

3.1.8 You Need A Communications Facility

If you require computer-to-computer communications, you will need some specialized equipment (Modems, phone lines, etc.) and communications software. If you are transmitting classified data, security issues need to be addressed.

Please contact MIT for further information, and approval.

3.2 The Tower of Babel

Virtually every software package has its own internal format for data storage on the disk. Although the file is actually written to disk by DOS, DOS does not care about its contents.

Most programs have a feature to store data in ASCII format, so that the data itself is readable by other programs. Any formatting information (bolding, centering, tabs, cell widths, numeric formats, database structures, French accents, etc.) are stripped away before storage. Rebuilding these formats in another program can be a formidable task.

As software matures, features for seamless transfer from one package to another are being added to a wider range of packages. Conversion, however, remains a black art, requiring intimate knowledge of file and coding formats of a wide variety of programs. The Department has access to specialized software for shuttling data around this Tower of Babel.

3.2.1 Wordprocessor Text Conversion

Three different word processors, WordPerfect, Word Wand, and Communiqué, are in current approved use on Department micros, along with Micom, Wang, and AES dedicated word processing machines. Quite often, it is necessary to move documents from one system to another.

FASTFACTS

The Word on Keyword

- The Word Processing Services Section (MISW) has the Keyword software system for this very purpose. MISW keeps a full range of pairings for various systems. Please contact Francine Powless at 996-2470 before you decide to enter a document into one system that already exists on another. The chances are that MISW will be able to translate the document painlessly and electronically.

You might also find that your word processing software supports "export" to a format called DCA (Document Content Architecture). If the target package also supports DCA, you can usually CONVERT your source data to DCA and then IMPORT it from DCA to the other package. This method is not really terrifying, but you should experiment with a copy of your document first to get the feel of the process.

Some Caveats:

- **Be Consistent.** If, for example, you normally indent the first line of every paragraph, always TAB over rather than TAB sometimes and SPACE sometimes.