STATE-OF-THE-ART CONTRACTOR

Getting Started on the Mac: Software

by Craig Savage

In my last column, I laid out the specs for Macintosh hardware. Software is next. I come from the training-wheels school of learning. I think you should crawl before you walk and walk before you run. With that in mind, I suggest that first-time computer users buy Microsoft Works or Claris Works. Both have a word processor, spreadsheet, database, telecommunications program, and rudimentary drawing program all in one application for less than \$200. These programs are a sort of Shopsmith in software. Like the famous all-in-one woodworking tool, they attempt, successfully in most cases, to provide all the major software tasks in one program. Not only is this cheap, but it is the perfect set of training wheels for the newcom-

Here's how it works. I am writing this article using the Microsoft Works word processor, and I'll check the spelling with the built-in spellchecker. I created the table

Function

Integrated

Accounting

CAD

accounting package called ACC-
PAC. ACCPAC integrates six
functions: general ledger, accounts
receivable, accounts payable, pay-
roll, inventory, and job cost. ACC-
PAC will teach you what a chart o
accounts is and even includes a
"Universal Construction Compa-
ny" chart of accounts already set
up. The program does everything
you need except estimating, and
that is no problem because you
can do it in the spreadsheet (see
"State-of-the-Art Contractor,"
4/91). You might not use the
inventory function, and the pro-
gram won't compare your estimate
to job cost, but you can do that
task by hand and still save plenty
of time. Your financial statements
will be as current as U.S. Home's,
and your bookkeeper will be able
to find out how much you owe to
a subcontractor. More importantly
with the click of the mouse but-
ton, you can instantly find out
how much is

Retail Cost*

\$185

\$199

\$37

\$138

\$134

\$188

erally accepted accounting princi-

ples," then I recommend a simple

owed to you.
It's easy, elegant, and cheap. And if later you decide to move up to dedicated construction software, your data and chart of accounts will transfer easily to the next

MacDraw II \$284 a a series (Claris CAD) \$644 to the spreadsheet and package you choose.

Software

Microsoft Works

Claris Works

Ouicken

ACCPAC

Superpaint

Canvas

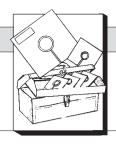
(below) with the spreadsheet and transferred it to this article. I use the database as a kind of electronic rolodex. It sits idle in the background, waiting for me to search for a telephone number or address. And the telecommunication module will let me send this article to JLC via my modem, where it will be deposited in their computer, ready for editing into the form you are reading now.

Let's pretend that you have taken the Works training wheels course — you could do it in a week of nights if you get involved — and you're ready to buy some dedicated programs to get your business going. If you currently run your business out of a checkbook (more contractors do than you think), I recommend Quicken, an elegant electronic checkbook that can even do rudimentary job costing.

If you are currently doing your books more along the lines of "gen-

Those of you who do design/build might find the CAD potential of the Mac interesting. If money is tight, start with a combination paint/draw program like Superpaint or Canvas. Both are easy to use and have scaling capabilities. They might be all you'll need for simple shop drawings and illustrations. If you need more sophisticated mechanical drawing features, and money is still a consideration, move up to Mac Draw II. Those of you who make a substantial portion of your living in design work should buy Claris CAD.

Finally, when considering the purchase of a computer, don't hesitate because computing is new to you. Buying a computer is just like buying any new tool. Sure, there will be a better cordless screwdriver on the market if you wait six months, but it's silly not to have today's model working for you now.



Craig Savage, a longtime builder and Macintosh user, owns Savage Co., in Palm Desert, Calif., and publishes the Macintosh Construction Forum, P.O. Box 1272, Sandpoint, ID 83864. He alternates this column with Morris Carey, who writes on IBM-compatible systems.

If you have a question about computing in construction, address it to State-of-the-Art Contractor, JLC, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.

Computer Bytes

A Macintosh user group for architects, engineers, and contractors in Orange County was recently established in Irvine, Calif. Members include oneemployee builders working out of a home office as well as large AEC firms. The group, called Mac+AEC, meets every third Wednesday, and the regular agenda includes announcements of job openings, new products, and special events, along with technical tips and demonstrations. For information on how to join, call John Stebbins at 714/559-0205 or Bob Waddell at 714/553-1117.

A set of construction forms and contracts developed by a homebuilder is available on PC and Mac diskettes. It includes primary construction and subcontractor contracts, specifications, change orders, and a variety of scheduling and estimating checklists, all of which can be edited using almost any word processing software. The complete set costs \$123 on diskette, and is available in printed form as well. For a free catalog, contact Wilhelm Publishing, Box 922, Columbia, MO 65205-0922; 800/842-2027. An electronic dimensional takeoff

system called Measuremouse includes a precision mouse and software that increases the speed and accuracy of linear, area, and volume calculations. The standalone program can be used in conjunction with PC estimating or spreadsheet software. According to the software's developer, Measuremouse is easier to use and faster than more expensive digitizers. It costs \$495 from Bright Systems, 1453 Tallevast Road, Sarasota, FL 34243; 813/359-3065.

-Sal Alfano