

How We Improved the 2007 Awards

Plus some strong programs not considered for 2007 Awards.

by Werner Ruotsalainen, Best Software Awards Nominations Manager

I'm very happy with the results of this year's *Smartphone & Pocket PC* magazine Best Software Awards. We put a lot of attention and work into creating a comprehensive and logically consistent category structure, and we think it paid off. Major changes include:

- Expanded sub-categories within the Communications category: This category had two sub-categories last year; it has 14 this year.
- Separate Emulator category with sub-categories: The Game Emulator sub-category from last year was turned into a major category called "Emulators." This new category has over a dozen sub-categories. We spent almost two months documenting the emulators available for Windows Mobile and creating a category structure for them.
- Expanded sub-categories in the Games category: For example, in addition to the Strategy sub-category, we've added Real-Time Strategy and Turn-Based Strategy. We also have separate categories for Backgammon games, First-Person Shooters, Golf games, Top-Down Puzzle Adventure games, and more.
- Expanded sub-categories in the Multimedia category.
- Expanded sub-categories in the Utilities category.
- Expanded the number of categories in the non-touch screen smartphone section.
- Minor changes in a number of other categories.

We had to expand the old category structure not only to handle the explosion of the quality titles, but to address some criticisms we've received about previous years' Best Software Awards. One of the problems we had in the past was that some sub-categories were too general. For example, the Strategy sub-category in Games contained far too many titles worthy of recognition. We divided that up into three sub-categories: Real-Time, Turn-Based, and Strategy (for titles that did not fit in the first two).

However, one thing has not changed: there are still far fewer third-party programs available for non-touch screen smartphones. Because of this, and even though we greatly expanded it, we were forced to use an abbreviated category structure for the non-touch screen software section.

Different versions of the same title

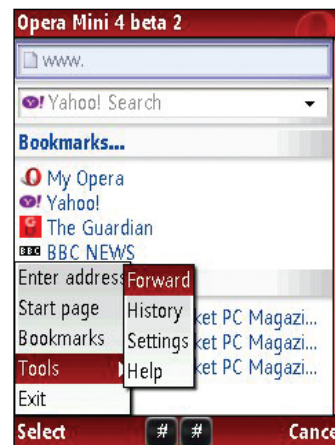
A number of software developers release multiple versions of the same product. For example, you might see a standard, professional, and even an enterprise version of the same program. Some even offer a free "lite" version of their program, which may have fewer features than the standard version. One important example of this is LogMeIn (Winner in the Utilities / Remote Host Control category) which is available as LogMeIn Pro and LogMeIn Free. We chose not to nominate multiple versions of this program because it would tend to divide up the votes between the different versions, insuring that neither one would win. LogMeIn Pro was the winner, but LogMeIn Free is a great program that doesn't cost you a cent. If you find a commercial program you like, you might check to see if a free version is available.

There are also a few cases where a vendor offers similar programs. For example, Opera Software offers a "Mobile" and "Mini" version of its namesake browser. In addition, there are a few cases where a previous version of a program is still available. For example, CorePlayer Mobile is an excellent video player, but you can still download its beta predecessor, TCPMP. In these two cases, because there were significant differences in the programs, we nominated both.

MIDlets and software that works with emulators

The variety of emulators available for the Windows Mobile platform means that there is a vast array of software that can run on these devices with their help. For example, with the FinalBurn emulator installed, you can run the old Cave and NeoGeo arcade games, which are way better than most native Windows Mobile arcade games. We did not include games and programs like these in the nominations, even though they can be run on the devices, because they were not written originally for Windows Mobile.

Java MIDlets were another concern of ours. MIDlets are cross-platform, Java-language programs, and most Windows Mobile phone-enabled devices come with MIDlet Manager software already installed. Generally speaking, we did not nominate any MIDlets for the awards because most of them were not devel-



Opera Mini, a Java MIDlet, running on a WM device.

oped with Windows Mobile in mind. We made an exception with Opera Mini, an excellent Web browser, because the developers focused on making sure it ran well under Windows Mobile. Note also that we have not included a sub-category for MIDlet Managers themselves and similar applications like Palm's famous threaded SMS manager because most of these are built into Windows Mobile devices (are OEM-only software) and are not available for download and installation.

"Hacked" software

A little discussed fact is that some programs designed for Windows Mobile touch screen devices can be made to work on non-touch screen smartphones with the help of stylus emulators like SPHelper. We've decided not to consider these titles in the non-touch screen categories because of the need to manually tweak the program and use a stylus emulator to make them work. If you want to read more about how to do this, check out my section (Menneisyys) in the *Smartphone & Pocket PC* magazine blogs (smartphonemag.com/blogs).

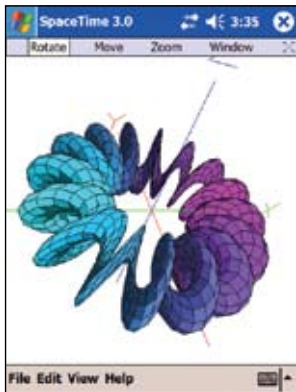
Slipped through the cracks

Some other excellent titles were not nominated for the Best Software Awards. In a few cases, we missed some deserving programs and,



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when we passed our nominations list by the developers, most of them did not request that we consider them. Unfortunately, considering the thousands of programs out there, it's hard to avoid this. After the nominations were closed and the voting completed, I noticed two programs that should definitely have been considered:



SpaceTime (spacetime.us) is a high-quality mathematics package available for touch screen devices, Windows PCs, and Palm OS PDAs. (The developer is working on a version for the non-touch screen smartphone.) It lacks some of the features of HiCalc (the winner of the Calculator category), but it's unmatched at 3D and time-dependent plotting and sophisticated CAS. Also, the developer is constantly updating the product.

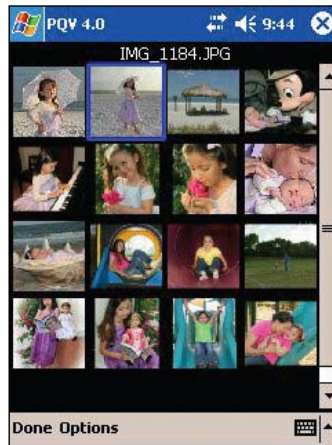
iTalkie (tabletmedia.com/iTalkie.html) should also have been nominated in the SIP and VoIP sub-category. It may not have outscored Skype (the winner), but it would have probably been a finalist.

In some cases, we removed a program from the nominations list because of a copyright issue or because the developer asked us to do so. For example, at the request of the developer, we had to remove the excellent NetFront Web browser (access-company.com) at the last minute because they removed the older version (3.3) from retail channels and had not yet released version 3.4.

Programs and updates released since the nominations closed

Since the Best Software Awards nominations closed, a number of brand new programs or significant updates of existing programs have been released. Here are some of the more noteworthy titles:

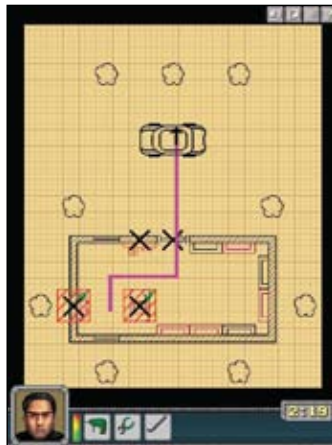
Larry Bank's PQV 4.0 (bitbanksoftware.com/PQV.html) has been completely rewritten and updated for both Windows Mobile platforms. (Larry is the creator of SmartGear, the winner in the Multiplatform Game Console Emulators category.) While PQV still has some bugs, it's clearly the fastest picture viewer out there. The picture loading speed may be of enormous importance for the serious



photographer that wants to zoom into his or her pictures as quickly as possible.



Orions: The Second Age (pocketmoregames.com) is a recently released add-on pack to Orions: Legend of Wizards (winner in the Games / Turn-Based Strategy category).



Stolen in 60 Seconds (herocraft.com/en) is one of a number of recently released games from HeroCraft. They also released a long-awaited controller fix for their excellent arcade compilation Arcade Park.

PocketCaprice 0.9 (pocketcult.com) is an Amstrad CPC emulator for Windows Mobile touch screen devices. Version 0.8 of this program was nominated, and although version 0.9 does have many new features and fixes, I don't think it would have surpassed Pocket Commo-

dore 64, the winner in its sub-category.

IM+ (shapervices.de) is the recently released update of an "all-in-one mobile messenger" program. The new version has multi-account and auto-logging support. The previous version of this program is a finalist in the Chat and Messaging sub-category.



The non-touch screen smartphone platform has also received some brand new titles. In addition to PQV mentioned above, Resco (resco.net) recently released their Audio Recorder application for the non-touch screen smartphone platform. The touch screen version of the program is the winner of the Call Recorders & Answering Machines sub-category this year. Now it's available for non-touch screen smartphones as well.

Final thoughts

One of the problems we haven't completely solved is how to deal with programs that can be listed in more than one category. For example, Resco File Explorer (the winner of the Utilities / File Management category) has an excellent system registry editor built into it. In my opinion, it's better than PHM Registry Editor, the winner of the Utilities / Registry Editors category. For simplicity's sake, we have limited each program to the single category that best fits the product. However, as you can see in the Resco example, it can lead to problems. Another example of this is Resco Audio Recorder, which is a winner in the Call Recorders category. However, it is missing from the category where most people would look for it: Audio Recorders. The sole reason for this is that a call recorder is able to do everything a "plain" audio recorder can, but not vice versa. The same reasoning is why CorePlayer and TCPMP are not listed in the Audio Players multimedia category: these video players can also play audio formats, while no titles in the latter category can play back videos.

The only exception to the "one category only" rule is the new Emulator sub-categories. Some of the multi-platform emulators have separately purchasable modules for the different console platforms they emulate. For example, you see MorphGear mentioned in a number of the Emulator sub-categories. ■