

# COMPANY REPORTS

**We have looked at three different package program approaches to providing a book-keeping solution for small businesses. In the last instalment we compared the pre-structured general ledger with the free format type. We continue our comparative look at three accounting packages, concentrating on their report facilities.**

The three packages we are examining are: Cash Trader from Quick Count, Microledger from Lewis Ashley, and Accountant from Compact Accounting Services. As well as recording data about the buying and selling of goods and services, computerised book-keeping packages should be able to deliver a wide range of reports. These can be split into two types. Management reports are intended for internal use by the business. Financial, tax, or VAT reports are designed to be seen by organisations or interested groups outside the business.

As with all computer systems though, the basic data has to be in the system before you can get a report out on it. Cash Trader and Accountant, for example, which do not have the facility to keep master files of supplier and client accounts, cannot produce the range of reports normally associated with sales and purchase ledger systems. Microledger, which has a sales and purchase ledger master file, can. All three packages will provide a printed record, known as an *audit trail*, since it provides proof of all data entries.

Microledger keeps a full transaction history for the current period for each supplier and client account. It can also produce invoices to be sent out to clients showing the balance owed, and the transactions that make up the balance. And it can produce remittance advice notes to be sent to suppliers (showing what they are being paid for). Microledger can also provide, through its sales and purchase ledgers, an index of account names both in numerical and in alphabetical order. Through its nominal ledger, Microledger can provide a full accounts list, a trial balance, and an analysis print-out by nominal code or analysis codes, as well as nominal accounts.

Among the print-out options available on Cash Trader are a summary of the week's takings, a listing of all nominal accounts, and a trial balance. It can also produce statements of cash or bank transactions, summaries of input or output VAT for the quarter, broken down according to VAT code, and final accounts.

Accountant offers nominal ledger reports such as a transaction listing, an account enquiry (listing

any particular account) and a trial balance. Sales day book reports include a batch audit trail report, showing all transactions posted for each type of batch posting; a summary batch report, showing postings to the nominal ledger and the VAT control account; and a VAT batch report, showing goods and VAT broken down into VAT category. Purchase day book reports are similar, showing input VAT rather than output VAT.

The aged debtors or creditors report is a good example of an essential management report that is very difficult to assemble by hand. Yet on a computerised system, with a reasonably sophisticated program, it is produced automatically without any additional work from the user. The report shows amounts owed or outstanding, analysed according to whether they are 30, 60 or 90 days overdue. The program reads the date recorded against individual purchases or sales, and sorts them in date order, into one of the three categories. When the amount is recorded as paid, it is automatically erased from the 'aged' analysis.

The trial balance report is common to all three systems. This prints out the account descriptions and the current debit or credit total for each account. Since all three packages use the double entry conventions, the total debits and credits in the system must always balance to zero.

From the trial balance a business will go on to draw up its profit and loss report and its balance sheet. Cash Trader simplifies its profit and loss report by totalling the incomings and outgoings, and then subtracts one from the other. This might be enough for small traders, but it is not a fully comprehensive profit and loss report. Neither of the other two packages attempts to produce either of these reports. They take the user up to the trial balance stage only.

Not all analytical reports can be produced with as little effort from the user as the trial balance and the aged debtors/creditors listing. These, like a couple of the other reports available (such as the transaction listings), are simple 'file dumps' where everything in the file is given some rudimentary formatting plus a heading, and then routed to the printer. Other reports are much more selective, and setting up the criteria for data selection can be tricky, whatever the package you are using.

For example, both Accountant and Microledger have sophisticated analysis and budgeting facilities. But the user has to do quite a bit of work in order to reap the full benefits of the package's reporting capabilities.

Accountant allows the user to set up group keys (or codes) to analyse nominal accounts. If, for