Samma Competitive In ‘Checklist Wars’

By John Lombardi
Review Board

As a junior member of the corporate world, Samma Word III has won a solid niche. Like its competitors, Samma is based on a "checklist" that popularizes the office environment in the 1980s -the leading series.

Like WordWrite 3, Officewriter, Multimate, and WordStar 5000, Samma Word III offers various features enabling the user to compute and "checklist" in which products are compared to a checklist of desired features. It also offers ease of learning and use, and robust error handling that prevents novice users against even the worst errors. This helps force the market's choices in some operations, especially with long documents.

FEATURES: Samma Word III is considerably less menu-driven than most of its competitors. It offers a fairly uncluttered screen, depending more on function keys and lists than menu selections.

By offering a semi-page-oriented approach, Samma Word III creates a middle-ground between the traditional page-oriented word processor like WordWrite 3 (which deals with documents page by page) and the document-oriented word processors like WordStar 5000 which treat the document as a whole. In page-oriented systems, if you make extensive editing changes in Samma Word, you must execute a new print command to display the changed document. In this case, you do not need to adjust each page for the correct page breaks. But like document-oriented systems, Samma Word III also lets you add and delete text as if it were dealing with a continuous document, automatically updating page breaks as you add text.

Similarly, Samma Word III offers an extensive checklist of standard features found in a modern word processor: complete set of editing commands, find and replace, move and copy, block operations, and file operations. In addition, Samma Word III contains many of the extra features now standard on corporate word processing programs: multi-page facilities, user functions for columns and rows, special foreign-language keyboard support, a spell checker, newspaper-style multiple columns, and macro facility.

The program's extensive back-up facility guarantees a file's integrity if various kinds of crashes occur.

Although Samma Word III lacks a template, a word count feature, or an indexing facility, its extensive word processing commands give it a place among the most useful programs available for the IBM PC.

PERFORMANCE: Samma Word III generally performs as expected. Its basic editing commands work predictably and effectively. The program executes moves, block operations, insertions, and cursor movement smoothly and gracefully. Unfortunately, Samma Word III handles most of the commands through the screen, and this slows down. For example, when you do a search, the program displays the entire text through the screen window, while it scrolls looking for the word. Be prepared for a long wait if you perform a search in a long file.

The cursor arrow keys move the cursor as expected, but the left arrow does not move the cursor up to the previous line when you reach the left end of the current line. The (navigating backspace) key does work in the previous line.

Samma Word III gives you a wide range of formatting options to control the placement of text on the page. You can change and manipulate indents, hanging indents, spacing, tabs, margins, headers, and footers. But any format changes that cover a significant portion of text cause the program to scroll through the text to make the adjustments. As an example, the message is time-consuming. For long documents, it gets ridiculous. We changed the line spacing for a 57-page document from 55 characters to 40 characters per line, and it took 37 minutes. And that's not even doing the page making. So, we definitely do not recommend this program for long documents.

Since it is semi-page-oriented, Samma Word III can quickly jump to a particular page. The program also has a zoom feature that allows you to see your text's layout on the paper. It is a nice touch, although it will not show newspaper-style multiple columns. Samma Word III handles newspaper-style columns less effectively than some other programs, such as WordPerfect. Like WordStar 5000, Samma Word III does not show how these columns will appear on the page, nor can you see more than one column on the screens at a time. To print multiple columns, Samma Word III prints the entire first column, then scrolls the printer backword to the first column and prints the second column next, in order to print the second column. Required, of course, is a printer with negative line feed capability. We have found both Wordperfect and Multimate better for multiple columns than Samma Word III.

Samma Word III's reformatting feature offers several options. You can direct it to guard against overlaps or columns (single lines at the top or bottom of a page), or to print the same number of lines on every page no matter where the page breaks fall. In this last mode, if you want the file reformatted to reflect the desired page endings, Samma goes through the entire document, demanding confirmation for each suggested page ending. This takes forever, and there is no shortcut. The only alternative is to send the file to the printer. Because the printing process requires automation, if requested: however, this does not change the file, so you could not make a minor adjustment for an individual page.

Fortunately, there is a block print command that lets you maintain the integrity of a table or a section heading.

Like many page-oriented word processing programs, Samma Word III works in typewriter mode, with insert mode as a special case for editing. The insert mode causes the entire text following the cursor to be moved down and the cursor to be moved to the previous insertion. However, most editing commands do not work in insert mode. Adding even a single character requires the invocation of the insert mode. Users accustomed to some sophisticated editing systems will find this tedious.

Among word processors in its class, Samma Word III is fine, and document management features are adequate but not better. Although you can copy, save, and delete files from within Samma, it lacks some tools found in Multimate, DisplayWrite 3, or WordPerfect. For instance, Samma does not have character padding features, allowing you to add or subtract spaces from an entire word or entire paragraph.

Samma Word III has extensive on-line help. The information is helpful, but we found the text hard to scan quickly because

Also Included In This Section
- Reports Pad
- Reports 2.1
- References
- Software Review Capsules

-except for
- Excellent/5 Symbols: 9 - 10:
- Very Good/4 Symbols: 7 - 8.9:
- Satisfactory/3 Symbols: 5 - 6.9:
- Unsatisfactory/2 Symbols: 1 - 2.9:

InfoWorld August 4, 1986 39
Reports Plus Is Good Idea That Needs Lots of Work

By John Weltschwech Review Board

Reports Plus, from Softwize Inc., attempts to address the problem of sharing data among incompatible databases. Using a single interface, it can generate queries and reports from Dbase, 1-2-3, Multidbase, DIF, and ASCII files, and it can even output to different file formats regardless of where they come from.

Unfortunately, the current release of Reports Plus is far from perfect, and the good idea behind this program needs some work. Reports Plus has performance problems, missing key features required in a report generator, and suffers from poor documentation and inadequate error handling.

FEATURES: Reports Plus offers two significant benefits. First, it is the only report generator we know of that can work with data files produced by several popular applications at the same time. Second, it can relate two or more different files if the files contain a common field. This makes it very useful in performing queries and generating reports that include data from completely different sources without going through an intermediate file creation procedure.

To say that this program is menu-driven is perhaps an understatement. Practically everything you do with Reports Plus is done by a menu. For example, as you develop your query statement, you select the records you want to extract from a menu. This selects logical operators (such as "and") and "greater than" as well as field names. As you pull people from the menu, you watch your query statement develop on a separate line. You can also add elements that are not in a menu, such as numeric constants. But everything else, including parentheses and mathematical operators, originates from a menu.

The menu structure also serves as a guide through the process of identifying your fields, specifying your query, and generating your report. The interface is so integrated with a way that it is practically impossible to avoid any of the steps needed to create a menu.

Furthermore, the menus are context sensitive. For example, if you select a file on a menu, the next menu you're presented with will include logical operators and parentheses. Of course, the most important step in creating a report is to identify the file or files you're interested in. You can modify the field names and record identifiers up to 25 characters long. You also need to specify the type of data contained in each field: numeric, text, or date. Data you can develop one or more reports from, and you can also add these reports to your library of previously generated reports.

Unfortunately, the software has a number of bugs that could make it difficult for users to create their reports. For example, the program did not save the query when you exited it, and it did not save the report when it was completed. This made it difficult to generate reports that were accurate and consistent. Also, the program did not allow you to save the report in a different format, which made it difficult to share the report with other users. Finally, the program did not allow you to save the report in a different format, which made it difficult to share the report with other users.

The program also had a number of bugs that could make it difficult for users to create their reports. For example, the program did not save the query when you exited it, and it did not save the report when it was completed. This made it difficult to generate reports that were accurate and consistent. Also, the program did not allow you to save the report in a different format, which made it difficult to share the report with other users. Finally, the program did not allow you to save the report in a different format, which made it difficult to share the report with other users.

In conclusion, Reports Plus is a promising program that shows a lot of potential. However, with some minor improvements, it could be a very useful tool for generating reports from a variety of data sources.

John Weltschwech is a professor of history and author of five books. He has been working with computers since 1987.

Additional information: Reports Plus is available for the IBM PC and XT, and compatibles. Requires 386SX or higher, 4 MB of RAM, and 1.6 MB of hard disk space. Recommended: 10 MB of disk drive (hard disk drive recommended). Samma Corp., 2700 N.W. 43rd St., Suite 203, Seattle, WA 98107.