

## *Overhead Express*

Reviewed by Richard A. Schwier

*Business and Professional Software, Inc.*, 143 Binney Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, (617) 491-3377.

*Hardware Requirements:* PC-DOS/MS-DOS, 192kb RAM, 2 disk drives, printer.

Textual overhead transparencies are arguably the most significant source of torture inflicted on students at all levels. Who among us has never been subjected to a demented math teacher who delighted in the interplay of blunt transparency pens and equally obscure formulae?

Riding to the rescue is a simple program from Business & Professional Software, Inc. called *Overhead Express*. *Overhead Express* is a program for creating textual overhead transparency masters — nothing else. Sure, you can use the masters as garage sale signs, but in essence, *Overhead Express* is dedicated software. This dedication is its greatest charm and its most serious limitation, but within this precise focus, the program ranges from extremely simple to quite sophisticated.

### *The Package*

*Overhead Express* is menu driven from the front-end, and from this point you can elect to create presentations in one of two editors, review existing work, print the completed transparency masters and alter the system configuration. I'll introduce you briefly to each of the major components of the package.

The Express Editor contains twelve fill-in-the-blank templates with many of the more common types of transparencies represented. It is extremely easy to use; if you have some experience with other tools, you will be able to figure this one out without even looking at the documentation. I have found that this editor meets most of my production needs.

The Custom Editor allows you more flexibility to make your own transparency masters, templates and screen presentations. Although you will probably use it less frequently, it is worth the trouble. The custom editor is somewhat more difficult to learn, but no problem if you have ever used a word processor which required "dot commands."

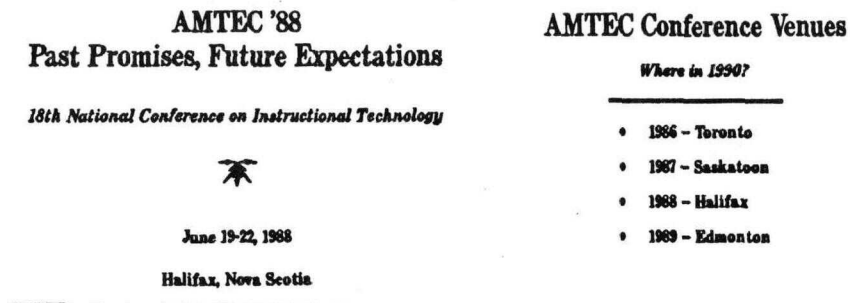
Review on Screen permits you to check your work on screen before you bother printing. Another option checks files for errors.

The Documentation in *Overhead Express* is well designed and includes tutorials, many useful examples and fairly comprehensive system descriptions and options.

### *The Express Editor*

This is the quickest way to produce transparencies. You are offered twelve pre-designed templates which can be visually scanned by pressing F1. These twelve represent a handy assortment of common productions needs: A list of centred or left justified points, title page, outline, grid, budget, quotation, two- and three-level cross breaks, prose, titles with a window for illustrations and a two column comparison (*see Figure 1 for examples*).

Figure 1. *Examples of Transparencies Using the Express Editor.*

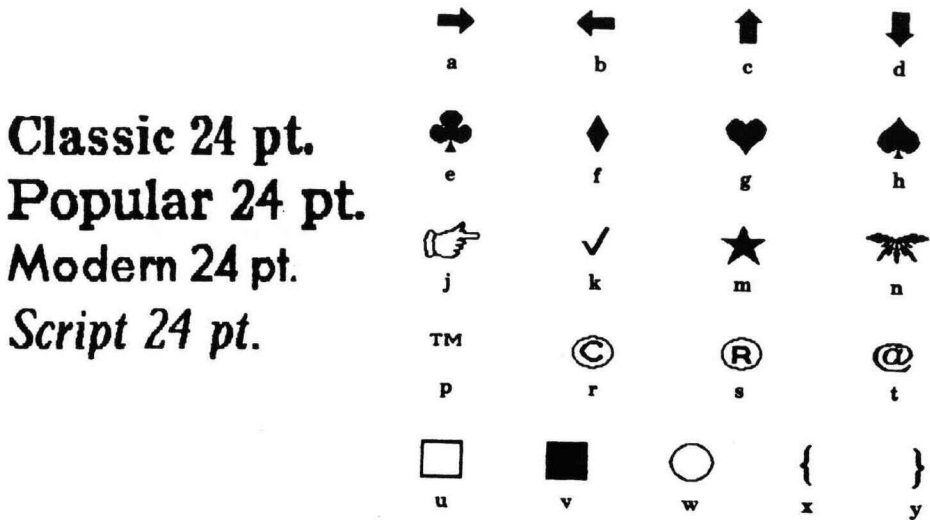


I have found that I seldom wander from these twelve templates because they are so easy to use, and the results are so pleasing—there's the rub. I often catch myself trying to conform my content to the formats offered rather than going to the trouble to custom design a format more naturally suited to my needs. Now this is certainly self-criticism, not a criticism of the software, but I suspect there are a number of you who would also yield to the sirens's song. Let this be fair warning that Overhead Express will lure you toward the rocks.

### *The Custom Editor*

The custom editor, although more cumbersome to use, gives you access to the full range of layout, fonts and highlighting offered by this package. In addition to producing overhead transparency masters, you may also use the custom editor to develop screen presentations for displays and the like. There are a variety of fonts and a number of graphic symbols (*see Figure 2 for examples*). These can be used in different sizes and emphasized using shadows and highlighting features to produce several different effects.

The custom editor is not difficult to use if you have any experience with embedded dot commands and escape commands in early word processors. In this editor, dot commands (e.g., font) are used to define parameters that remain in effect for up to an entire page. Backslash commands (e.g., \font) remain in effect for only a single line, or until turned off within a line. The resulting series of commands do not resemble the final product, and you need to review the completed product on screen to determine whether you have what you want (*see Figure 3 on page 204*).

Figure 1. *Samples of Fonts and Symbols Available.*

The custom editor can also be used to string together several frames, each shown for a designated time period using a `.wait <# seconds>` command. The result is a screen show, the type you might see at a trade show display where several screens of information are shown in sequence. This isn't something you will use every day, but it is nice to have around for special occasions.

### *Checking and Producing Presentations*

Several options on the main menu allow you to check your presentations and finally produce them on either the screen or printer. Under Check Presentation you can either Review on Screen a reduced version of your final product as it will appear when you actually print it, or select Verify Presentation and check the presentation file (all of the commands and text) for errors either automatically or manually. I usually restrict my selection to Review on Screen, as my main interest is in the 'look' of the transparency master.

Finally you may produce your file (which may contain several transparencies or screens) on either a printer or the screen. Caution! Producing on screen is specifically for those rarely created screen shows — not transparencies. The format of a transparency is different than the format for a monitor screen. There is no reduction of the image to make your transparency fit on your monitor. As a result, only a portion of the image is reproduced on the screen. To review your transparencies on screen before printing them, you must select Review on Screen under Check Presentation. This is a minor, yet disconcerting, bit of confusion in the main menu of the program.

Another limitation of the program is in its system configuration. Among

Figure 3. *Commands and Product from the Custom Editor.*

```

:.page
:.elastic
:See you in
:.elastic
:.font S60
:.box
:Edmonton
:.box end
:.elastic
:.font C40
:for
:.elastic
:AMTEC '89
:.elastic

```

See you in



Edmonton

for

AMTEC '89

other things, you will need to specify the printer being used, paper dimensions and graphics adaptor. The list of printers accommodated by Overhead Express is very limited, and includes only the mainstream of printers. Still, given that most "fringe" printers use the same protocol as one of the mainstream printers, you will probably find that one of the configurations works. I managed to connect an Apple Imagewriter to an IBM XT for this program successfully after playing for about two hours.

#### *Documentation*

The documentation for this program was unnecessary for the rudimentary use of the program—high praise! For more sophisticated applications, I found the documentation well designed, clearly and economically written and comprehensive. Users who are comfortable with the format of the IBM DOS manuals (a breed apart) will enjoy the Reference section, which mimics that format.

#### *Recommendation*

For a simple, inexpensive, dedicated piece of software, Overhead Express receives my heartiest applause. It is easy to use and effective. I use it often and my students are grateful.

My main reservation is that because it is primarily textual, graphic images may be relegated to the back bench . . . and yes, to those of you firmly entrenched in the Apple orchard, the Mac can do many of the same things using other software . . . and incorporate graphics easily.

## REVIEWER

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