

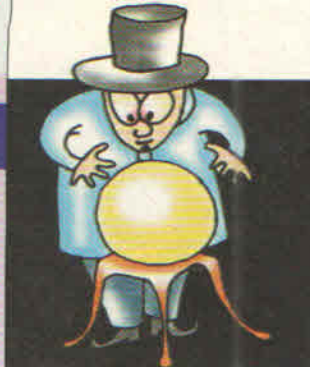
Crystal Ball Gazing

Nope, no mushroom clouds or Uncle Sam here. I see that mainframes are back! Or rather centralized systems. Now that IT offers the best of both worlds—centralized information and individual productivity—organizational data is necessarily going to coalesce into humongous databases at a centralized location where management and maintenance of the data can easily take place.

Users are going to connect to this data using Internet networking technologies. The new IT plan by the government means that connectivity problems are likely to be re-

solved soon. Therefore, if everybody in the company is connected, wherever they are in the world, why can't they work with their accounting information using this connecting method? The client-server facilities already available with Microsoft Visual Studio 6 indicate that making accounting applications for use with Internet technology are easier than ever before.

At least, that's what my crystal ball says.



to import data and then specify the appropriate fields and let Fact take over. A help screen gives you further details.

Besides this, the data is stored in .dbf files, making the package easy to extend with proper programming support.

Suitability

Fact is useful for most organizations. Even though this is an industrial strength package, it is simple enough for traders and service units. Small businesses might find it unnecessarily heavy-duty.

Pros & Cons

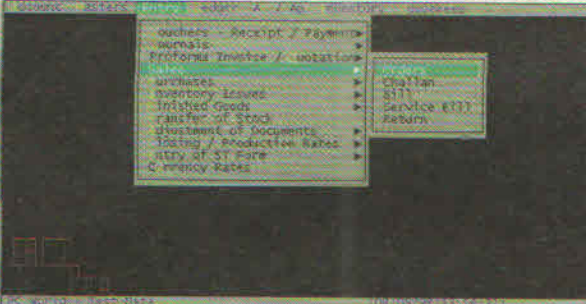
Despite having a large feature set, it is the excellence in making things simple that is Fact's greatest plus point. The analytical capabilities are unfortunately limited as is the report creation facility.

ues and without much fuss you have the voucher ready.

Besides this, you can expect the usual facilities of bank reconciliation, proforma invoices, linked documents that Fact's competitors also provide.

Reporting and Analysis

There is no limit to the number of additional fields that you can add, to either the header, or the detail section of any voucher and to some master records. However, these fields, which will not be validated are only available for printing along with the voucher, like the invoice. There is no scope for que-



Fact's main menu puts everything within easy reach. The menu system is also as per the standard adopted by Microsoft for Windows. A user-definable shortcut bar would have made things just right.

rying or reporting based on these fields.

Despite providing a number of excellent facilities for analysis, like its document class for making three levels of analytical categories, Vedika has not provided for a report writer. There is a document modification module that can be used for changing the appearance of printed documents.

External Links

Fact approaches the export/import requirement from the programmers' perspective. You can select the Fact's data tables that you wish to export and do so in either SDF, or delimited format. All data files are exportable. The import facility is also very comprehensive—data can be imported into all transaction files. Fact asks you to select the transaction type (cash voucher, inventory return, sales challan, etc.) and then select a file from which

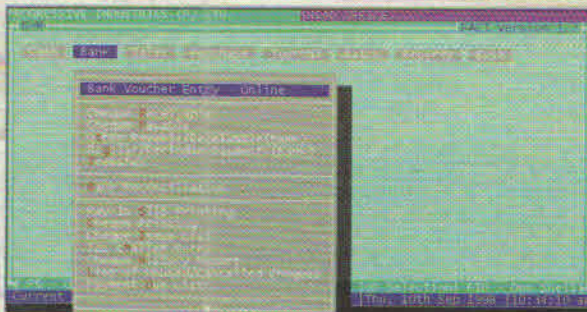
Symco ver. 1.2



This package appears in our evaluation for the first time and its breadth of features pleasantly surprised me. Though this Foxpro 2.6 based version is only about three years old, it is able to handle most of the work that finance, purchase, and stores departments are usually involved with.

Ease of Use

While most accounting packages have standardized on the usual ease-of-use features like pop-up lists and online master creation, Symco has gone further and simplified the process of accounting online. As a result, you have predefined methods that aid data entry to actually reduce the number of keystrokes used per transaction. Also useful was the fact that pop-up lists were intelligent and only displayed required information. For example, entering a receipt from a customer displays only the



To get here you have to negotiate a couple of menus but then you get a plethora of options without any clutter on the screen. A shortcut bar and a status bar at the bottom of the screen adds good value for the Symco user.

Editor's Choice



I made my choice for the Editor's Choice award by looking for the package that presented the maximum power to the user and had the least number of drawbacks. The race was a close one. Developers continued to improve their packages, like Easy, Accord, Fact and the new ones in our review - Symco and T-FAT are running neck-to-neck to provide the best accounting solution for you. It will not be a simple task to select the best choice for your specific needs without checking on your business needs and current IT usage level.

When you decide to buy a package for your business, my advice is to look through most of these packages as well as check for locally available support. Remember that making the best use of these packages requires professional advice.

Despite a close race, Symco's 3-module FA package edged out the rest in the field in this

shootout. The package can handle most kinds of requirements from its users, is easily modifiable and extendable and helps speed-up voucher creation. One shortcoming that was evident during my evaluation was the lack of a facility to allocate transactions to groupable analytical categories, which most of Symco's competitors do provide. However, there is a decent (though not quite as efficient) alternative available in the form of multiple tree-views of cost-centers. Finally, there was the question whether it made sense to award the Editor's Choice award to software that resided on an outdated operating system—DOS. We came to the conclusion that there was sufficient reason for the existence of DOS and therefore the accounting software. Therefore, all things considered, this time's winner of the Editor's Choice Award is Symco FA.

outstanding invoices for the customer.

The program is modular. So a user has the choice of purchasing only the accounting, or sales, or inventory modules, or a combination. As a result, the menus of the program deal with only one module at a time. You have to exit from a module to enter another. However, since the data files are interconnected, the data does not need to be re-entered. Also, the use of function keys speeds up the process of switching from one module to another.

Another intelligent feature is the creation of automatic entries. Every accountant has to make some provisional entries at month end, which he reverses the next day. Symco can identify such vouchers and automatically pass the reverse entry, saving the user this effort.

Reporting and Analysis

You can link each voucher to a cost center, while the individual debits and credits can be linked to an analysis code and a cost center. The cost centers can be grouped while the analysis codes cannot. Interestingly, the same cost center can be linked to various grouping schemes. So, you can view expenses in an unlimited variety of formats.

Symco provides for creating an unlimited number of grouping schemes to which you can link general ledger accounts or cost centers, or sub-ledger accounts. Thus, it provides for a variety of ways to look at your accounting information. However, this method of analysis is not quite as powerful as the one in which each transaction is allocated or linked with a number of groupable analysis codes in the manner that, say, Accord does.

Trial balances and other reports can include provisional entries, when you so specify. These are distinct from the automatic entries mentioned earlier.

You can add fields of your choice to existing input forms which can be displayed or used in reports which you create or modify using the standard Foxpro report writer. You can even modify existing input documents using the standard Foxpro screen generator.

External Links

Symco uses standard .dbf and .cdx files. So most Foxpro programmers should be able to extend the power of the package. Besides this, Symco provides for importing data if it is made available in a prescribed format. It can also export data. In fact, you have access to Foxpro's expression builder to specify which records you want to export.

Suitability

This package is especially suited for well managed accounting departments because it does not offer any facility to delete a voucher—definitely a plus for corporates.

This package is useful for all kinds of organizations, but given its complexity it might be an overkill for small-scale units.

Pros & Cons

This package can take a load of the accounts task basket because of its large list of reports and simplified input. It is not appropriate for organizations with simple or low volume accounting. This time's winner of the Editor's Choice Award - Symco is fairly comprehensive package of tools for accountants.

T-FAT ver. 5.28L



Scope of Package

Suchan Software Pvt. Ltd. from Mumbai have made a fairly comprehensive package in T-FAT. It is able to handle more kinds of transactions and records than the others reviewed here. I was impressed to note input screens for purchase enquiry, vendor quotations, purchase orders, goods inward notes, qual-