

IconAuthor promises multi- media authoring for humans

By Shalini Chatterjee

The traditional rhythm of hacker life involves keeping strange hours, drinking strong caffeinated beverages, and frequenting vending machines that hold tempting caches of candy and snacks Homer Simpson would die for, while chiseling away at interminable code to create tools to build new software applications.

But this is an aging stereotype, especially among some multimedia application programmers.

IconAuthor 5.0, the latest release from AimTech (Nashua, NH), is a multimedia authoring tool that bypasses the painful code crunching and instead employs a "visual programming" environment. Even nontechnical folk, AimTech officials say, can build applications that create text, graphics, animation, audio, and video.

Some examples of applications created with IconAuthor are those for computer-based training, simulations, self-service kiosks, performance support systems, and interactive product presentations.

IconAuthor 5.0 features built-in editors: a SmartObject editor for linking and embedding graphic text and files; an IconAnimate editor for special effects like fades and wipes; and a Video editor for full-motion analog video and digital video. As the applications are developed, they can be run, tested, and edited in real time.

It also offers a database and several user-defined variables, which are more flexible than preset variables, said Elaine LeBlanc, vice president of marketing.

ToolTalk is included (SunSoft's object-oriented application that lets tools "talk" to each other), as well as other standards like a shell script, a program launch, etc. IconAuthor can communicate with other applications by taking advantage of ToolTalk, SunSoft's capa-

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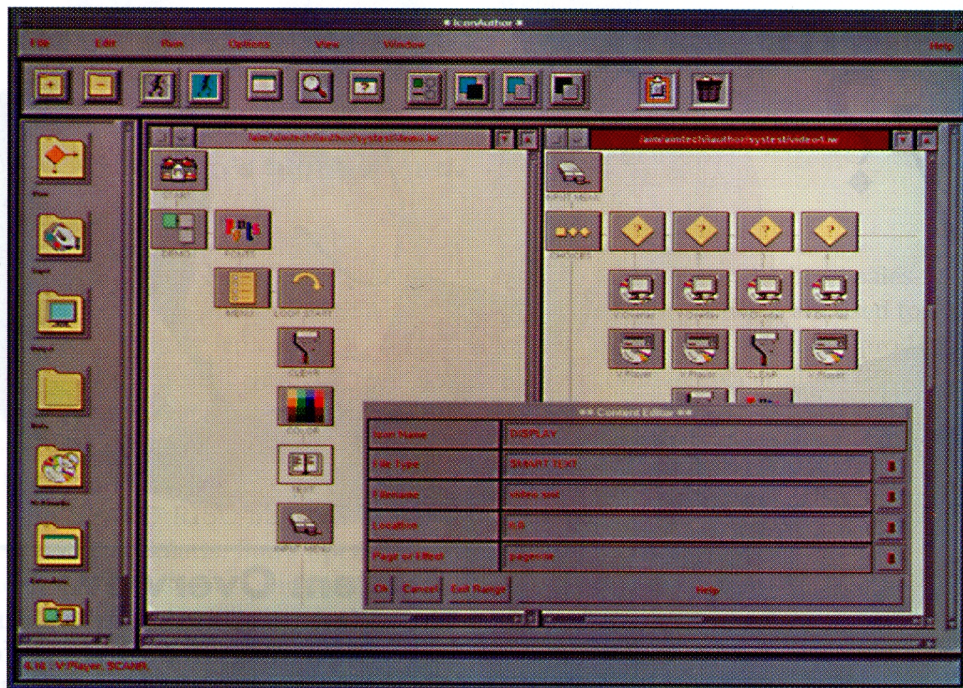
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bility for inter-message communications.

A program icon comes in handy "when you want to write something special, such as something to invoke a cal-

culator if you're creating a financial application," LeBlanc said.

IconAuthor also talks to external devices, such as a printer, modem, or mainframe.



IconAuthor is designed for nontechnies as well as experts.

AimTech claims IconAuthor 5.0 features an "open architecture" — what this means to users is they aren't stuck with IconAuthor's tools. If there are some snazzy graphics or animation sequences developed by a friendly neighbor, they won't be rejected by IconAuthor but will work with the IconAuthor's own set of selections.

Training courses (basic and advanced) are available for \$1,500 for a four-day course. Technical support is available at 18 percent of the licensing fee. AimTech provides consulting and application development service using IconAuthor 5.0 and CATS MEOW, the company's multimedia presentation and playback system (see "MultiMedia comparison," *SunWorld*, August 1992).

The cost for IconAuthor on Solaris 1 and 2 for SPARC and x86 is \$10,000 for a single-user license, \$20,000 for a four-user license, and \$35,000 for a 10-user license. ■

For more information contact AimTech, 20 Trafalgar Square, Nashua, NH 03063, (603) 883-0220.