

By John Lombardi
Review Board

As a junior member of the corporate word processing fraternity, Samna Word III has won a solid niche. Like its competitors, Samna is based on a dedicated word processing system that was popular in office environments in the 1970s—the Lanier series.

Like Displaywrite 3, Officewriter, Multimate, and Wordstar 2000, Samna Word III offers many features, enabling it to compete in the "checklist wars" (in which products are compared to a checklist of desired features). It also offers ease of learning and use, and robust error handling that protects naive users against even the worst errors. This helps offset a marked slowness in some operations, especially with long documents.

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

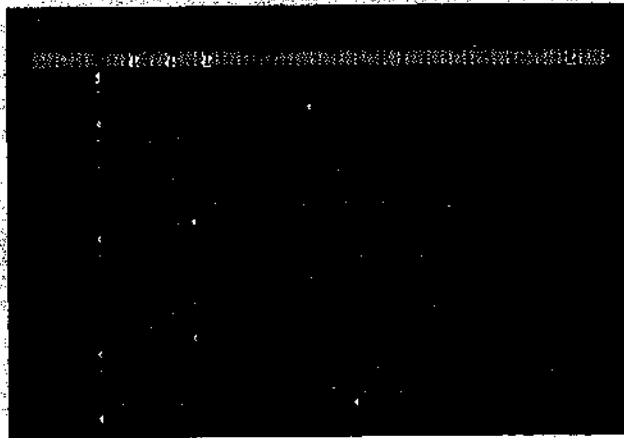
By offering a semi-page-oriented approach, Samna Word III seeks a middle ground between the traditional page-oriented corporate word processors like Displaywrite 3 (which deal with documents page by page) and the document-oriented word processors like Wordstar 3.3 (which treat the document as a whole). As in page-oriented systems, if you make extensive editing changes in Samna Word, you must execute a special repagination command to adjust each page for the correct page breaks. But like document-oriented systems, Samna Word also lets you edit and enter text as if it were dealing with a continuous document, automatically inserting the appropriate page breaks as you enter text.

In general, Samna Word III offers the standard checklist features of a modern word processor: a complete set of editing commands, find and replace, move and copy, block operations, and file operations. In addition, Samna Word III contains many of the extra features now standard on corporate word processing programs: mail-merge facilities, math functions for columns and rows, special foreign-language keyboard support, a spelling checker, newspaper-style multiple columns, and macros (stored keystrokes).

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

Although Samna Word III lacks a thesaurus, a word-count feature, or an indexing facility, its extensive word processing commands give it a place among the more powerful programs available for the IBM PC.

PERFORMANCE: Samna Word III generally performs as expected. Its basic editing commands work predictably and effectively. The program executes moves, block operations, searches, and cursor movement smoothly and gracefully. Unfortunately, Samna Word III handles most movement commands through the screen, and that slows it down. For example, when



Samna Competitive In 'Checklist Wars'

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 take the cursor up to the previous line when you reach the left end of the current line. (The destructive backspace key does wrap to the previous line.)

Samna 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 adjustment, which, as mentioned above, is time-consuming. For long documents, it gets ridiculous. We changed the line lengths for a 57-page document from 65 characters to 40 characters per line, and it took 37 minutes. And that doesn't count repaginating. As a result, we definitely do not recommend this product for lengthy documents.

Since it is semi-page-oriented, Samna Word III can quickly jump to a particular page. The program also has a zoom feature that will show your text's layout on the page. This is a nice touch, though it will not show newspaper-style multiple columns.

Samna Word III handles newspaper-style columns less effectively than some other programs, such as Wordperfect. Like Wordstar 2000, Samna Word III does not show how these columns will appear on the page, nor can you see more than one column on the screen at a time. To print multiple columns, Samna Word III prints the entire first column, then scrolls the printer platen backward to reposition the

paper 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 at multiple columns than Samna Word III.

Samna Word III's repagination feature offers several options. You can direct it to guard against widows or orphans (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 break falls. In this last mode, if you want the file reformatted to reflect the desired page endings, Samna 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 repages automatically 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 protect command that lets you maintain the integrity of a table or a section heading.

Like many page-oriented word processing programs, Samna Word III works in type-over mode, with insert mode as a special case for editing. The insert mode causes the rest of the text following the cursor to be moved down one line to permit unlimited insertions. However, most editing commands do not work in insert mode, and adding even a single character requires the invocation of the insert mode. Users accustomed to more sophisticated editing systems will find this tedious.

Among word processors in its class, Samna Word III's file and document management facilities are adequate, but not better. Although you can copy, save, and delete files from within Samna, it lacks some tools found in Multimate, Displaywrite 3, or Wordperfect. For instance,

Samna Word III's help system, error handling, and page/document orientation may make it a useful alternative.

Samna Word III lacks the wild card search, sort, and document history capabilities found in these other programs.

The spelling checker works reasonably well. It finds unrecognized words and displays them in context along with suggested alternatives. In our test, the dictionary flagged as unrecognized the words *Samna* and *backspace*.

Although a decent performer, the spelling checker is not as clever as Wordperfect's spelling checker at finding alternative spellings, nor is it as sophisticated at handling mismatched words. For example, Samna Word III can skip a word that doesn't match the dictionary, but it can't skip that word throughout a document; instead, you have to skip it each time it occurs, a real irritation.

Although we primarily ran the program on a fixed disk, we also used it on a floppy disk system. The program slows considerably on a floppy system because it writes often to the disk, especially when reformatting or carrying out a search. As a result, we would not recommend this program for use on a floppy-disk-based system.

Even though Samna Word III is slow at some operations and lacks some features found in more sophisticated competing programs, we found its performance adequate in its likely environment, that of a typing pool or secretary's desk. On the balance it performs solidly enough to rate a satisfactory.

DOCUMENTATION: The Samna Word III manual has two parts, a large, comprehensive reference manual and a smaller getting started booklet. All of the documentation is well-done, clearly prepared, accurate, and helpful. We had no difficulty finding things we needed to know. Samna's index is good, the manual's typography clear, and the illustrations and examples generally helpful.

We found the photographs of screen displays considerably less helpful than they might have been. Small and sometimes not clearly reproduced, these displays were less useful than the other printed examples in the manual. These photos would be more useful if they were bigger.

Samna 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

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InfoWorld reviews only finished, production versions of products, never beta test versions.

Excellent/5 Symbols/9 - 10:

Tops in its class

Very Good/4 Symbols/7 - 8.9:

Offers special benefits

Satisfactory/3 Symbols/5 - 6.9:

Meets essential criteria

Poor/2 Symbols/3 - 4.9:

Falls short in essential areas

Unacceptable/1 Symbol/1 - 2.9:

Fails to meet minimum standards

it is given in all uppercase letters. Text is easier to read if it appears in upper and lowercase.

One strength of Samna's documentation is that you get complete printer descriptions. Although Samna Word III supports only a limited number of printers, that support is clearly outlined in the printer section. Each printer gets a page or so that tells you what it will do, how to set the printer's switches, and what cable you need to connect the printer to an IBM PC class machine.

Unfortunately, Samna supports only 27 printers (compared to hundreds of printers supported by some of its competitors). An optional printer support disk will let you use an additional 30 printers, but you get it only by paying an extra \$25 or by signing up for one of the extended support plans. This limited printer support would be less of a problem if you could create your own custom printer driver table, as you can with other word processors such as DisplayWrite 3, but Samna Word III has no such facility. This is a serious drawback, forcing the user to depend on the vendor for future printer developments.

This deficiency is sufficient to offset the very good guidance given for the printers the program does support. Despite this limited printer support, Samna Word III's documentation is generally good and its on-line help extensive. We rate documentation as very good.

EASE OF LEARNING: Samna Word III is relatively easy to learn. The tutorial system is extensive, and although we found the lessons short, a novice might profit by learning the program in small, easily digestible pieces. The large, keyboard template and clear command summary sheet are quite helpful, as are the stick-on

labels for the command keys.

Like the help screens, the tutorial's information is presented entirely in uppercase letters, making it hard to read.

As is true of any program of this complexity, Samna Word III is not quickly learned. It has many functions and capabilities that require time and effort to master. However, the well-done documentation, tutorial, and help system, combined with reasonably helpful error messages, earn this program a satisfactory rating for ease of learning.

EASE OF USE: Although Samna Word III is relatively easy to use, its major drawback stems from the slowness of some functions. Nothing is more irritating than having to wait minutes for a program to complete a search or a reformatting operation on a medium-size document. Nonetheless, we found most of Samna Word III's features and command sequences as effective for experienced users as for novices, because the program offers more opportunities for experienced users to bypass menus with function keys. The program will suppress the automatic help display that normally occupies the upper third of the screen, providing help only when requested. Command sequences and block highlighting are easy to use and remember.

Despite some difficulties with large documents and slow operation in some areas, the powerful features and good command structure earn this program a very good in ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING: By and large, Samna Word III handles errors well. None of the common error conditions — open disk doors, system power outages, warm reboots — caused any particular difficulty or resulted in much lost text. Our biggest loss of text resulted from a power outage: We lost only one page of data from our current file, and both backup files (Samna saves two generations of backups for each file) were unaffected.

Whenever you press the wrong command key, Samna provides a short explanatory error message together with a reference number. The manual provides a more complete explanation of the error condition and how to avoid it, but in most cases, such an explanation is unnecessary. Unfortunately, the error messages can stay on-screen after the condition has been corrected, a minor but annoying reminder that we did something wrong.

One error message we received was indecipherable: "SysError 3-1." A call to the vendor's support line provided the following explanation: Because of a design flaw, the program requires at least six carriage returns on a page. The workaround — putting six carriage returns on the page — was simple. This was the only unclear error message.

Otherwise, the program's error-handling capabilities and especially its multiple backups earn Samna Word III a very good rating for error handling.

SUPPORT: Samna Word III's phone support consists of two levels. For the first 30 days, Samna will answer any question free. To get telephone support after this period, you must subscribe to one of several extended support plans. The options, ranging in price from \$125 to \$249, include limited phone support, one year's worth of program updates, the optional printer support disk, and a periodically produced booklet called *Samna Word Tips and Tricks*.

We called Samna's toll-free hot line with questions. It took about four tries to get through, but the representative proved exceedingly knowledgeable and helpful. The support lines are open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern time on weekdays.

You'll have to pay for extra printer support if your printer is not one of the 24 models the program handles. Most of

Samna's competitors provide more extensive printer support as part of their program packages.

Samna's warranty is for defective disks only and lasts for 30 days, compared to the industry-standard 90 days. Fortunately, the program is not copy-protected.

Balancing the limited printer support and considerable fees for extended support against the expert telephone help, we rate Samna's support as satisfactory.

VALUE: Within the realm of corporate word processing packages, Samna Word III has most of the features and capabilities it needs.

At \$550, it is at the high end of its market in price. For the money, Samna offers a

reasonably full-feature product with solid performance, compared to its direct competition, which offsets its awful reformatting speed and general slowness. We rate this product satisfactory in value for the secretarial market.

However, we do not recommend this program for those preparing long documents that will require much editing, for those who have floppy-disk-based machines, or for those needing newspaper-style columns.

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Reports Plus Is Good Idea That Needs Lots of Work

By John Walkenbach
Review Board

Reports Plus, from Softsynt Inc., attempts to address the problem of sharing data among incompatible databases. Using a menu-based interface, it can generate queries and reports from Dbase, 1-2-3, Multiplan, DIF, and ASCII files, and it can work with up to 10 different files at once — regardless of where they came 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, is 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 possible to perform queries and generate reports that include data from completely different sources without going through an often tedious file-translation procedure.

To say that this program is menu-driven is perhaps an understatement. Practically everything you do with Reports Plus is done by way of a menu. For example, as you develop a query statement to select the records of interest, you pull everything you need from a menu. This includes logical operators (such as "and," "or," "greater than," "equal to") as well as field names. As you pull the relevant words from the menus, you watch your query statement develop on a separate line. You can also type in 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 files, specifying your query, and generating a printed report. The menus are linked in such a way that it is practically impossible to omit any of the steps needed to produce your report.

Furthermore, the menus are context-sensitive. For example, if your previous element was a numeric constant, the next menu you're presented with will include logical operators and parentheses.

The first step in creating a report is to identify the file or files you'll be using. You can then modify the field names and provide identifiers up to 22 characters long. You

also need to specify the type of data contained in each field: numeric, text, or date. Then you can develop one or more report formats that specify the fields to be printed (including computations involving multiple fields or constants), as well as headers, footers, groupings, and so on. Finally, you specify your query by constructing a logical statement to include or exclude records based on the criteria of interest. And, of course, you can bypass the query and select all records in the file. You can also group your queries into tasks, and the menu-driven nature of this program allows you to run predefined queries or tasks simply by pointing to one and hitting the enter key.

When designing a report, you'll find that you have just about all the flexibility you need. But if you're in a hurry and don't have time to customize a report, Reports Plus offers a standard quick-list report, as well as a count of records that meet your query criteria.

PERFORMANCE: The first thing you may notice about Reports Plus is its sluggishness. On an AT system, speed is no problem, but with an 8088-based IBM PC, we often found the delays between menus to be excessive. After you type a menu choice, it's not uncommon for five seconds to pass before the action takes place. If you're used to programs responding instantaneously, you'll be disappointed.

We tested four of the product's six file types and were able to generate reports that pulled data from four different sources — a remarkable feat in itself. We expected a significant slowdown when working with multiple files, but here we were pleasantly surprised by the program's speed, even with relatively complex sorting.

But the program does have a serious bug. We used a 1-2-3 name-and-address database in which a field contained last name and first name, separated by a comma. Reports produced from this file were fine — until we attempted to sort them. Sorting messed up the entire report, scrambling the fields as well as the records. The only way to get a presentable report was to go back to the original file and delete the commas. Subsequent tests with other file types showed similar problems when we used commas within a field. We find it hard to believe that such a serious bug survived the manufacturer's testing.

A major limitation is the program's incapability to work with fixed-format ASCII files. This is a fairly common file type in which the fields are not separated by commas or any other delimiter. As it stands, the ASCII files that Reports Plus can use must have fields separated by a comma or a carriage return/line feed sequence. This seems like an unnecessary restriction and severely limits the range of files that Reports Plus can use.

Another limitation — perhaps even more serious — is that the program can't print its reports to disk. Many users like to send reports to disk to save time and for later editing. Reports Plus allows printing to disk through the program's standard

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REPORT CARD

PERFORMANCE SOFTWARE SAMNA WORD III

	Unacceptable	Poor	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent
5.7					
Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Error Handling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Samna Word III is a reasonably full-feature corporate word processing program that is easy to learn and use. Although somewhat slow in editing large documents, and very slow at reformatting, Samna's good help system, strong error handling, and hybrid page/document orientation may make this a good alternative for secretarial use. Not copy-protected. For the IBM PC.

PRODUCT DETAILS

List price, \$550. Version tested (3.0) available for IBM PCs, XTs, ATs, and compatibles. Requires 320K of RAM, MS-DOS or PC-DOS 2.0 or higher, and two floppy disk drives (hard disk drive recommended). Samna Corp., 2700 N.E. Expressway, Suite C-700, Atlanta, GA 30345; (404) 321-5066.