MetaKey

KEYBOARD UTILITY

ALL EUROPEAN LANGUAGES. WINDOWS. KAPPA
TYPE INC. $45.

This keyboard enhancement allows easy input of special characters.

By providing alternate keyboard layouts, MetaKey—a keyboard utility from Kappa Type—makes typing special characters easier and quicker for Windows applications users. Once MetaKey is installed, any ANSI character can be accessed using some combination of keystrokes, and users can access any accented character with a maximum of two keystrokes. This is a very useful product for desktop publishers, typesetters and anyone else who regularly uses "special characters." And it especially is beneficial for anyone who types in foreign languages.

Using MetaKey, the user can produce any desired ANSI character without acrobatics. MetaKey requires an extended keyboard (101 standard, 101 variant or 102).

The right ALT key is re-assigned so that when it is pressed simultaneously with other keys, it produces one of the "special characters" (the left ALT key retains its normal function). For example, the registered trademark sign "®" can be produced by holding down the right ALT key and typing the letter "r".

Different users may have personal preferences, and the special characters in different languages may be easier to type using one keyboard layout or another. Some translators may want to use their respective national keyboard layout for the most common special characters in their language, but they also may want to be able to type other special characters easily—this would especially be useful for anyone who types in several languages. For this reason, MetaKey offers alternate versions of keyboards for the following countries/regions: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latin America, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, and the UK. Three alternate US keyboards also are offered, so the user certainly can find one he or she is very comfortable with.

Judy Rincon, a Spanish translator at SimulTrans, a translation company in Mountain View, California, uses MetaKey all the time. Like many translators in the United States who translate into European languages, Judy prefers to use the American keyboard. She uses US alternate keyboard layout 2, in which the primary assignment of the top row is switched from the numbers to commonly used accent marks. The accent marks are non-spacing characters—to type an accented letter, the accent is typed first and then the vowel. For example, to type the letter "é", Judy presses the "5" key followed by the "e" key. It is not necessary to hold down the CTRL key or the ALT key. "That way I don't lose my rhythm when typing," says Judy. She also likes being able to go back and forth between Winword and FrameMaker and having the keyboard behave exactly the same.

Since MetaKey simply adds existing keyboards to those already present, users can switch back and forth between different keyboards by using the Control Panel. In this way, the user can select any of these new alternate keyboards at will, try out different ones or switch back to the standard keyboard at any time. With so many possibilities to choose from, it is hard to go wrong with MetaKey.

—*THOMAS HEDDEN*