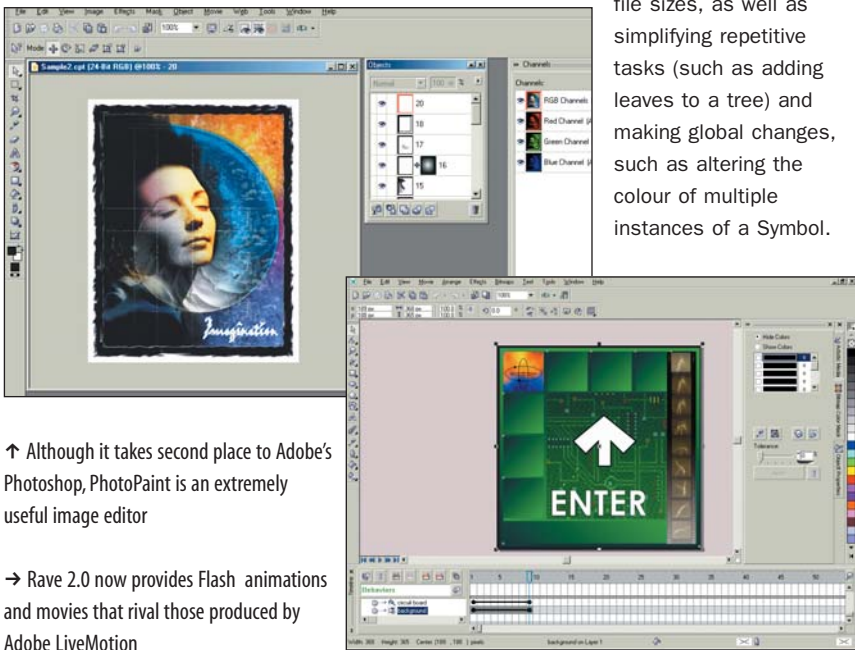Image-editing suite
CorelDraw 11.0 beta

For those who have never encountered this application before, CorelDraw is the premiere graphics suite for the PC (although Corel now releases the Mac version simultaneously). Programs such as Adobe Photoshop or Macromedia Flash offer better individual components than CorelDraw, but no other package combines such a huge range of features as Corel's flagship suite.

Certain upgrades have been a must for dedicated users: version 6.0, for example, transferred CorelDraw to a 32bit Windows environment, the 7.0 release stabilised many of the bugs evident in the previous version, while CorelDraw 10.0 introduced Rave, a Flash animation component.
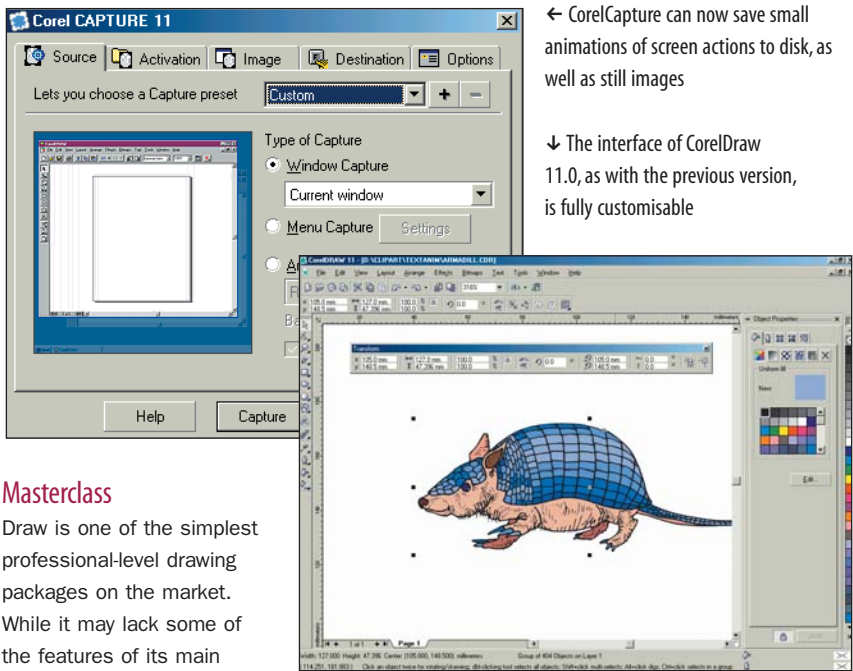
Version 11.0 – the latest release – is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, providing a maturity and improvement over recent changes rather than groundbreaking new features.

At its heart, CorelDraw consists of three primary graphic applications: the eponymous Draw, PhotoPaint (both versions 11.0) and Rave 2.0. These three programs are supported by a huge range of utilities, such as CorelTrace and CorelCapture, as well as stock libraries of graphics and photos that were not included with the beta version we reviewed.

← CorelCapture can now save small animations of screen actions to disk, as well as still images

↓ The interface of CorelDraw 11.0, as with the previous version, is fully customisable

Masterclass
Draw is one of the simplest professional-level drawing packages on the market. While it may lack some of the features of its main competitors, such as Macromedia Freehand and Adobe Illustrator, it includes many additional components that they do not offer.

The biggest change is the use of Symbols, which are common to both Draw and Rave. Symbols (familiar to Flash users) are instances of an original graphics file that can be used multiple times. Advantages of this include reducing file sizes, as well as simplifying repetitive tasks (such as adding leaves to a tree) and making global changes, such as altering the colour of multiple instances of a Symbol.

Pressure-sensitive brushes have been added to the graphics tablet, which is useful for smudging or roughening work. The new three-point drawing tools to create ellipses, rectangles or curves might not appear at first to be of value, but over time you may change your mind. There's also the ability to keep or discard text formatting which is extremely useful when copying and pasting between Word.

For those interested in exploring the open standard SVG (scalable vector graphics) format for distributing vector images across the web alongside Macromedia's proprietary SWF format, enhanced support for this format in Draw 11.0 will be appreciated.
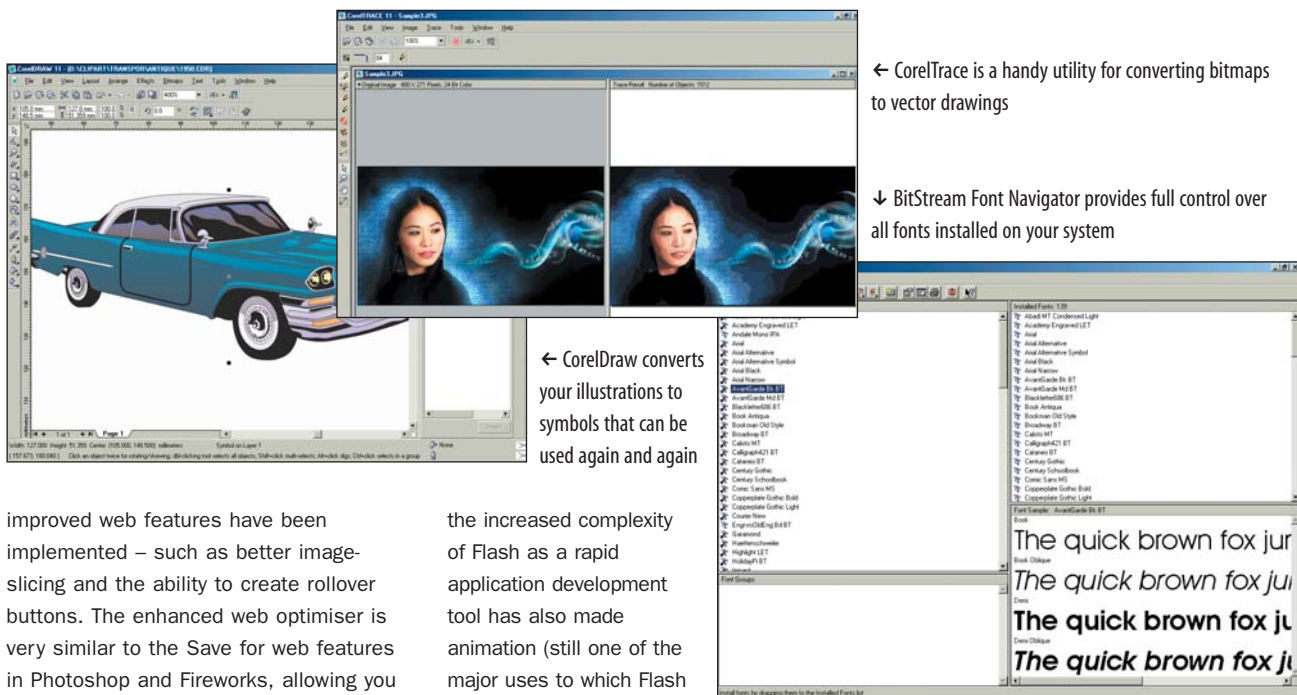
Paintings to rave about
PhotoPaint, Corel's bitmap editor, has long played the role of poor relation to Adobe Photoshop or even Fireworks for web-based graphics. It is, however, an extremely competent graphics program that works with multiple layers (called objects in PhotoPaint) and has implemented a host of improvements in this latest version.

The user interface has been streamlined, a very good cut-out tool for complex masks is now available, and

↑ Although it takes second place to Adobe's Photoshop, PhotoPaint is an extremely useful image editor

→ Rave 2.0 now provides Flash animations and movies that rival those produced by Adobe LiveMotion

← CorelTrace is a handy utility for converting bitmaps to vector drawings

↓ BitStream Font Navigator provides full control over all fonts installed on your system

← CorelDraw converts your illustrations to symbols that can be used again and again

improved web features have been implemented – such as better image-slicing and the ability to create rollover buttons. The enhanced web optimiser is very similar to the Save for web features in Photoshop and Fireworks, allowing you to preview image quality from a number of interactive presets.

For new users, there are a number of useful quick fixes. Image stitching has been improved, so it is now simpler than ever to create panoramic images from multiple photographs, and a red-eye removal tool is also included. A Spot Filter effect simulates depth of field and a new bevel effect creates 3D buttons and the like.

However, PhotoPaint always feels a couple of generations behind Photoshop and does not offer quite as much control for the experienced user. Having said that, it's still a solid application and the improvements that have been made are all in the right direction.

Rave 2.0 demonstrates the most remarkable changes. The first version attracted little attention, but Rave 2.0 has been improved to such an extent that it now rivals Adobe LiveMotion. Flash MX has changed the nature of the field for Flash production, making the interface (even the programming application) of choice for a wide range of interactive sites and technologies. Rave cannot compete at this level, although support for behaviours has been improved.

However, and Adobe seems to have come to the same conclusion,

→ The Export to Web function enables you to preview how compression will affect your images in PhotoPaint

the increased complexity of Flash as a rapid application development tool has also made animation (still one of the major uses to which Flash is put on the web) more complex. If you want to build complex network applications, choose Flash; if you want to spice up your web graphics, Rave is a simple and effective alternative.

Utilities you can't refuse
For most suites, three such extensive applications would be more than enough, but the utilities bundled with CorelDraw include a number of applications that you'll find yourself going back to again and again. CorelTrace is simply one of the best programs around for converting bitmaps into vector images: load your photo, select your parameters for conversion and you have a fully scalable drawing.

CorelCapture is slightly less useful, although recent versions allow users to capture onscreen actions as animations, as well as static images. Finally, BitStream Font Navigator 4.0 offers easy management of system fonts and CorelDraw will be bundling a cut-down version of ScanSoft

OmniPage for OCR (optical character recognition), although this was not included with the beta software.

Verdict
For veteran users, particularly those who have invested in alternative packages to run alongside CorelDraw, such as Adobe Photoshop or Macromedia Flash, version 11.0 is not as important an upgrade as the previous release. If you do not already own a professional graphics suite, however, CorelDraw 11.0 will beat the competition hands down when it is released in September as no other suite comes close to offering this level of sophistication within this price range. Anyone looking for a one-stop solution for their image-editing needs will have an able array of programs for a low price. ∎

Jason Whittaker

CorelDraw 11.0 beta

System requirements: 200MHz Pentium II or greater; Windows 98/Me/NT 4.0/2000/XP; 64MB RAM (128MB recommended); 1,024x768 screen resolution.

Corel: 0800 581 028
Website: www.corel.com
Price: £340, £169 upgrade from 9.0 and 10.0

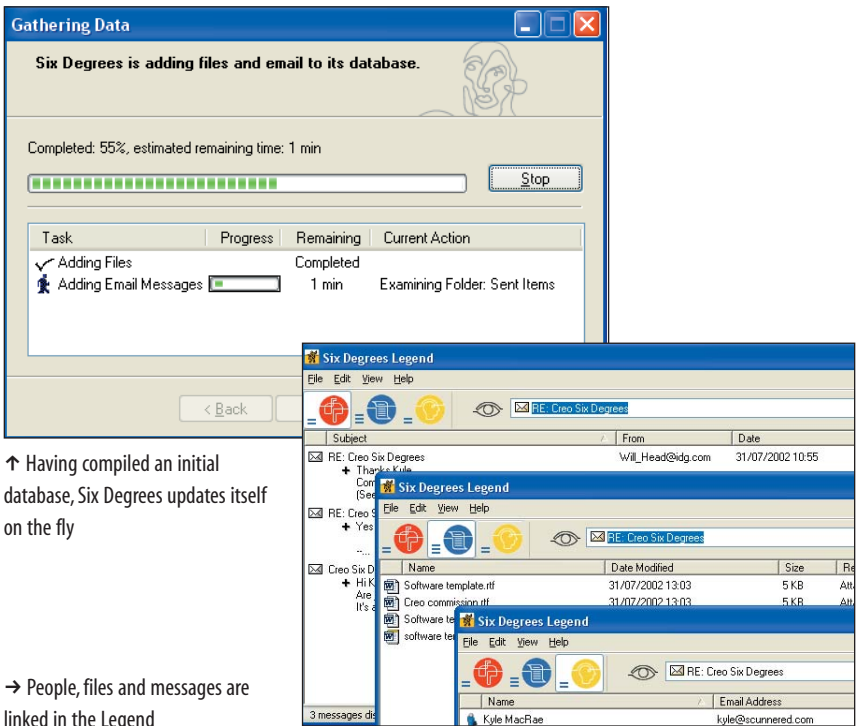|	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									8		
Features										9	
Value for money										9	
Overall										9	

Project management software
Creo Six Degrees

In a muddle with your messages? Struggling to keep tabs on your projects? Too busy to organise your files? Creo Six Degrees may be the answer to your prayers. This project management application monitors your email, assuming you use either Outlook or Entourage, and builds relationships between your messages, file attachments and contacts. Together, each set of relationships forms a project, so that you are able to access all project-related material at any time and from any starting point. Highlight an email in your inbox, for example, and Six Degrees lets you quickly view and retrieve all other messages and files exchanged with this person on the same subject.

Good focus point
The program's main interface, or Legend, contains three panes, each of which holds links to information pertinent to the current focus, which can be any email, contact or file. For example, if Ernie the editor emails you a document for review, this document becomes the focus for Six Degrees the moment you open it. The People pane then contains a link to Ernie's contact details (plus those of anyone else who was copied in on the message); the Message pane links to Ernie's original email (plus any other related email); and the File pane links to the original file attachment (plus any other project-related files).

Switch documents or check your email and Six Degrees changes focus with you. Thus you can work on several projects simultaneously without worrying about organisation – Six Degrees is on hand with links to all the material you need.

That's the theory. In practice, Six Degrees makes assumptions about the relationships between contacts, messages and files according to certain rules and it only really works if you play the same game. For instance, files saved in the same folder are automatically assumed to be related, as are files in different folders but with similar names. If you routinely name your files letter1, letter2, letter3

↑ Having compiled an initial database, Six Degrees updates itself on the fly

→ People, files and messages are linked in the Legend

and so forth and stick everything in My Documents, Six Degrees will have a hard time figuring out their relationships. Similarly, it pays to give each email a meaningful subject line – 'Ernie's document revision draft 1' is a better clue to a project relationship than 'Hello'.

Help for the hapless
Of course, this rather begs the question of whether you really need an application like Six Degrees. If you routinely filter and archive your emails, save file attachments in project-related folders and keep your address book up to date, Six Degrees is hardly a revelation. In fact, it's best suited to those with an overflowing inbox and precious little hard disk discipline.

The execution also leaves a little to be desired. Six Degrees doesn't take dates into consideration, so it tends to link similarly named files even if they were created months or years apart. Nor can you manually add files to or delete files from a project, which is daft: sometimes a little user intervention will keep a project in order.

But perhaps Six Degrees' greatest drawback is the way it assumes that every

project is driven by and centred around email. If you work alone or share files across a LAN (local area network), this isn't the project manager for you.

Verdict
Six Degrees certainly imposes order upon chaos and that's a good basis for building the killer desktop application it so plainly wants to be. For now, however, the price is high for a product with a few rough edges and an over-dependence on email. ■

Kyle MacRae

Creo Six Degrees

System requirements: Pentium processor; Windows 2000/XP; 128MB RAM (256MB recommended); 64MB RAM; 12MB hard disk space; Outlook 2000/XP.

Creo: 08705 246 222
Website: www.creo.com/sixdegrees
Price: £68, free 30-day version for download

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use								7			
Features							6				
Value for money						5					
Overall							6				

Intrusion detection and firewall software
BlackIce PC Protection 3.5

BlackIce, although often lumped together with personal firewalls such as ZoneAlarm and Kerio Personal Firewall, is an IDS (intrusion detection system), making it more like a nightclub bouncer than a swipecard entry system. A personal firewall monitors incoming and outgoing internet traffic (called packets) by checking the identity (the port and protocol) being used by each packet. BlackIce does the same but it also analyses the traffic, looking for suspicious behaviour.

BlackIce PC Protection 3.5 has new application and communication controls to prevent malicious software from running and blocks unauthorised access to the internet and other networks. These changes counter criticism that earlier versions of BlackIce lacked outbound access control to prevent spyware leaking personal data or malicious software from using a computer to mount attacks on others.
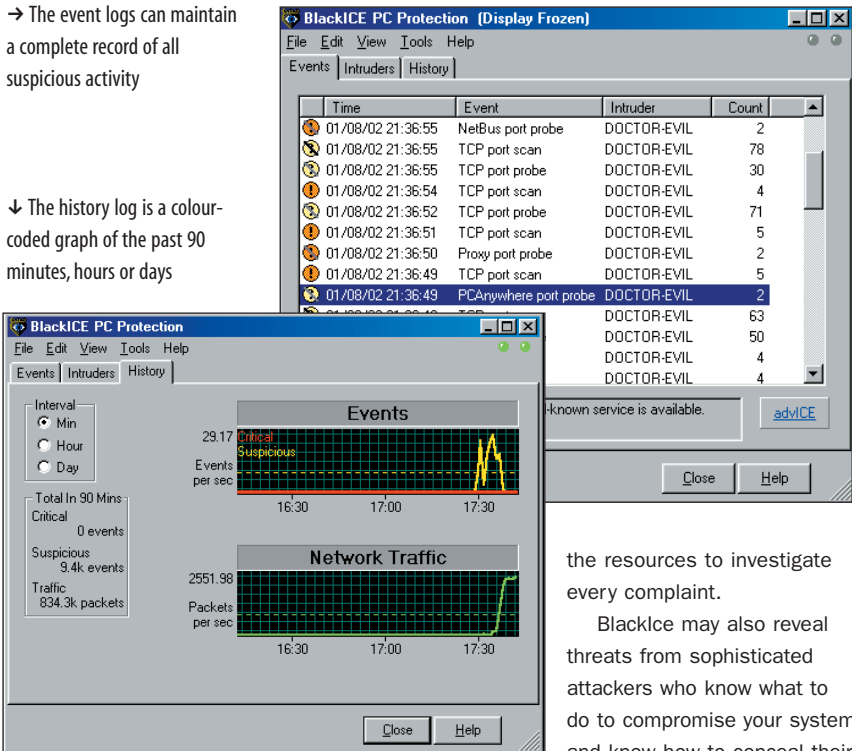
No identity crisis
Personal firewalls are a reasonable defence against threats and attacks while connected to the internet, but many penetrations of personal firewalls use established and trusted routes. When asked to 'Allow Internet Explorer to access the web', the answer 'Yes' enables you to browse the internet but also allows malicious websites to manipulate Internet Explorer for nefarious ends.

BlackIce also checks identity but then takes a closer look at the contents of packets, analysing their makeup to identify potential threats. When it detects unusual behaviour BlackIce compares it against a database of known exploits and, if there's a match, it blocks the traffic or application, whether inbound or outbound.

By combining firewall and intrusion detection software BlackIce can offer more effective protection than a personal firewall, but any security system is only as good as its configuration. It's essential to run an antivirus scanner to ensure that the system is free from malicious software before installing BlackIce. Most personal firewalls don't make this point obvious.

→ The event logs can maintain a complete record of all suspicious activity

↓ The history log is a colour-coded graph of the past 90 minutes, hours or days

BlackIce at least issues a warning but it should be given greater prominence.

Provided the system is not already compromised, a default install of BlackIce delivers good security for a standalone system. Networked PCs require manual intervention and, as the user interface is quite complicated, it's possible to make simple errors that reduce protection.

Evidence against
BlackIce demands more work and a deeper understanding of risks than most personal firewalls, but it's also a step up in terms of risk management. The program issues colour-coded threat alerts and audible warnings but, unlike many personal firewalls, records a wealth of detailed information in its logs.

It also produces evidence files that can be used to help track down attackers so that you can inform their ISP – but you have to be able to interpret the data. There's no point in bombarding an ISP with complaints. The purpose of the logs is to confirm that BlackIce is protecting your system – and ISPs simply don't have

the resources to investigate every complaint.

BlackIce may also reveal threats from sophisticated attackers who know what to do to compromise your system and know how to conceal their identity effectively. You can't hope to catch them, but at least having confirmation that the system has been compromised alerts you to restore from backup or rebuild the system.

Verdict
Although its user interface needs further refinement, BlackIce is an effective security tool for those prepared to delve into the detail. The ordinary home user, however, is still better served by simpler tools, such as Kerio Personal Firewall. ■

Terence Green

BlackIce PC Protection 3.5

System requirements: Pentium processor; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/NT 4.0/XP; 16MB RAM; 7MB hard disk space.

Guildsoft: 01752 895 100
Website: www.iss.net
Price: £30

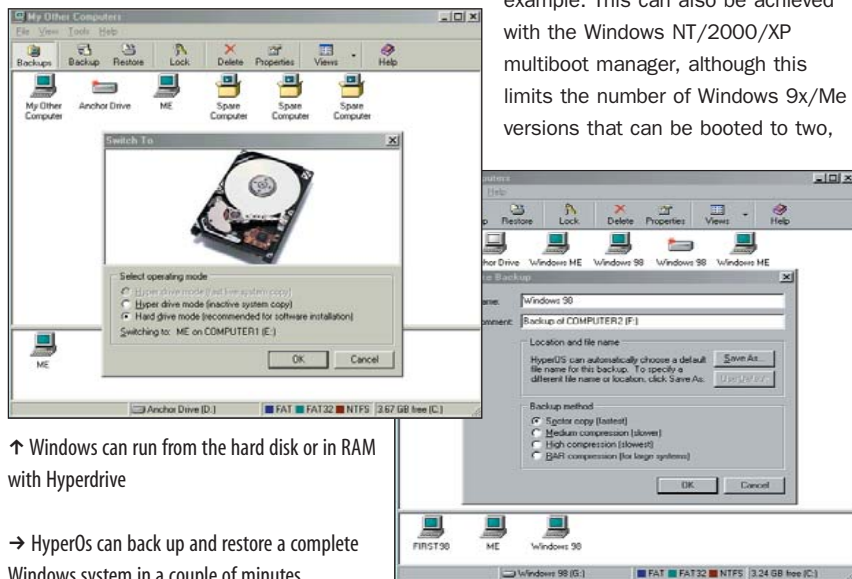|	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use							6				
Features									8		
Value for money									8		
Overall									8		

Multifunction Windows manager
HyperOs 2002

HyperOs enables up to 20 copies of Windows to be installed and run on a single PC in any combination – from 20 copies of one version to any mix of Windows 95, 98, Me, NT, 2000 and XP. But why? Most people manage with one copy of Windows. Some users need two after upgrading to Windows 2000 or XP to run games or applications. But beyond this demand for booting multiple copies of Windows comes from test labs, educational establishments, programmers and web designers who are already well served by a swathe of boot management, drive imaging and software distribution utilities. The HyperOs advantage is that it combines all the above services in a single tool.

Duplicate on demand
Setting up HyperOs involves installing each required Windows version once, after which an image of the system is saved. These images are duplicated and added to a My Other Computers folder. Double-clicking an icon in this folder restarts the computer with the selected Windows image.

Saved images which also serve as backups can be further configured, adding drivers and applications as necessary. These can, in turn, be duplicated, enabling multiple copies or versions of Windows – each with a different configuration – to be booted on demand.

→ The HyperOs 2002 Setup Wizard outlines the installation procedure

HyperOs also allows rapid disaster recovery as its copy function restores images faster than traditional drive imaging or backup software. Recovery time is reduced to little more than the time taken to boot the backup. The down side is that HyperOs lacks the additional security measures usually included in software distribution tools designed for labs and classrooms.

Hyper is active
Some versions of HyperOs (there are six in total) include Hyperdrive, which can boot and run Windows 95, 98 and Me as well as applications entirely within RAM much faster than from the hard drive. Hyperdrive makes the computer very responsive but requires at least 768MB of RAM. Running Windows in RAM provides some protection against viruses as all changes to the system are discarded at shutdown, but it cannot block access to other local drives should a virus occur.

HyperOs can be put to good use setting up separate Windows 9x/Me systems to prevent a highly tweaked games setup from compromising a business system, for example. This can also be achieved with the Windows NT/2000/XP multiboot manager, although this limits the number of Windows 9x/Me versions that can be booted to two,

whereas HyperOs can manage up to 20. HyperOs is less effective with Windows NT, 2000 and XP as they are not subject to the same multiboot limitations as Windows 9x/Me. Although only 10 entries can be shown in its boot menu, Microsoft's multiboot technology supports as many copies of Windows NT/2000/XP as can be put on to the available hard disk space.

HyperOs works well once installed but the process of setting it up and installing each version of Windows is long-winded and complicated. HyperOs also requires the C drive to be FAT32-formatted and may require other hardware changes. Expect to make a few practice runs before becoming a proficient HyperOs user.

Verdict
HyperOs is a unique multiboot utility, but much of its function can be duplicated through standard Windows procedures and lower cost utilities. ■

Terence Green

↑ Windows can run from the hard disk or in RAM with Hyperdrive

→ HyperOs can back up and restore a complete Windows system in a couple of minutes

HyperOs 2002

System requirements: 400MHz AMD K6 Athlon/Duron or Pentium III minimum; Windows 9x/Me/NT/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 20GB hard disk space.

Simply: 0870 727 2100
Website: www.hyperos2002.com
Price: £99 (10 copies 9x) to £249 (20 copies 9x/Me/NT/2000/XP/Hyperdrive)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use						6				
Features								8		
Value for money							7			
Overall							7			

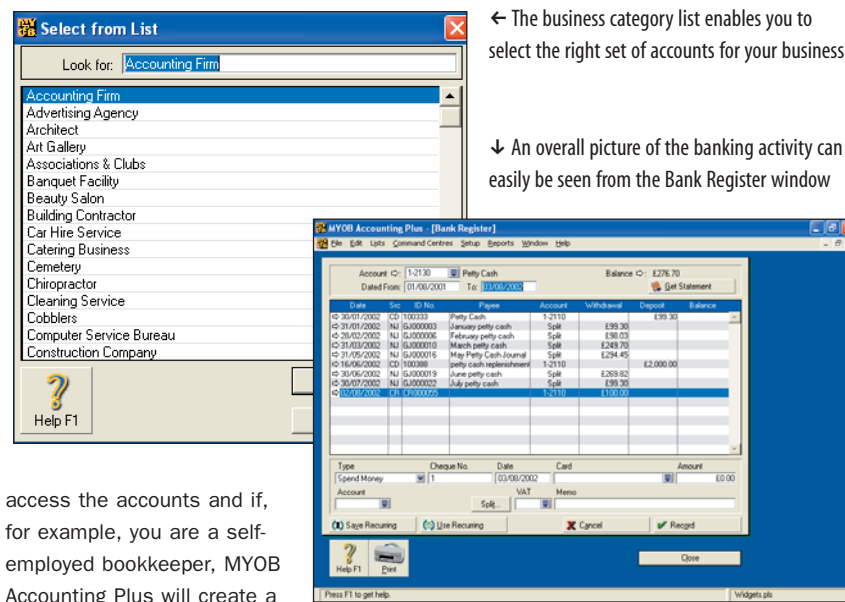## Accounting software
MYOB Accounting Plus 11.0

Many people shy away from computerised accounting in the mistaken belief that it is hard to learn and difficult to master. Looking at some accounting packages on the market it's easy to understand their trepidation. Fortunately with MYOB Accounting Plus, knowledge of accounting is not a necessity and the Command Centre is so easy to navigate that accounting becomes a joy.

Accounts at the ready
One of the greatest assets of MYOB is its large set of precreated business accounts, with a choice from 100 different businesses spread over five categories. From accountant to veterinarian, MYOB has an account list to suit.

Having initially set up your company the main interface opens with a set of eight icons, which include: accounts, banking, sales, time billing, purchases, payroll, stock control and card file. Click on any one to open the appropriate window. The main screens are designed like flowcharts, making it easy to see where you're going.

MYOB provides a multiuser application as well as multicompany accounts. This means that more than one person can

← The business category list enables you to select the right set of accounts for your business

↓ An overall picture of the banking activity can easily be seen from the Bank Register window

access the accounts and if, for example, you are a self-employed bookkeeper, MYOB Accounting Plus will create a new company for each client.

The New Bank Register enables you to control both bank and credit card accounts easily. You can enter all transactions for asset accounts with bank privileges or liability accounts with credit card privileges from one single window. Once the transaction has been recorded all necessary ledgers are updated. If your bank offers the facility for bank and credit card statements to be downloaded to your PC, then by clicking the Get Statement icon from within the Bank Register your statement can be imported into MYOB.

To save time, invoicing for time and materials doesn't have to be billed separately. By using the MYOB Activity Slips in the Time Billing
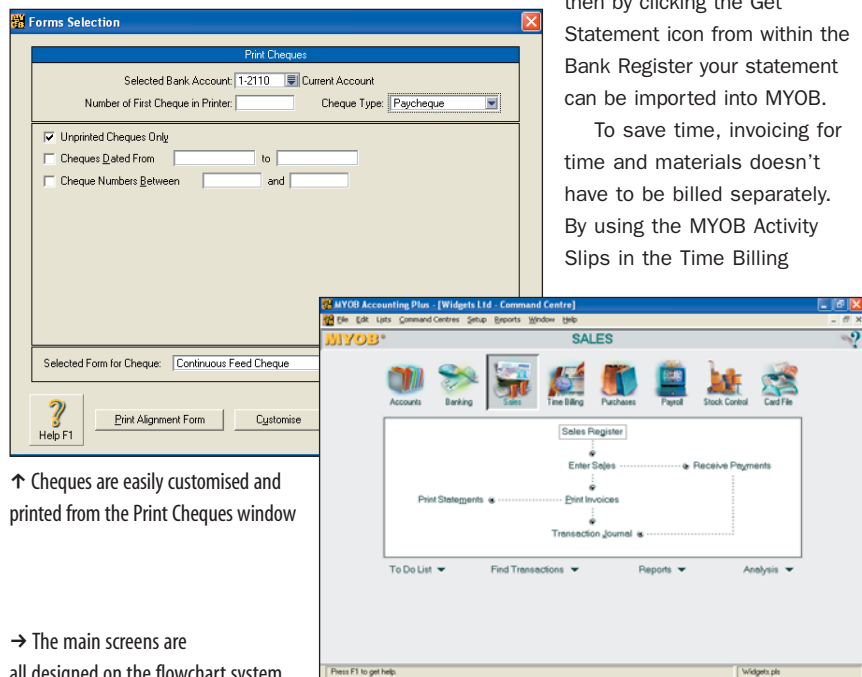
window, both time and materials can be billed on the same invoice.

MYOB also allows you to print different types of cheques from within the same window. The options available are: regular, payable, refund, pay cheque or all types of cheque. MYOB Accounting Plus concentrates on speeding up the daily workflow. This has been achieved by creating register windows for banking, sales and purchases for an overall view of each activity.

Verdict
An extremely powerful accounting tool, MYOB Accounting Plus is worthy of a place in any business. ■

John Barnett

↑ Cheques are easily customised and printed from the Print Cheques window

→ The main screens are all designed on the flowchart system

MYOB Accounting Plus 11.0

System requirements: 166MHz Pentium; Windows 98/NT 4.0; 32MB RAM; 40MB hard disk space (plus 35MB per data file).

MYOB: 0845 130 3975
Website: www.myob.co.uk
Price: £299, upgrade £179

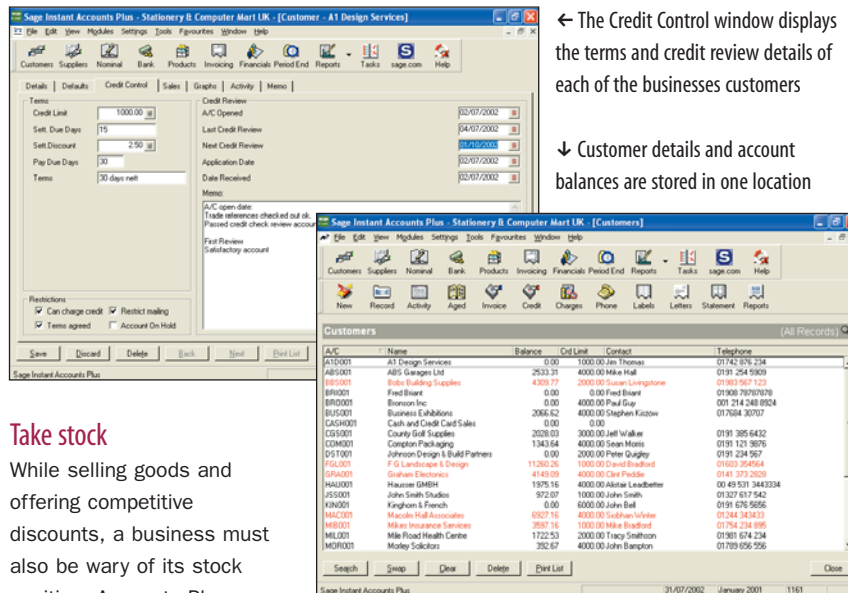| 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									9	
Features									9	
Value for money									9	
Overall									9	

Accounting software
Sage Instant Accounts Plus

The name Sage is synonymous with accounting. Look on the shelves of any major software store and the familiar green box of Sage Accounts urges you to add it to your shopping trolley. Instant Accounts Plus, tailored specifically to meet the needs of the smaller business, incorporates slightly richer features than its sister program, Instant Accounts, as well as the added benefit of being multiuser-ready to a maximum of two users. Businesses now have the option of either forking out for a two-user licence up front or simply buying a second copy at a later date.

Improving the old
The look and feel of Instant Accounts Plus is very similar to Instant Accounts, but this application does have some subtle enhancements. These include advanced credit controls; giving the user the option of adding additional credit information, such as credit reference; the date the account was opened; details of the last and next credit review; application date; and date received. If any additional notes need to be made regarding credit agreements between the business and its customers these can easily be added using the Memo box.

Many businesses nowadays give discounts to loyal customers and Accounts Plus can help in this matter with its four main methods of discounting sales – good customer discount; discount based on the invoice value; settlement discount; and finally discount based upon quantity sold.

← The Credit Control window displays the terms and credit review details of each of the businesses customers

↓ Customer details and account balances are stored in one location

Take stock
While selling goods and offering competitive discounts, a business must also be wary of its stock position. Accounts Plus contains a basic stock control system. Once a product has been invoiced to the customer the stock position is automatically adjusted to reflect the sale.

Stock control systems, however, are not infallible. Should a discrepancy arise and your paper stock allocation does not match the stocktaking figure, Accounts Plus allows the necessary adjustments to be made to remedy the error.

As well as the above features Accounts Plus also includes links to Sage WebTrader, giving users a completely integrated e-business solution, the ability to create custom reports with the aid of the Report Designer Wizard and full integration with Microsoft Office.
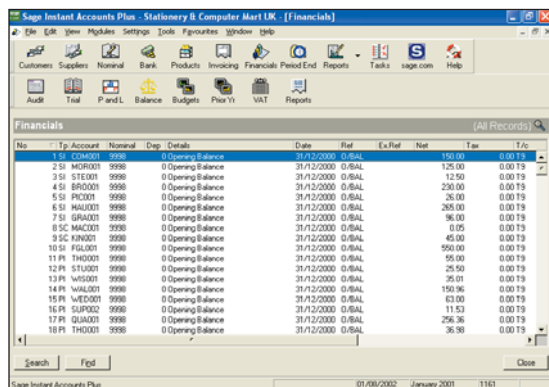
Sage Instant Accounts Plus is ideal for the small business. However, the choice of business accounts is limited. If your company doesn't fit into the available categories you can opt for General Business. Although this provides a basic chart of accounts suitable for most firms, an expanded choice would be better.

Instant Accounts Plus also lacks the facilities to run the accounts of multiple businesses. However, it has plenty of power to perform the mundane accounting tasks we all hate. And, for those unfamiliar with accounts, it has plenty of wizards and Help notes to assist with the more complex procedures.

Verdict
Highly respected in the field of accounting software, Sage has developed a power-packed application. It is feature-rich but missing an integrated payroll feature which is disappointing because not every small business is a sole trader. ■

John Barnett

← The Financial window gives easy access to budget, profit and loss and balance sheet details

Sage Instant Accounts Plus

System requirements: 133MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/NT/XP; 32MB RAM (64MB for 2000/XP); 50MB hard disk space; 800x600 resolution.

Sage: 0845 300 0900
Website: www.sage.co.uk
Price: £205

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use							7			
Features								8		
Value for money								8		
Overall								8		