



Accounting Made Easy

by Morris D. Carey, Jr.

I recently reviewed an accounting program called *Buildsoft*, and the more I work with it, the more I like it. It has several interesting features that make it very powerful. Most noteworthy is an alternative set of menus that uses plain English instead of "accountantese." For example, if you don't know what "debit savings" means, you'll be happy to find that *Buildsoft's* alternate menu asks instead if you would like to "increase savings."

Another feature I really like is automatic bank statement reconciliation. To reconcile your bank statement, just enter all deposits, bank charges, and checks, and the program will do the rest. *Buildsoft* will also load your data into the program for you. Not too shabby.

I am not as interested in the CPM scheduling module that comes with the program, but that's because I'm a remodeling contractor. I know this feature would be valuable to both custom and track builders, and to remodelers who do long-term projects.

At first I had some trouble getting used to the keyboard conventions. For example, you have to move the cursor using the tab key when most other programs use the cursor keys or the carriage-return key. And it takes two keystrokes to do a search. These things may seem unimportant, but, as a reviewer, I am interested not only in what the program will do, but also in how it does it. After working with the program for several days, however, and talking with a fellow from *Buildsoft* for several hours, I realized that, although they are quite different, the keyboard conventions aren't all that difficult to use.

Buildsoft is the first program I've seen in years that I really want to become versed in. So you can expect to hear more from me about this one.

Buildsoft costs about \$5000 — about the same as or less than other big accounting packages. The program is approved by NAHB and interfaces with CMS Espri estimator (*JLC*, 6/89). The company is also working on an interface with the SolidBuilder CAD program (*JLC*, 2/92). For more information about *Buildsoft*, write UFAB Inc., P.O. Box 13893, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709; 800-999-8322.

Almost Turbo

A \$500 estimating program called *Turbo Construction Estimator* (TCE) is extremely user-friendly and simple to operate, and pricing is very versa-

tile. You can change prices at the item level or with a global markup that adjusts every price in the estimate, but can be hidden on the report. There's also a group markup that affects only some prices, such as all plumbing or all electrical items. And the program allows you to alter all items in an estimate that have the same description and price. This is handy when you take off an item like "water-resistant wallboard" several times and want to see what the bid price would be if water-resistant wallboard was 10¢ a square foot more or less expensive. You can also add a series of markups to the end of the estimate.

The estimating screen is very clean and easy to understand. The total estimate cost, including all markups, is constantly updated on screen as you make adjustments, and category subtotals, such as "Plumbing" or "Carpentry," are shown as well. Each item in the estimate is displayed on a single line with the quantity, unit of measure, item description, unit price, and the extended price.

Reports are equally easy to understand. A half dozen or so report choices are built into the program, but you can also export the estimate to an ASCII text file. Then you can use almost any word processor to make the report look the way you want.

The word "turbo" implies speed, and the program is fast when you're switching between menus or from a menu to your data. And copying an old estimate to create a new one is almost instantaneous. But TCE requires too many key strokes when it comes to entering estimate quantities, such as 2500 square feet of this or 30 lineal feet of that. You have to cursor over the item you want to work with, then hit a key to call up the quantity entry screen, clear the old quantity, enter a new quantity, and, finally, hit another key to enter the quantity into the estimate. Very un-turbo.

But you should compare *Turbo Construction Estimator* to other similarly priced programs before you make a final decision. If you like the way it looks and feels, it may be the right software for you. ■

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