——————COMPUTER SOFTWARE REVIEWS——————

Origin 8. OriginLab Corporation, One Roundhouse Plaza, Suite 303, Northampton, MA 01060.

Origin 8 (service release 5) continues the tradition of providing high-quality graphics with a powerful analysis package. The additional features that OriginLab developed for this version make it an exceptional product which is a one-stop data analysis and presentation preparation tool.

As with previous versions, users are able to import their own data. With Origin 8, there are now additional import formats—including National Instruments TDM and TDMS, JCAMP DX, Molecular Devices pClamp ABF 2.0, and Net CDF.

The big news for Origin 8 centers on multisheet workbooks and automatic recalculation of analysis results.

The multisheet workbooks in Origin 8 are somewhat similar to Excel; that is to say users can utilize several sheets for one experiment to keep related raw data and analysis results together. Furthermore, one can also embed graphs in a cell (or several cells to give it a bigger appearance). If this is done, then one can also contain related graphs along with their data and analysis results all in the same workbook.

To make it attractive to Excel users, Origin can import your XLS files (with an option to keep the cell formatting such as color, font, and borders) into its own workbooks for further analysis. If you wish to keep your data in your XLS files, that is okay too—since Origin can open Excel directly within its workspace, allowing you to use the much greater graphing and data analysis features within Origin.

Another interesting feature of the Origin workbook is that of "sparklines", a term coined by Professor Edward Tufte. These are small graphs contained at the top of the worksheet columns to show a plot of data contained in each. These are incredibly useful for providing a glimpse of ones results. Since they are images, they can be copied and pasted into any desired reports using other software like Word. Items, such as annotations and titles, can be added to the sparklines.

Origin 8 starts to really show its worth when one uses the new recalculation feature for analysis operations. By using Origin's analysis tools with the recalculation mode set to "auto", one at first gets simply their desired analysis operation result—such as statistics, or peak fitting, or some other curve fitting. However, Origin will now remember exactly what to do for that worksheet's raw data if they are ever changed. One can then simply reimport new data to replace the old to have Origin update the associated graphs and the analysis results. This is what OriginLab calls creating an "Analysis Template". Such analysis templates can either be a whole Origin project (OPJ file) or just a single Origin workbook (with sheets for raw data, analysis results, and analysis curve data). In essence, the user creates their own custom analysis operation tool without any programming required.

OriginLab provides an array of training opportunities ranging from in-person visits to webinars. Customized training is available and a "bring your own project" opportunities where the trainer tailors the experience to a specific project for the customer. There is also a JumpStart service that will develop customized processes and customized analysis and graphing templates. Additionally there is an online discussion forum for users at www/originlab.com/forum/.

Origin8 provides all the expected functionality along with additional features to allow users to analyze data and report the findings in a professional manner with ease. It is a valuable product for every lab.

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