



## Cheap Accounting Software

by Morris D. Carey, Jr.

I get so many letters asking for advice on where to find inexpensive accounting software. The fact is, most software today – regardless of type – is a bargain compared to a few years ago. Computer technology is no longer a premium. It is a buyer's market and inexpensive alternatives are everywhere.

In 1978 I contacted a computer rental company in hopes of arranging for a computer to be installed at my business office (there weren't any microcomputers in those days).

A friend of mine also had a construction business in the same building, and we both thought that having a computer would help our businesses. We talked about splitting the cost.

We didn't realize how expensive a computer terminal could be. As it turned out, the installment cost of \$25,000 was far too expensive for us to consider, even as a two-way split, especially since there would be a monthly use fee and phone line costs, too. We painfully and reluctantly put the idea of an in-house computer to rest.

My company went broke shortly after that, during the recession of 1980-81, and so did my friend's. We didn't have a handle on the management end of our businesses.

In late 1982, when IBM made microcomputer hardware available to everyone, the price for what I needed dropped to a "truly affordable" \$7,000. The price did not include word-processing software, or a partial accounting library, which ran another \$2,000. However, this was still only about a third of the cost of the terminal I had considered four years earlier.

When it came to selecting accounting software, I picked from two of the first programs available for the IBM. One system was made by BPI Systems, Inc., and the other by Peachtree Software. They were very similar.

I opted for BPI and began by purchasing only part of the accounting system. I bought the general ledger (GL), payroll (PR), and job-cost (JC) modules (which included an estimating program).

Both systems also offered accounts payable (AP), accounts receivable (AR), and inventory control (IC) modules. Our company was not large enough then to warrant all the detail provided in the AP and AR modules, and we did not need the IC module. (I have since purchased AP and AR.)

Although the BPI accounting library I purchased (and still use) currently sells for far less than I originally paid (\$250 per module vs. the \$500 I paid), it is no longer a bargain. Also, the job cost module has been discontinued, which makes the rest of the program useless to a contractor.

Peachtree, on the other hand, has really come down in price. The entire library (GL, AR, AP, IC, JC, PR, and Fixed Assets) sells for \$199. Not \$199 per module — \$199 for the entire accounting system.

If you are anxious to convert your hand-kept set of books to a computer accounting system, and want a sophisticated yet inexpensive system to do it with, take a closer look at Peachtree (Peachtree Software, 4355 Shackelford Rd., Norcross, GA 30093; 800/247-3224).

The Peachtree program has a lot of neat features:

- A custom report-writer is available for an additional \$199, which allows the user to query and print out stored data to their own specifications.
- The database for the estimating system is divided into two sort levels (division and item).
- All modules are integrated, which makes single entry of data possible – a real time-saver.
- The installation program allows the user to select which modules will be loaded onto the hard disk. This will save space for smaller companies who don't want to use all the modules. Later installation of the additional modules is possible.

The program is not "copy-protected," so you don't have to worry about a secret installation code being lost or a stupid security block causing your computer to lock up. The program may prove to be slightly complicated if you decide to use all the modules, but the user's manual is excellent and easy to understand. The program comes with sample company data, and sample data-input forms too.

All things considered, Peachtree is a super business-accounting system. I wish I had started out with Peachtree instead of the \$3,000 BPI system I own.

### Estimating for the Mac

I'm frequently asked to recommend estimating software alternatives for the Macintosh. Choices are limited, so when something does come along I'm anxious to get the word out to you as soon as possible.

Although I have not reviewed this particular program, I wanted to let you know about it anyway, so you could have the opportunity to begin your own investigation.

It is an estimating and job-cost accounting program, and is called "Cost Management System." The software is manufactured by Softough Software, Inc., 5200 SW Macadam Avenue, Suite 255, Portland, OR 97201; 503/241-1841.

The program is not a spreadsheet overlay, but is actually written from scratch in database form (the kind I like). The sample reports created by the program are well thought-out and professional looking. And, as always with Apple programs, the selection menus are little pictures rather than words. (Frankly, I'll never figure out the appeal of that feature.)

You'll be the first to know my impression of the program just as soon as I can arrange for a demonstration. From all outward appearances it looks pretty good.

### Letters, Letters, Letters...

*Q. This summer I previewed the program you suggested, the NCE Estimator 2000 by National Computer Estimating, Inc. It seemed to fit my needs perfectly.*

*I also decided to preview the NCE accounting software package, but the computer I purchased it from, Bird Software, apparently is no longer a representative for this program. Bird gave me the number of the company selling the accounting package, but nothing is known about NCE. Could you please check to see what may have happened to NCE?*

*I need to find them, too, because there is a coded number protection device in the program that I may need to reload someday if the software crashes. I hope you can tell me – and others – what may have happened.*

K.J. Knox  
Talula, Ill.

A. Ahhh! The world of software manufacturing. Someone once said that the easiest part is making the software. And then there's the marketing.

NCE, the maker of "The Remodeling Estimator," has been around for several years, and has made sales agreements with several software marketing firms, one of which was Bird Software Company. Bird Software Company was a subsidiary of Bird & Son, the roof-covering material company.

According to Dave Charles, president of NCE, Bird Software is no longer in business. Fortunately, NCE users will not have to suffer, because NCE has agreed to provide free limited technical support to everyone who purchased The Remodeling Estimator from Bird Software. Way to go Dave!

Charles advises NCE purchasers to call his toll-free computer support line – 800/323-3020. ■

*Morris D. Carey is a partner with Carey Bros. Construction, a successful remodeling firm based in Pittsburg, Calif. In addition, he has reviewed hundreds of construction-related computer products, and conducts computer seminars for The Journal of Light Construction. If you have a question about computing in construction, address it to State-of-the-Art Contractor, c/o JLC, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.*