

FINAL REPORT

On The Market

Package: Cash Book and VAT Register System
Manufacturer: Dragon
Software: Dragon 64
Features: Maintains records of VAT transactions, as well as details of income and expenditure.
Price: £39.95

Package: Home Finance Manager
Manufacturer: DYN Soft
Software: IBM PC
Features: Allows you to enter and calculate the value of investments.
Price: £19.95

Package: Home Financial Management
Manufacturer: THORN/EMI
Software: IBM PC
Features: This program will set up a system for expenses and income. Each month's figures can be displayed as bar charts.
Price: £19.95

Package: Home Ledger
Manufacturer: Spectrum
Software: IBM PC
Features: Allows up to 1250 entries per month of accounts due from customers.
Price: £15

Package: Budget Manager
Manufacturer: VCA
Software: IBM PC
Features: Spreadsheet type package allowing income and outgoing expenditure to be assessed. Data can be displayed either numerically or as bar charts.
Price: £29.95

Analysing data is something that computers are rather good at. Even relatively simple stock recording systems, such as Dragon Data's disk-based program for the Dragon 64, are able to generate some surprisingly detailed reports. In the last article in this series on business software we look at alternative methods of analysing data.

Anyone responsible for stock control needs to know about more than one particular item of stock. They will want to be able to look at all aspects of their stock holdings and stock movements. This can be done in two ways: either through enquiries on the screen or printed reports. The Dragon program's enquiry menu contains a number of options governing the kind of data that is available and how it will be presented.

An essential enquiry or reporting facility concerns slow moving items. Since all transactions are dated when they are keyed in to the system, the program already has the information it needs in order to generate a slow moving items report. All it has to do is to search through the transaction history file and compare dates. Because businesses differ in their definitions of 'slow' (what is slow to one might be excellent business to another), the report has to allow the user to define the terms.

This is neatly accomplished in the Dragon system. By filling in a date in the area provided (e.g. 150484, for 15 April 1984), the user will automatically give the system a marker to start the search. All items that have no sales transaction histories will be read by the program and then printed. This provides a very useful reporting facility, since any number of slow movement

reports can be generated simply by giving the program a different date. The only restriction on the user is that the date has to fall within the confines of the transaction histories on file. If there are no slow moving items that fall within the date specified, the screen message on the Dragon program will read: 'NO ITEMS WITHIN SELECTION CRITERION'.

There is one limitation to this kind of report. It only picks up stock items that have had absolutely no transactions at all. Yet it is clear that in some cases a user might well feel that a particular stock line from which there had been two sales in six months, should qualify as a slow mover.

A more sophisticated system would provide greater flexibility. There are two ways of achieving this. Either the system could offer an additional selection criterion other than the date, such as specifying the number of transactions below which an item would be printed on the slow moving report. Or the system could itself read and compare movements on all the lines, listing, say, the slowest 50 lines, then the next slowest 50 lines and so on.

SCREEN DISPLAY

The screen displays each item separately. Consequently, if there are a large number of slow moving stock items, paging through the list will be a time consuming business. In that case, therefore, a printed report might well be a better alternative than a screen display, since it is quicker and easier to scan. The systems designer has to take this into consideration when a business program such as a stock control package is being put together or 'specified'.

The stock movement display contains a good