page-per-minute text output on our tests and the precision of its color-matching on RGB and CYMK images.

The DeskLaser is bulky. It weighs 66 pounds without its cartridge consumables and 90 pounds in its shipping carton. Its large footprint (19.7 x 15.3 x 19.3") will consume some desktop real estate. But the printer appears to be built to last. It has a recommended duty cycle of 20,000 prints-per-month monochrome, or 500 color. Consumables consist of four (CYMK) toner cartridges, a belt cartridge, fuser oil bottle, and cleaning roller. These items are easy enough to install. The starter cartridges included with the printer will deliver 5000 monochrome or 3000 color pages at 5% saturation. A set of QMS refill cartridges costs about $400 but contains twice as much toner, doubling copy output. (QMS estimates production costs of 2-cents a page, monochrome and 11-cents, color.)

The DeskLaser includes both Ethernet 10BaseT and ECP/Parallel interfaces. (The bundled QMS Network Print Monitor manages TCP/IP print-sharing.) The printer ships with a single 250-sheet feed tray. (A second 250-sheet tray add-on costs $479.) Envelopes are printed from the standard feedtray. The DeskLaser has no manual single-sheet/envelope feeder. The driver has no direct support for duplex printing or 2-up/4-up print sheets. The printer's lack of advanced paper handling options may make it a less-than-perfect choice for some desktop publishing/proofing chores, although standard Letter/A4/Envelope options, transparencies, heavy paperstock, and T-shirt transfers are supported.

The DeskLaser's 600x600 dpi color printing is good, but not as smooth as the fine 1200 dpi photo-quality output of some microdot inkjets. (To beat DeskLaser output on ordinary laser bond, however, advanced inkjets require special, $1-a-sheet, photopaper. And the DeskLaser is better at CYMK and RGB color-matching than the Epson and H-P inkjets we've tested lately.)

QMS offers several upgrade options for the DeskLaser: a resolution boost to 1200x600 or 2400x600 dpi output with Postscript Level-2/PCL-5 support, memory upgrades (to 64MB), and a photocopier daughterboard. The printer's speed and economy of consumables recommend it for use in producing reports and business graphics in high-output workgroup environments. The DeskLaser is probably less appropriate as an output device for photographic images or high-end page proofs.

-- Lenny Bailes

LCD Projectors, comparitive review

PRODUCT INFO	(duplicate this table for each product reviewed)
Name/Version	InFocus LP 400
WinList summary blurb	A good accessory for Road Warrior presentations: portable, bright, and dependable,
WinList justification (why it made the list or didn't)	See above: lightweight, good image quality and includes most features of standard-size LCD unit

PRODUCT INFO	(duplicate this table for each product reviewed)
Name/Version	Acerscope 7743
Notes	Includes mouse/annotation tool
WINLIST	
Makes the WinList? (yes/no)	I'd say no
New or replaces what?	
WinList summary blurb	
WinList justification (why it made the list or didn't)	See above: (Cons: slightly larger and heavier footprint)

==============QUICK VIEW============
InFocus LP 400
Bottom Line: Light weight, small footprint
Price: $2999
Platforms: Win 3.x, Win 9x, NT

Pros: Very portable (light weight) easy to set up and use. Clear, bright colors, sharp at both `near and distant focal ranges

Cons: lacks gamma adjustment control and support for other bells and whistles such as add-on zoom lenses or memory cards
==============QUICK VIEW============
Acerscope 7743
Bottom Line: Economical price, but bulkier than the Infocus model. Acceptable, clean display in "darkened-room" scenarios. Less illumination power than Infocus LP400.
Price: $2000
Platforms: Win 3.x/Win 9.x, NT

Pros: Economical, functional, supports optional zoom lens

Cons: A little bulky for portable use; cumbersome mouse interface for access to on-screen menus, not bright enough for brightly-lit room.

Strongest Rival: Infocus LP400

Prices are dropping on LCD projectors for PC road warriors. The good news is that these devices are getting lighter and smaller, with better functionality than older, bulky units at less than half the old prices. The InFocus LP400 shows the high end of (the quality spectrum) for under $3,000. The Acer Acerscope

7743, at $1,000 less, isn't quite as impressive -- but it still showsyou can get a more-than-decent projector without breaking the bank.

The LP400 Personal Projector is an impressive offering from InFocus Systems. Weighing only 6.8 pounds, the LP 400's small footprint (3.9 x 9 x 12 inches) and bundled carrying case make it extremely portable. The projector's 700-lumen brightness is sufficient to yield a perfectly visible image even in a brightly-lit room.

The unit includes a standard D-Sub VGA interface, and can also toggle between composite or S-Video display ports. (The S-Video cable is not included.) A 1-watt mono speaker integrates tiny-plug input from a computer sound card or right/left RCA cables from a VCR.

We found that output through the VGA port was sharp and legible even at distances of 3 to 4 feet. (The recommended focal range
is 5 to 16 feet.) S-Video quality was a bit fuzzier at close range, but acceptable at ranges of 8 to 15 feet. S-Video resolution is limited to a 60Hz vertical refresh rate, whereas the VGA port can go up to 75Hz. The LP 400 supports trucolor S-VGA display resolutions from 640x480 to 1024x768 pixels. At 1024 x 768, the display is automatically "condensed" to 800x600. The condensed display tends to omit selected lines of pixels. This creates a rippling effect at 1024x768 when screen windows are repositioned and is not optimal for displaying text in small font sizes. The true 800x600 screen mode is a better choice. [sy: how well does the display compress? Does it downsample or just throw out pixels?] We were impressed by this projector's ability to render subtle differences in color intensity on our Displaymate test suite. (The projector's automatic detection/adjustment features worked well, making it unnecessary for us to use the included manual tracking and synchronization controls.)

The LP-400 has an easy-to-access on-screen menu through four directional navigation buttons. Two of the buttons double as a volume control and the console also includes convenient one-button options to switch the input source or go to standby mode. The control console permits "ceiling" and "rear projection" display inversions and supports NTSC, NTSC 4.3, PAL-M, PAL-N, and SECAM standards for the composite and S-video ports. A helpful status screen can display tghe number of hours that the bulb has been used and useful diagnostic information about the current display resolution.

The AcerNote 7743 is an economically priced projector ($1,000 cheaper than the InFocus model) with roughly equivalent features. But Acer's offering is bulkier and its output is not as bright. The 7743's physical footprint (6.6 x 16.25 x 13.25"/16 pounds) makes it less suited to use as a portable projector.

The 7743 produces a clean display image in a focal range of 5 to 20 feet -- with best results in a dark or dimly lit room. It includes most of the same physical options as the LP400: VGA, S-Video and Composite RCA ports with dual audio feed for computer and video displays. On-screen menus are driven through a pressure-disk pointing device that we found a bit awkward. On the plus side, the 7743 control console contains dedicated buttons for adjusting brightness, a "freeze-frame" button, and an annotation tool, none of which are present on the InFocus projector. The 7743 also contains a "keystone" adjustment knob, which has the effect of rotating the display backward and forward to eliminate trapezoid distortion if your projector is lower than your screen.

The 7743 has a brightness rating of 200 lumens, making it less desirable than the LP-400 for use in a brightly-lit room. On our Displaymate color scales tests, this projector failed to register subtle intensity differences in various hues and grayscales. Low-intensity grayscales appeared as black boxes and there was little difference in brightness between mid-range and high-intensity colors.[sy: did it have problems with lighter colors, darker colors, or midranges?… more info pls.] At a distance of 5 to 10 feet, our subjective impression was that MPEG multimedia had reasonable color correspondence to aperture-grille monitor display. Text at 800x600 and 640x480 resolutions was clean and readable. This projector

exhibited a bit more pixel loss in its condensed 1024x768 display mode than the InFocus LP400 did. [sy: clipping meaning… missing pixels? Bad downsampling?]

The bottom line: The InFocus LP400 and Acernote 7743 are both suitable for use in standard desktop presentation and tutorial scenarios. Budget permitting, the LP400's portability and brighter display recommend it for a wider number of presentation situations.

■　Lenny Bailes

Monitor Reviews

PRODUCT INFO	(duplicate this table for each product reviewed)
Name/Version	Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 900u
WinList justification (why it made the list or didn't)	Pros -- very good colors and color-registration, exceptionally clean, sharp text at high resolutions, added USB functionality Cons: very slight pulsing in corners, not that convenient (lacks driver diskette, and may require user adjustments),

==============QUICK VIEW=============
Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 900u

Bottom Line: Well-suited to photographic work and DTP, rich, accurate colors, excellent text display at all resolutions. Natural "flat" display for users who dislike standard CRT "rounded" effect
Price: $799
Platforms: Win 3.x/95/98, NT, Unix, Macintosh

Pros: very good colors and color-registration, exceptionally clean, sharp text at high resolutions, added USB functionality, good benchmark performance, good antiglare screen, very full-featured anti-distortion controls.

Cons: very slight pulsing in corners; monitor requires careful adjustment to eliminate pincushioning at non-preset, higher scan rates. (Lacks separate-channel RGB color compensation, but the generally excellent color display may make this feature unnecessary -- the video adapter may offer this option)
Rival: Iiyama Visionmaster ?? II

Desktop publishers and multimedia mavens will want to take a look at Mitsubishi's Diamond Pro 900u 19" monitor. Its rich colors and "natural flat" look will appeal to users who dislike the "rounded screen" of standard CRT monitors. The monitor includes a powered built-in USB hub (two "upstream" ports and three "downstream") that can simultaneously connect to two computers. Front panel controls allow the display and hub connection to be toggled on-the-fly between a D-Sub and BNC interface on separate computers.

The 900u has a 17.9" x 18.2" x 18.0", 55-lb footprint. Mitsubishi complements the standard Aperture Grille design (used by Sony in its Trinitron models) with a three-inline electron gun and corrective lens. The result is brighter, flatter image rendering that compensates for inherent concave distortion of lines near the edges and corners of the screen.

The monitor's performance on our Displaymate benchmark suite ranged from good to excellent. We needed to use the monitor's front-panel controls to adjust screen size and to compensate for corner curling and pincushioning in non-preset configurations. (We adjusted the vertical refresh rate at 1024x768 from a preset of 75Hz to 85Hz, to test the display in a higher-end, "professional" configuration.) We also had to download a Windows 95 driver and ICM color-matching profiles from Mitsubishi's website, as these weren't included in the package.

Although the Diamond Pro front-panel controls are a bit awkward to use, they contain more adjustment options than most competing models, including controls for color purity and regional geometry. The monitor supports eight automatic presets and six user-configurations, with a continuous color temperature range from 5000K to 9950K. A bundled USB-interface W95/98 Control Panel extension greatly simplifies front panel OSD adjustments.

After our adjustments, line resolution at corners of the screen was undistorted and crystal clear. Text was very sharp and legible. Performance on color registration and convergence tests was excellent. However, we detected a faint pulsing of color intensity in screen corners at all refresh rates, most noticeable when looking at light/white colors.

Watching DVD movies on this monitor, with its flat screen and perfect color balance, is a pleasure. Optical-quality anti-glare screen coating, 24-hr, seven-day-a-week support, and a three-year warranty are added benefits. The 900u can be a bit finicky at non-preset resolutions, but its well-matched colors and razor-sharp text display are probably worth a little extra adjustment time.

-- by Lenny Bailes

PRODUCT INFO	(duplicate this table for each product reviewed)
Name/Version	Philips Brilliance 201P
Notes	Really impressive performance
WINLIST	
Makes the WinList? (yes/no)	Yes (best monitor I've reviewed yet)
New or replaces what?	
WinList summary blurb	Excellent performance on all benchmarks, suitable for high-end CAD (supports 1800x1440dpi), DTP, or multimedia authoring. Large viewable screen area (diagonal 19.9") crisp, Colorific color management software allows near-perfect screen/printout matching. Easy to use OSD controls + extra USB screen management application and 4-port USB hub.
WinList justification (why it made the list or didn't)	See above: (Cons -- USB hub ports are at back of monitor, which is slightly inconvenient.)

==============QUICK VIEW=============
Philips Brilliance 201P

Bottom Line: Accurate, error-free text, line, and color display at all resolutions. Easy to configure.
Price: $1049 (+ $59 for the add-in USB hub)
Platforms: Win 3.x/95/98, NT, Macintosh
Pros: excellent benchmark performance, completely moire-free, crisp display (hi-res support at high refresh rates), easy to configure (well designed front-panel controls + Customax software controls), accurate color rendition and flexible color-matching
Cons: [] Rival? ((Can you suggest one?))
Philips
Phones (U.S.) 800-835-3506 (423)-475-8869
Web: www.monitors.be.philips.com/news/newb21.htm
Circle #xxx

If you're shopping for a distortion-free, high-performance monitor, the Philips Brilliance 201P should be on your short-list for consideration. With its excellent rendering of lines and colors and large viewable screen area (19.9"), this monitor is well-suited to use with a high-end multimedia or CAD/CAM

workstation. Its shadow-mask CRT footprint is slightly less flat than a SONY Trinitron model, but free of the aspect ratio distortion that makes true "flat screens" less useful for CAD work.

The Brilliance 201P has a 19.3'x 21.7" x 20.8", 70 lb footprint. It supports both D-SUB and BNC video connections. (An optional back-panel hatch cover attaches to shield cable connections). Front panel controls are easily-accessible, but the monitor is smart enough that you may not have to use them. The screen image is automatically centered on startup and the monitor communicates with the video card to choose a reasonable vertical refresh rate (85Hz, if supported, at 1024x768, 1280x1024, and 1600x1200 resolutions).

[[cut for space?]] We found it unnecessary to use the 201P's many front panel options, which include rotary, vertical linearity, and corner correction, anti-moire filter, .7v/1v input toggle and other standard controls. [[end cut]] All settings can be configured from a single-button and rotary knob selection dial. Monitor fine-tuning can also be done with the mouse through the supplied Customax screen management software.

The 201P excels at color matching and color management. Philips bundles Colorific's color management software, which significantly expands the number of custom and preset profiles you can use. We were particularly impressed with the automatic configuration of profiles for desktop publishing, multimedia, CAD/CAM and photographic editing. We obtained a near-perfect match-up of a complicated TIF screen image with its printed output. The monitor also produced a clean, well-defined display for DVD and MPEG playback. The 201P also delivered flawless performance on our DisplayMate video benchmark test. [[cut for space?]] It was perfectly stable on screen resolution tests -- no pulsating or distortion at screen corners. All boxes in the color-scale display screens were clearly visible, even the dim ones in the first row (which most monitors blur into the background). [[end cut]]

For ordinary business users the Brilliance 201P may be a bit of overkill. But it is competitively priced with other 21" models. A $50 optional 4-port USB hub plugs into the back of the monitor. The hub successfully handled all peripherals we tested, but we had to flip the power switch on and off , occasionally, to trigger detection of newly attached devices. The 201P has standard EPA/NUTEK power management, and ships with a three-year warranty.

-- by Lenny Bailes

Home Networking Kit

PRODUCT INFO	(duplicate this table for each product reviewed)
Name/Version	Passport Plug-In Network
Notes	Complete networking kit, through standard AC wall outlets and parallel port interface -- includes WinProxy software which provides Internet access to client pcs
WINLIST	
Makes the WinList? (yes/no)	Possibly
New or replaces what?	
WinList summary blurb	Instant Win95/98 peer networking -- no cables, no internal adapters, no fuss
WinList justification (why it made the list or didn't)	Easy to configure; provides full peer networking services. [Possible caveat -- transfer speed is slow, 18 kilobytes per second on our tests -- throughput is advertised at 350 kilobits/sec, which should produce 35K throughput, if one byte = 8bits + 2 stopbits]

==============QUICK VIEW=============
Intelogis Passport Plug-In Network
Price $199 [incl two PC plug-ins and one printer plug-in] additional PC plug-ins $79ea; printer plug-ins $59ea.

requires: Windows 95 or 98, IEEE 1284-compatible parallel port on
each network device, 5MB of disk space, and 110V single, dual, or triple phase power outlet for each node;

Bottom Line: Offers instant, full peer network connectivity for Win95/98 workstations within the same building -- but slow (parallel cable speed).

Pros: Eliminates drudgery of cabling and NIC configuration. Automatically configures hardware and software (including TCP/IP addresses). Easy to use. Bundled WinProxy software allows multiple PCs to share a single Dial-Up Internet account.

Cons: Slow data transfer speeds compared to 10BaseT. (Average 15 to 20 Kilobytes per second). Does not run on Windows NT or support gateway to NT through multihomed PC. Minor multimedia driver conflicts. More expensive than a standard 10BaseT network (depending upon cabling and carpentry costs).

If this needs to be condensed, suggested cuts are in [[brackets]]

Depending upon your network bandwidth needs and projected cabling expenses, the Passport Plug-In Network can be an economical life-saver or an expensive luxury. [[It connects Win95/98 PCs and printers without using 10Base cabling or internal network adapters.]] Passport provides full Win95/98 file and printer sharing through smart, external AC plug-in modules. As a bonus, the bundled WinProxy software permits multiple PCs on the network to share a single dial-up Internet account.

Passport's great advantage for small business users is its "instant," painless setup. Hardware and software configuration are both automatic [[-- the package even configures its own TCP/IP addresses.]] The

Passport adapters don't perform well plugged into a surge protector. Intelogis thoughtfully includes two powerstrips in the kit so you can free up wallsockets. We used the supplied adapters to connect two PCs and a printer in different rooms of a two-storey flat. The entire process (including software installation) took less than an hour. The Passport Administrator let us quickly share the printer and map network drives with just a few mouse-clicks.

Users who prefer the standard Win95/98 Network Neighborhood interface can use it to share resources in the usual way. [[Passport supports Microsoft's NETBEUI, IPX-SPX, and TCP/IP in addition to the proprietary Intelogis PLX transport protocol.]] The range of a Passport network is defined by common electrical wiring in a building or buildings that share a power transformer. To avoid the possibility of neighbors tapping into your network, Intelogis includes a "secure network" option that hides selected resources. When computers and printers on the "public" network are dragged into a "secure" network they disappear from the common listing. [[(For additional protection, you can assign standard Win95/98 Share-level passwords to any shared resource.)]]

Passport network traffic is much slower than standard 10BaseT. Throughput is limited by the parallel port interface that connects each node to its plug-in AC adapter. Network printing is unidirectional only, so output is a bit slower than what you might expect through a bidirectional ECP cable. We averaged file transfer rates of 15 to 20 kilobytes per second in our tests with compressed images and Windows CAB files. While this is less than the advertised 350 kilobit/second capacity of an ECP printer interface, it's also about 10 times better than a 28.8Kbps Internet connection. We were able to put Passport's WinProxy Internet feature to good use in sharing a 128kbps ISDN account between our clients on the network.

The bottom line is this: if you have to link PCs in different rooms, but dread the carpentry and cable work, the Passport Plug-In Network kit may be just what you want. It's easy to use and it works. However, if you require Ethernet speed and can afford the cabling, you'll get much better performance out of a standard 10/100BaseT network.

-- Lenny Bailes

Software/Utilities:

EasyCrypto 98 File encryption/decryption utility
Price $29.95
Secret Mail 2.0 e-mail client with built in encryption/decryption
Price $59.00
File Shredder 2.0 File delete/overwrite utility
Price $14.90
Requires: Windows 95/98/NT4.0, disk space: 3MB

Bottom Line: Offers simple, fast encryption/decryption of folders or individual files under 128-bit Blowfish algorithm. Slightly pricey, as similar shareware utilities offer more functionality

Pros: Strong encryption/decryption is integrated into Explorer Shell options. Supports quick drag-and-drop from Windows Explorer. Includes 40-bit encryption option for transmittal outside U.S.A.

Cons: Lacks flexibility (can't manage multiple passwords in same directory), requires additional purchases for e-mail and shredder capability. Minor interface limitations (won't encrypt/decrypt in root directory, appends current date to protected files) E-mail program has finicky SMTP handler, sometimes balks at incorrect file dates on ISP-stored messages.

[[Suggested cuts in brackets.]]

[[In recent months, "bullet-proof" encryption algorithms have become grist for business-section headlines: once thought to be impregnable, the RSA and DES-encryption schemes used by the National Security Agency can now be compromised by skilled hackers within minutes.]]

TopStudio's EasyCrypto 98 is a security utility for Windows 95/98/NT4+ that makes use of the newer 128-bit "Blowfish" encoding algorithm. (As of this writing, unlike RSA and DES, the "Blowfish" scheme has yet to be cracked.) To protect the security of your data EasyCrypto 98 offers convenient Windows Explorer right-click extensions. [[You can quickly select and encrypt/decrypt individual files or folders.]].The package also supports automatic creation of encoded, self-extracting ZIP archives. TopStudio's companion utility, Secret Mail 2.0 is pared-down e-mail client that can transmit/receive encrypted messages (+ file attachments) through SMTP/POP3 mail or a private LAN. (For POP3 mail, the program can be used as an extension to a full-featured client like Eudora or Microsoft Outlook/Outlook Express.)

TopStudio is a Norwegian shareware company in the process of going commercial. Easycrypto 98 and Secret Mail deliver their promised functionality but (like many shareware offerings) have some interface limitations and minor glitches. EasyCrypto offers several convenient ways to load and access files for encryption/decryption: you can right-click in a Windows Explorer listing, select from an Open Files dialog or drag and drop into a file window. Multiple files/directories can be bulk-processed, but only if they all share the same encryption password. The program becomes confused if you try to unpack self-extracting archives into a root directory (such as A:\ or C:\). [[You need to be sure to use a nested folder as the target.]] We were also disappointed by the loss of the original date/time stamp in encrypted files. (Some of EasyCrypto's competitors share this limitation.)

On the plus side of the balance: EasyCrypto 98 includes a weaker, 40-bit version of the Blowfish algorithm for users to comply with strong encryption import/export regulations. A virus-protection feature checks

the integrity of encrypted files or archives before decryption, warning you if the originals have been altered.

The Secret Mail application, sold separately, encrypts e-mail messages into transmission envelopes that require user-specific "ID Cards" to become readable. As with PGP, you send your personal ID Card to each recipient. Encrypted messages can be dragged (as attachments) from a regular mail client into Secret Mail, or you can download directly through the program's built-in SMTP and LAN transports. We found that Secret Mail's POP3 "receive message" feature was a bit sensitive to erratic handling by ISPs, but we had no difficulty using it to send encoded messages and attachments. We used Eudora Pro to pick these messages up and dragged them to a Secret Mail window to "decode" them.

Setting aside the limitations we found, EasyCrypto is a convenient "quick-and-dirty" encryption tool. Secret Mail is a bit pricey for its functionality. (Some competitors combine "Blowfish" file and e-mail encryption within a single package, along with the file shredding feature that TopStudio offers in another separate application.)

<div align="center">-- Lenny Bailes</div>

(From Computer World, 1998
Eudora Pro 4.0 CommCenter

<div align="center">Reviewed by Lenny Bailes</div>

Eudora 4.0 CommCenter is an upgrade of a popular personal e-mail client. The "CommCenter" portion of the package consists of Internet services: subscription "Fax anywhere" and subscription newsgroup access, plus a free Internet paging/conferencing utility. By integrating IMAP4 and LDAP (Light Weight Directory Access Protocol) support into Eudora and offering users a fax enabled maildrop, QualComm hopes to attract the attention of Enterprise buyers seeking a "universal inbox."

The base e-mail client is a fine upgrade of the previous version of Eudora: it adds useful features (HTML message formatting, new tool windows, voicemail, IMAP4 and LDAP support) to a rich, user-friendly interface. However, the CommCenter enhancements fall short of delivering the enterprise functionality of Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes. Eudora 4.0 CommCenter lacks features to route personal scheduling information, distribute documents through shared network folders, or display custom forms and correlate responses. Qualcomm's Auto-configuration access protocol (ACAP) does permit automatic network installation and configuration of CommCenter as a client for Eudora WorldMail Server, v. 2.

The new IMAP4 compliance of the mail client permits easy real-time synchronization of local message stores with an IMAP server message base. Eudora Pro 4.0 (and previous versions) can perform partial synchronization of local message stores with standard POP3 servers.

The integration of HTML display support for incoming and outgoing messages now complements Eudora's support for proprietary text formatting extensions. Eudora Pro 4.0 is bundled with a browser-only version of Microsoft's Internet Explorer, v. 4.0, and Apple's QuickTime extensions which you may add to your desktop during installation. [[** Cut the following bracketed material, if there are space limitations**]] [[**The standard Eudora message viewer lets you display Qualcomm or HTML formatted text, multiple fonts, bullets, and inline JPEG/BMP images. QuickTime adds a wider variety of JPEG support. If you elect to install IE 4.0, then messages can also display GIF and PNG images, inline images from websites, numbered lists, tables and forms, or other embedded objects created with Microsoft's Dynamic HTML.**]]   This enhanced display support may be a welcome feature for some users, but the best part of it is that it's easy to disable if you don't want it. Eudora "PureVoice", another new feature,

lets you create and attach voice recordings to e-mail messages The proprietary Qualcomm format for these attachments condenses soundfiles to about 1/10th the size of standard Win95 Wave files.

The Eudora Pro 4.0 mail client is easier to configure and more acessible than the previous version (although its new logo slows down initial program loading). A built-in wizard walks you through account setup (settings can be imported from an existing Outlook, Outlook Express, or Netscape configuration). Mailboxes and message stores created under previous versions of Eudora are automatically migrated to the new environment. QuickStart and Reference guides in Adobe PDF format complement the printed manual.

The Eudora interface is well-organized and extremely functional. It includes a series of convenient filter options that can automatically shunt mailing list correspondence and other specialized messages into pre-configured mailboxes or folders. [[**cut the following bracketed material if there are space limitations**]] [[**Filters also allow you to automatically open or print messages, notify applications that email has arrived, or automatically forward a message to a designated address.**]] New in this version is a "Make Filter" wizard that automates the creation of message filters for novice users. Also new in Eudora Pro 4.0 are a series of dockable/floatable tool windows: a Windows file browser, "Personalities" (alternate accounts), "Signature," and "filter-report" windows. Eudora's address book can be used to set up multiple address listings that contain e-mail addresses, real postal addresses, telephone/fax numbers, and a freeform comment field.

Support for third-party plugins is another attractive Eudora feature. These modules, written for the Eudora API, add functionality to the basic package. This version includes the KeyView file viewer, PGP encryption utility, McAfee VirusScan, Aladdin Stuffit (for Macintosh files) and a few sample programs that automatically change text case,

The Fax and Voicemail service included in the CommCenter edition of Eudora lets you transmit, receive, and manage faxes or voice mail through the Eudora interface and a subscription Internet account. The service is free for three months, thereafter, $12.50 per month. Qualcomm's Internet Pager permits you to contact and conference with other Eudora users over the Internet. Internet Pager is an extremely simple, text-only utility, unsophisticated in comparison with Microsoft's NetMeeting or Mirabilis ICQ. The other bundled component of CommCenter is a set of trial subscriptions to Internet news and information services (NewsBeat, Inquisit, Infobeat, and Clarinet.) All of the other upgrade features (including the sample plugins) are available in the Eudora Pro 4.0 basic e-mail package.

Eudora Pro's clean, full-featured interface continues to recommend it as the personal e-mail client of choice. While IMAP4 and LDAP support enhance its desirability, we'd be hesitant to recommend CommCenter as an enterprise replacement for Outlook 97/MS Exchange, Lotus Notes, or even Netscape Communicator. The Internet services that Qualcomm has bundled do not compensate for the advanced functionality offered by other Enterprise Client/Server packages

Rating B (CommCenter), A- (basic e-mail)

Notebook review
(from ComputerWorld, July 1998)

Sony VAIO 505G and 505GX notebooks
Price: $1,999 (505G), $2,699 (505GX) Sony Electronics, Inc. 888-315-7669
www.sony.com/pc

Pro: Compact and light; good power management; pretty good multimedia

support

Con: Size and weight limits configuration options; CD-ROM an external
option; use of common ports requires port replication be attached

Grade: B
by Lenny Bailes

Current wisdom among notebook computer manufacturers is that smaller is
better. This is true despite user preference for capable systems that
usually require more size and weight. But notebook makers continue to look for the best of both worlds.
Sony has become the latest notebook maker to try to appeal to corporate users with a hin but capable
notebook.

Sony's VAIO 505G and 505GX notebooks are among the first to arrive in the marketplace with the new
SuperSlim size. These notebooks are less than one inch thick, and slightly smaller in area than a standard
sheet of typing paper.

In their standard configuration, the VAIOs weigh only three pounds. But many users will quickly add to
that. The weight will grow by 1.5 pounds for the included detachable port replicator and external floppy
drive, and by another half pound for the $300 optional external CD-ROM drive. But in the standard
configuration, the VAIOs offer most of the features found in more expensive, larger-footprint notebooks.

The VAIOs use a 10.4-in. TFT display and MPEG-accelerated video circuitry that delivers undistorted, full-
screen playback of multimedia video. The bundled software applications are skewed toward home-
consumers: Sony's Picturegear, Digital Photo Manager, Microsoft Money and Intuit's Quicken Basic.
Microsoft Works is included for light business use. Both machines include a 56K-bit/sec. internal modem,
single PC Card slot and Universal Serial Bus port

The 505G ships with a 200MHz MMX CPU. The 505GX's processor runs at 266 MHz, and this model has an
I-link (IEEE 1394 Firewire) port to accommodate Sony's Digital Handycam Camcorder. Otherwise, the two
models are identical. The 505G unit that I worked with performed very well for a machine of its CPU class.
The screen display was crisp and Sony also got the Windows 98 power management features right.
Mobile users will need this feature, since the standard battery has an estimated life of just 1.5 to 2.5
hours. (An optional long-life battery extends this time to 5 hours. The 83-character keyboard is small but
functional, with duplicate Shift, Ctrl, Alt, and Fn keys and large Enter and Backspace keys. Both VAIOs
include a programmable power key on the side of the case that provides one-button access to the
function of your choice.

The chief virtue of these machines is their portability, but this is also their principal limitation. The floppy
drive is an external plug-in unit. An optional 14X external CD-ROM drive may be purchased separately.
The CD-ROM drive uses the system's only PC Card slot, and must be plugged into a separate AC adapter --
so you won't be using it on airplane flights. In order to print, or gain access to external serial, keyboard
and mouse ports, you must plug in the included port replicator attachment. The 2.1GB hard disk
configuration may limit the VAIO's effectiveness as a professional design tool, but should be no
impediment to creating business presentations and displaying MPEG-1 multimedia. These units should be
a good buy for mobile users of Office 97 who need to shed weight and space in their travel bags. Sony
offers a 64MB RAM configuration for both machines, with an upgrade to 96MB to be available in 3rd
Quarter, 1998.