

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

**Act! for Windows 1.0 -- ACT! Gets Into Windows**

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ACT! from Contact Software International is the contact management program that, in many respects, defined the category. A quick and powerful system designed to reduce keystrokes to a minimum, ACT! has been helping people track meetings, appointments and calls since 1987. Although ACT! has always been the best-seller in its field, updates have come at a slow pace. In its five-year history, there have only been three, versions 1.1, 2.0 and 2.1. Now, after more than a year of development, ACT! for Windows has finally arrived. It has been worth the wait.

Contact Software has done an excellent job at melding the feel of its original product with Windows. If you are a current ACT! user, you can readily transform your contact databases to the new program and begin using the Windows version immediately. Although the Windows version does not add a great deal of functionality over the DOS version, it makes the features much more accessible. The Windows operating paradigms of point, click, drag and WYSIWYG (What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get) have been implemented very well.

ACT! for Windows installs easily using an automatic installation program. If you are converting from a DOS version, the first task is to convert your existing contact list to the new format. Contact Software has made a major product change and adopted dBASE standard file structures in its Windows version. This makes your ACT! files accessible to any of the multitude of programs that follow the .DBF format. The next DOS version of ACT! will also use the dBASE standard. Until then, ACT! for Windows has built-in utilities to import and export files in the original ACT! format. Following the Windows file filter paradigm, export is simple with the "File Save As..." command. Similarly, "File Open" can use .DBF files or files from ACT! 2.0 or 2.1.

In my beta version, the initial file import and convert was tediously slow. The program processed a new name about every six seconds, so my 700-name database took more than an hour to convert (on a fast 486-33 computer). Contact Software officials said that this performance should improve in the shipping product. Although slow, all my contact information, complete with histories, appointments, notes and letters, ported to the new file structure intact with no lost data items.

As easy as the DOS version of ACT! was to operate, ACT! for Windows is even easier. The menu bar remains essentially the same, with only minor changes to conform to Windows conventions. The new program, however, uses a toolbar to make the most common commands operate with single clicks. My toolbar had 15 buttons, and you can expect two or three more in the final product. The toolbar in the final product should be customizable, allowing you to add your own icons for special macros that you design.

In its Windows form, ACT! retains all the fields in its original contact-oriented database. Associated with each contact are the expected fields (name, company name, address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address, secretary name, etc.) plus 15 userdefinable fields. A notes field is also associated with each contact for inserting free form notes. In Windows, the notes field is a true window, popping up when you need it, going away when you don't. The display, no longer limited to 80 characters by 25 lines, is much more appealing; you can edit any displayed field by simply clicking on it and starting to type.

You can schedule three types of activities with your contacts, phone calls, meetings or "To-Do's." You can assign specific times to your activities or just give them a date. When ACT! is running, it will signal you when you have a meeting or call time approaching. The program is also very good at detecting schedule conflicts as you set new

appointments. Scheduling activities really benefits from Windows in that a calendar window pops up when you begin to assign a time to an activity. The date can simply be selected with the mouse.

The program offers several ways to move to your desired contact. Screen buttons page through the current group--a name or letter (A, B, C and so on) at a time. A rolodex icon button displays a scrolling list of all contacts along with their phone numbers. The Lookup function lets you jump to a contact or group of contacts based on matches in any of the standard data fields. My beta version was much slower than the current DOS version when performing searches and selecting contact groups. Although Contact Software expects this to improve, Windows' overhead may result in a somewhat slower feel in the Windows product.

My favorite tool buttons are Day, Week and Month. Clicking on one of these displays an appointment calendar view of the requested period. It is very convenient to see all your appointments for the month on a single page. The calendar display includes buttons that let you page through the calendar for additional periods or print the current display. With the old version of ACT!, you could print your appointments for the month, but it was never this easy, nor was the result as neatly printed.

The calendar view uses the Windows drag-and-drop ability to let you quickly and easily reschedule a call or meeting. When the client calls to reschedule your next appointment, you simply drag the meeting information to a new time slot on the calendar display and drop it; all related information moves instantly.

The built-in report generator and word processor also derive substantial benefits from the conversion to Windows. Both are now true WYSIWYG in their screen and printed output and can use any font, type style or point size available in Windows. The built-in spell checker from Houghton-Mifflin is fast and easy to use.

Contact Software plans to offer existing ACT! users a substantial discount on the new product, so if you are an ACT! and Windows user, this is one product I would convert to immediately.

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