

Product Review by Alan Baker, November 2002

• Product Information

Name: PowerDesk Pro 5

Manufacturer: "V-Com" (V Communications, Inc) www.v-com.com

Note: The reviewed version was from OnTrack who has since sold this and several software titles to V-Com.

Cost: \$29.95 for download; \$39.95 physical shipment (CD)

I checked several online sources and could not locate this product on their web sites, although several other V-Com titles were available.

\$19.95 to upgrade from version 4

Trial: Not offered at the web site

• What is PowerDesk Pro?

This is a suite of utility applications that assist you in managing your files. The main interface is a replacement for MS Explorer and all the included utilities are available from this file manager interface. It is much more than just a super-charged MS Explorer as the feature section of this review will describe. Among other things, from the main interface, you can move, copy, zip, label, color code, search, view, prioritize, convert and view files quickly and easily. Although many of the features can be obtained for free as "freeware" or "shareware", the single interface and consistent tools makes this a good choice.

- **Requirements:** 486/Pentium or better • Windows 95B/98/Me/NT/2000/XP • 32 MB RAM • 40 MB free disk space • VGA graphics

• Installation

I installed from the CD. The installation was straightforward and without incident. As always, I rebooted after installing this software.

Features

• Main (File Manager) interface

Serves as a replacement for Windows Explorer and as the central access point for many PowerDesk functions.

Unique features include:

- Selectable file details columns (and put in any order that you want)
- Two-pane view (see two file lists at once)
- Customizable Toolbar with icons for sorting detail view, accessing file properties, drives and many other functions.
- Functions that allow moves, copies, zips, label, color code, search, view, prioritize, convert and views your files quickly and easily.
- Easy access to the run dialog and MSDOS prompt
- Ability to add notes to your files that appear in detail view
- Gives file-type specific information about a file (i.e. size and format of graphic images, song name and length for MP3s, notes, etc.)

• File Finder

This utility is faster and more complete than the Windows Search applet. It will search within zip and other archive files. You can also print a list of the search results. Search criteria include: keyword, file type and size, date, path, attributes, creation, modification and access dates, contents, file info, and notes. It supports refining a search that has already been completed ("drilling down", for you database nuts). When a file is found, you can open it or perform other

appropriate actions on it. For MP3 audio files, you can locate files based on song title, artist name, etc.

- **Viewer Pane**

When this option is active, it allows you to preview each file (handles over 200 file types) by clicking on the file in the file manager with this option selected. This is similar to the full version of Quick View. You can have the preview pane appear in several places on the screen. For graphic file types, you can convert from one format (30 formats supported) to another and set compression levels for appropriate file types. For .zip files, you see the list of files in the selected archive file. You can change the preview size and can zoom.

- **Dialog Helper**

This tool is not accessed from the main application, because it is a use-once type of applet. It modifies your other application programs to provide a "most recently opened" list. It updates your other applications by adding a favorites icon to the Open or Save dialogs. This icon gives you access to up to the 20 last items you opened or saved, expanding that list greatly from the normal 5-9 or adding it where it did not exist before.

- **Folder Synchronizer**

A similar function is available in Windows ME, and I have never found a use for it. The most probable use would be to get two folders on two separate drives or PCs into synch. It could be used also for a simple back up solution to a removable drive. A very common use for some people is to get their desktop and notebook PC to have the same document folders and files. This function provides an interface to see both folders at once and compare them, but you will still need a way to connect those two PCs, if that is what you are doing.

- **PowerDesk "Toolbar"**

This feature enables a separate tool bar for your desktop where you can add your favorite programs, files and Internet addresses for quick access. This is not part of the File Manager interface – it puts another tool bar on your desktop. You can customize it, re-order the icons and control the placement of the tool bar. Windows ME and XP users may not find this additional toolbar needed, but Win 95 users will delight. Hey, I just found out that you can also display multiple clocks for different time zones! For those of you with desktops that are cluttered with icons, this is a good tool.

- **Taskbar**

The taskbar is on the File Manager interface, and allows for favorite programs, files and internet addresses to be easily accessed. Here is where I would put links to all my favorite file management utilities (and Control Panel).

- **Size Manager**

This application can be accessed from the File Manager interface and provides an easy way to get file size information. I have just needed to find out the total file space in a folder and all its sub folders (so I could figure out if it would fit on a single zip disk). I couldn't find a way to get this total easily without resorting to DOS. With this tool, I would have saved lots of time. Besides, the graphical display is lots more fun and it provides lots more information. And, you can print out the results by exporting it to a text file.

- **FTP**

That's what you need to download or upload files from Internet servers. There is a simple graphical interface to allow you to easily browse a remote directory and move files from / to that server. It also supports more advanced users with support for the resume and chmod commands. This is much easier than using the Windows FTP command.

- **Zip/UnZip**

This facility allows you to encode and decode archive type files such as .zip files. It also supports the, ARJ, LZH, Z, GZ, TAR, RAR, PAK, ZOO, CAB, ARC and DWC formats. Just highlight a zip file in the main interface and you can unzip it. Highlight several files and right click and you can archive and password protect these files into a zip file. You can create a self-extracting zip file too. (This is helpful if sending to someone who does not have a zip program). Related to this is an encryption feature that allows you to encrypt files in several formats. Naturally, you have the ability to un-encrypt them too.

- **E-mail Attachments**

Sometimes we get an e-mail attachment that we can't read. Often, that is because we are set up to read only one type of encoding and the sender was set up to send a different one. This happened a lot in the early days of AOL, for example. With Power Desk, you can view files encoded in MIME, UUencode, BinHex code or XXencode formats.

- **Help in Managing image files**

Using the File Manager interface, you can preview image files (bigger than just thumbnails), convert over 30 file types and even connect via USB port to some Digital Cameras and view and transfer files. And, the notes feature really helps keep track of what those pictures contain.

- **Help in Managing MP3 files**

Again, using just the File Manager interface of Power Desk, you get help with managing these special audio files. For example, you can Play MP3s and media files in file manager, edit MP3 tags and playlists or sort songs by artist, title, album, etc.

- **So . . . did it actually work??**

Well, I have used Power Desk for a week now and I'm not even close to using every function and menu option. When I loaded it to test, I was skeptical, since I had most of these functions covered by an array of added utilities I had collected over the years. After using PowerDesk regularly, I am ready to stop using many of these separate utilities. That's because Power Desk works and everything is right there in the main interface. If you don't have these functions already, this is a good choice. Even if you are a freeware junkie like me, you might really enjoy this package. I can't speak for Windows XP users, but the Windows 9x/ME users can get a real benefit from PowerDesk.

- **Documentation**

When I installed PowerDesk I got an .rtf file that is the User Guide. There is a good Help file for PowerDesk. The V-Com web site has a downloadable .pdf or .zip file that contains their version of the User Guide.

- **Product Support**

The V-Com web site has a Support page where there is a FAQ database and an e-mail connection to their Tech Support group.

- **Company Contact Information**

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