Synergy
SynApps Software Inc.

The people at SynApps like to call themselves "the other Redmond software company". Tough billing to live up to. Composed of ex-Microsoft and hDC employees, SynApps has taken on as their charter the production of tools to enhance the *Windows* environment. In *Synergy*, with one fell swoop, they are trying to address inadequacies in *Windows* as it's distributed, compete with the company that was first on the scene in the *Windows*-enhancement market, and combat the syndrome that has users buying one utility after another and watching their bank balances shrink at an alarming rate.

Looking at the volume of software included in a *Synergy* package, it appears that SynApps has accomplished their goal. There's something here for everybody, and a couple of the utilities are quite good. In particular, we're impressed with the idea behind the Psychic, the tool that helpfully extends your "Open" and "Save" dialog boxes with lists of recently-used files, saving you lots of keystrokes and frustration. The problem is, Psychic, like most of the other tools in *Synergy*, falls into a category once described as "not ready for prime time". *Synergy* shows promise, but it's not there, yet.

The *Synergy* applets run with the support of two .DLL files totaling 380 kilobytes that the package's installation script places in your SYSTEM directory. While this kind of behavior is something we normally frown upon, it makes sense with *Synergy* because you can compile your own scripts into what appear to be standalone .EXE files, but in reality rely on these libraries, too. In total, the package uses two megabytes of disk space, but nearly half of that is taken up by sample scripts, .WAV sound files, and the .ECL files that serve as storage vehicles for *Synergy*'s Eclipse button-driven program launcher. Installation and the subsequent use of *Synergy* also place several .INI files in your Windows directory, may leave behind an unneeded file named INSTALL.BIN, and makes various modifications to WIN.INI, so you'll want to keep track of your resources.

Doubleday defines "synergy" as a mutual reinforcing of agents, which together produce an effect greater than the agents would acting separately. It's hard to argue with that definition as a choice for this collection's name, as several of the utilities are designed to work together, through such avenues as drag-and-drop. However, we extend the definition when it applies to *Windows* software, to include the clause "the agents should look and act similarly". *Synergy* suffers here, as it comes off visually more like a collection of programs that happened to get bundled together than one designed to be distributed that way. Menus frequently differ in appearance and function, and buttons for performing the same task lack continuity. We also dislike the choice of colors made by the developers for the text on their buttons; we found it difficult to read using both sixteen-color and 256-color *Windows* drivers.

Ignore the promise of the product's name, and you may find something you like in *Synergy*. Audition plays .WAV files, adding the ability to move, copy and delete them, either in groups or individually. Unlike *Windows*' native Sound Recorder, it also lets you load and play a file with a single action, although a flaw in *Synergy*'s installation script may force you to edit WIN.INI manually to get this feature to work reliably. File Fetch finds the files you've buried in the far reaches of your hard disk, but accepts only file names for search parameters and can't search multiple drives in a single pass. Optionally, it will delete files that match your search specification, either with or

without your confirmation. Picasso is an icon-designing utility, capable of writing .ICO files and reading .ICO, .EXE, and .DLLs, and FX lets you alter your *Windows* environment by assigning customizable startup/minimize/maximize "Zoom" and system-wide window-shadowing characteristics. It also extends *Windows'* system-event sounds, in much the same way as Aristosoft's *Wired for Sound* (see figure 1). If you use FX, it insists on making itself an automatically loaded program by altering the LOAD statement in WIN.INI.

Some of the other utilities offer broader usefulness. SynAppShot is an entirely button-driven screen-capture program offering window,