The Able-1 Integrated Program Has Problems

By John Lombaro
Review Board

When or later, someone will expose an integrated package that provides seamless integration between full-function spreadsheet, database, spreadsheet, and communications modules. This framework and Symphony do a reasonable job but with some limitations. Able-1, the integrated program reviewed here, offers many features, a consistent set of commands, and easy document transfer between modules, but it also has problems. First, the individual word processing, database, spreadsheet, and communications modules aren't as good as their equivalent stand-alone counterparts. And there are some serious flaws.

FEATURES: Able-1 offers all the standard supporting modules, but there are some serious flaws.

The spreadsheet module continues to improve. Although not as complex, rich, or powerful as Lotus 1-2-3 or Quattro, Able-1's spreadsheet module will meet the needs of most business applications.

Moreover, like Multiplan, the Able-1 documentation and interface screen is designed to be user-friendly, with pull-down menus and a consistent set of commands. Able-1 also allows you to store your files (except graph files) from one task to another. For example, you can include a spreadsheet in a word processing document, and you can save a list of commands you entered as a word processing document to a database file. This kind of data transferability is a major accomplishment, and although many other programs will let you convert data from one format to another, their methods are more tedious and complicated.

Although integration is needed, the ability of an integrated program to change its interface depends on the quality of its individual modules. And this is where Able-1 fails. For example, Able-1's word processing module, although offering a reasonable set of commands, does not have the rich and robust features associated with full-function programs such as WordPerfect or even the very robust WordStar 2.5.

Able-1's word-processing module is a simple word processor, although offering a reasonable set of commands, does not have the rich and robust features associated with full-function programs such as WordPerfect or even the very robust WordStar 2.5.

Able-1 also offers a formidable interface screen, but with some limitations. Able-1 is a general-purpose integrated package. Its major flaw is in its lack of a user interface. Able-1 does not provide an easy-to-use interface screen, and its commands are not as intuitive as those in other packages.

In conclusion, Able-1 is an integrated package with a formidable interface screen and good capability for transferring data among its programs. It has a capable database, spreadsheet, and communications modules. It may be useful for general business applications. But the interface is less than ideal, and its command structure is not as intuitive as those in other packages.
The dictionary is merely one of the worst performers we have seen in a long time. The performance of the word processor is not acceptable.

The spreadsheet works much better, although its calculating speed is slower than that of Lotus 1-2-3 or even older versions of Multiplan. Nonetheless, the good complement of functions and the reasonable speed of execution under the spreadsheet is a fair performer. Although the graph function is useful, it is not as comprehensive as Lotus 1-2-3's anxious graphics.

The communications program performs well within its limits; perfectly well. In fact, communications allow the transfer and receipt of data, and logs in. However, the absence of centralised administration and the failure to include any of the standard error-checking protocols greatly reduces this module's usefulness. Because of these limitations, and because much more competent programs are available quite cheaply, we rate the communications program as a fair performer.

Measured against a program such as PC-File, which has roughly the same functionality, the Able-1 database performs well. PC-File includes its capability to link files, its quick retrieval of items, its flexible screen formatting, and its capability to interact with the word processing program or spreadsheet. There is no programming language, although you could construct your own program. This module is a good performer.

The Able-1 modules are a mixed bag — some being reasonably effective, others moderate, and the word processing unacceptable — making it difficult to rate this software. Balancing the strengths and weaknesses of the different modules, we rate Able-1's overall performance as fair performance. We rate Able-1 as a good performer.

The documentation, which consists of a single 381-page paperback book, reflects the unevenness of the package. For the most part, the explanations are clear and helpful, and the index is reasonably complete. Unfortunately, the book's layout makes it nearly impossible for it to be flat. As a result, we had a difficult time keeping the manual open.

The manual is rich in technical details. We couldn't find much information about the limits of the various programs. For instance, we wonder how many records the database can hold, what the maximum size of a record or spreadsheet is, and how large a text file the word processor can accommodate. We found it impossible to locate the answers to these questions in the documentation.

Also, much information is scattered in different sections. Although each module has its own manual, there are no cross-references to related topics. The section on the spreadsheet, for example, does not mention the word processor, and vice versa. This makes it difficult to find information about a particular topic.

In conclusion, Able-1 is a reasonably good program with some weaknesses. The database is strong, the spreadsheet is fair, and the communications program is acceptable. However, the word processor leaves much to be desired. Overall, Able-1 is a good choice for small businesses or for those who need a comprehensive package but don't require the most advanced features.
Reportworks Customizes Appleworks For Reports

By Cynthia E. Field
Review Board

Reportworks adds some spice to the rather bland Appleworks integrated word processing, spreadsheet, and database program. This is small business that has no access to advanced report generators should find this Appleworks enhancement program from Megahertz Corp. to be invaluable and capable.

FEATURES: Reportworks reads data from Appleworks database and spreadsheet files. Enriched with dozens of features, the program formats, composes, series, and searches through this information to create reports complete with both text and summary pages. Besides getting format, you can design your own templates such as invoices and purchase orders as well as mailing labels.

The program looks and acts like Appleworks. Reportworks features the familiar Appleworks stacking index card system. You can see your report any time you want to. If you regularly use three programs, select a font size, and print a report. You can tap out on the screen and see a report on your desk. You can also use the card system to create and change reports.

Customer support consists of a thorough manual with instructions, a number of features, and the amount of text. The English used is highly descriptive and of considerable value. When we closed our Appleworks window, it was left with a cursor on the screen. The cursor moved to the next position and then would move to the next position.