

payroll module not usually seen in a product priced as aggressively as *Act 1 Plus*. Except for federal information current in the year of production, tax tables are input manually (which we consider an improvement over the prevalent practice of requiring the purchase of annual updates to prevent the obsolescence of the payroll module). Payroll also allows for highly personalized benefits tables, and includes editable templates for several government forms, including W-2 and 941. Applications (Cougar Mountain's moniker for the modules) can be told to interface with each other automatically, where appropriate.

It's cheap, it's fast, and it's strong. We haven't reviewed the network capable features of the *Act* line of accounting programs, but for single station use, we recommend *Act 1 Plus* highly, as long as you don't need to be taught accounting basics before you use it.

### **Pacioli 2000** **M-USA Business Systems**

When you put a product on the street at a price one quarter to one **hundredth** that charged by your competition, you're going to raise a few eyebrows. With *Pacioli 2000*, Jose Hurtado, a founder of the company that produces, and formerly the driving force behind *DAC-Easy Accounting*, is inviting such ocular calisthenics. The question is, will they leave you with a good feeling, or just a headache?

Steering firmly away from today's prevalent trend in accounting software, *Pacioli 2000* comes in a small box, with a single book (plus similarly-focused videotape), one 3.5" and two 5.25" diskettes, and little else. Wait a second . . . there's also a catalog of M-USA's other products, samples of several forms they've designed to be used by *Pacioli 2000*, and an order form. Is this a hint (like those found in many accounting software packages)? No, it's much more than that. To use *Pacioli 2000*, you'll need forms - **lots** of forms - and M-USA figures it'll make up for *Pacioli 2000*'s ridiculously low price by selling you the accessory products on the back end.

"Oh no," you're probably saying, "more overpriced forms from a vendor too far away to make sense." Well, you're wrong. The forms are reasonably priced, of acceptable quality, and with M-USA's operations set up in Texas, nobody's too far away. You take another look. "Fifty bucks, huh? What've I got to lose?"

Fast forward a few weeks. You've ordered *Pacioli 2000*, and after a typical delay - remember how much fun setting up an accounting program is - you're ready to go. You crack the seal on the box, take a look at the contents, go to the clearly labeled installation instructions ("type install"), and exhale loudly. You knew nothing was that easy.

*Pacioli 2000* is installed by a batch file that requires you to use precise syntax to get acceptable non-standard results; Those who follow the directions as printed will have the product in directory C:\PACIOLI (which may or may not be OK with you). To install *Pacioli 2000* in a directory of your choosing, you must first create that directory and make it the default on the destination drive. At the end of the installation process, you're asked, innocuously, if *Pacioli 2000* may modify your system configuration files. Answer yes, and your CONFIG.SYS file will be appended if it doesn't contain a "FILES=20" (or more) statement, BUT NOT BACKED UP FIRST. We applaud the effort to make everything easy, but this kind of action, as we've stated before in these pages, is **unacceptable**.

After installation, you'll find two megabytes of your hard disk occupied, with *Pacioli 2000*'s program and configuration files in one directory, and a set of empty data files in a subdirectory named "COMP01" (for "Company 1"; *Pacioli 2000* allows you to set up as many as 999 companies concurrently, each in their own directory). Don't delete them, because if the "active"

company's files are missing when you load *Pacioli 2000*, you'll crash your system. The message that appears on screen will lead you to believe that you'll simply need to start over (and ultimately that will be true), but first you'll have to reboot.

Once you get by the installation hassles, *Pacioli 2000* is, as its own documentation and promotional materials trumpet, "the best accounting value on the market today". Except for a conspicuously missing payroll module, it is probably all the accounting program you'll ever need. **If the terms of the previous sentence bother you, (as well they might), you can stop reading this article right now.** Come back in November, though, because that's when M-USA plans to release a payroll module that will interface with the current generation product. It will be provided to registered users for only the shipping charges. Still with us? Read on:

*Pacioli 2000* is a seamlessly integrated accounting package that includes eight modules: General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Inventory, Billing, Purchasing, Budgeting, and Auditing. We **mean** seamless, too. Unlike almost every other product on the market, you needn't activate each module individually, nor alert them to each other's existence. It runs in as little as 445 kilobytes of available RAM, but because of its heritage (*Pacioli 2000* uses Novell's network-ready *Btrieve* database as its engine), you'll be happier with its performance if you can give it closer to the full 640K that the product claims to need.

Documentation is thorough, but probably will leave you feeling a little bit uneasy. The portion of the videotape that concerns itself with *Pacioli 2000* (decent basic DOS and general accounting theory primers are also included) and the printed documentation cover virtually identical territory, and whether you choose a view-and-practice or a "read only" strategy for learning *Pacioli 2000*, the whole process will only take about three hours. There's nothing too inaccurate, nor is anything ignored, but there isn't much continuity, and the first time you try to find the procedure for executing a particular chore in the book's index, you'll have to grit your teeth a bit. One piece of advice should stand out clearly: Use a mouse. Despite an easily navigated interface, replete with drop down and pop up menus and clear dialogue boxes, using the keyboard for issuing commands is clumsy, at best. The help facility is strongly context-sensitive, and indeed helpful. If you really get stuck, free unlimited technical support is just a phone call away (your nickel). We're skeptical about M-USA's ability to continue providing such service at so inexpensive a product, but officials there insist that they intend to do so.

By offering 36 simultaneously open accounting periods (months only), *Pacioli 2000* displays a flexibility all too uncommon in products of its genre. Periods must be opened (and closed) consecutively, and setting them up is easy, but when it comes time to go to month 37 (or if you make a mistake), you'll have to feel your way through gingerly. A tip: instructions are in the documentation; just keep hunting. *Pacioli 2000* also boasts nine optional levels of secure passwords, determining which transactions each user can affect.

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One of the best features of the product is the ease and method of setting things up. While *Pacioli 2000* comes with a built-in chart of accounts that will suffice unmodified for many users, when you want to append or amend, you'll be pleasantly surprised. Not only do accounts keep track of such items as terms, interest charges, pricing codes, tax tables, and credit lines, but you can edit them on the fly. No more realizing two-thirds of the way through entering a transaction that you forgot to input a new client's information and needing to back out; just use the "NEW" command, and keep working!

When it's time to analyze results of your company's activities, *Pacioli 2000* continues to impress for its flexibility, but due to *Btrieve's* nature, is very slow. If you can overlook that problem (using a 386 machine helps, but only marginally), you'll find more reports than you probably will ever need, arranged logically among three areas. Accounts Reports include such staples of the back room as trial balances and accounts activity, Receivables/Payables concerns itself with such fare as aging reports and monthly statements, and Products/Services will give you inventory control, price lists, and vendor information. Want more? *Pacioli 2000* includes a report generator that allows you to "roll your own".

It comes down to a few basic issues. If you use a dot-matrix printer, (there are no forms for laser printers available), don't mind printing everything you do (everything can be output to screen or file for viewing or data exchange with your other software, but you **must** print all checks before *Pacioli 2000* lets you post them), and use a third party to prepare your payroll, you can't go wrong with *Pacioli 2000*. Now if only the installation process wasn't the way it is . . .