



IAN MCKINNELL

microcomputers like the IBM PC and the Sirius, such as Micropro's Mailmerge (the best-known mailing program) or Peachtree's Mailing List Manager, include a number of helpful and very sophisticated features. Not only can a large number of different address files be created, but they can also include comprehensive search and select facilities that enable special one-off mailings of parts of a list. For example, a golf club secretary using such a system would have no trouble mailing all new golf club members with a handicap of less than 15 who have paid their fees.

Search and select is achieved through the standard database techniques of indexing and keying records, then carrying out logical tests of selected fields in the record to see if they fulfil the user-specified conditions for inclusion in the list.

These advanced packages also have detailed formatting facilities. This is a particularly useful feature, since the names and addresses produced by the system can be tailored to fit the size and shape of the labels. With the Peachtree system, for example, selecting the LABEL FORMAT option on the main menu produces the image of a box on the screen, together with a listing of all the fields on the mailing list record. This gives the user a visual representation of the label being created. There are also facilities for informing the printer that, for instance, the label stationery is three labels wide, so three labels should be printed with each pass of the print head, and so on.

In general, mailing programs are at their most useful when dealing with sizeable lists. If you have only a handful of labels to do, it is probably easier to type them individually - unless, of course, the information is already on computer! Because of this, mailing programs for home computers (even when they are ROM-based) generally require you to store your data on disk rather than on cassette.

One example of a package designed for the standard BBC Model B is that provided by GCC, a software company based in Cambridge. GCC has, for some time, marketed its own ROM database called Starbase, which had all the necessary facilities for database—only mailing lists. But the company has now released a version of Starbase in 16K ROM, which provides full mailing facilities in conjunction with the ROM-based word processing package, Wordwise.

Starbase comes with a manual and a utilities disk. In conjunction with Wordwise, its mailing facilities include personalising of standard letters and label formatting. The utilities disk makes it possible to send commands to the printer while running the label format option. So a selection of different typefaces may be used on machines with suitable printers.

One particularly useful feature of Starbase as a mailing package is its ability to carry out arithmetical operations on fields in an address file. In this way, documents such as personalised statements and invoices for club membership can be created, with the computer carrying out all the necessary individual calculations.

Commodore 64 users have a good choice of mailing packages. One example is Visawrite, produced by Visa Software. Unlike Starbase, Visawrite will work with either a cassette or disk, and can be used with any database package that can create a sequential file. On the other hand, used as a processing package on its own, it will hold up to 500 names and addresses. These are set up by using each document page as a record card and merging them with a standard letter.

When used on its own, Visawrite does not have selective search facilities, although users can browse through names and addresses and mark them individually for inclusion in a mail run.

Chain Mail

The word processor supplies a skeleton letter with blanks where specific information such as date, name and address should be, and the database supplies the relevant data from its records. After the letters, addresses are printed on sticky labels

Mailing List Software Prices	
Memoplan	Free with Z80
Fileplan	Free with Z80
Mailmerge	£167
Mailing List Manager	£202
Starbase	£69
Wordwise	£46
Visawrite	£80 (Disk)
	£90 (ROM)
All prices include VAT at 15 per cent	