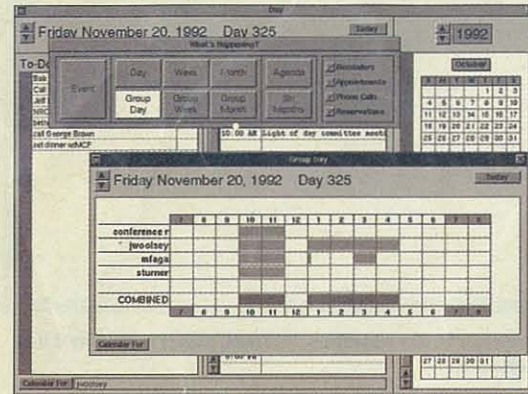


Happening Software?

For all the talk about collaborative computing, there are remarkably few good applications for group scheduling on any platform. On NeXTSTEP, where multitasking should make having a scheduler open at all times a natural, calendar programs of any type have been especially weak.

Now that is changing. With Sarrus Software near to shipping Pencil Me In and Adamation breaking off some of its Who's Calling technology into a group scheduler called What's Happening,



Group views in What's Happening display workgroup schedules in a variety of visual time frames.

pening, NeXT users have a choice of full-featured programs for managing individual or group calendars and to-do lists. The first out of the gate, What's Happening is a comprehensive application that does almost anything you can imagine in a calendar program. For some users, though, it may do more than they want.

The heart of What's Happening is the Event panel, which allows you to categorize entries as any of five types of events. They may be tentative or firm, recurring or not. They may include contact information, attached files, and Lip Service messages. Alarms can be set to tickle you by voice message or screen panel. Events can be assigned to any number of users or resources. For security, they can be set as private, readable, or writeable.

Schedules can be displayed in eight different views – in text or charts by day, week, month, and six months – or output in various report formats. Navigating around the days, months, and years is easy and natural. The group views display scheduled time as bar charts, so finding

open slots visually is easy.

The ability to handle multiple resources is provided by the robust underlying database, which Adamation licenses from Ingres. The server technology provides for industrial-strength data handling and searching, but it also contributes to a somewhat industrial feel.

Using a computerized calendar should feel like paging through a datebook, but What's Happening feels more like a mainframe-style database. While you can enter basic information in the calendar views, you enter most data in the Event panel. You are prompted twice, to confirm the entry and to inform you of the entry. Although these messages can be switched off in preference settings, the default settings err on the side of too much information.

Depending on your preference settings, performance can be sluggish. If you want all views updated or resources set on each view (otherwise you must refresh each screen individually), the database response may take a second longer than you would like.

I have some other quibbles. The to-do list has no function for setting priorities, but simply lists each entry alphabetically. Text can be entered in the day and week views but can be modified only in the Event panel. The views have fixed text boxes, so only a limited amount of information is displayed. I'd also like to see more report options, including reduced-size output for popular notebook formats.

One annoyance relates to group scheduling. What's Happening makes it possible for another user to put a nonerasable event on your calendar. A better solution would be to provide a means for users to accept a proposed event before it is entered in the database.

What's Happening is a strong NeXTSTEP program despite these reservations. It follows the interface guidelines well. Screen real estate is used judiciously with the proper preference setting, so it is natural to keep the program running at all times without cluttering your workspace. A Services menu item allows you to call up schedules from within other applications. The documentation is complete and contains a good tutorial. Installation is fairly automatic for stand-alone systems, but you'll want your system administrator to set it up on your network.

What's Happening is a good choice for workgroups or departments with heavy scheduling needs, and it will likely find a home in many corporate NeXT sites. Users more interested in managing their calendars wouldn't go wrong either, but they might find that What's Happening is more database than they are looking for. ♦

by DAN RUBY

What's Happening?



Group-scheduling application that does virtually anything you'd want. Underlying database lends an industrial feel.

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