Microsoft Office97†

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Over the past few years Microsoft Office—a package consisting of a word processor, spreadsheet, database, and presentation graphics—has taken over most of the market from similar products from Lotus and WordPerfect. The technical reason for this has been generally thought to be superior integration of the different pieces of the overall package. Office97 continues this seemingly seamless integration.

Installation of Office97 from the CD-ROM containing the software was easy and fast, and I was able to still keep my Office95 software running independently. Office97 consists of Microsoft Word97, Excel97, PowerPoint97, and Access97. Individually each program is very good to excellent and in combination is the most integrated combination available for a PC.

Office97 contains a number of enhancements. One is a fast Web query search that allows full-text searching of Office97 and HTML documents on your PC or on the local area network, if you are attached to one. Another is that all four programs allow for saving files in HTML (which was possible in Office95, but only if you downloaded free upgrades from the Microsoft Web site).

Among the enhancements for Word97 there is a new grammar checker, an improved speller, better help through an Office Assistant module, and style previewer. There are dozens (over 50) of other new and improved features which are too numerous to mention here.

Excel97, the most popular spreadsheet program in use today, has close to 40 new and improved features. These include the Office Assistant help module, better Internet and Web interfacing, a multilevel undo capability, an ability to use natural language formulas, and a chart data table feature that enables one to display data in tabular as well as graphical form.

For PowerPoint97 there are some 50 new and improved features. Design templates have been improved, it is possible to import HTML files, and a new charting module, Graph97, has been added. It is now possible to record and save voice narration of your presentation as well as use a sound clip from a CD-ROM.

Lastly for Access97 there are some 15 new and improved features, including a number of hyperlink, HTML, and Internet Web functions.

In summary, Office97 is a very nice package and certainly is an excellent overall suite of programs to install on a new computer. If you already have another package, from WordPerfect or Lotus and particularly Office95, you need to ask yourself if it is worth the cost to upgrade and the time and effort to learn the new and additional features. You also need to ask yourself if you yet use all the features of the current word processor you have, and if what do you need to do either cannot be done with your current word processor or you have difficulty in doing what you need to do and this new software will improve the situation. The size of Office97 has grown to occupy almost 200MB of space on your hard disk (if you chose all the features), so that may be a consideration as well.

The list price of Microsoft Office is $499, with updates costing $349. Discounts from these list prices are available in most stores and Internet shopping locations.

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