



## REVIEW OF MICROSOFT OFFICE:MAC 2004

by Jack Hennessy

A couple of months ago, I was provided with a complimentary copy of the standard version of Microsoft Office:mac 2004. The stipulation accompanying this gift was that I was to use the software and prepare a review for publication on the Cambria Computer Club's website.

Well, this is it!.....Sort of. For reasons which are elaborated upon below, this is the first installment of what should become an ongoing review (and forum) of Microsoft Office:mac 2004. Other Club members (and outsiders for that matter) are encouraged to submit corrections and alternative opinions for incorporation into future updates and expansions of this review.

But first, some reservations have to be stated. Microsoft Office is, and always has been, a colossal aggregation of software packages, compared to its contemporary competitors. Its aim seems to be to provide every imaginable feature for each of its component packages. As a result, it likewise incorporates features that the average user would never have imagined—ultimately adding to its overall massiveness.

Therefore, a comprehensive, integrated review of the entirety of Microsoft Office:mac 2004 is not realistically doable. The 2005 and 2006 versions would be on the market before all of the current features could be examined and commented upon. Instead, as each software package is used and projects are completed, I will try to add commentaries to this review.

Microsoft Office:mac 2004 consists of five (5) individual, but interrelated software packages:

- Entourage 2004—an e-mail and personal information manager
- MSN Messenger for Mac—an instant messaging program
- PowerPoint 2004—a presentation application
- Word 2004—a word processor
- Excel 2004—spreadsheet/worksheet software

A full installation of Microsoft Office:mac 2004 can require in excess of 600 MB of hard disk space. It further requires a Macintosh G3 OS X compatible processor or higher, OS X version 10.2.8 or higher, 256 MB of RAM and a 1024x768 or higher resolution monitor.

I typically obtain software for specific uses, locating freeware and finding the least expensive alternative for what I want to do, *with certain exceptions*. I use Photoshop elements to enhance my digital images because it's the best, even though there are

numerous freeware alternatives. I also use Filemaker Pro for database management and Adobe Acrobat to create cross-platform readable documents.

But, why would anyone want to buy a comprehensive suite like Microsoft Office:mac 2004 at an MSRP of \$399, when alternative packages (AppleWorks, OpenOSX Office) and component programs (Nissus Write, Mariner Calc, Keynote) offer equivalent capabilities at lower cost? Three reasons come to mind. First, Microsoft is the industry standard, they'll be around as long as there are personal computers and their commitment to supporting Macintosh is apparent. Second, using Microsoft Office:mac 2004 to prepare your documents ensures that they will be readable by friends and colleagues who PCs. Third, in those rare and unfortunate instances when a Mac user is compelled to transfer or initiate work onto a Windows machine, he/she will be in familiar territory using Microsoft Office software.

## GENERAL

In my working life, I used Microsoft Word and Excel, both Mac and PC versions, extensively. So I thought that I was familiar with the capabilities of each and the user interface that I would find with the 2004 versions. NOT!

Things can change dramatically in 5 years, especially with computers. Not only did I discover strange pages, menus and cursor formats opening up, but, to my horror, there was no owner's manual in the box to explain these anomalies to me. Of course there was a small "getting started" pamphlet in there, useful for not much more than installing the CD-ROM right side up.

This is not unusual because today's software packages are almost universally shipped without hard-copy manuals. These documents are expensive to produce, are apt to contain errors and require that inventories of updates and replacements be maintained by manufacturers, distributors and retailers. (Note that Adobe PhotoShop Elements is an exception; it includes a 256 page "Users Guide" in the box with the CD-ROM.) Many current software packages include an electronic manual (in Adobe Acrobat format) on the CD-ROM, which the buyer has the option of printing partially or entirely.

Microsoft Office:mac 2004 software packages have "Help" menus which is a characteristic of many OS X applications. My quarrel with this approach is that the appropriateness of the help received is directly related to the seeker's ability to conjure up the terminology that the search algorithm (developed by the geeks in Redmond) is looking for. This can cause considerable difficulty for those of us who are techno-babble challenged.

However, all is not lost for the monetarily well off because the dearth of software owner's manuals has spawned an entire industry of third parties who rush to fill the void,

providing, for not insignificant prices, surrogate manuals, e.g. "Microsoft Office:mac 2004 for Dummies".

Lacking the incentive and the wherewithal to purchase one or more of these aids, I plunged ahead, relying on my own instincts and experience.



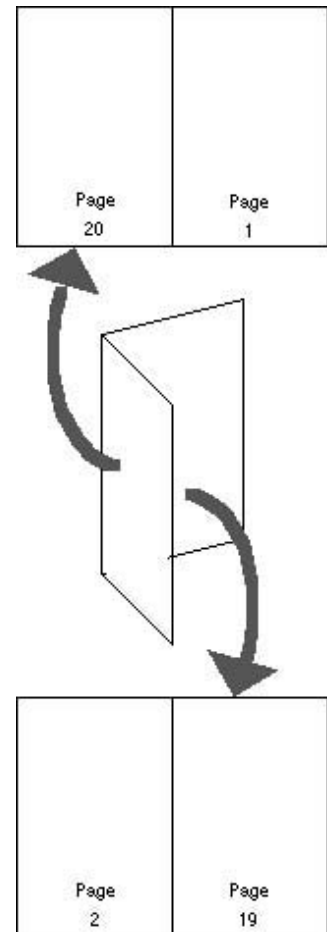
## MICROSOFT WORD

My first project was to produce a church bulletin—the document typically handed out at Sunday services containing the liturgy, hymns and readings of the day as well as weekly announcements and schedule information. At our church this is in the form of a booklet formed by folding over  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$  inch landscape mode pages. It usually consists of twenty  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$  inch pages, which equates to five  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$  inch sheets printed back to back.

The obvious difficulty in preparing such a document is that, in the final draft, the sequence of text and objects that is printed on the paper is not the same as the sequence in which they will be read and used. Thus, in landscape mode, the outside  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$  inch page of the booklet (before folding) has page 20 on the left and page 1 on the right. The opposite side of this page has page 2 on the left and page 19 on the right. This continues for all interior pages until the center of the booklet (opened flat) has page 10 on the left and page 11 on the right.

Word actually provides a set of templates for this type of a document, identified as a "catalog" (File/Project Gallery/New/Menus & Catalogs/Catalog). But the templates are pre-formatted, i.e. bells, whistles, etc. for producing an illustrated catalog already included. This format didn't seem too suitable for the church bulletin I was building, so I moved to alternate Plan B.

Plan B was to use text boxes linked together from one bulletin page to another (Insert/Text Box). This technique, as the name implies, lets you put text elements into 'boxes' which can be manipulated around the page like pictures, with the added feature of allowing the text to 'flow' from one box to another even though the boxes themselves may not be on adjacent pages. I didn't get too far with this approach because early on I was confronted with an obstacle that I was unable to overcome; specifically, I wanted to use 'Drop Caps' (as shown at the beginning of this paragraph) for most church bulletin paragraphs. I was unable to accomplish this in the Text Box mode.



(By way of explanation, what I was unable to accomplish is not necessarily undoable; I just couldn't devise a way and my patience wore a little thin. There are 10 different pull-down menus on the Word menu bar—excluding 'Font' and 'Help'—with an average of 12 options per menu. In addition, one of these options is the 'Formatting Palette', which contains at least 25 options. Consequently, anything but the simplest formatting requires extensive research, trial-and-error and/or a prodigious memory.)

Plan C, which eventually worked, was to compose the bulletin in its logical order and then copy and paste the pages into the booklet sequence. The result was a very fine document, integrating several text formats, titles, images and hymns. However, Microsoft Office:mac 2004 should not be confused with Desktop Publishing Software; it contains many of the features, but in a coherently integrated package.

So, what's the bottom line on Word? It's definitely a powerful word processor, full of features and enhancements. To take full advantage of these, one must commit to a demanding learning process and to frequent use to maintain proficiency. Also, I personally found many of the procedures required to generate a finished document to be somewhat counterintuitive, but that may be the result of my having been joined at the hip to AppleWorks for the last 5 years. For my part, I'm glad to have it, but I'm not sure that I would have invested my own funds to obtain it for the uses that I would normally put it to.

TO BE CONTINUED