The Pascal Newsletter:
An Outsider's Retrospective

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INTRODUCTION

This document attempts to provide a retrospective commentary about the **Pascal Newsletter**. This newsletter was published between January 1974 and November 1983. The newsletter's purpose was described in the first newsletter as follows:

> *This is the first issue of a newsletter sent to users and other interested parties about the computer programming language Pascal. Its purpose is to keep the Pascal community informed about the efforts of individuals to implement Pascal on different computers and to report extensions made to the language.*

The newsletter eventually became the main communication vehicle for the **Pascal User's Group** (PUG), a rather extensive organization which had several thousand members at its zenith (I believe the membership never exceeded 3,000 in one year).

This reviewer sees the Pascal Newsletter as a significant endeavor by a group of computer programming professionals to communicate useful and timely information about a specific programming language in a non-traditional and stimulating fashion. This type of communication would serve as a very useful model for similar communications of other types of technical endeavors.

The newsletter issues described in this retrospective include issue # 1 through 27. Other issues past 27 may exist, but these are unknown to this reviewer.

NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION HISTORY

George Richmond (Computing Center, University of Colorado) started the Pascal Newsletter with issue # 1 in January 1974. He produced three more issues (# 2 to 4) while doing the other thankless chores of distributing two Pascal compilers and promoting Pascal in other ways.

In mid-1975 **John Strait** and **Andy Mickel** (University of Minnesota) proposed a Pascal User's Group (**PUG**) after having talked to several other Pascalers around the U.S. At the Minneapolis ACM '75 conference in October 1975, Strait and Mickel launched the group at an ad hoc meeting (35 members) convened by **Rich Cichelli** and **Bob (Warren) Johnson**. A year later we began the task of producing 4 issues of Pascal Newsletter which PUG as a group assumed responcibility for.

Mickel and Strait edited the first 2 new issues (# 5 and 6) with help from Tim Bonham on the Implementations section. By issue # 8 Strait had less time for the constant demands of the newsletter and only promised occassional help. But with issue # 8 **Jim Miner**, **Sara Graffunder**, and others volunteered to help. With issue # 9-10 (a combined issue) the load was spread quite a bit, which only caused coordination problems.

Combined issue # 9-10 was born with a new name, **Pascal News**. The reason for this change in Mickel's words was "We changed the name to avoid confusion by people who think a newsletter is 4 pages long."

Mickel held the job of editor for issues # 5 to 14. With issues # 15 and 16 Mickel and **Rick Shaw** shared the editor's chair. Shaw took over full editorship with issue # 17 and produced 6 more issues (# 18 to 23).

Nick Hughes in the U.K. produced special issue # 23A as "a supplement to plug the lengthening publication gap between U.S. originating issues 23 and 24."

Issues # 24 to 27 were produced by **Charlie Gaffney**. Gaffney was the publisher of **USUS News**, the newsletter for the UCSD p-System User Society of La Jolla California. Issue # 27 (November 1983) again encountered a name change, **Pascal & Modula-2**, in hopes of attracting programmers with an interest in the programming language Modula-2.

(* Part of this history is from Pascal News combined issue 9-10, page 10 *)

NEWSLETTER SECTION EVOLUTION

The newsletter's internal section organization evolved over time to become a well-organized publication.

Issues # 1 to 3 were rather short in length (10 to 20 pages) and contained basically the "From the Editor" section and a section with Pascal compiler information. Issue # 4 was rather lengthy (52 pages) and contained a section organization that was to become standard for later issues. None of these issues contained a table of contents.

Andy Mickel's issue # 5 laid the groundwork for the section organization of all future newsletters. This issue had a cover with "Pascal Newsletter" in big type, a clear issue number, a table of contents listing, and a note that this publication was produced by the Pascal User's Group. This issue contained the following sections (comments follow that describe the section in a little more detail):

Policy	
Editor's Contribution	
Here and There with Pascal	(* general Pascal news *)
Articles	
Open Forum for Members	(* PUG member letters *)
Implementation Notes	
All Purpose Coupon	(* general purpose coupon *)

The "All Purpose Coupon" was very innovative since it contained on one page multiple selections for readers (e.g. PUG membership renewal, newsletter backissue orders, address corrections, Pascal compiler bug reports, article contributions, and general comments). Note that this coupon appeared first in issue # 4.

The "Open Forum for Members" section contained letters from PUG members. Some of the letters were from key Pascal people (e.g. Dr. Niklaus Wirth).

Issue # 6 included a new sub-section of "Here and There with Pascal" called "Membership Roster" (this issue listed 516 PUG members from 22 countries).

The articles appearing in the newsletter were excellent. Some of these articles described Pascal programs and provided complete listings of the programs. As a reference for Pascal programmers, language designers/implementators, and students of programming languages this section is a treasure chest. Some of the more interesting article titles follow ([ ] enclose the newsletter issue):

The Need for Hierarchy and Structure in Language Management	[6]
Yet Another Look at Code Generation for Pascal on CDC 6000 & Cyber Machines	[7]
A Novel Approach to Compiler Design	[11]
Status of the UCSD Pascal Project	[11]
What are Pascal's Design Goals?	[12]
BSI/ISO Working Draft of Standard Pascal	[14]
The Pascal Validation Suite	[16]
Referencer/Map/XRef Programs and Descriptions	[17]
Some Observations on Pascal and Personal Style	[17]
Pascal-S: Subset Pascal written in Pascal	[19]

Several of the newsletter issues were devoted to single topics. For example, issue # 16 contained a complete discussion and source code listing of the Pascal Validation Suite, an extensive collection of programs which attempted to validate Pascal compilers. Issue # 14 concerned a standards draft for Pascal from the U.K. The article "Some Observations on Pascal and Personal Style" is fascinating since it provides some insites into personal programming styles and use of Pascal's features.
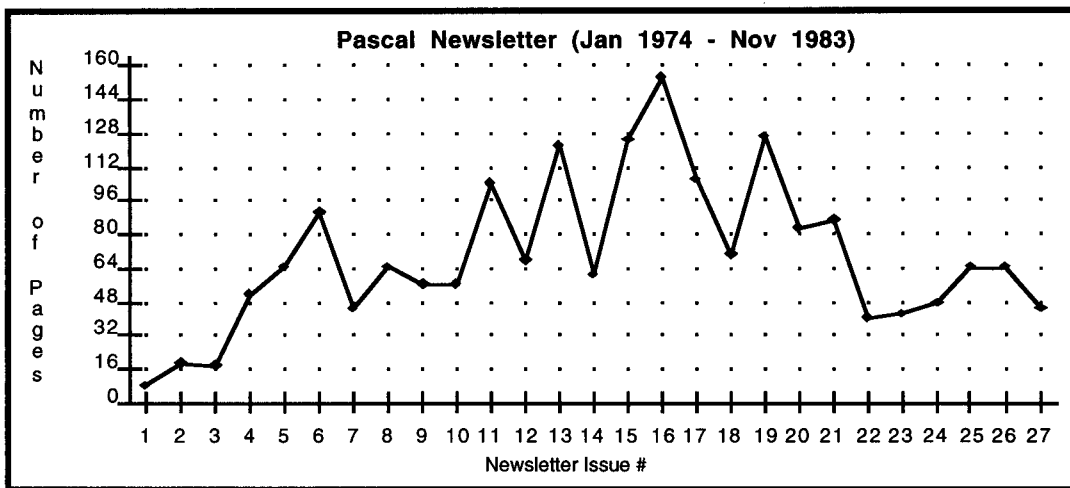
The Implementation section contained detailed descriptions of many different Pascal implementations for many different machines.

Concerning cover art issues # 1 to 8 were rather staid and contained no artwork. Combined issue # 9-10 featured the first of many monochrome cover artworks. This issue featured a set of paperclips (not much, but a beginning). Other issues featured more artsy covers (for example, issue # 12 displayed a screwdriver and a pen, # 13 had lobster claws, and issue # 16 featured a set of photographs showing road signs with a Pascal flavor [e.g. Wirth Parkway, Pascal Avenue]). Issues from 17 onwards were a little bit more subdued, though issues # 19, 21, 22-23 contained cute caveman drawings. Issue # 24 contained a very conservative cover and began a conversative trend which lasted until the issue # 27, the joint Pascal/Modula-2 issue. This issue contained a nice computer-generated artwork in color.

NEWSLETTER FACTS

After looking at the many Pascal Newsletter issues I came across some interesting facts.

o   Overseas members contributed most of the articles (issue # 13 p. 4).

o   The shortest newsletter was issue # 1 with 8 pages.

o   The longest newsletter was issue # 16 with 154 pages.

o   The 28 newsletters (includes issue # 23A) contained a total of 1,807 pages.

o   The average newsletter contained 65 pages.

o   Most of the newsletters contained colored covers, though the color was not standardized in any way (issues # 1 to 4 had white covers). The paper stock inside each issue was mostly white.

o   Issue # 8 contained light green paper stock for its inside pages (this seems to have been the printer's mistake which caused the newsletter editor some problems).

o   A graph showing the newsletter issue numbers, their page numbers, and the editors of the various issues follows:

Pascal Newsletter (Jan 1974 - Nov 1983)

Number of Pages vs Newsletter Issue #

Editors: GR   AM   RS   CG

GR - George Richmond   AM - Andy Mickel
RS - Rick Shaw   CG - Charlie Gaffney

REFERENCES

I used issues # 1 to 27 as the basis for this paper as graciously sent to me by Andy Mickel, the second newsletter editor (thanks Andy!).

For a delightful paper about Pascal's history and a little bit of history of the Pascal Newsletter see Dr. Niklaus Wirth's paper **Reflections on the Development of Pascal** (ACM SIGPLAN Notices, March 1993, p. 333+). Pages 339 and 340 discuss the Pascal User's Group (PUG) and the Pascal Newsletter.

SUMMARY

Though the Pascal Newsletter is long gone as a publication, it may still serve as an excellent model for how to establish a fruitful dialog between diverse individuals concerning a specific technical topic.

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