

# OFFICE MANAGERS

**The availability of cheap computing power, coupled with the high cost of developing applications from scratch, has created a market for 'off-the-shelf' business packages. In this series we will be looking at how these systems work. The market spans both domestic and small business users, companies and corporations.**

The label 'business packages' covers a wide range of applications, and in addition to differences of function there are crucial differences of scale. The first main division of scale is between cassette-based software aimed at the home computer user and disk-based software. Because disk storage technology gives programmers access to fast read and write facilities, all business software ought to be disk-based, but not everybody wants to pay an additional £200 to £400 for a floppy disk-based system.

The other division is that between single-user microcomputers and multi-user machines —

microcomputers that are capable of supporting a number of separate terminals. We will start with the simpler systems and deal with the multi-user applications later in the services.

Business software is designed to be used by the layman rather than by the computer specialist. Because of this, whether a program is designed for a cassette-based system or the largest multi-user disk system, it will usually take an 'interactive' approach. This means that the user is guided through all stages of operating the system by a series of prompts and messages on the screen.

Typically, the various operations will be arranged as a numbered set of options on a 'menu'. Selecting a function from the main menu might take the user to a secondary or even a tertiary menu of choices. The screen will then display a request for data, usually information in a form similar to what would be entered into a manual book-keeping system. This 'user-friendly' approach has been one of the factors that have made business applications programs so successful.

The three functional divisions that we will consider in this series are the sales ledger, the purchase ledger and the general (or nominal) ledger. The sales ledger records sales made by the business in the ordinary course of its trading. The purchase ledger records the purchases necessary to enable it to continue trading. The general ledger provides a total picture of the state of affairs of the company and its bank balance at any given time.

Business programs are composed of files. Each file contains a number of records and each record contains a number of fields. The distinction between files, records and fields is simple. A sales ledger program, for example, will have a customer master file consisting of the records of each of the customers. Details on each customer, such as the name and address, are divided into fields within the record.

In addition, of course, a business program needs a way of performing operations on data. Examples of programming routines needed are input routines (which allow data to be entered into the system) and arithmetical routines, which manipulate numerical values in numerical fields inside records and across records.

In 'mainstream' business packages — those designed for use with disk-based systems — the sales and purchase ledgers record a great deal of detail. Sales and purchases are recorded (the accounting term is 'posted') against individual customer and supplier accounts. The idea is that the package should store as complete a record as possible of all the transactions between the

## Money Management

A sensible approach to the limitations of cassettes is to sell separate programs that can be used together if necessary. This invoicing program works quite happily by itself, leaving you to manually update your own stock records. Alternatively, it can use files generated by its companion programs as part of a completely automated system. One advantage of this approach is that you can gradually computerise your business step-by-step rather than undergoing a complete change all at once

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INVOICE GENERATOR
ACCOUNT NO. : BB364
INVOICE NO. : 11 1
INV DATE   : 21/03/84
CUST. REF. : UNV
DEL. METHOD:

INVOICE TO : NODDY BOOK CO.
             62 OXFORD ST
             LONDON

DELIVER TO : MR PLUG

FOOTNOTES :

IS THIS ALL OK ? Y
  
```

## Easiledger

Cassette-based business software is limited as to the size and number of programs in a package. As a result, programs like this one tend to concentrate on a particular task. This package has elements of accounting software such as debit/credit ledgers, year-to-date summaries and so on. But it's only intended as a management aid for controlling cash flow and won't handle your whole accounts by itself

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PRINT JOURNAL

# - RECORD NUMBER , T - RECORD TYPE

# T DATE   AMOUNT NAME   CRED/IT CHQ
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1 1 10-10  100.00 JONES 123456
2 3 11-10   12.99 NOLEN 123457
3 6 12-10  200.00 GENIN
4 8 15-10   23.99 JONES 1263   CREDIT
5 9 17-10   12.99 NOLEN 1272   123622
6 3 18-10  100.00 SMITH 123888
7 4 19-10   12.99 PARSO 2522
8 5 20-10  200.00 GENIN
9 6 21-10   46.45 SMITH 2822   CREDIT
10 1 27-10  100.00 GENIN 123322   123849

PRESS ANY KEY TO CONTINUE
  
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LIZ HENNEY