


UTILITIES

Contacts! v2

RATING



PROS Easy to use + Low-cost, semi-bespoke + Good manuals
CONS Notes are not 'objects' + Plain interface + Some elements have unfinished feel
PRICE £299 (£351 inc VAT) single user including FileMaker Pro 6.0; £179 (£210.33 inc VAT) without FileMaker Pro; £2422 (£2846 inc VAT) 10-user including FileMaker Pro; £1222 (£1436 inc VAT) 10-user without FileMaker Pro. FileMaker Pro Manuals £20 each
MAKER Cruse Control
NEEDS Any Mac capable of running FileMaker Pro 5.5
HELP Unlimited Web
MAC OS X Native
CALL Cruse Control 01923 842295
URL www.crusecontrol.com

WORDS Richard Dyce

ONE APPLICATION STILL notable for its absence from the Mac platform is a decent, out-of-the-box, multi-user customer relationship manager (CRM). Until Apple comes up with iCRM, most of us will continue making our own using FileMaker, 4D or AppleScript Studio. However, there's an alternative in the form of Contacts! v2.

Contacts! provides a straightforward, easy-to-use FileMaker database that handles the more universal elements required in a

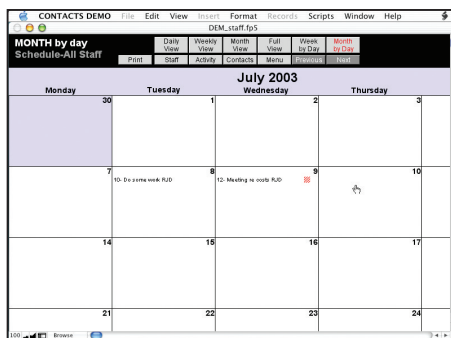
multi-contact, multi-company, and multi-user contact management system. You can use it to manage company details and individual contacts at those companies; to send letters and emails to those contacts, either one at a time or in bulk via a mail merge; to import and export contact data to a PDA; and to schedule appointments for multiple users of the system.

Detail description

As a basic CRM solution, Contacts! works in exactly the way you'd expect. You start by setting up your company details – address, Web site, phone and fax numbers, and company logo. You then add the details of the users who'll be using the system. You need to restart the system in order for these changes to take effect.

Once you've restarted, you can start entering companies and contacts associated with those contacts. Contacts! is very forgiving compared with other FileMaker-based solutions in that you can add a contact and it will create the related company for you so you don't have to think ahead when taking someone's details over the phone.

Contacts! can be bought as an add-on solution for your existing



DESIGN FLAWS Some of the layouts are poorly designed, and will require a monitor larger than 800 x 600 pixels.

FileMaker Pro licences (starting at £179 a user), or you can buy a copy of FileMaker Pro alongside your copy of Contacts! (starting at £299 a user), although you should be looking at purchasing a copy of FileMaker Pro Server as well for more than two or three users.

Inevitably, comparisons will be drawn with other FileMaker-based CRM solutions, such as ecOrganizer (see Reviews, 21 February 2003, p38). Both solutions will get the job done and are comparable in terms of pricing. However, the differences lie in the slickness of ecOrganizer's interface compared with the robust, simple one in Contacts!, and the more malleable ecOrganizer contact model, where, for example, it's possible to have a contact related to more than one company.

However, despite a more sophisticated client model, ecOrganiser loses out to Contacts! when it comes to data entry and handling data obtained from other sources. For instance, when entering new contact details from scratch, the system checks to see if the contact you're trying to add already exists.

Similarly, when importing contact data from an external source – for example, a CSV or tab-delimited text file – any contacts that are suspected duplicates are marked, and the system won't import them until they've been edited.

Furthermore, for those rare instances where you find yourself with two versions of the same company, such as ABC Ltd and ABC

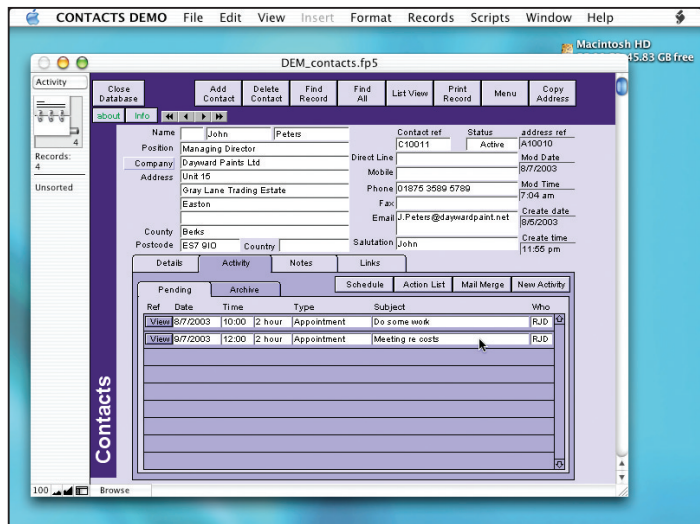
Limited, each with their own set of employees, Contacts! provides a neat method for merging the contacts for two or more companies, enabling you to delete unwanted company records without losing the attached contacts. For anyone who's used a FileMaker-based CRM application, this is a great solution for an all-too-familiar problem.

Support team

The real strength of Contacts! lies in the bundled support material. Paper and online-based help is provided, as well as a tutorial DVD, and pop-up dialogs throughout the system. When introducing any new system into an organisation, especially where it will be the tool people use every day, the existence of clear, easy-to-understand training material can't be underestimated. The documentation is task-based – for example, how to add a contact or company, how to send attachments, how to print labels and so on.

As a company, Cruse Control, gives a clear impression of being keen to work with its customers. It is dedicated to providing good support, improvements to Contacts! itself, as well as help in integrating the program into your existing FileMaker systems.

Contacts! v2 isn't the best CRM solution for the Mac, but it can be adapted to your needs. It is fairly low cost (especially given the bundled copy of FileMaker), and gives you at least a two-year head start compared with writing your own solution from the ground up.



CUSTOMER SATISFACTION Contacts! provides the standard CRM features you'd expect, including multi-user scheduling.