SLINGS AND ARROWS

By Dennis Thorp

Before I plunge into this month's topic, I want to clarify a point that, I'm afraid, has been implied but not made crystal clear in past articles: primarily, there is very little relationship between cost and value in the microcomputer field. What you **don't** know will "cost" you or your employer. The best values in software can often be found among the "shareware" listings, and excellent hardware comes from manufacturers that are not generally well known.

There is an old saying, "You can tell the pioneers by the arrows in their backs." I've been debating, as I search for a direction for this column, whether to emphasize "state of the art" technology, or to try to take beginning users step by step through buying decisions and initial setup on to doing useful work. In my conversations with WGCSA members since I started writing this column, I have come to the realization that even the people who already have computers do not have the foggiest idea of what I am writing about. One told me that he read the articles and found them "interesting," but he didn't understand them. So it appears that instead of inspiring entry-level users to push forward or for nonusers to rush out and purchase a computer, I have simply been muddying the waters for those people.

In a conversation with Dale Gadd, a staff member at GCSAA headquarters, trying to come up with ideas for this column, he suggested that I expand on CONFIG.SYS and ANSI.SYS. Questions on these two essential files appear quite frequently on the electronic bulletin board that he runs. I plan on doing something like that in a future column, but the Catch-22 aspect of that is a user has to be far enough advanced on the learning curve to be able to use a modem and the necessary software to tie into Dale's BBS to be able to ask the question. Then he has to be able to write a batch file to implement the answer or to experiment to get the best configuration for his particular hardware. Another item we discussed was where an entry level user could turn for help. I mentioned taking classes offered by the local computer store or technical school. One method I forgot to mention is the "mentor" or "coach" system. That is a system I learned in the military officer corps, whereby a young officer picks someone senior to pattern himself after and learn from. Both people benefit and the junior person gets farther by being pulled along than he can by pushing forward on his own. Business and government use the same system. Lee Iacocca and Alexander Haig are examples of this system at work. Another method I failed to mention was to join a user's group. This would be the simplest way to gain access to a large number of extremely knowledgeable people. IBM has a service that catalogs PC users groups by ZIP code or telephone area code. Just call 404-988-2782, tap in the proper code, and the computerized voice-messaging system provides all the details you'll need. Users groups exist solely to share information and lend a helping hand to PC voyagers. Consumer-oriented services include not only on-the-spot assistance but monthly newsletters, telephone technical support, training, and education.

Where's the microcomputer field heading? IBM recently released DOS 4.0. Without getting into specifics, the most important features are the cracking of the 32 MB barrier for hard disk partitions and cracking the 640K RAM barrier without having to provide an outside extended or expanded memory system driver. It is becoming apparent that OS/2 will not displace DOS any time soon. That is guaranteed by the enormous installed base of 8088- and 8086-based systems (including IBM's PS/2 Models 25 and 30) that will never be able to run OS/2 in any form. Existing 286-based systems just don't have the horsepower to be effective OS/2 platforms. Efficient OS/2 operation requires -386 chips, plenty of 32-bit RAM, memory caching, and super-fast hard disks. Shipments of 8088- and 8086-based machines are dropping rapidly, and -286 machines will far outnumber -386 machines until well into the 1990's. However, the latest -386/25 machines are so fast they leave skid marks on the paper.

IBM's strategy of late had been to distance itself from DOS and the 8088. These were the twin "golden geese" up until IBM announced the PS/2 with Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) and OS/2. MCA offers no significant performance or functional advantages over Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) for running OS/2 or anything else. IBM PS/2 products are being steeply discounted in the marketplace at the present time as acceptance remains stalled. Compaq on the other hand is charging a premium and still gaining market share. This turn of events means the virtual collapse of IBM's attempts to use OS/2 as a weapon against it's competitors. It's also a blow to the PS/2 hardware line's clear proprietary direction. IBM's efforts to seize the initiative from its hardware competitors are doomed to failure, as IBM's trumpeting of it's PS/2 line fell on deaf ears. Has IBM lost touch with its customers? The significance of all this for my readers: Beware the car sales lingo!! OS/2 is for those needing true multitasking capabilities and not just the ability to run an occasional background program, local area networks (LAN) in other words. The single user can be satisfied well into the next century with DOS and an 8088- or 8086-based machine. The installed base is so large that attempts by IBM or anyone else to move in another direction are bound to meet with extreme resistance. The shift from 5.25 to 3.5 inch floppy disks has not been an unqualified success, either. Instead of having one 'standard' disk size, we now have four. How can you have four "standards?"

Another hardware development that fascinates me is the rate at which the speed of modem transmission over ordinary telephone lines is increasing. It wasn't long ago that my brother-in-law had trouble getting a clear

transmission at 300 bps between his home and office in the Milwaukee area. "Dirty lines," he said. Extraneous electromagnetic noise. Dale Gadd told me he recently upgraded to a 2400 bps modem and cut his monthly telephone bill in half. It paid for the new modem in two months. I'm glad I don't have his phone bill, even at the new rates. 9600 bps is becoming common and speeds of over 19000 bps will be available soon.

Recently, I've started to evaluate the TRIMS Grounds Management Software Package. It does the job of tracking, organizing and reporting information for you. The result? Better information and decisions, more time spent doing what you were trained to do — "keeping it green" — and less time spent on paperwork. And you don't have to be a computer expert to get the most out of our software. Using it is as easy as filling in the blanks. Some of the things it does are: 1) Tracking Man Hours — tells you at a glance how many hours were spent by activity. 2) Generating Work Orders — you can literally track and manage your people, your equipment and your budget by creating work orders. 3) Controlling Expenses — the first step in controlling expenses is knowing exactly where your budget dollars go. 4) Fast, Accurate Budgeting — you'll know exactly where every man hour and dollar was spent. 5) Chemical Applications — TRIMS takes the number crunching out of chemical applications. 6) Managing Water Usage — water demand can be balanced with pumping capacities to maximize equipment life, shorten the irrigation cycle and minimize energy usage. 7) Personnel Records — maintain up-to-date employee files. 8) Inventory Control — perpetual inventory system tracks parts and supplies as they are ordered and consumed. 9) Scheduled Maintenance and Events — schedule preventive maintenance, special events and recurring jobs with amazing ease. 10) Equipment Maintenance Records — records are automatically updated on equipment whenever a work order is processed. Parts and labor costs are tracked. The program is from LABB Systems, 6018 East Osborn Road, Scottsdale, AZ l85251, (602) 481-9710. Lee Bornstein is the man to talk to.

My first reaction was only lukewarm. An investment of $995.00 seemed rather high. But the more I thought about it, the more reasonable it became, considering the software it would replace. Plus, there would be a

minimum of learning required. The program comes with a 250-page manual and free telephone support for one year. I duplicated one of the sample reports on my electronic spreadsheet, and I feel confident that given a couple of hundred hours I could develop something similar, but I'm not sure how interactive the reports would be. TRIMS doesn't have the flexibility of something that I might develop myself, but that would probably be an advantage for the beginning user. And don't think this is just for the bigger, richer clubs. Having less money to

work with requires that we be more efficient. There is less of a margin for error. This would be a good place to start, in my opinion. There is also a demonstration package that can be purchased for $50.00. The price is applicable towards the software purchase. Hardware Requirements: DOS 2.1 or later, IBM compatible, 512 K of memory, 10 megabyte hard disk, graphics printer, Monochrome, Hercules, CGA, EGA and VGA monitors are supported. A copy of the TRIMS program directory is included (Figure 1).

TRIMS PROGRAM DIRECTORY

Budgets & Expenses
Master File Add/Change/Delete
Enter Transactions
Expense Account Inquiry
End of Month Procedures
Define Budget Source Codes
Import Budget Data From Disk
Delete Repeating Transactions
Payroll/Budget Interface
Budget Project Descriptions
Print Monthly Expense Recap
Print Consolidated Budget
Print Project Budget
Print Transaction Report
Print Master File

Schedules & Events Calendar
Enter Schedules & Events
Print Schedule
Purge Events From Schedule
Telephone Directory
Print Telephone Directory

Equipment Maintenance
Add/Modify Equipment File
Equipment Maintenance Records
Work Orders
Work In Process Report
Delete Completed Work Orders
Print Equipment Master List
Print Maintenance History
Delete Equipment & Report
Delete Old Maintenance Records
Tow Vehicle Speed Calibration
Sprayer Specifications
Spray Tip Specification File

Chemicals & Calibration
Chemicals & Coverage Info.
Sprayer Calibration
Seed/Fertilizer Information
Seed/Fertilizer Cost Estimates
Grounds Dimension & Definition
Print Grounds Definition
Edit Grounds Section Names

Irrigation Management
Satellite Group Start Times
Satellite Controller Timing
Print System Timing Chart
Print Water Demand Chart

Inventory
Master File Add/Change/Delete
Inventory Change Records
Purchase Orders
Remove Completed P.O.'s
End of Period Procedures
Vendor File Maintenance
Full Inventory File Listing
Open Purchase Order Report
Items on Order Report
Item Requirements Report
Inventory Value Report
Physical Inventory Report
Inventory Usage Summary
Inventory Transaction Listing
Delete Item & Report

Personnel & Labor Records
Enter/Change Employee Data
New Period Initialization
Enter Weekly Labor Hours
Delete Payroll Hour Records
Print Payroll Hours Report
Print Full Employee List
Print Address/Phone List
Print Vacation Status Report
Enter Project & Labor Codes
Print Project Labor Summary
Print Labor Cost Summary
Print Weekly Project Hours
Print Project/Labor Codes

System Utilities
Setup System Options
Screen Definition
Create New Blank Data Files
Menu and Password Changes
Backup Data Files to Disk "A"
Restore Data Files From Floppy
DataFlex Report Generator
DataFlex Query Delete
DataFlex Reindex Utility

(Figure 1)