

PRODUCT reviews

- Planon Docupen
- Pixie

Planon Docupen

By J.V. Bolkan

I last reviewed a pen scanner just two months ago in the September issue, and it wasn't a positive review. So, I cringed when I got the call from a PR man offering me a chance to review his company's pen scanner. As positive as I'd been going into that first review, I was dreading the arrival of Planon Docupen RC800. I should have relaxed—this is a pretty cool gadget.

Although “pen” is part of the name, only a giant would use a pen this large, and even a giant wouldn't lay a pen on its side to use it. Now that we have it clear that the Docupen is not remotely pen-like in operation and just barely so in size, let's get on with what it really is and what it can do.

At about 9" long, and as thick as a man's thumb, the 2 oz. Docupen will barely fit in a shirt pocket (like a pen, I suppose) but it doesn't feel secure. The included leather carrying case is a much better transport option. Transporting is the key, because the Docupen is fully portable. This feature alone made me really like this scanner. I may be dense, but I don't understand why it's important to make something tiny, if it will only work when it's attached to something big like a computer. The Docupen has its own rechargeable lithium-ion battery and built-in flash memory. Not only can you take your scanner to where the content is, rather than hauling it all to your computer, you can scan without an annoying cable tether. When you're dealing with ultra-lightweight scan-



Smooth rollers, ergonomic design, and high-speed scanning help make the Docupen easy to use. Status lights make it easy to switch between scan modes.

ners, an attached cable is more annoying than you'd imagine. The Docupen doesn't even require one of those annoying power brick rechargers—it recharges off the USB cable whenever you connect it to a computer.

The second deal-breaker for most ultra-portable scanners is ridiculously small scanning area—again, the Docupen excels here. With a live scanning area 8" wide, the pen can easily scan a standard 8.5" x 11" page of text, or a glossy 8 x 10" color photo. Did I mention that the Docupen can scan in 24-bit color at 400 dpi? It can. Of course, at those settings you fill up the relatively small 8 MB built-in memory pretty fast. In addition to the large file sizes, color photo scanning really isn't the best application for a handheld device. Scans are a bit muddy, you must be fairly precise and scan slowly.

Text mode (black and white) and 12-bit color mode (for spot colors and non-photo graphics like charts and graphs) are much easier to do, and eat the available memory less quickly. At default text mode (B/W, 100 dpi) I could scan quickly, covering a full typewritten page in about 4 seconds. The multiple soft rubber rollers make it easy to keep the device on track. The entire process of scanning is extremely simple, I didn't even need to look at the manual or even the startup guide before performing a few scans. Turn the device on, start rolling, and the scan light automatically comes on. Once you stop, the pen begins saving the file, then turns itself off. I was able to scan 5 or 6 pages before the built-in RAM was filled. The battery lasts a bit longer than the time needed to scan those pages, but seemed to fully



The Docupen excels at text-based, full-page scanning and is capable of full-color (24-bit) photo capture at 400 dpi.

editable word processing document. You can also drag photos onto a variety of image editing applications, and best of all, you can save any document as a PDF file.

Aside from the slightly disappointing control software, the Docupen suffers a couple other minor drawbacks. The door housing the microSD expansion slot is very flimsy, and the seating mechanism for the tiny RAM card is also flimsy and difficult to use. The pen didn't recognize the RAM until I reseated the chip twice. I was a bit disappointed that the pen's flash RAM is deactivated when you install an expansion card, but as it's difficult to scan enough content to fill a 128 or 256 MB card before the batteries need charging, this isn't a huge problem.

As far as gadgets go, the Docupen is fairly expensive at \$299. But with the excellent software bundle and solutions to almost every problem inherent in pen-based scanners, it is well worth the money.

Planon Docupen RC800
1.888.507.3926
<http://www.planon.com>

Pricing and System Requirements
\$299; Windows 2000/ME/XP, Mac OSX (not certified for Intel-based Macs)



J.V. Bolkan is senior editor and associate publisher of L&L. He has been reviewing high tech products since mullets and leg warmers were actually fashionable.

charge itself back up in the time it took to transfer the pages to my computer over the included USB 1.1/2.0 cable. I wasn't able to fill a 256 MB microSD RAM card I installed in the expansion port before the batteries were exhausted, but I did get more than 10 text pages scanned.

The software for dealing with your images is a mixed bag. The Docupen is a TWAIN device and can be used from within any application that supports TWAIN cameras and scanners. The Docupen device control software can be called up as a stand-alone application, or through the TWAIN interface. It isn't the most intuitive software, and it can be downright annoying. For instance, any time you ask the software to find the pen to down-

load or erase the images stored, the software pops up a box warning you to turn on the Docupen, whether it is already on or not. Worse, the software is curiously sparse in features. You cannot download a single image, you must download the entire contents of RAM. Likewise for deleting.

On the positive side, ScanSoft's PaperPort 9.0, an excellent document management software, is bundled with the Docupen. Although PaperPort uses the pen's rickety TWAIN interface, once you have the images transferred into the application, things get much better. Drag a scanned page of text onto the Microsoft Word icon (if you have Word installed) and it'll be run through a remarkably fast and accurate OCR routine and become an

typical worksheets for use on the computer or on paper for recognizing and organizing basic concepts. The activities include letters and numbers, language arts, math, science, social studies, and "all about me." The possible modifications and applications are endless.

The text feature allows children to add labels, captions, or even sentences to their pictures. The program also has a recording feature for audio output to go with the picture. This gives teacher or student the ability to narrate picture stories.

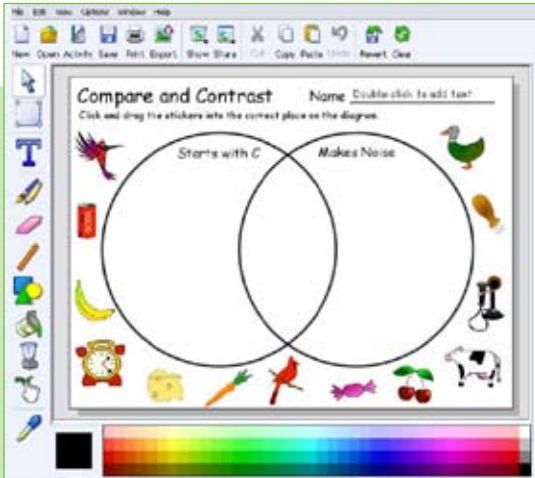
An interesting feature of Pixie is that students can complete the worksheet activities using the library of stickers. Students select graphics to represent their knowledge of the concepts. The

The text feature allows children to add labels, captions, or even sentences

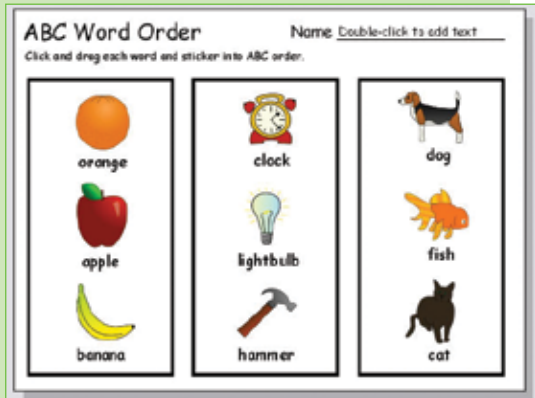
Pixie

By Sarah McPherson

Pixie's tag line is "Art starts here!" The program is designed for primary students and their teachers to create instructional activities using clip art within the program. The activities create



Pixie's intuitive icon-based tool palettes make using the program easy and fun for younger students.



Pixie's potential for creating graphically rich worksheets is nearly endless.



Pixie's visual and textual features make it a strong tool for various learners.

Stickers section of Pixie has 25 categories with hundreds of items relevant to all the curriculum areas and high-interest topics such as zoo animals, pets, family members, and many more.

For example, I created a counting exercise. The activity sheet only has “7 – seven” and the directions at the bottom. I chose ladybugs to represent seven using Add to Page, Copy/Paste features.

Another sample used the ABC order for matching names of visuals to letters of the alphabet. The pictures are clear with easily recognizable depictions of the items making it quite easy for young children to make the proper association of picture to word or letter. This activity is completely customizable allowing the teacher to scaffold the activity with fewer items, no words, words only, or whatever is needed. The instructions could be that the student arranges the pictures in alphabetical order and writes the label.

Other examples include the Venn diagram for language arts, and mathematical exercises for pattern completion. All the activities are customizable by simply deleting the item and adding other stickers.

Pixie allows creative art in arranging the stickers, effects, and backgrounds to be pasted into a slide show. The screen allows the clipart to be easily placed wherever the teacher or student wants. There are no pre-set templates. The text feature can be used in any area of the screen. This makes it very easy to make a slide show or single slide poster-like representation of curriculum concepts. The program allows students to use a constructivist approach to select and arrange visual images to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

The drawing tools can be used for adding color background, shapes,

arrows, and lines. The color palette is extensive with gradients, shades, and patterns of all colors available. This is where the actual art starts.

Pixie has an export feature to compress the pictures in a BMP, GIF, JPEG, or PNG format. This allows files to be saved as pictures for importing into other programs as needed.

Pixie is an extremely useful program for primary students in all curriculum areas. The extensive graphics, the drawing tools, templates, customizability, flexibility, and compatibility are all features that make Pixie an indispensable tool for teachers and students. The graphics are excellent and the ability to combine and modify elements in so many different ways makes the program a valuable resource for primary, early elementary, special education, and ELL teachers. Pixie is a “must have” in the repertoire of computer-based tools in the elementary classroom.

Tech4Learning
San Diego, CA 92108
1.601.563.5348; Fax 1.619.283.8176
<http://www.tech4learning.com/pixie>

Pricing	
Mac-Win Hybrid CD	\$44.95
Five License Pack	\$179.95
500+ Licenses	\$18/license

System Requirements
Macintosh: G3 or higher,
OS 10.2 or higher.
Windows: Pentium III or higher,
Win 2000/XP



Dr. Sarah McPherson is coordinator of instructional technology at New York Institute of Technology. She teaches methods for integrating technology into instruction for diverse student populations including those with special needs and English language learners.

<http://www.iste.org/LL>