

Informed Designer by Shana Corporation

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Shana's **Informed Designer** consists of three separate applications: **Informed Designer** gives you tools to draw forms; **Informed Manager**, (packaged and sold separately) allows you to store information electronically, complete and store any form you create, and provides a full featured database; **Informed Mini-Manager** (packaged and sold with Informed Designer) is also used to complete and manipulate forms, however it is designed for storing smaller numbers of forms. Together they provide a solution for designing forms and completing them electronically. You can design the form to be completed on line or have your commercial printer prepare the forms from your artwork. Informed Designer has color capabilities for the spot color printing process. The forms designed to be completed by Informed Manager (and Mini-Manager) can have "intelligent" features such as automatic calculations, format, lookup, and check information. You can test forms using the test mode of Informed Designer to verify the "intelligent" operations of your design. Reviewing this package was an interesting challenge. I have designed many forms and so was excited to try out this powerful program. It turned out to be a bit more of a challenge than I had anticipated as there was no tutorial portion included. So I had to (gasp!) read the manual. There I discovered several sample documents to be used when learning different features of the programs. I was impressed with the number of features and ease of use. The use of either a laser printer or an ImageWriter is supported. Spot color is available if your form needs it. The section describing color handling was thorough, including crop marks, registration marks and color names.

A fair amount of time is needed to learn about "the Drawing", setup, size, offset and so forth. This is a basic building block of starting to design your form and I would not recommend skipping this part. You might feel brave about putting in your lines and check boxes and titles, but this "Drawing" controls the window where you will be working.

The numbered pages of a form are the ones you actually fill out and print. Each form can have between 1 and 99 numbered pages, with each page having as many as 99 parts (*i.e.*, Customer Copy, Accounting Copy, Packing Slip). Creating multipart pages is as simple as choosing the Multipart command from the File menu.

One new concept was that of the "work page". There is one work page for each numbered page; but the work page does not print, and whatever you place on the work page does not show on any other page of the form. The manual indicates that there are two common uses of the work page: as a place to put instructions or information useful to someone filling out the form, and as a place to put cells that should not be printed with the rest of the form (such as one required for calculations).

Every page has a master page. It functions much like those of desktop publishing master pages with items placed on it appearing on all pages. A master page is not an additional page of your form. When you fill out a form using Informed Manager Mini-Manager (or the test mode in Informed Designer), you press the tab key to move from one cell to the next in the order your designed. You will change from one page to the next in the sequence you designated.

The Drawing Environment

Most of the drawing tools in the palette are easily recognizable. If you have used any of the Macintosh drawing programs, you will find the controls, menu bars, rulers, grids, guide lines, etc., easy to manipulate. The dimensional controls are designated by use of the rulers or menu boxes. The drawing accuracy is controlled by the number of dots per inch. So at 100% on most Mac screens you can control accuracy at 72 dpi. If you change the view scale, you effectively change the drawing accuracy as well.

You can enter text by simply selecting the text tool, positioning the pointer and starting to type. The text will continue across the drawing area and then wrap. You can also create paragraph boxes to constrain the text within a specific area (similar to that found in programs such as Design Studio or Quark) and the text will wrap within the text block. The line, rectangle, circle, arc and polygon tools operate in the same fashion as most Mac drawing programs.

The field tool is, however, a new one. Fields are composed of various elements or parts. These parts automatically appear when you draw a field, making it easy to draw

the graphics that commonly surround a cell. Each field consists of a title section, the title divider, a cell section, rule lines and sometimes comb lines (the little upright lines that separate letters on forms used for data entry. Each part of the field is treated twice in the manual, once in a brief description and again in greater detail.

The table tool is like the field tool. Like fields, tables are graphic objects that you use to hold information. Each table contains one or more columns and each column contains a cell (“a holding place for data”). When you use this tool, the different parts are drawn all at once, including the column title sections, table title section, title dividers, row lines and column sections. This generic table is then modified to your own design.

Changing an Object’s Appearance

A whole chapter is dedicated to this subject. There are a very large number of ways you can accomplish this goal, paint attributes, type attributes, corners, field attributes, table attributes. Each of these has a submenu or dialog box. You can change more than one object at a time. Simply select the objects you wish to change and use a settings command or submenu. Once you have adjusted your desired settings, these can be locked to prevent unintentional changes.

Objects can be duplicated once or many times, aligned (to each other, to the drawing grid or to a specific position on the form), grouped/ungrouped, moved forward or backward in the drawing, resized (by measurement, percentage or example), and distributed evenly across an area of the form (visually or by value). An object (including text) can be rotated about its center, 90 degrees to the left. All objects can be rotated except fields and tables.

Importing Artwork and Text

Informed Designer supports PICT, EPSF, and TIFF files as well as text files. Selecting the Import command displays the names of all files that are stored in the supported formats. Designer will read the graphics or text from the file, create a new object to hold it and center that object in the drawing window. You are allowed to import a form’s scanned image in PICT or TIFF formats. I was not able to try this as I do not have access to a scanner, although the directions in the manual were easy to understand. The authors indicate the scanned form is best used as a tracing aid. After you import a scanned image, you can use the drawing tools to accurately place the graphics and text on your form.

Color can be used for spot color overlays for commercial printing, print color forms on color printers and to highlight areas on your form so that they stand out on the screen. Informed Designer allows you to define up to 1,000 different colors. I did not print out the spot color overlays, nor did I have the opportunity to print out in color; however, I did play around with color in my design and thought it made the forms more attractive and easier to complete.

Forms created with Informed Designer can be printed on any printer that works with a Macintosh computer. You can print from design mode, tile large forms, print crop marks and print spot color overlays. As you design a form, you can test its calculations, formatting options, and intelligent features with “test mode”. You can enter cell values to make sure that you have selected the correct type and attributes. This part of the review took me a lot of time and I was not satisfied with my results. NOT because of the capabilities of the program. I’m sure these are all according to the manual. Here was where I really missed having a tutorial with a guide to follow instead of having to invent my own data.

Data Intelligence

Speaking of data...I slowed down a bit in this area. I am a desktop publisher and designer and am not long on spreadsheet-type stuff. This section of the manual introduced the data-handling capabilities of Informed Designer, Informed Manager and Mini-Manager. You can learn how to add “intelligent” features such as calculations, validity checks, choice lists, and help messages designed to help the person filling out the form. I’m sure there are some of you readers who would like a detailed description of this feature of the program. I will say after reading most of the information in this section and the relevant sections of Mini-Manager, this area is probably the core of what makes this such a powerful and versatile program.

A good operator can use many different programs to draw or design a form that is both attractive and functional. It can include all the necessary blanks, check boxes and decorations (logos, colors). The formatting can be such that it fits the typewriter and have enough room to enter all the necessary data. But Informed Designer goes much further. The parts can be designed to limit the data entered, perform calculations on data entered, include date and time values (and test those formats). You can use Boolean data types (true/false, yes/no), check boxes, and even pictures. Someone filling out your form can enter a different picture on each new copy of your form, such as a picture of an inventory item. You can design Alert dialogs and Help messages triggered by those filling out your form.

Different forms can be linked together. If a form contains information that is already entered in another form, you can “look up” that information rather than having to retype it. This feature is one that will be especially appreciated by those who fill out forms filled with part numbers, prices, ship-to, and other repetitive data. It started getting complicated again, so I just read much of this part. All I can say is WOW!

Finally, I read a chapter that made me feel as though all that had gone before was grade school stuff... I got to the **Formulas** chapter. Those of you who have had some experience with spread sheets and accounting packages will find this section much easier to understand than I did. I was impressed with the fact that this program is rigged to understand operands created with formulas including text constants, Boolean constants, name, date and time constants as well as numerical. I wish I could explain this part in greater detail, but perhaps someone out there who has purchased this program and has more spreadsheet/accounting practice than I will write a second chapter to this review. I do know enough about the subject to say that the range of functions listed is impressive and flexible. You can quite literally prepare a form that can perform inventory calculations, price sheets, and other very complex functions. I believe the limits would be your imagination, patience, understanding of your subject and just a bit of familiarity with basic programming principles.

Informed Mini-Manager

This is the second, smaller, but no less important part of this package. It is like its big brother Informed Manager in that it is a database application you can use to fill out and manipulate any form you've created with Informed Designer, only it is more suitable for storing smaller numbers of forms. You can enter new forms, search for, find change, print, and remove forms. Intelligent features such as calculations, automatic formatting, and on-line help aid you in filling our forms quickly and accurately. Options allow you to collect forms for batch printing or printing forms individually.

A small manual covers all the various aspects of dealing with Informed documents. It covers the routine stuff such as opening, closing and copying. You are taught the ins and outs of completing an existing form or a new one. Chapter 4 describes how to organize forms, and provides instructions on how to create, edit, duplicate, remove, find, search for, and browse through your forms. There are detailed menus giving you a great deal of control over your forms and the data on them. There are keyboard commands for many of these items which, with some practice, could make you very fast at manipulating your information. You can add new data or edit old data. If you mess that up you can revert to the most recently saved version (that is, the version prior to the last activation of the form).

The Find command is quite powerful. You provide a “search value” that identifies the forms you're looking for, then Mini-Manager lets you “find” on any cell with the exception of picture cells. There is a whole section in the manual defining all the varieties of search values and the special symbols Mini-Manager understands. This section is one I read only and did not test, but it is straight forward and relatively easy to understand. In practice, I'm sure one could be quite clever at entering just the right information.

Conclusion

This package is no light-weight! I would recommend it highly for a company application (large or small). With study and practice, Informed Designer/Informed

Manager/ and Informed Mini-Manager will provide all the forms/data handling most companies might require. If you are familiar with spreadsheet programs, you will pick up on the more complex parts of this trio very quickly. If you are not, do not be discouraged, just plan for a slightly longer learning curve. If you are fortunate enough to have experience with a drawing program, in addition to spreadsheet, this is really the program for you!