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# Software Review:

## **PSPad - Freeware Editor for Microsoft Windows OS**

By Jeffrey D. Cox

"Free or Open-Source Tools," the December 2006 Intercom magazine cover story, contained a large list of heavy-duty tools that technical communicators on a tight budget can use. One tool not mentioned in the article is PSPad. It can be best described as Notepad on steroids, and I have found it quite handy and powerful.

As anyone who has worked with Notepad knows, it is extremely limited. PSPad is a wonderful editor for simple text files, but it also contains tools to support and assist in the hand-editing of a large number of ASCII-based coding languages, including C++, JavaScript, perl, SQL, Visual Basic, and even x86 Assembly. Hexadecimal editing is also supported.

Getting PSPad is easy; just point your browser to <http://www.pspad.com/en> and then click on the Download button in the left side of the window. Using the Installer version steps you through the entire process of getting the software up and running.

To use spell-checking, you will have to separately download a free dictionary from the web site (use the link in the window where you chose the Installer version) and uncompress it in the /spell subdirectory under your installed PSPad software. The dictionary downloads as a .cab file, which can be uncompressed using a program such as WinZip® or WinRAR. Finally, go to the Settings > Spell settings command in PSPad and choose the dictionary you installed.

When you start the software, you will see a project pane and text editing pane. If you will be working with a large number of files, you can create a project to con-

tain all of your files. Multiple projects of various types can be open simultaneously.

Select Project > New Project to open an empty project. You can double-click on the New project or Folder text to assign a new name for the default project or folder created for your project. If you want to add more folders, highlight the New project folder and select the New Folder shortcut menu command. If a project does not require a folder, it can be deleted using the Delete Folder shortcut menu command. Files can be added to folders or a project using the Add Files shortcut menu command.

Once you have created a project, you can specify settings to define an external compiler for your code, based on the file type. A log file can also be specified to capture compiler output, along with a log parser to assist in locating code errors. You can also define external applications, the file format (DOS, Unix, or Mac), and other parameters for your project.

Program Settings allow an extreme amount of interface and software behavior modification, including support for 36 languages, completion of characters, web server and proxy server settings, and the ability to customize shortcut keys. Backup features include whether or not to add a BAK suffix to backup files and how often PSPad should perform an autosave.

The text editing pane has a wealth of features that are useful for the editing of any kind of text file. Unlike Notepad, multiple documents can be open and edited during a session, but this is just the beginning. PSPad contains several features found in products such as Microsoft Word. Among these are the ability to record, manage,

and play back macros, bookmarking, auto correction of typed text, the ability to lock the active document, and file comparison. Two other useful features are FTP support for accessing remote files and the ability to search and replace text in multiple files.

As mentioned above, PSPad is particularly suited for editing coding languages and contains a number of features to assist in this task.

The View > Line Numbers command allows you to toggle line numbers on or off, which is very useful if you are troubleshooting code or are working with very large files.

A code window can be turned on using the Tools > Code Explorer window command to see the structure of any code you are editing. The Code Explorer window also provides some rudimentary troubleshooting, since any invalid code will cause the structure to appear strange.

Another nice code-editing feature in PSPad is the ability to change the colors of code elements, such as XML tags, using the Settings > Highlighters Settings command. The software assigns default color settings to elements, but you can easily change these by highlighting an item in the Highlighter Settings dialog box and then using the Font Color button to select a new color.

Code can be viewed in a web browser window or, if you want to remove tagging and use the text in another application, you can select the text and use the HTML > Conversion > Remove HTML Tags command.

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