Cool Tools Found under the Tree

Whil Hentzen

When I've had the time, I've snuck in my two cents on various "Cool Tools" that have shown up on my desk. The past fall and winter have been so much more hectic than usual that a number of Cool Tools have piled up on my desk. While I'm waiting for someone to magically appear and take over the Cool Tool column for me, I thought I'd plow through the collection that I've already got.

COM Explorer

I've shared my frustration with the implementation and architecture of the COM component mechanism we're forced to use these days - in lieu of a better solution, you need to at least have tools to deal with it. COM Explorer by 4Developers, brought to my attention by Rick Strahl of West-Wind Technologies, is one such tool. It's purpose is to explore, manage, and fix ActiveX Controls, In-Proc (DLL) servers, and Out-Of-Process (EXE) servers. You can browse registered COM objects, and view a variety of information about them, as shown in Figure 1. Furthermore, you can detect screwed up or missing dependencies, track problems associated with "versionitis," and clean up the registry, as shown in Figure 2.
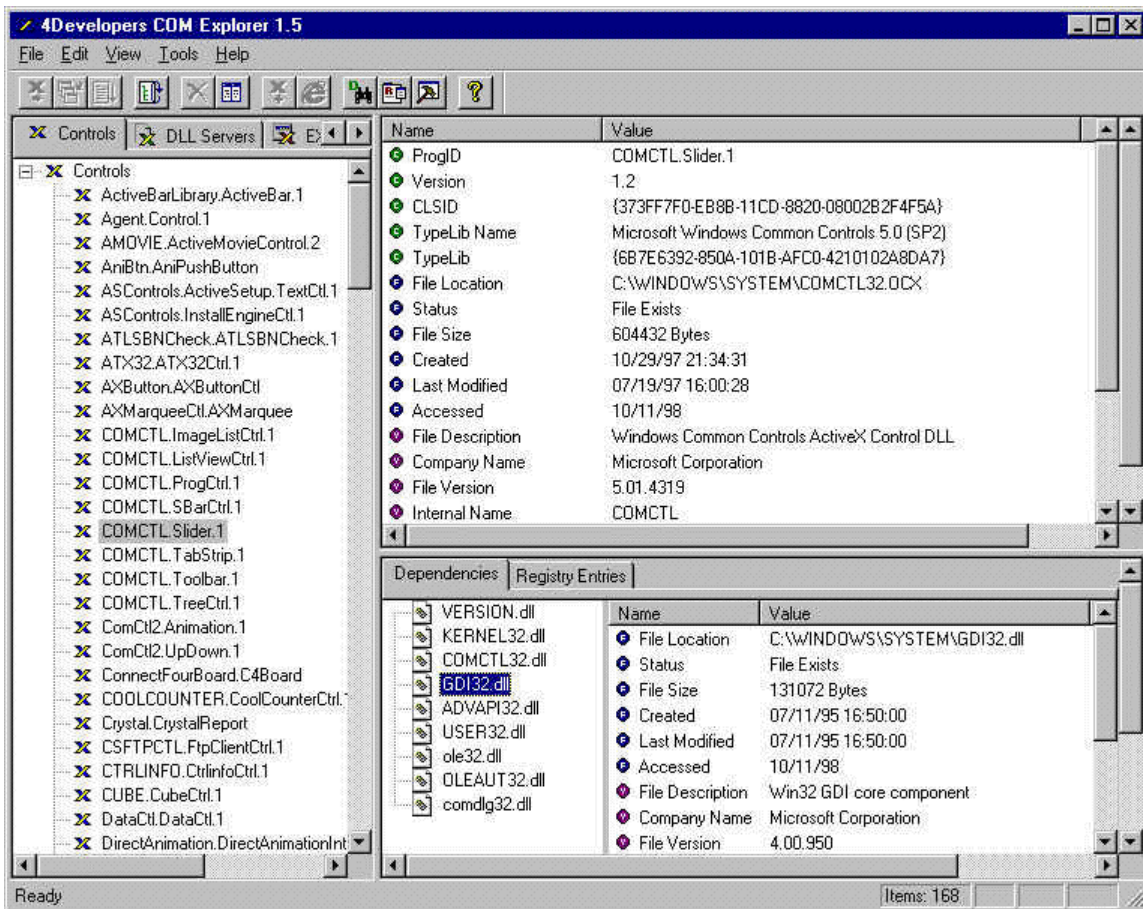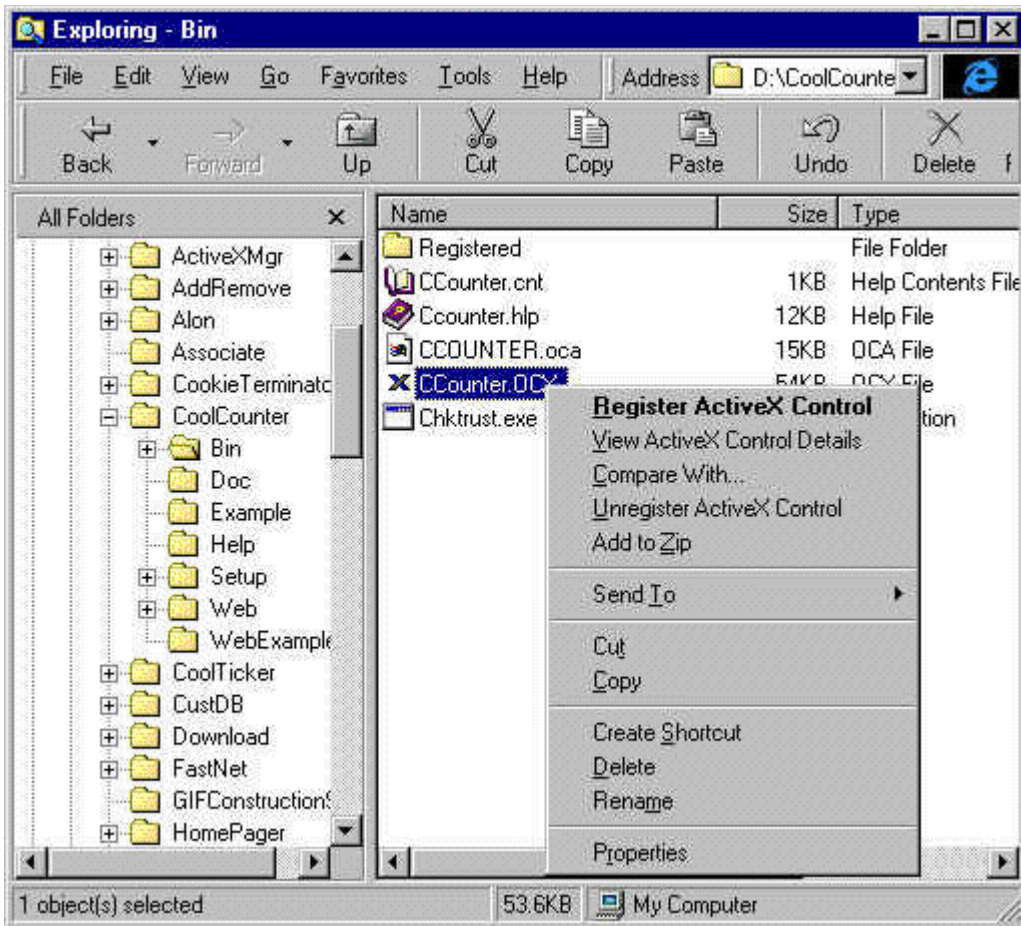

Figure 1. The main screen of COM Explorer.

COM Explorer adds functionality to the Windows Explorer shortcut menu.

You can download a trial version at www.4developers.com. 260 KB. A single license is $129, a site license is $350, and a corporate license is $650. Well worth it.

Windows Monitor
When you create VFP Servers, they can often hang - and the only way you can reliably kill them is by rebooting. Sure, there are commands available to you inside MMC and elsewhere in NT, but they don't always work.

After I demonstrated such nasty behavior at DevCon last year, Frank D'Arrigo came up to me and mentioned a freeware program, NT Monitor, will kill those sessions for you. It's included in this month's Subscriber Downloads.

NT Monitor will display active processes and open windows. You can select a particular process and the owner will be displayed. You can also select a window and it's owner (a process) will be displayed. You can also close a specification application, such as one that is "Not Responding", or a process.

Be forewarned that this tool is intended to be used by experienced programmers. Unlike tools built-in to the operating system, you can use NT Monitor to kill system processes, such as KERNAL32, VMM32, and others, but think about what that means - you're not killing an errant application - you're killing part of the operating system. Do not try this at home, and keep small children away! <g>

PowerDesk
I use Windows Explorer a lot. In fact, I usually have two half-size Explorer windows open, laid out side-by-side, because it makes it really easy to compare the contents of two folders, or to drag stuff from one directory to another when they're on drives or machines far apart in the Explorer tree.

There are a couple of problems with this arrangement. First, I tend to keep the windows arranged "in order" so that drive C is on the left, and drive "F" is on the right - and so that the window arrangement on

the screen reflects the order in which the buttons are displayed in the task bar. OK, that's pretty anal, but, that's me. Needing to keep things this orderly, however, exacts a price. I'm forever fussing with things to keep them arranged "just so." A waste of time, to be sure, but I've found it keeps me from making mistakes like dragging old versions of files on top of new ones. And besides, not having professional sports teams in Wisconsin means that I can either watch the Cubs and the Bears, or have my Sunday afternoons free to keep my windows arranged. Tough call, eh?

The other problem, of course, is that with every additional open window on your system, you increase the chances of a random GPF (as opposed to the planned-type of GPFs). With two copies of the incredibly stable Windows Explorer running, I'm constantly crashing. It's NT, so more often than not a recovery is easy, but not always. And if you don't have a 21" or better monitor, two Explorer windows may not work for you.

After a long discussion on this very topic, Russ Swall of Vision Data Systems forwarded this info on PowerDesk from Mijenix. I could fill an entire issue on this tool. Let me pique your interest with a couple of things that I found immediately compelling. The Size Manager (see Figure 3), allows you to dig up stats to answer the question "where did all my hard disk space go." 'Nuf said there.

Size Manager -> My Computer

File Edit Tree View Tools Help

Normal | Find Results

Folders	Total	Files in Folder	Subfolders	Nbr of Files	Modified
My Computer					
3½ Floppy (A:)	---	---	---	---	---
Shrinkwrap (C:)	1.49GB (75%)	77.5MB	1.41GB	16	---
AccuSoft	9.50MB (01%)	512 bytes	9.50MB	0	11/9/
Acrobat3	5.23MB (00%)	512 bytes	5.23MB	0	8/30/
Collwin	1.85MB (00%)	1.85MB		17	12/20/
dastdata	21.3MB (01%)	21.3MB		57	9/9/
Fp	68.5MB (04%)	16.6MB	51.8MB	9	11/20/
import	4.36MB (00%)	1.67MB	2.69MB	9	9/9/
Iomg_NT	2.09MB (00%)	2.09MB	2.50KB	22	8/23/
Multimedia Files	1.50KB (00%)	512 bytes	1.00KB	0	8/23/
Program Files	1.02GB (69%)	512 bytes	1.02GB	0	12/20/
Recycler	1.50KB (00%)	512 bytes	1.00KB	0	8/23/
Temp	15.6MB (01%)	10.0MB	5.60MB	346	12/20/
TEMPsu	255KB (00%)	255KB		2	11/1/
Winnt	272MB (18%)	6.80MB	265MB	91	12/20/
Internal (D:)	1.96GB (98%)	11.0MB	1.95GB	26	---
Customers (E:)	1.59GB (93%)	1.41MB	1.59GB	17	---

My Computer 728MB free (11.6GB Capacity) | View: Normal | Sort by:Folders | Active: Tree Pane
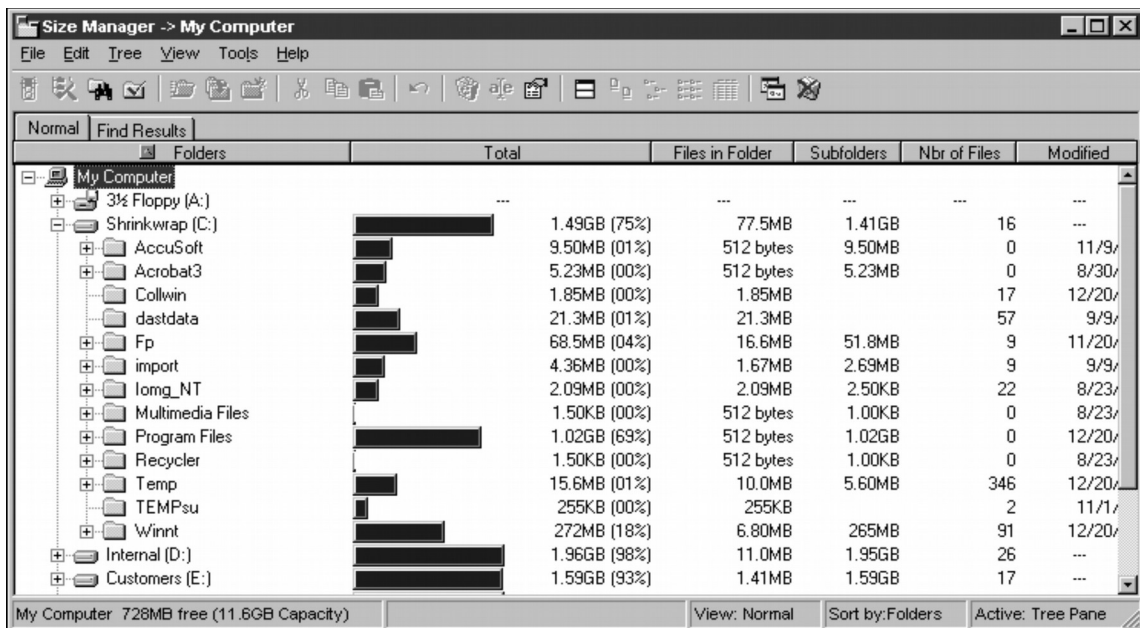
Figure 3. The Size Manager calculates and displays where your disk space has gone.

The PowerDesk tool, a replacement for Explorer, has a column for File Extension - in addition to the File Type column in Explorer. If you've struggled with Explorers categorization of a variety of VFP file types as either "the same kind" or as "Visual Basic" file types, you're probably thinking it worth it's price right there, wouldn't you say? You can also sort on Time, not just Date/Time.

You can also select to display the PowerDesk window in Single Pane, Dual Pane Horizontal or Dual Pane Vertical with a single menu command. However, it's still one window - not two. The Tools menu drop down has a variety of useful commands, including Erase Diskette, Copy, Erase, and Format Disk, and Add/Remove Programs - most available elsewhere, but in disparate locations. See Figure 4. You may also find the Compare and Synchronize Folders menu commands invaluable by themselves - you can intuit what they do.
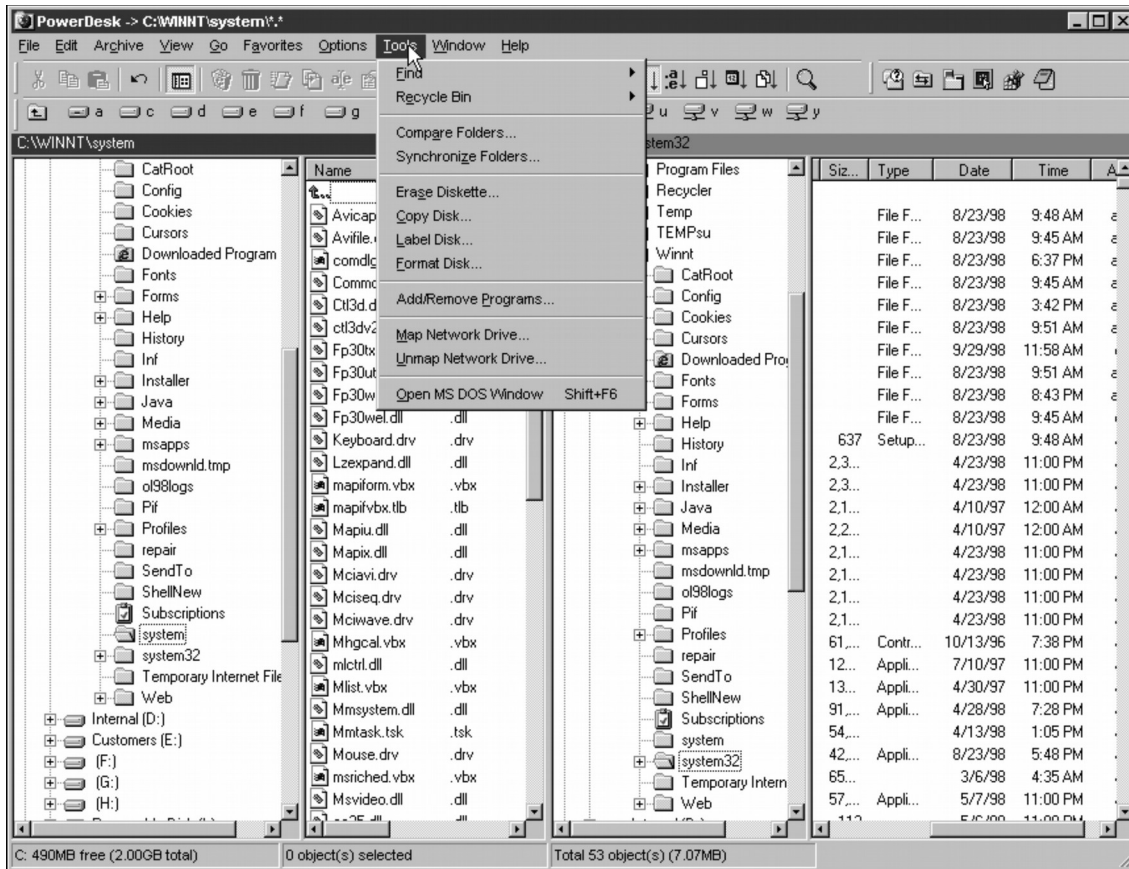
Figure 4. The PowerDesk Panes have additional columns for File Extension and Time, and the Tools menu drop down shows a variety of useful features.

PowerDesk is available, along with some other tools, at www.mijenix.com. 2.9 MB. $39.95 for download only; $39.95 + shipping if you want the CD and a printed manual.

Collage Complete

If you need screen shots for any purpose - application specifications, articles, or books - stop using Print-Screen and Paintbrush, and jump over to www.innermedia.com for a copy of Collage Complete. I've using various incarnations of Collage since the olden days (pre-VFP 3.0 release when I was scratching out the Programming VFP book), and still regard it as the standard.

CC allows you to fine-tune to nearly a ridiculous degree how you want to capture information from your screen and what you want to do with the results. You can identify the file that captures are sent to, and whether or not CC should automatically create and increment the filename. You can determine the format of the file (TIF, JPG, etc.), what type (grey scale, color, depth of color), and how it's sized and scaled. See Figure 5.

You can also determine whether you can to automatically dump a capture to a file, or to preview is first, and whether you want to capture instantaneously. You can also have CC wait for a period of time you specify, so that you can "set up" the capture, for example, opening a drop down list and then getting the mouse out of the way.

Collage Capture <ORIGINAL.SET>

File   Actions   View   Options   Help

Capture Settings...

✓ File Output Settings...

Printer Output Settings...

Preview...

Save Image to File

Print Image

Start Capture Now

File Output Settings

Image Destination

◉ File   Browse...

D:\575-9906.TIF

☒ AutoIncrement

Customize AutoIncrement...

○ Clipboard

Help

Adjustments

Brightness: 100 ◄ ____ ►

Sizing/Scaling...   Transforms...

Style

Format: TIFF

Comp: No Compression

Type: 256 Level True Gray (8-bit)

Pattern: No Pattern

Cropping Area: left   top   width   height

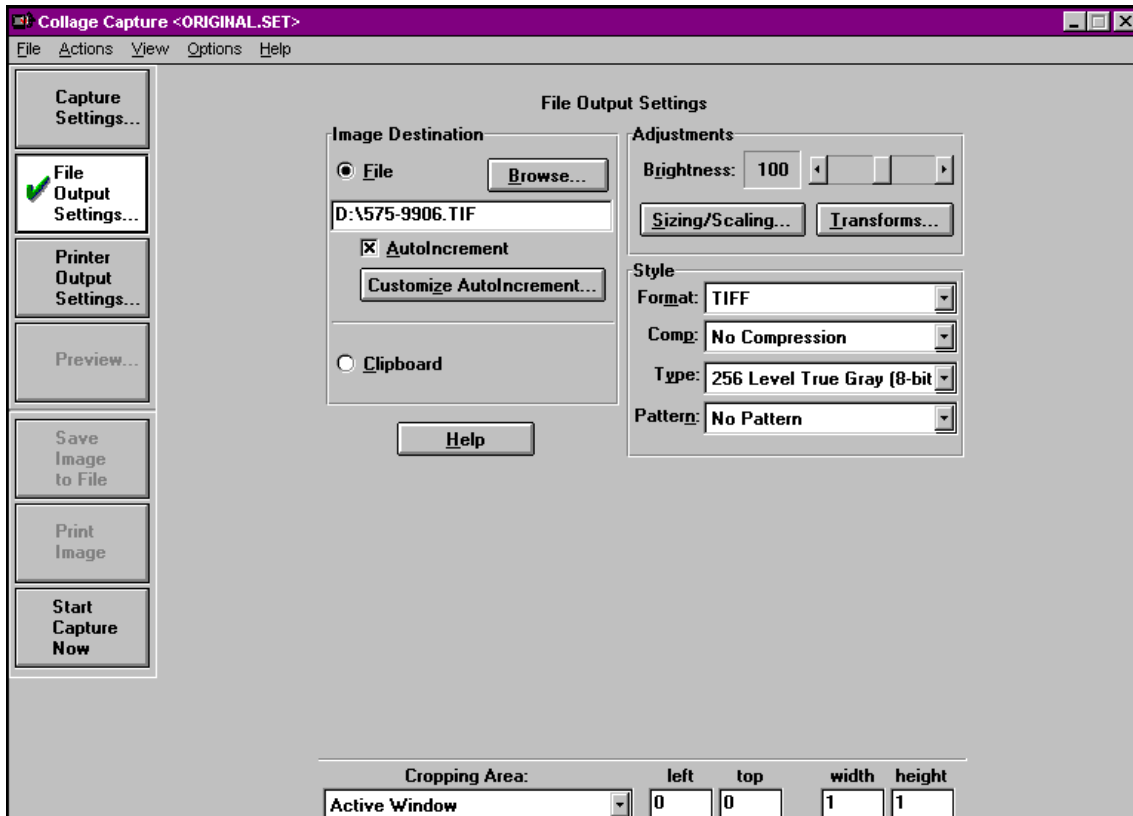Active Window   0   0   1   1

Figure 5. You can customize how Collage Complete creates and names files.

Even handier than the auto-naming feature (which I think is pretty darn handy), is the ability to preview what's been captured and then tweak it before saving to a file. If you use Print-Screen and Paintbrush, you're forced to cut the part of the image that you want to use - and if there's a lot of stuff underneath, the background can interfere with what you've cut.

The Preview pane allows you to select (or "crop") what you want to save - a menu pull down, a title bar, a client window, the active window, or even custom coordinates. You could use the last in order to capture several windows that each overlay each other, or a drop down that opens up outside of a client window area. See Figure 6.
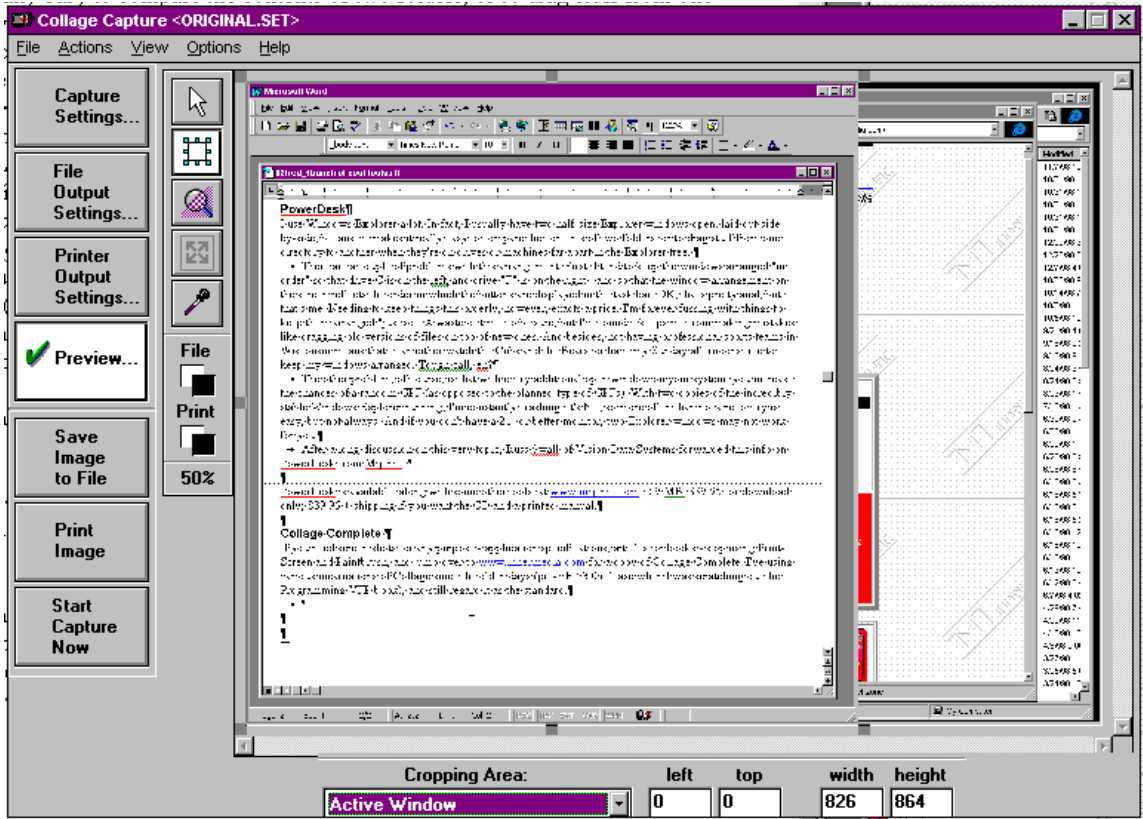
Figure 6. The Preview screen allows you to view the entire screen, and then change which part of the image should be saved.

Collage Complete is available, along with some other tools, at www.innermedia.com. 765 KB. $149 plus shipping and all that. Inner Media always ships the media and the manual, even if you've gotten the downloads first.