



Reference Point

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Technical Resources for DataCAD®

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A Name is a Name is a Name But a Year's Maintenance is Money in the Bank

The new A/E/C product (which will run as a Windows® application) that has been under development at Cadkey, Inc. has been known as "Parthenon" for some time. However, this is not the name that will be used when it hits the market. Neither will it be known as DataCAD, as both products will be maintained in parallel.

Marketing plans are currently under development, so Cadkey needs to name the product. As a means of soliciting input from current DataCAD users, Cadkey is sponsoring a "design contest" to name the product and to design the Windows Icon for it.

Entries may be submitted in any format; they should include the following:

- Product name
- Icon design (see below).
- A brief explanation of the design.
- Identifying information (designer, firm name, address, phone number) should not appear on the entry. It should be included in a sealed envelope accompanying the entry.

Entries should be submitted to Lou Bodnar at Cadkey no later than January 15, 1992.

The entries will be judged by Cadkey management and the A/E/C product group. The winning entry will be published in 3D WORLD and the winning firm will be awarded one year's free maintenance.

The intent of this exercise is to solicit the input of interested (and creative) DataCAD users; the "winner" may or may not be used as the final product name/icon, at Cadkey's discretion.

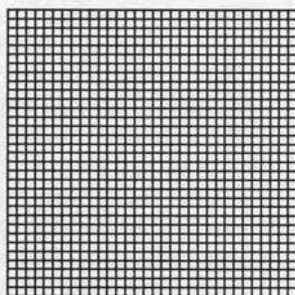
The prize will be awarded in either case.

Good Luck

The Fine Print:

All entries will remain the property of Cadkey, Inc. Should the winning entry be selected for use as the product name/icon, the winner will be required to waive all rights to the name and icon design.

For more information, call Lou Bodnar: at ext. 6425.



Icon design:

A Windows icon is a 32 pixel x 32 pixel bit map image. It may contain up to 16 colors. Each of the 1024 "boxes" may contain only one of the 16 colors.

There are no restrictions on format for the icon design; it may be hand drawn, computer generated.....?

Editor's Note:

Cadkey has recently shipped an update to the AEC Model macro and the new ClipIt macro. Users should check the settings in AEC Model before using it; the default values for Head Hgt, Sill Hgt, and Sash/Offset may cause unexpected results. The use of ClipIt appears to be straightforward. If problems arise or if interesting application possibilities present themselves, they will be discussed in a future issue.

In this issue, the main article is the first of two dealing with multiple-scale plotting to a single drawing sheet. Strategies abound for accomplishing this task; each particular to individual requirements. The subject is complex and involves a number of menu areas in DataCAD. Information presented here is very general, appropriate to a variety of installations.

Doing Windows focuses on running DataCAD 4.06 under Windows. The process of exploring and refining Windows settings and DataCAD configurations can be time-consuming and frustrating. The end result (quick access to DataCAD from Windows) is of limited utility. However, many users are attempting to do this. The article may assist users in first deciding if they *really* want to do it. For those who wish to, an approach to configuring DataCAD under Windows is outlined.

Points of Reference presents the first of a series of articles on DataCAD Users Groups. This article discusses the problem of "core" member burn-out. It also reviews some organizational strategies aimed at minimizing this phenomenon. Future articles will deal with topics including: Group direction, model agendas, and recruiting new members.

Philip Hart

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A Case for Not Running DataCAD 4.06 Under Windows:

Editor's note:

At this time, Cadkey, Inc does not support DataCAD 4.06 running under Windows. Tech Support may or may not be able to assist callers experiencing problems resulting from doing this.

There has recently been a lot of discussion among users about running DataCAD 4.06 under Windows®, most of it centering on "how to" issues: getting a mouse to work in DataCAD under Windows, loading graphics drivers, configuring DataCAD.....

But *Why* run DataCAD under Windows? Parthenon, which will be specifically implemented as a Windows application, will take advantage of that environment and should perform extremely well. DataCAD 4.06, on the other hand, is a complex DOS application. Not only is it *not* written as a Windows application, but the system requirements imposed by Windows limit the performance of DataCAD.

The combination of DataCAD 4.06 and Windows 3.0 is both difficult to configure and impedes DataCAD's performance.

For working sessions in DataCAD of any significant duration/importance, a "straight DOS" configuration (optimized for DataCAD as the primary application) should be utilized. However, a user may wish to produce material in a Windows application that draws upon DataCAD in one way or another.

This newsletter, for instance, is produced in Word for Windows® and Page Maker® under Windows. DataCAD is referenced on a regular basis to verify menu sequences, menu actions, prompt messages, etc. while writing articles. It is also used to generate graphics by importing HPGL plot files. For these purposes, it is convenient to switch quickly between DataCAD and Windows applications; slower DataCAD performance is not a significant factor because it is used in very a limited way.

Users of Windows applications for whom it is important to run DataCAD under Windows are urged to create two distinct system configurations. Under one, optimized for Windows, a special DataCAD setup may be accessed for occasional use. Under the second (straight DOS) configuration, system parameters should be optimized for DataCAD usage.

DataCAD should not be hampered by Windows' overhead; neither should Windows applications be compromised to facilitate running DataCAD for the sake of convenience.

But if You Must:

The following steps are ones that have been utilized by a number of users to run DataCAD successfully as a DOS application under Windows running in 386 Enhanced Mode. They should be regarded as suggestions only; depending on the particular hardware configuration, differing approaches may be required.

- Boot up in a Windows configuration; exit Windows to DOS.
- Save the current DataCAD configuration. At the \MTEC prompt, type:
COPY DCAD.CFG DOSDCAD.CFG
COPY RUNDCAD.BAT DOSDCAD.BAT
- Find a combination of mouse drivers that will work for both Windows and DataCAD. Usually, this means installing a driver supplied with the mouse, verifying that Windows will recognize the mouse, entering DataCAD's Config and changing to a CADKEY driver that will recognize the vendor supplied driver.

In the case of most Logitech serial mice, for instance, the user installs a Logitech driver, which Windows recognizes, and configures DataCAD for a Logitech BUS mouse.

- In Config, set the path for virtual files to a hard disk sub-directory. Let Windows cache hard disk reads rather than have it deal with a RAM disk.
- In Config, turn off the software display list, if it is being used. Exit Config, saving settings.
- From DOS, enter DataCAD using RUNDCAD to verify that it is running properly. Fine tune as necessary.

Once the right combination is found, be sure to save the DataCAD configuration upon exiting Config.

- In Windows, create a PIF (Program Information File) named DCAD.PIF. The Program Filename should be set to RUNDCAD.BAT and the Startup Directory to C:\MTEC; Display usage: Full Screen; Execution: Exclusive; KB Required should be 512, Desired: 640. Under the Advanced section, Foreground Priority should be set to 100%. The High Graphics options should be selected, as should Emulate Text Mode. Under Memory Options, try setting the KB Limit settings to 1024 for both EMS and XMS.

Editor's note:

Using DOS 5.0, QEMM 386® 5.12, and PC-KWIK®4.0, DataCAD reports 40 Page Frames available in an optimized DOS configuration. The best DataCAD-under-Windows configuration that I have achieved to date shows 31 Page Frames. The number of Page Frames available to DataCAD is one measure of the performance capability of any given configuration.

The user may create DOS batch files to quickly swap configurations and reboot to a setup appropriate for either Windows or DataCAD. The time spent in such a rebooting sequence is more than compensated for by the increased productivity in "pure" DataCAD and Windows configurations.



- In the Program Manager, under File, select New, then Program Item to create an icon for DataCAD. For Program Name: DataCAD; for Command Line: DCAD.PIF.

From this point, the user must tinker with the settings in the DCAD.PIF file (using the PIF editor in Windows) and in DCAD.CFG (by changing settings in Config).

Once DataCAD appears to be running properly from Windows (i.e. the mouse works, drawing files can be entered and saved, templates and symbols can be accessed, etc.), some additional changes should be made to facilitate running DataCAD both from DOS and from Windows.

- In DOS, at the \MTEC prompt, type:
REN RUNDCAD.BAT WINDCAD.BAT
REN DCAD.CFG WINDCAD.CFG
REN DOSDCAD.BAT RUNDCAD.BAT
- Using an ASCII editor, edit WINDCAD.BAT to include the lines shown in bold face type in the following:
cd\mtec
COPY WINDCAD.CFG DCAD.CFG
drv*(driver name)*
dcad %1
drv*(driver name)* -r
COPY DOSDCAD.CFG DCAD.CFG

These additions copy the DataCAD configuration for Windows (WINDCAD.CFG) to DCAD.CFG before entering DataCAD from Windows and then copy the DOS one (DOSDCAD.CFG) to DCAD.CFG upon exit. DataCAD can then be entered with RUNDCAD, after rebooting to a DOS configuration, as before this process.

- Finally, in Windows, use the PIF editor to change the Program Filename called in DCAD.PIF from RUNDCAD.BAT to WINDCAD.BAT. Double clicking on the program icon for DataCAD should now result in entering DataCAD.

Further experimentation with various settings controlling the operation of Windows may result in improved DataCAD-under-Windows performance, but great care should be taken that the performance of Windows applications not suffer as a result.

Depending upon the interest/input of readers, issues surrounding the optimization of DataCAD-under-Windows may be explored in future issues of Reference Point. The experiences of DataCAD users who have experimented in this area are actively sought.

USER INPUT

Multi-Weight Dashed Arcs:

DataCAD does not support a double weight dashed line type arc. To approximate one, draw it single weight and use Offset to create arcs on either side of the original one.

The distance to offset will depend upon the plot scale, pen size, and the line weight assignment in the plotter menu. At 1/8" scale for a .25 pen with line weight set to 8, good results have been obtained using an offset distance of 1/2".

Watch Out for Sel Set 8:

Some DCAL macros use Sel Set 8 as a "temporary" holding area for entities that they create or modify. They may clear Sel Set 8 without warning the user that they are doing so. It is recommended that the user avoid placing entities in this Selection Set. Alternately, one should verify the actions of frequently accessed macros to ascertain whether or not they utilize Sel Set 8 for their operation.

Use the Sel Set Toggle in Obj Snap:

When on, this toggle limits the entities "searched" by the object snap (middle mouse button) to those in the active Selection Set. The other settings in Obj Snap remain in effect when the Sel Set toggle is on, so the user may establish a very particular group of entities and conditions for snapping.

An example:

In placing light fixture symbols in a reflected ceiling plan, it may be desirable to have many layers turned on. However, the user may wish to be snapping only to the intersection points of lines defining a lay-in ceiling grid (on a layer other than the active one). Snapping to these points, especially on a slower system, can be very time consuming. Clear a Selection Set, make it the active one, and place the grid lines in it. Toggle Sel Set and Intsect on in Obj Snap. Snapping speed will improve, making placement of the fixture symbols a "snap."

This issue's User Input again comes from the editor. Reader input is strongly desired.



Multiple Scale Plotting to a Single Drawing Sheet

For new users of DataCAD, rooted in manual drafting techniques, first attempts at laying out working drawing sheets can be daunting. The requirement to think in terms of "real world" dimensions when placing details (all to be plotted at the same scale) on a sheet is a potential problem area. When the sheet incorporates details to be plotted at differing scales, real confusion can set in.

In the following, an approach is presented to this subject. The discussion has been framed in general terms; each office will need to define its own specific requirements. Out of necessity, some dimensional information is referred to throughout the article. Drawing sheet size is assumed to be 30" x 42" and coordination of detail plotting to 8 1/2" x 11" sheets is discussed. As appropriate, the user will need to extrapolate to his/her own situation.

It is assumed that the user is currently working with some form of "office standards" for drafting. These might be as formal as a written set of guidelines for drafting, or as informal as a set of experience-based preferences residing only in the user's mind. It is expected that these standards will form the basis for the CAD standards developed in the following process. Conversely, the needs imposed by DataCAD should prove to have a positive impact upon the quality of the existing standards.

The single most important factor in multiple scale plotting is controlling the location of the snapping point used in LayOut under the Plotter menu.

Presumably, the user's drawing sheet border layer contains a center snapping point that is used in LayOut. Regardless of the user's preference for Input Mode, the drawing sheet border layer should be placed so that the center snapping point of the Border layer (the plotter layout point) is located at Absolute Coordinates X = 0, Y = 0. This assists in the process of multiple scale plotting by referencing a uniformly identifiable point in space. It also addresses the "single precision problem."

See R.P. v.1, no. 1, User Input for a discussion of this problem. It has bearing on a number of areas in the operation of DataCAD.

The first step in the process is to change the elements of the drawing sheet border layer (Border) to the correct size for plotting at 12" scale. The user's Border layer will have been created for plotting at some scale, let's assume 1/8" for the purpose of illustration.

- Enter the **Enlarge** menu; at the first prompt: "Locate the CENTER of enlargement," snap to the center snapping point of the border.
- Select **Enlrgmnt (F8)**, then **Set All (F6)**, and at the prompt: "Enter enlargement factor," type: .010416 (value for enlargement from 1/8" to 12" scales, see Table, page 6). Press **Enter**.
- Press the right mouse button to return to the main **Enlarge** menu. Select **Area (F3)**, verify that **AndCopy (S2)** is **OFF**, and select all of the elements in the Border layer.
- Check the accuracy by plotting this at 12" scale. Use **Identify (I)** to verify text size in the title block.

Next, a "layout grid" needs to be created.

Starting with a drawing file containing only the Border layer, create a new layer. Name this layer "Master." In the Master layer, create a grid of "Detail Boxes" as shown in Figure 1. Some parameters for sizing these boxes:

- They should be sized (at plotted size) to comfortably fit an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet.
- The border areas between the boxes may be kept to a minimal size. Title text and graphics will be contained within the *Detail Boxes*.
- The size of the *Detail Boxes* should be informed by the standard practices of the user's office; they should approximate a format currently in use for manual drafting.
- If the *Detail Boxes* are drawn using **Rectngl** under the **Polygons** menu, make sure that **CntrPnt** is turned **OFF**. The only snapping point in the drawing should be the one in the center of the Border layer.
- The *Detail Boxes* must be of equal size.

Plot the results, including the Border layer. Adjust and replot until the layout is perfect. Time spent on getting this right is well worth it. Finally, copy the center snapping point from the Border layer to the Master layer.

A Tip:

When first creating the firm's drawing sheet border, the user should experiment with the "plottable area" available. Accepting the DataCAD default drawing area for a D size sheet, for instance, yields a "maximum effective plotting area" of 21" x 33". Depending upon the plotter, the actual area available may be greater.

To experiment on a D size sheet, draw a rectangle with **CentrPnt ON 36" (X) x 24" (Y)**. Use **Copy** or **Offset** to create a series of lines parallel to and inside the rectangle at 1/16" intervals (plotted size).

In the **Plotter** menu, set **Scale** to 12". Select **Custom** in **PaperSiz** and set the size to 36" (X) x 24" (Y). Snap to the center point of the rectangle in **LayOut**. Plot it.

By determining which lines were plotted at the edge of the plotter's limits, the true effective plotting area of the plotter can be determined. Using this information, the user can create a "maximized" drawing sheet border.

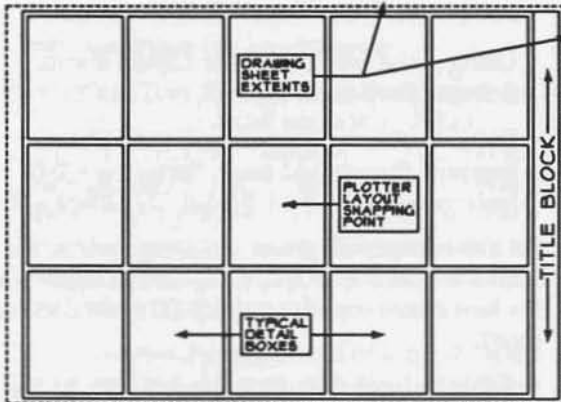


Figure 1

Next, create a typical Detail Box, including title and graphics information. To do this, copy one of the boxes from the 12" Detail Box layer to a new layer, naming the layer "Detail". In this new layer, draw the graphics and enter the text that would be used for a typical detail title. Plot this layer to an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet to verify its accuracy. Figure 2 illustrates an example.

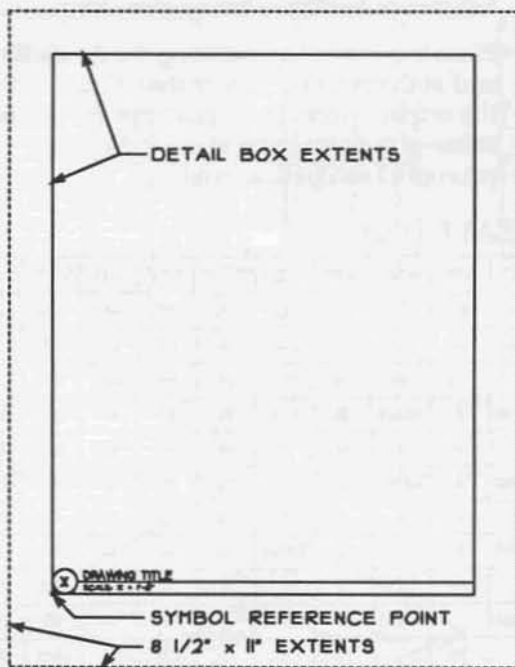


Figure 2

Three basic elements have now been created. Next they will be saved as symbols. By placing these symbols, using the Enlarge function in the Template menu, multiple scale plotting to a single drawing sheet will be facilitated.

The following describes the process of creating a template similar to that illustrated in Figure 3:

- Using ActvOnly under the Layers menu, activate Border layer.
- Enter the Template menu (T or t).
- At the prompt "Enter template file name:" type LAYOUT and press Enter.
- At message line: "File c:\mtec\tpl\layout.tpl does not exist." and prompt: "Create new file?" answer yes by clicking on F5.
- At the prompt: "Field 7 Field name:" press the right mouse button.

The user is returned to the main Template menu and a blank template (3 x 10) is drawn.

- Select Dvisions (F3).
- At the prompt: "Number of X divisions in template:" type 1 and press Enter.
- At the prompt: "Number of Y divisions in template:" type 3 and press Enter.

The template is redrawn, 1 box x 3 boxes.

- Select SaveSym (F5).
- At the prompt: "Save to which symbol file:" select New Path (S8).
- At the prompt: "Enter new path name:" type c:\mtec\sym\layout\ and press Enter.
- At the prompt: "Path 'c:\mtec\sym\layout\' does not exist. Create it?" answer yes by clicking on F5.
- At the prompt: "Save to which symbol file:" type: BORDER (or any name suiting the office's standards) and press Enter.
- Toggle Area (F3) as the selection method.
- Respond to the prompts for selecting (by area) the entities to make the symbol by drawing a box around all of the entities in the Border layer.
- At the prompt: "Enter reference point for symbol" use the middle mouse button to snap to the snapping point in the center of the border.

- At the first Field prompt: press the right mouse button. This symbol (and the other,

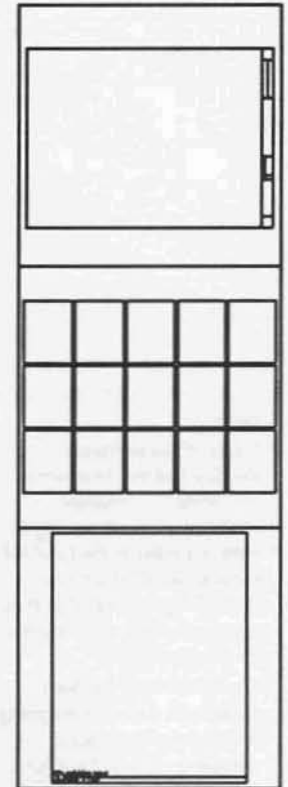


Figure 3

Note:

The process of creating a template and saving symbols described at the left assumes that all template (.TPL) files are in the directory:
 C:\MTEC\TPL\
 It also assumes that all symbol subdirectories are directly under:
 C:\MTEC\SYM\
 Users with differing directory structures should modify the described process accordingly.



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following ones) do not require entries in their Fields, as Reports will never be run on them.

The symbol is saved and displayed in the upper box of the template. The user is returned to the main Template menu.

- Select **ActvOnly** under the **Layers** menu (L or l, F4). And choose the Master layer containing the 12" scale Detail Boxes.
- Enter the **Template** menu (T or t) and select **SaveSymb** (F5).

Repeat the sequence just described to save the 12" Detail Boxes as a symbol, naming the symbol "Master." At the prompt: "Enter reference point for symbol:" snap with the middle mouse button to the snapping point copied earlier from the Border layer.

Repeat for the 12" Typical Detail Box layer. Name the symbol "Detail." Snap to the lower left corner of the box for the symbol reference point.

The symbols have now been saved and a template created for them. The drawing file should now contain no entities, as the process of saving the entities as symbols deleted them. To test the accuracy of the symbols and to demonstrate the use of the system, place each symbol as follows:

- First, create a new layer named "Layout."
- Using **ActvOnly** under the **Layers** menu, activate the Border layer (L or l, F4,F1).
- Enter the **Template** menu (T or t). The message line should read: "Rotation = 0-0' Enlargement = 1.0 x 1.0 x 1.0 "Z" Offset = 0'."

For this example, the primary plotting scale for the sheet is assumed to be 1/8" (imagine that a floor plan has been drawn covering roughly 2/3 of the drawing sheet).

- Select **Enlarge** (S4), then **Set All** (F6). At the prompt: "Enter symbol enlargement factor:" type 96 and press Enter. Press the right mouse button to return to **Template** menu.
- Set **Explode** (S6) ON (asterisk displayed).
- Press the **INS(ert)** key until the message line reads: "Current input mode is absolute Cartesian (x, y).
- Select the Border symbol (displayed in the top template box) by clicking on it with the left mouse button.
- Place the symbol by pressing the **Space Bar** and at the prompt: "Enter the x distance from the origin:" press Enter to accept the default value of 0; press Enter at the Y distance prompt to accept 0, as well.

Note:

Users of the software display list will be aware of the anomalous behavior exhibited when attempting to snap to a point in the LayOut menu under Plotter. The methodology described in these pages provides a work-around for this problem.

The Border layer has been placed with its center snapping point located at absolute coordinates 0,0. In LayOut, then, the user would press the **INS** key to set Input Mode to Absolute Cartesian and use the space bar to select the X=0, Y=0 point to establish the plotting layout.

LAYOUT SCALE (To:)

MASTER SCALE (From:)	12"	6"	3"	2"	1 1/2"	1"	3/4"	1/2"	3/8"	1/4"	3/16"	1/8"	3/32"	1/16"	1:20	1:40	1:100	1:1000
12"		2	4	6	8	12	16	24	32	48	64	96	128	192	240	480	1200	12000
6"	.5		2	3	4	6	8	12	16	24	32	48	64	96	120	240	600	6000
3"	.25	.5		1.5	2	3	4	6	8	12	16	24	32	48	60	120	300	3000
2"	.16666	.33333	.66666		1.3333	2	2.6666	4	5.3333	8	10.666	16	21.333	32	40	80	200	2000
1 1/2"	.125	.25	.5	.75		1.5	2	3	4	6	8	12	16	24	30	60	150	1500
1"	.08333	.16666	.33333	.5	.66666		1.3333	2	2.6666	4	5.3333	8	10.666	16	20	40	100	1000
3/4"	.0625	.125	.25	.375	.5	.75		1.5	2	3	4	6	8	12	15	30	75	750
1/2"	.04166	.08333	.16666	.25	.33333	.5	.66666		1.3333	2	2.6666	4	5.3333	8	10	20	50	500
3/8"	.03125	.0625	.125	.1875	.25	.375	.5	.75		1.5	2	3	4	6	7.5	15	37.5	375
1/4"	.02083	.04166	.08333	.125	.16666	.25	.33333	.5	.66666		1.3333	2	2.6666	4	5	10	25	250
3/16"	.015625	.03125	.0625	.09375	.125	.1875	.25	.375	.5	.75		1.5	2	3	3.75	7.5	18.75	187.5
1/8"	.010416	.02083	.04166	.0625	.08333	.125	.16666	.25	.33333	.5	.66666		1.3333	2	2.5	5	12.5	125
3/32"	.007812	.015625	.03125	.046875	.0625	.09375	.125	.1875	.25	.375	.5	.75		1.5	1.875	3.75	9.375	93.75
1/16"	.005208	.010416	.020833	.03125	.04166	.0625	.08333	.125	.16666	.25	.33333	.5	.66666		1.25	2.5	6.25	62.5
1:20	.004166	.008333	.016666	.025	.033333	.05	.06666	.1	.13333	.2	.26666	.4	.53333	.8		2	5	50
1:40	.002083	.004166	.008333	.0125	.01666	.025	.03333	.05	.06666	.1	.13333	.2	.26666	.4	5		2.5	25
1:100	.000833	.001666	.003333	.005	.00666	.01	.01333	.02	.02666	.04	.05333	.08	.10666	.16	2	.4		10
1:1000	.000083	.000166	.000333	.0005	.00066	.001	.00133	.002	.00266	.004	.00533	.008	.01066	.016	.02	.04	.1	

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- Using **SetActive** (F3) under the **Layers** (L or l) menu, activate the Master layer.
- Enter the **Template** menu (T or t), select the "Master" symbol and place it by either snapping with the middle mouse button to the snapping point in the center of the Border layer [both **LyrSnap** (S5) and **End Pnt** (F2) must be ON in **ObjSnap** (X)] or by using the Absolute Cartesian Input Mode method used to place the Border symbol.
- Using **SetActive** (F3) under the **Layers** (L or l) menu, activate the "Layout" layer.
- Place a "Detail Box" symbol as illustrated in Figure 5, snapping to the correct point in the Layout layer. Figure 6 illustrates the result.

This completes the placement of the 1/8" scale Border and Detail Boxes grid. Next, a 3/16" scale Detail Box will be placed. *This scale has been selected for graphic clarity.*

- Using **SetActive** (F3) under the **Layers** (L or l) menu activate the Layout layer.
- Enter the **Template** menu (T or t), set the enlargement factor to 64 (S4, F6, 64, Enter, Right Mouse button). Place the "Master" symbol as above. Figure 4 illustrates the display at this point.

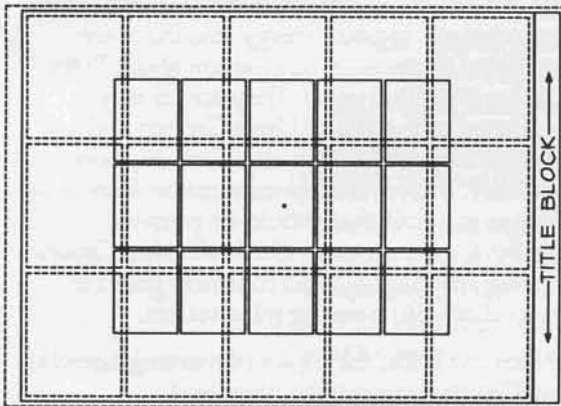


Figure 4

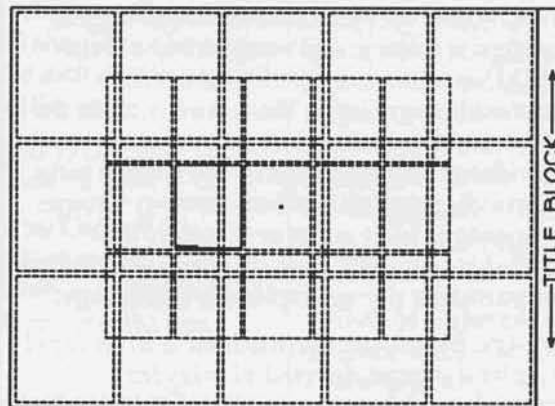


Figure 6

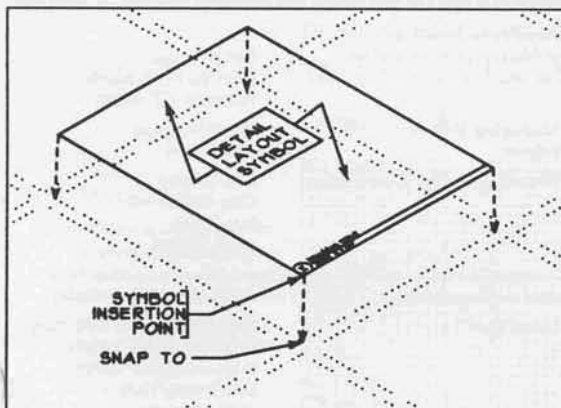


Figure 5

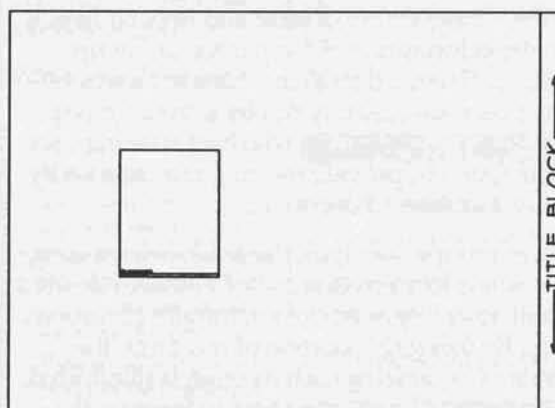


Figure 7

Plot the Border layer only. Set the **Scale** (F4) in the **Plotter** menu to 1/8"; set **PaperSiz** (F5) to the appropriate size; snap to the center snapping point of the Border layer to set **Layout** (F9). The plot center for this sheet is now set *and should never be changed.*

Leaving the paper in the plotter, plot the 3/16" scale Detail Box by making the Layout layer **ActvOnly**, entering the **Plotter** menu, and resetting the plot scale to 3/16". See Figure 7.

As can be seen from the above, careful control of the enlargement factor and insertion point of the symbols provides a simple means for coordinating plotting multiple scale elements, from within both a single drawing file and from multiple drawing files.

Note:

John Hitch has created a pair DCAL macros (**Plot 40** and **Layout 40**) that provide a series of tools that automate much of the process described here. Most notably, a preview of the sheet layout of multiple scale elements is enabled. They are available at a very reasonable price. For further information:

Hitch & Associates
3309 Childers Street
Raleigh, NC 27612

Next Issue:

Coordinating irregularly sized drawing elements that need to be plotted at differing scales.



POINTS OF REFERENCE

Users Groups: Some Shared Experience

The advantages of participating in a Users Group are many and varied. They may be summarized simply: benefiting from the shared pool of experience available through a Users Group, the DataCAD user's skill level/productivity can be greatly enhanced.

A hesitation about Users Groups is the perception that, by sharing with others, some competitive advantage is lost. Uniformly, even the most advanced users of DataCAD report that, for all of the information that they "give away," they are usually rewarded at each meeting with new insights into the use of the software.

If there is so much to be gained through Users Groups, why are there not more of them? Why do they struggle to keep going? The primary reason appears to be that, for all of their benefits, Users Groups routinely require the input of considerable time and energy for their maintenance.

Respondents to a recent questionnaire almost unanimously reported that the single biggest problem in starting and maintaining a DataCAD Users Group is the degree of effort required to organize it. This effort includes the initial one required to start a Group and extends to that demanded by the routine tasks surrounding each individual meeting. Groups struggling to keep going or that have disbanded are typically ones that have relied upon one particular person to provide this energy.

Groups that have maintained a high level of activity have devised strategies through which organizational responsibilities are either minimized or shared.

These strategies are diverse and depend largely on the composition of the particular Group. Smaller Groups (less than 20 active members) have been successfully run by a "core" group: 2-4 dedicated members who host meetings, set their agendas, provide meeting minutes, notify other members of events, etc.

These groups may typically hold their meetings at a single location (a member's office, a dealer's training facility, a school's computer classroom, etc.). By fixing the location of meetings, the strain of organizing each meeting is minimized, allowing the "core" members to focus on the content of each particular meeting.

Larger Groups, though, have evolved procedures by which responsibilities carried by the "core" members are minimized. DBUG (DataCAD Boston Users Group) rotates responsibility for meetings to a designated Host and Co-Host. The meetings are held at the Host's office. The Host is responsible for refreshments (paid for by donations collected at the previous meeting), for setting the agenda, and for running the meeting.

The Co-Host is responsible for taking meeting notes, writing them up, and mailing them. The Co-Host becomes the Host of the next meeting. Two "core" members maintain the mailing list, administer the Group's budget (principally for the mailing of meeting notes), and provide to the Host and Co-Host standardized materials useful for organizing meetings. They also act as the "contact people" to Cadkey, Inc. and to other Users Groups. While this structure may not be appropriate for other Groups, it provides an example of a creative approach to the problem of "core member" burn-out.

The people who have organized Users Groups and continue to pour energy into them are dedicated to sharing information about DataCAD with fellow users. They are equally dedicated to the *idea* of Users Groups and are the best source of information and support available. Improved communication *between* the Groups is a goal that should be pursued. Ideally, Groups could include all other Groups on their mailing lists and routinely provide each other with meeting minutes, etc.

In the next issue, the topics of meeting agendas and Group focus will be discussed.

Please refer to 3D World, vol. 5, no. 4 for the most recent listing of active DataCAD Users Groups.

Editor's Note:
Many thanks to the User Group "contact" people who took the time to respond to my questions.

New Tech Support Phone #:
When calling for Tech Support, dial ext. 7157; you will be ringing Mark Hyjeck's extension. If his line is busy, the call will automatically be forwarded to Clay Rogers.

New Phone Extensions:
Dale Arsenault 6426
Lou Bodnar 6425
Mark Hyjeck 7157
Clay Rogers 7100
Frank Simpson 6443
Mark White 6455

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