New Version of Excel Available

by Craig Savage

I attended two conventions during January that convinced me that my love affair with the Macintosh is not unique. The first convention, Macworld Expo in San Francisco, was packed with 60,000 attendees trying to find out what's hot and what's not.

Macworld Report

One program that is definitely new and hot is Microsoft's latest release of *Excel* for the Mac. By now you must know that I consider owning Excel a must. In fact, if you only own one application, make it a spreadsheet — either *Excel, WingZ, Full Impact,* or *Mac Calc*.

Excel 3.0, the new version, has added an icon-based tool bar at the top of the spreadsheet. The most useful tool for contractors will be an improvement to the "SUM" function. Now to get a total of a column or row you simply click on the "SUM" icon and click on the cell where the total should appear. The program will automatically total the appropriate row or column.

Another improvement is the addition of a new graphics layer, which works something like putting a clear acetate layer over the spreadsheet. It lets you import logos, graphics, and just about anything you can cut from any other program.

Excel 3.0 is the first Microsoft product to support Object Linking and Embedding (OLE) and the soon-to-be-released System 7.

OLE, which is contained in the program, enables the linking of a document created with one application to data from another application. For instance, with OLE you could put financial data from an Excel spreadsheet on an invoice or letter created with *Microsoft Word* and every time the spreadsheet information was updated, it would also automatically change that section on the Word document.

So far, however, Excel 3.0 is the only program that has OLE in it.

Excel 3.0 can also share data more easily than ever before with the IBM version of Excel 3.0 running on Windows. Other new features include an eight-level horizontal and vertical outliner which compacts minor divisions into major ones (like all the plumbing tasks into one major category).

Also of importance is the claim that Excel 3.0 will recalculate 100 times faster than version 2.2. With all the new features, the spreadsheet itself is easier to use. The icon-based toolbar will make a simple spreadsheet easier to set up and the draw layer should make generating forms easier.

At Macworld, Apple also demonstrated its new Mac LC which is now in stores. Its low cost (LC), color performance, small size (called the pizza box), and expandability make it a good choice for the contractor just starting to computerize. Also announced was the development of a notebook-sized Mac to be introduced (with the help of Sony) before the end of 1991.

The company also hinted that System 7, an upgrade of the Mac operating system, is expected to be released in August. The system promises to make communicating in a network easier. Among other improvements, this new version will include the inter-application communication that will allow applications to share information in real time.

Computer Programs in Atlanta

The other convention I attended was the National Association of Home Builders' annual convention in Atlanta. I ran across both *Mac Measure,* by Tally Systems (1742 Garnet St., Suite 111, San Diego, CA 92109; 619/268-1610), and believe it or not, *Measure Mac* (800/ 255-6420) at that show. Both programs use digitizers that allow you to do quantity takeoffs and input the data into your estimating system or spreadsheet.
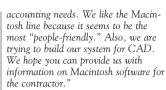
Measure Mac works as a desk accessory, a handy feature that lets you do other work and call upon the accessory when needed. It comes complete with a digitizer, stylus, cable, and software for $2,995.

Mac Measure runs as an application (as opposed to a desk accessory), and is more powerful. It has a built-in construction calculator, and it displays a digitized graphic of the item you are working on so it is easy to see if you have missed a wall, footing, or other structural element. Subcontractors such as drywallers, painters, concrete subs, and contractors that do a lot of bidding find that using a digitizer to do quantity takeoffs can save them hours a day. That translates to a quick payback for one of these systems.

Readers Write

Pinto Architectural Contractors writes:

"We are in the process of computerizing our office and seeking a software program designed for the contractor's accounting needs. We like the Macintosh line because it seems to be the most "people-friendly." Also, we are trying to build our system for CAD. We hope you can provide us with information on Macintosh software for the contractor."

I have to say that contractors' accounting needs is probably the area least served by Macintosh software. There are only about 6 programs (compared to 106 on the PC) that could be called dedicated accounting programs for contractors. Any of the six might fit your requirements but I am afraid you have not given me enough information about your company (such as gross sales, number of employees, number of computers, or type of construction) to make a very good recommendation.

However, your requirement that CAD be part of the picture makes me think of one program that you might want to look into. It is called *Construction Contractor Management,* from the Exciever Corp. (14688 County Rd. 79, Elk River, MN 55330; 612/441-8166). It is a core module which does estimating and job costing. It runs alone or in conjunction with their other accounting modules, including accounts payable, accounts receivable, general ledger, and payroll. It has a takeoff module, and for your purposes it also interfaces with several CAD programs, including *Archicad* (Graphisoft, 400 Oyster Point Blvd., S. San Francisco, CA 94080; 800/344-3468 or 415/266-8720), *Mac Architrion* (Gimeor, 185 Berry St., Suite 4604, San Francisco, CA 94107; 415/546-1874), *Mini-cad* (Graphsoft, 8370 Court Ave., Elicott City, MD 21043; 301/461-9488), and *Versacad* (Versacad Corp., 2124 Main St., Huntington Beach, CA 92648; 714/960-7720), importing a list of materials and turning them into an estimate automatically.

Turtle Creek Software (651 Halsey Valley Rd., Spencer, NY 14883; 607/589-6858), the maker of *MacNail,* the original estimating and accounting package for the Mac, is also working on integrating its package with Mac Architrion and Archicad. ■

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