Software Support Lost

By Morris D. Carey Jr.

As a matter of good business, software companies generally treat end users fairly. However, sometimes they don't.

One such case is the decision by Computer Associates of San Jose, Calif., to discontinue support of its *BPI Entry Level* accounting system. This decision essentially means hundreds of contractors must now spend thousands of dollars on new accounting software.

BPI was one of two accounting programs made by small companies that were sold by IBM in the early 1980s. Both BPI and the software made by Peachtree Software Inc. included job costing capabilities, which became very popular. Because IBM is so respected (and because the programs were pretty darn good), both of them sold like hot cakes. By the mid-1980s, BPI had earned a reputation as one of the most used accounting programs in the country.

What made BPI so popular was that it was almost mistake proof; was constantly being improved; and it was easy to learn with good, consistent menus and reasonably well-documented manuals. Best of all for contractors, it had job-cost accounting. The job-cost module could also be used for estimating. It was simple, but effective.

By the late '80s, BPI got into financial trouble and was bought by Computer Associates. After the purchase, Computer Associates released a few modifications to the software, revised the user manuals and continued to support the program — including annual payroll tax-table updates (at BPI's regular price of $125 per year). In my estimation, the transfer of ownership was handled very professionally, and technical support service continued to be quite good.

Now, however, Computer Associates has notified BPI users that 1991 will be the last year for payroll tax-table updates. Without tax-table updates in 1992, the payroll program will be unusable, which makes it impractical to use the rest of the program for accounting, estimating, and job costing.

Computer Associates is offering BPI users the option of converting to one of two whole new accounting systems. The basic one would cost about $1,200 for four modules (general ledger, payroll, accounts receivable and accounts payable). The price isn't too bad, and data from existing BPI files can be automatically converted to the new program. Unfortunately, the new program doesn't work anything like the old one. It has different menus and requires different keystrokes to operate it. But the biggest drawback is that it doesn't come with job costing. Without job costing, it wouldn't be much good for most contractors. The second choice is what Computer Associates calls "an upgrade" to their *ACPAC* accounting system, that does include a job-cost module. The conversion price, however, is a hefty $4,000.

Neither choice seems very fair to me. One is less the job-cost ability, and the other costs six to ten times as much as a typical upgrade. I have asked Computer Associates if they will release information on the dis-continued program pertaining to upgrading payroll tax tables. They said that they won't and declined to say why.

Essentially, those users who require job costing will have to pay $4,000 for the Computer Associates upgrade. Or, they must find another system at the same or greater cost, learn how to use it, and finally reenter historic data into that system by hand (which could cost additional thousands of dollars in time).

For those of you who are looking for an accounting system, there may be a lesson to be learned from the actions of Computer Associates: Choose a software vendor carefully. Consider how long the company has been in business as well as how dependent you will be on that vendor for support.

There are several other terrific accounting programs listed in the accompanying boxes. ■

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Accounting Programs

Construction Data Control Inc. (CDCI)
A Weyerhaeuser Affiliate
3675 Crestwood Pkwy., Suite 400
Duluth, Georgia 30136
800/221-3929

Profit Builder - Version 6.9
System Includes:
JC/GL/AP/AR/PR/PO/SC/AIA/
T&M BILLING/RW
Basic System JC/GL/AP......$3,995
AR/AIA/SC/RW (each) $500
PR/PO (each) $1,500
Estimating $2,995
Annual Maintenance $600

Basic Builder II
System Includes:
JC/GL/AP/AR/PR/RW/T&M
BILLING
Basic System JC/GL/AP/AR$1,995
Estimating $1,995
All other modules (each).......$500
Annual Maintenance $500

Professional Subcontractor
System Includes:
JC/GL/AP/AR/PR/RW/T&M
BILLING
Basic System JC/GL/AP/AR$1,995
Estimating $1,995
All other modules (each).......$500
Annual Maintenance $500

Job Systems Inc.
2884 Walnut Hill Ln.
Dallas, Texas 75229
214/351-5627

Job$ - Job Oriented Business System
System Includes:
GL/PR/JC/AP/AR/EST/SCHED/
EXPORT
Basic System GL/JC/AP.........$645
All other modules ....$300 each
Estimating $495
Updates $50

Small System Design Inc.
2540 Frontier Ave., Suite 104
Boulder, Colorado 80301
800/272-0053

Construction Management Software (CMS)
System Includes:
GL/JC/AP/AR
Basic System $3,495
Payroll $700
Multi-State Payroll $850
Estimating & Scheduling....$1,995
Basic System with
Estimating $4,990
Periodic Update $200
Service Contract ....$795-$995
(includes free updates)

Construction Management Software Plus (CMS Plus)
System Includes:
GL/JC/AP/AR/PO/BILLING
Basic System $6,295
Payroll module $700
Multi-State Payroll module....$850
Inventory module $995
Estimating & Scheduling....$1,995
Basic System with
Estimating $7,790
Periodic Update $200
Service Contract ....$795-$995
(includes free updates and free telephone support)

Software Shop Systems
Route 34 PO Box 728
Farmingdale, New Jersey 07727
800/554-9865

Construction System
System Includes:
GL/AP/JC
Basic System $2,995
with PR/AR/IC...................$6,695
Annual Updates (per module)$110
Annual Support ....$495-$800

Construction Manager
System Includes:
GL/AP/JC
Basic System $4,495
with PO/PR/AR/IC $8,495
Estimating $4,995
With digitizer $7,295
Annual Maintenance
(per module) $110
Annual Support ....$495-$800

Omware Inc.
100 Pleasant Hill Ave. North
Sebastapol, California 95472
800/726-6278
Master Builder Series — Version 5 Job Management System
System Includes:
GL/AP/AR/PR/JC/BUDGET & BID
Basic System $2,500
Update......................................$60

Master Builder Series — Version 5 Business Master
System Includes: Job Management System modules plus AIA Billing, Certified Variable Rate PR, Multicompany Financial, Contract Management (Change Orders), and Estimating
Basic System $4,000
Task Master (scheduler, PO, and specification writing)..............$500
Updates $600

Master Builder Series — Version 5 Advanced Business Master
System Includes:
Business Master System modules plus Task Master, Equipment Costing & Equipment Maintenance, and Daily Payroll
Basic System $5,000
Updates $600

Timberline Software
PO Box 728
Beaverton, Oregon 97075
503/644-8155

Medallion Builder
System Includes: GL/JC/AP/RW
Basic System $5,870
Payroll module $1,385
Accounts Receivable module $490
Inventory module $1,155
Purchasing Management
module..................................$1,590
(subcontract and PO control)
Estimating module.................$990
Annual Maintenance $925
(includes free updates)

ABBREVIATIONS
GL = General Ledger
PR = Payroll
JC = Job Cost
AP = Accounts Payable
AR = Accounts Receivable
PO = Purchase Orders
CO = Change Orders
RW = Report Writer
EST = Estimating
SCHED = Scheduling
EXPORT = Data Export to Spread Sheet or other Programs
AIA = AIA Draw Request
IC = Inventory Control
SC = Subcontractor Control