

Hard cash for writing software

By Bil. Alvernaz
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SANTA MONICA, Calif. — Two years ago, Peter Norton had to give away what he wrote about the then-new IBM Corp. Personal Computer.

Since then, both the man and the computer have reached superstar status: The IBM PC has become an industry standard. Norton gets paid for what he writes and is riding high on the wave of PC's success.

Norton has written dozens of articles and two books about the IBM PC, explaining what makes it work and how to use it. His articles and columns regularly appear in national computer publications. His software package, called Norton Utilities, is one of the best-selling packages for the PC.

Now, IBM has provided him another opportunity: He just finished three books about the PCjr, IBM's new, smaller, home version of the PC. He is writing more articles and has a column in a magazine aimed just at PCjr users.

What Norton does best is explain and interpret what all the

technical talk means. In the process, he says he "fills the need" of people who have a voracious appetite for basic knowledge to understand more about IBM's personal computers. Through understandable metaphors, he has educated people who had no computer background or training.

Norton bought an IBM PC in early 1982, shortly after it became available, "just to fool around," he says. Until then, his career had been a long series of systems-programming jobs. ("In the old West, I would have been known as a drifter," says the 43-year-old.)

He is the first to admit his success is a combination of being in the right place at the right time and having the ideal background and technical training. He is quick to add that blind luck helped a little, too.

But those who have watched him add another factor: his shrewd marketing savvy — the best example of which is that he chose to market not his product, but himself as someone a computer user could relate to.

The Norton Utilities started



PENNING SUCCESS: Peter Norton teams up with the IBM PC.

it all. After buying the PC, Norton quickly discovered some awkward aspects of working with it. One of the most popular parts of the package is a program called Unerase, through which erased files can be reconstructed and "picked up" from oblivion on the computer disk. His programs also allow PC users to look at other program disks (even hidden files) and to modify them.

Ease of use quickly popularized Norton's programs. His free tip sheets led to writing articles by the summer of 1982. At the end of that year he had written his first book, *Inside The IBM PC*, but barely showed a profit.

Initially, Norton bet his life savings of \$30,000 that he could make it selling his PC pro-

grams. By 1983, his after-tax profit from Norton Utilities alone was \$250,000. This year he expects that to at least quadruple. And that doesn't take into consideration his book income or other projects.

Not one to sit back and take it all for granted, Norton still works five and sometimes six days a week, with his wife, Eileen. Norton Utilities still is based in the one-bedroom apartment converted to offices in Santa Monica, Calif.

Folding his arms, in a famous pose from his marketing ads, Norton is the first to admit how thankful he is for IBM's venture into personal computers. He smiles warmly as he says, "Without the PC, I really don't know what I would be doing now."