
Subject: Re: DOS 2 history (ping: Wayne)
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 04 Sep 2026 02:45:28 GMT
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You guys are my kinda guys. That's cool stuff! Both of you!

Check this out. It's too retro for the metro.

Back when the Altair 8800 was sold, there was literally no such thing as a full screen editor. No micros had 'em, not even any minicomputers had them. For about \$10,000 (in 1970s dollars) you could buy a dedicated word processor but you literally couldn't edit a file on your million-dollar minicomputer or mainframe. People used line editors instead.

Screen editors weren't made 'til the very late 1970s and weren't popular until microcomputers used memory-mapped displays. So most systems had no screen editor.

When full-screen editors and word-processors hit the scene, they were all the rage. People called that kind of user-interface WYSIWYG (pronounced wizzy-wig) which stood for "what you see is what you get." Remember that, guys?!!

There were many reasons that full screen editors weren't available. For one thing, even the most minimal full-screen editor needs about 32Kb. Lots of code to make it all happen. So that takes up half your memory if you have a fully-loaded 8-bit microcomputer of the day, which maxxed out at 64Kb. And even competent minicomputers usually didn't have much more than that.

But even more importantly - there was no way to update the whole screen rapidly. The interface to the terminal was RS-232 - a serial connection usually running a maximum of 9600 baud.

That's about 960 characters a second. The typical terminal had an 80 x 24 display, which is an array of 1920 character spaces. So to fill a screen takes a full two seconds. (!)

That's no bueno. Nobody would ever write a full screen to do updates. Even just a full line update took enough time it's kinda noticeable. So back then, you did clever cursor positioning to make a decent user-experience on programs that filled data in specific positions on a display.

Your program would create a page upon startup, and then only update certain sections for the user.

Well, knowing all this, I was really driven to make a full-screen editor for my Altair 8800 for its 50-year birthday. It uses every trick I could throw at it, and it works pretty darn good. Way better than it has a right to, given the technology it used.

Check it out if you feel like going down memory lane:

Altair Editor, a full-screen in-memory text editor for the Altair 8800