Easy-to-use LinksWare connects the documents

Version 3.0 creates electronic links among text, pictures and movies

By Michael Murie

LinksWare Corp. recently shipped Version 3.0 of its "hypermedia" application, LinksWare. The $189 program lets users create links between standard-format files such as Microsoft Word documents and QuickTime movies.

While Apple's HyperCard provides buttons for linking between cards, it's comparatively difficult to create and maintain links from words in a HyperCard document. LinksWare offers users a simplified approach for linking documents: You select a word or phrase, then select a file that you want to link to.

Creating links

The first time you use LinksWare, you must create a Link Set. Links are stored in sets, not in the documents themselves. You can store different links in different sets, and you can have more than one set of links for a document.

After you create a Link Set, you use the Open command to open the text file in which you will create a link. LinksWare uses Apple's XTND technology to read documents; the program includes XTND filters for the most common word processing applications. LinksWare displays the file in a noneditable window (you can't edit documents, only add links to them).

Creating a link is very simple: You choose Add Link from the Links menu and select the word or phrase that you want to create the link from (Version 3.0 includes a tool palette, which you can also use for basic link functions). An Open

File dialog appears, which lets you choose the document to link to. You can link to a variety of documents, including other text files; PICT, Paint, Sound and QuickTime files; and compiled AppleScripts. You can also link documents to themselves. For instance, clicking on a linked word could scroll the document to a particular paragraph in the document.
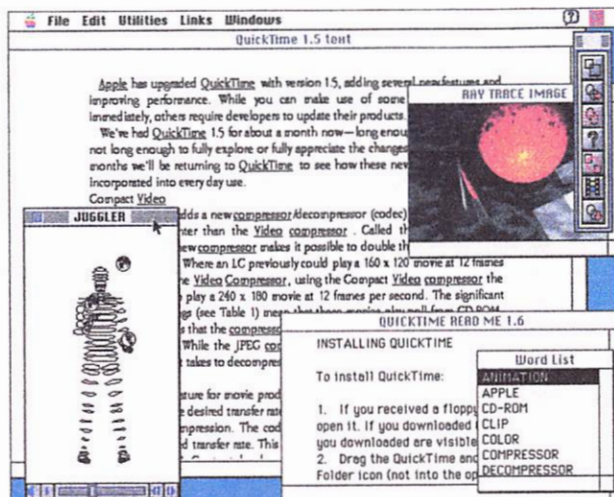
Editing links

When you click on a linked word, LinksWare highlights it, then executes the link. If the word links to a separate file, the file is opened in another window.

Once you've created the link, you can "edit" it with the Bind function. This lets you reposition or resize the window or scroll to a specific word in the file (even if you are linking within a document). The next time the link is executed, the file will open to the new location. The Bind function can also be used to start QuickTime movies at a chosen frame number. The Terminate Clip command specifies at which frame the movie should stop playing. LinksWare, however, does not let you resize QuickTime movies.

Links can be associated with individual words in a document. If a link is added to the word "QuickTime" in a document, every occurrence of that word in the document will have the same link. If you try to add another link to "QuickTime," LinksWare will ask you if you want to replace the existing link. Links to the same word in another document, however, can be different.

Because links are stored separately from documents, links based on single words will still work if the original document has been edited. Phrases, however, work differently.

The underlined words in this document are linked; several of the links are shown. The tool palette provides a shortcut to menu commands for adding, binding and removing links. The Word List displays all the linked words in a set.

LinksWare stores a linked phrase as a location. If the document is subsequently edited, the link will no longer work correctly. Therefore, you should link a phrase in a document only when you know that the document will not be edited.

Displaying links

LinksWare offers two ways to display linked words. You can have all the linked words in a document displayed in a type style of your choice, such as underline or italic. An option from the Words menu also provides a list of linked words in the open document; this list, however, is not alphabetized.

LinksWare also gives you several ways to view links. In the Expanded mode, LinksWare displays any word that has a link stored in the Link Set. If you click on the word, a window lists the other files that contain links for that word; you can then open those files to see where the link goes. We would like to just go to the link. If your open document has a link for the word, LinksWare will not list the links in other documents; it will simply execute the link.

The Abstract feature creates a text file containing a list of all the links associated with a particular word. The file lists the word, the name of the document it's linked to, and a paragraph of text that surrounds each occurrence of the word in the document.

Finally, LinksWare lists all the words and files linked in a set, but they're in two separate lists. What's missing is a list that shows what your entire linking system looks like — one that shows which words are within which files.

Documentation and support

The manual for this fairly simple program is appropriately small and very good. The company is a small enterprise, so when you call the office, you won't always get a human voice. We called twice with questions and found responsiveness to be good.

Two distributable versions of LinksWare are provided for those who want to pass their documents on to others. LinksWare Runtime lets users view documents but not create links. The ReadLinks program works only with documents that are linked to themselves. Both programs require a distribution license for more than 20 copies.

Conclusions

LinksWare is a simple utility that easily creates electronic links between documents. We would like to see more-structured information about the links in the system, an option to add different links to the same word and an easier way to share links across documents (perhaps a copy function). We also think users should be able to create permanent links to phrases, although we understand the problems inherent in such a feature.

With a street price of less than $100, however, LinksWare is an inexpensive utility that offers users something practically unavailable elsewhere. While you can use HyperCard or Aldus Corp.'s SuperCard to create an on-line reference that links words to other documents, LinksWare's system is far easier to use. And with the support for AppleScript, you can create some quite sophisticated productions.

LinksWare Corp. is at 641 Lily St., Monterey, Calif. 93940-1631. Phone (408) 372-4155; fax (408) 646-9104. □