

D.T.P.

MICHAEL GREEN takes a look at the wider implications of the new technology

DESK Top Publishing, or DTP as it is commonly known, has flourished in South Africa for about four years now, and the advantages of economy, flexibility and variety are obvious.

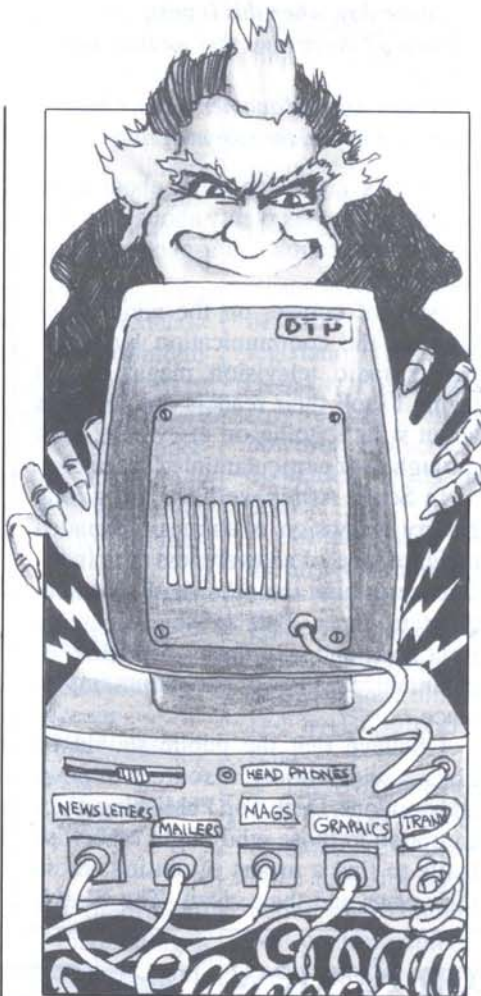
You can produce almost anything on your desk top, from a house magazine to a newspaper, from an office memo to sophisticated four-colour advertising.

On your desk-top equipment you can produce different pictures, graphics, different type styles and layout formats, but a word of caution. The equipment, the technology, cannot do everything for you. It can obey your commands, and to some degree think for you, but it does not and cannot displace human talent. You still need to have writing skills, and editing skills and visual skills. Technology is the servant, not the master, and I am always more interested in what is said than in how it was printed.

The fact that there is still a place for a writer who can tell a tale or construct an argument or pen a graceful phrase is cause for some consolation to me in my declining years.

What are the implications of the development of Desk Top Publishing? The implications are, I suggest, huge.

Anybody who has some basic skills and R20 000 or so to buy a computer, a scanner and a printer can become a publisher. Publishers exercise influence of one kind or another, no matter what they publish. The intention of the publisher is



to inform and to some degree to influence, even if it is only to persuade more people to join the Boy Scouts.

Influence in the wider, political sense has, in the past, been exercised by the big publications, the newspapers and the magazines. It requires a great deal of money to launch and sustain publications of this kind, and typically they have been in the hands of the rich and powerful, be

it the eccentric millionaire, a political party or a group of shareholders in a mining company. And the vast sums of capital at risk have imposed a responsibility, a discipline, an accountability, an inhibition if you like, on the people who run these publications.

I have many responsibilities as the Editor of *The Daily News* and the *Sunday Tribune*, but quite clearly one of my main duties is to keep them afloat, to keep them financially viable, in the interests of the readers, the shareholders and the staff who work there. It's no good being the best paper in town if you have to close down because you are losing too much money.

But this kind of restraint hardly applies to a desktop publisher who has invested R20 000, as his working capital in a computer, a scanner and a printer. He can, within reason, publish what he pleases or what he thinks there may be a demand for.

I am strongly in favour of this. I believe in communication. I don't believe that the channels of communication should be restricted to the favoured few. If anyone wants to start a daily or weekly or monthly publication propagating their own political or economic ideas, they should be absolutely free to do so. In spite of our changing times, there are still plenty of laws that would prevent publishers from preaching murder and pillage, or an avenging crusade, or the complete upheaval of our society.

But, of course, there are some disadvantages in the kind of desk top free-for-

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all that one could envisage for the future. It could provide a platform for cranks or villains such as those who distributed pamphlets in Natal saying that on a certain day black people should murder whites and rape Indians.

Desk Top Publishing could also lead to a vast increase in the printed garbage that arrives in our post boxes every day, offering anything from plumbing services to insurance policies and encyclopaedias.

It could lead to the publication and dissemination of reckless and unjustified and damaging statements, with very little redress on the part of persons who may be injured by those statements. It's not much use instituting an expensive legal action for defamation against a publisher with a capital base of R20 000, and other avenues of complaint could be equally unrewarding.

I am a member of the South African Media Council, which exists to protect the freedom of the media and to consider complaints against the media, and not long ago we had to dismiss a complaint against a little desk top publication because first, it was difficult to track down who was actually responsible for it and second, it was not a member of the media within our own Media Council definitions.

There are probably other patent and latent hazards in the DTP explosion that seems likely in the nineties. A conservationist suggested to me not long ago that this would sharpen further men's insatiable appetite for paper, which would mean the felling of forests and the poisoning of rivers from the effluent of pulp mills. Rather a gloomy prognosis and perhaps too pessimistic.

Having said all that, let me look briefly into a more cheerful crystal ball. I have no doubt whatsoever that communication, in the broadest sense of the term, is the key to harmony and happiness in the world at large, if indeed those admirable qualities are ever attainable. At its most basic we have the face-to-face encounter, FW de Klerk meeting Nelson Mandela, George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev. We all know that much good can come from such forms of communication.

As the twentieth century Irish poet James Stephens says:

*My enemy came nigh;
And I
Stared fiercely in his face...
Then, as I turned away,
My enemy,
That bitter heart, and savage, said to me:
...Some day, when this is past;
When all the arrows that we have are
cast;
We may ask one another why we hate,
And fail to find the story to relate.*

There's not much there about computers but there is plenty about the value of communication, inter-personal communication.

And, of course, on the wider scale there is the communication by newspapers, radio, television, magazines, all trying to tell their readers and listeners about what's going on elsewhere, seen through their particular tinted spectacles.

In South Africa we have had a long history of division, of animosity founded on ignorance, of unawareness of or indifference to how the other half, or three-quarters, lives. That is slowly coming right now, and as it does so the lines of communication are of paramount importance.

I believe that the public should be given a wide variety of sources of news and opinions. Desk Top Publishing gives an option to those who might otherwise battle to find a means of putting across their news and their views. *The Weekly*

Mail is a good example, although I would not describe it as being without adequate financial resources.

I do not accept the criticism that is sometimes made that the conventional Press – the establishment Press – is blinkered and narrow in its view and interpretation of events. Most of us try very hard to reflect a wide variety of opinions; for example, the *Daily News* publishes weekly extracts from the Black Press and the Afrikaans Press, knowing that most of our readers do not normally read those newspapers.

But there is always room for a wider range of publications if, as I said earlier, they fulfil a need. There seems little doubt that people in the world in general today are better informed than they have been at any time in the past. And for that the printed word and the electronic impulse have been responsible.

The social implications are huge. Consider Eastern Europe, where decades of suppression of any critical information could not prevent an eventual political and economic upheaval. In spite of all the efforts at censorship and control, the people managed to keep themselves informed and in the end they made their own judgment on their affairs.

Some DTP practitioners no doubt will carry heavy responsibilities with their publications as we speed along to the millennium. I don't know how much interest I will be taking in these matters by the year 2000, but I have no doubt that there is an exciting road ahead, with further technological improvements and developments.

What will South Africa be like? I don't know, nor does anyone, but I think it will be a pleasant place to live in, and I think that communication at all levels will be more important than ever. On balance, I think the outlook is bright, for our country and for Desk Top Publishing.

Michael Green is Editor-in-Chief of the Sunday Tribune and The Daily News.

Details on the desk-top Review

The Rhodes University Journalism Review was produced on the Editor's home computer fitted with a standard 14" screen.

Output is 300dpi from an HP LaserJet III with resolution enhancement technology and using a PacificPage PostScript cartridge.

The magazine was produced using Xerox Ventura Publisher and CorelDraw, with graphics integrated at repro.

It was printed on Sappi's In-combo Gloss 80gsm with a cover section on 150gsm Dukuza Gloss.

