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System 7.5: Apple Guide Description (7/96)

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TOPIC -----

This article discusses Apple Guide, the new help system integrated into System 7.5.

DISCUSSION -----

Among the many advanced features of System 7.5 are those that actively help users accomplish specific tasks. Chief among these is Apple Guide, an electronic assistant that leaps beyond traditional help systems and guides you through specific procedures one step at a time, actually leading you through to the completion of the task.

Working with Apple Guide is not unlike working with a teacher or coach -- someone you can ask questions of and who points the way, but lets you take the way yourself. Apple Guide marks a leap from the passive assistance of typical help systems to on-line active assistance that lets you accomplish tasks as you learn how to do them.

With Apple Guide, you can learn how to accomplish new or complex tasks by following on-screen prompts. Apple Guide also provides on-screen "coachmarks" that provide visual clues by circling or highlighting items such as menu selections.

Rather than requiring the you to search an electronic manual that covers an entire application, Apple Guide decides which information to provide to you based on the current context (which window is in front, what item is selected, and so on) For example, Apple Guide automatically skips a step in a process if you have already completed that step, letting you accomplish the task more quickly. It also checks to make sure that you have completed the current step before moving on to the next one.

Apple Guide doesn't simply offer a text description of various tasks; instead, it prompts you with meaningful queries about specific operations. For instance,

at the desktop level it offers queries that apply to Finder and system operations (How do I change the desktop pattern? How do I share a file? How do I empty the trash?) and then provides hands-on instruction for the selected task.

Apple Guide is also a standard for third-party applications and custom solutions. Since Apple Guide is built into the operating system, it will quickly become the standard way of providing help and access to advanced functionality in many application programs. Apple expects that the majority of software vendors will provide support for Apple Guide in their applications.

Applications that support Apple Guide lead users through the steps required to perform particular operations. This is especially important as applications add more and more features and functionality.

In a page layout application, for instance, a user might want to know how to change a block of text to a different font or import a word processing file into a column. With Apple Guide, the user can learn the steps to complete the operation while actually performing the task and getting work done - rather than leafing through a manual or browsing through on-line help for the relevant topic or working through a tutorial.

Businesses, schools, and other organizations can reduce training and support costs by creating their own Apple Guide databases to lead users through tasks that are unique to their company or organization. For example, a human resources department could use Apple Guide to assist employees in filling out forms electronically -- guiding the user through obtaining the correct form from a network server, filling it out, and sending it to the proper electronic mailbox.

Databases can be created with Guide Maker. Apple will deliver Guide Maker tool as part of the Apple Guide Authoring Kit which is expected to be available through APDA, Apple's source for developer tools, when System 7.5 is available.

Compatibility

Apple Guide is compatible (can provide assistance) with System 7.5, PowerTalk, and QuickDraw GX. Application programs must be rewritten, and assistance files created in order to take advantage of Apple Guide's active assistance technology.

Usage Requirements

Apple Guide requires System 7.5.
Apple expects that the majority of software vendors will provide support for Apple Guide in their applications.

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