

DECwrite v2.0: A Novice's Perspective

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This paper will show why I changed from using TeX to using DECwrite. The advantages for doing this are the import/export features, online readability through the Export to Bookreader... function, and its user-friendliness (similar to Microsoft Word, but more powerful). Another prime advantage of using DECwrite is the elimination of paper waste through the online readability format through the use of Bookreader.

TeX to DECwrite

As a TeX user for the last eight years converting to DECwrite was not as difficult as first thought. If you know about TeX, you know that it is said to be the best mathematical typesetting, or text processing, system around. However, the learning curve and the fact that TeX is not a WYSIWYG system have been two of the major disadvantages to its use.

DECwrite offers robust word processing; desktop publishing for layout and content driven documents; an on-board draw package; CDA LiveLink connections to images, spreadsheets, and business graphics; fully internationalized font sets; multi-vendor, multi-desktop, multi-operating system capability; and very successful desktop publishing product. Many of DECwrite's utilities are similar to those of Microsoft Word (word processing) and MacDraw II (graphics) on a Macintosh. DECwrite's menu bar, as well as its pull-down menus, help the learning curve proceed at a rapid pace. Several predefined document styles— from a letter to a telephone directory—are provided.

In TeX, setting up style files requires defining your own styles from scratch with no predefined formats. DECwrite allows the creation of your own personal styles, as well as modification of existing styles. TeX allows the same; however, you must be familiar with the various aspects of typography and a small amount of programming to create an effective style.

Formal Training vs No Training

Most software packages come with an online tutorial program or a manual to walk you through the use of the software. DECwrite has an online tutorial within the application itself that is accessible from the Help menu. This tutorial takes you through the simple steps of setting up a memo with the inclusion of two graphics. Once you become familiar with this lesson, you are able to tackle almost anything.

The online help library covers all the menu items. It provides detailed instruction on the use of DECwrite's features aiding you in the creation of professional-looking documents.

The ability to teach myself everything I have done in DECwrite by using the Help key has been of major benefit. As no documentation set was readily available to me, I managed to produce two documents without significant problems. The final results make you appreciate the user-friendliness of DECwrite.

TeX, on the other hand, offers no online tutorial program, the manual is not easily readable, and there is no online help library. Therefore, it is not as easy to learn how to use TeX without many hours of reading and experimenting with the software.

Formal training by attending a class is preferred to effectively learn the use of TeX; however, DECwrite is written in such a way that the documentation along with the online support is enough. Attending a formal DECwrite training session may be necessary to learn how to create your own style tem-

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plates. I am looking forward to this during the next year.

TeX Document Conversion

As mentioned before, all previous documents were done in TeX. Upon discovering DECwrite, I began converting all TeX documents into DECwrite format. These conversions are done by using *detex*, a code which removes all TeX command sequences from a file leaving a plain ASCII file. The file is now ready for importing into DECwrite format.

Special Uses of DECwrite

Importing Files

To import files into DECwrite, open a new document with the appropriate pre-written or self-created style file. The next two steps demonstrate how to import a file:

1. Pull down the File menu displaying the **Include Document...** from the **Import/Export** submenu. A dialog box appears asking you to select the necessary document.
2. After the document is selected, it is automatically included after the current page.

When all formatting is accomplished, you have a nice looking document that is ready for printing.

Importing not only involve plain text files; but also graphics.

Importing Graphics (Linking Pictures)

Importing graphics into a DECwrite document is easily done. The linked graphics can be in the form of DDIF (the CDA format used by DECwrite) or EPS files. Images scanned with either DECimage or TIFF images are importable via the use of the CDA Converter Library. Graphics can also be created in DECwindows Paint and linked to DECwrite documents.

Once graphics are included in your document, you have a finished document complete with graphics.

In comparison to TeX, graphics inclusion in DECwrite is much easier. The ease of being able to see the actual graphics on screen in the document makes DECwrite a very suitable package. TeX does

not allow you the ability to see the actual graphic on screen and you are not always assured that the graphic will appear exactly where you need it to.

Exporting to Bookreader

DECwrite gives you the ability to export documents into Bookreader format for online document creation. Bookreader creates topical-based books, as well as handling graphics, tables, and footnotes. It also allows the use of hot spot pop-up windows. Bookreader allows any computer which runs X windows to access an online version of the DECwrite document. The DECwrite format used is retained in Bookreader, thus eliminating the need for hardcopy output.

In the electronic age, as well as the push to go to a paperless society, DECwrite and its exportability to Bookreader make it the answer to achieving online readable documents.

Creation of the SSCL Computing Newsletter

The SSCL Computing Newsletter originally started in Microsoft Word on a Macintosh because of its graphics inclusion ability and electronic retrievability from any Macintosh within the Laboratory. After learning DECwrite, I started producing the newsletter with it.

The first DECwrite issue looked far superior to that of the Microsoft Word issue. Everyone who received the DECwrite issue commented how good it looked.

I took the DECwrite version of the SSCL Computing Newsletter to a *How to Create, Edit, and Design Newsletters* seminar. This seminar offered techniques in producing a newsletter and criticisms of participants' newsletters by the instructor. The newsletters offered by other participants were professionally typeset, trifold, pamphlet-like newsletters. Comments were given on how the presentation of their material could be improved. When the instructor reached the SSCL Computing Newsletter, he commented, "This is the best, and most professional, looking newsletter I have seen." There were a few criticisms made about use of headings to break up the textual areas, but the use of white space was appropriate.

Conclusions

This paper has shown why I converted from using TeX to DECwrite. The advantages of doing this were the import/export features, online readable capabilities, and user-friendliness. Overall, DECwrite will help to eliminate paper waste and make all documents online readable retaining a professional-looking format.

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