Review of the Apple //e SwyftCard

Ezra Shapiro • BYTE • September 1985 • p37

Application Environment for the Apple//e

The SwyftCard from Information Appliance Inc. is a text-oriented data-handling product based in ROM that comes as an add-in card for the Apple //e. The brainchild of Jef Raskin, former head of the Apple Macintosh development team, the card offers word-processing, information-retrieval, program-development, calculation, and telecommunications capabilities in an integrated package.

The SwyftCard environment is designed for speed. Because the program resides in firmware, there is no need to access a disk for program information. All data manipulation occurs in memory, roughly 40K bytes on a 64K-byte Apple //e. The SwyftCard uses a disk format that equates one disk to that 40K-byte figure; this wastes some disk capacity, but the only times the program really has to use the disk drive are at the beginning of a work session (retrieving data) and at the end (saving data).

The program is available directly from the card's firmware when you turn on the computer. Since the SwyftCard serves as its own operating system, you need a single disk only to store data. Thus you can use the card with minimal hardware setup: an 80-column 64K-byte Apple //e, a monochrome monitor, and one disk drive. The SwyftCard does not interfere with other Apple software; if you place a program disk in the drive, one keystroke removes the SwyftCard system and loads the new program.

The environment is essentially a continuous scroll of text divided only by page breaks. You enter data as with any word processor, and the SwyftCard provides all standard word-processing functions. There are no files as such; if you wish to print a section of the scroll, you mark the top and bottom of the region and send the block to the printer. Formatting for printing is automatic, although you can change parameters when you want. Rapid movement through the text scroll is provided by a search algorithm that takes advantage of a peculiarity of the Apple //e keyboard -- two keys with apple symbols on either side of the space bar. Depressing one of those keys initiates a search for the next letter or combination of letters entered; you can abort the search by typing a short string of gibberish. The right key searches forward; the left one moves backwards.

The SwyftCard interfaces smoothly with the //e's AppleSoft BASIC interpreter. You enter programs as raw text. You highlight the program text as you would for any word-processing operation, press one command key, and the program executes. BASIC can also be used as a shortcut for some text manipulations. For example, you can store boilerplate phrases or paragraphs as string variables. Typing the variable name, marking it, and executing recalls the stored text; retyping or complex copying operations are replaced by a few keystrokes. You follow similar mark-and-execute procedures for calculating numeric expressions in text and for setting printer and telecommunications parameters.
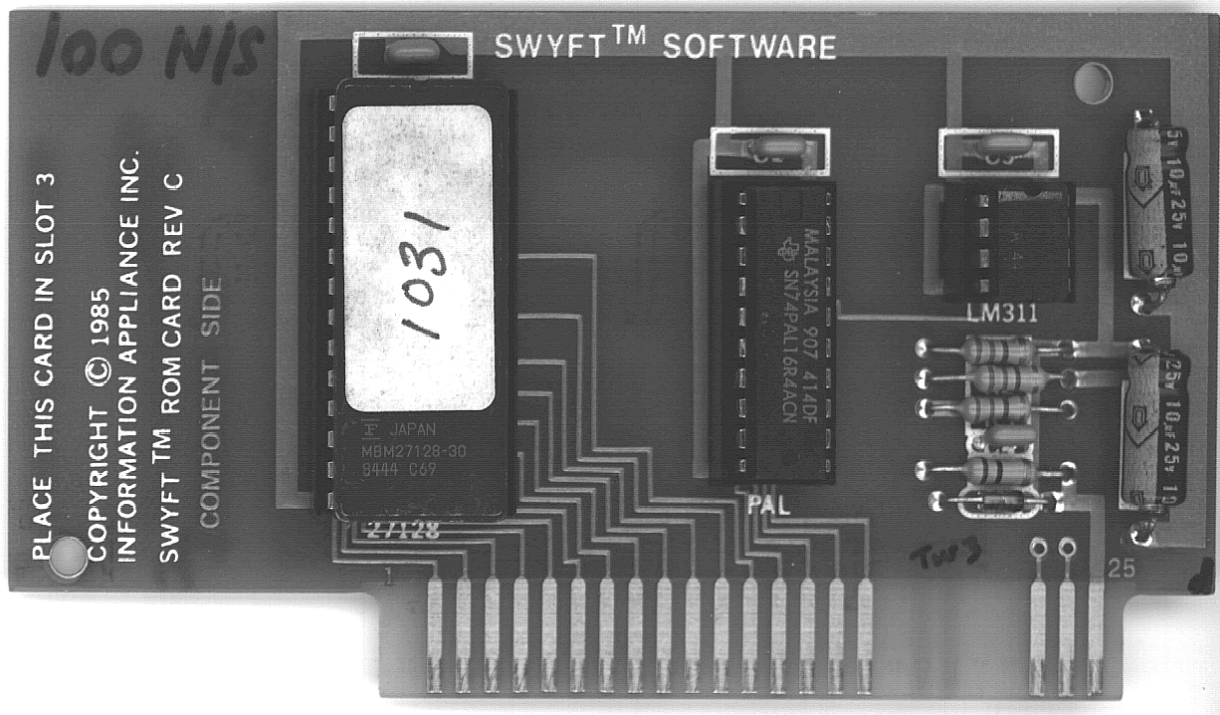
You do the same to dial the modem. Once you are connected, the text of your on-line session is incorporated into the scroll. If the modem is set to auto-answer, the SwyftCard will act as a rudimentary bulletin board -- it will accept an incoming text stream. If you are at the keyboard, the card stores the message without interrupting your work.

Priced at $89.95, the SwyftCard package contains the card itself, self-adhesive labels for the nine command keys, a manual, a schematic diagram and theory of operation, a tutorial disk, and a utility to convert SwyftCard files to Apple ProDOS format.

Contact Information Appliance Inc., 530 University Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301, (415) 328-5160.

NOTE: This review also featured a photo of the SwyftCard labeled "The SwyftCard add-in for Apple //e computers" and the following text:

SWYFT™ SOFTWARE
PLACE THIS CARD IN SLOT 3
COPYRIGHT © 1985 INFORMATION APPLIANCE INC.
SWYFT™ ROM CARD REV C
S/N 008)

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