
COMPUTER SOFTWARE REVIEWS

Fillers, Extenders, and Diluents Electronic HandbookElizabeth Brown[†]

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The Fillers, Extenders, and Diluents Electronic Handbook has both a CD-ROM (ISBN 1-890595-14-4) and print (ISBN 1-890595-13-6) edition for 1998. Both products sell for \$195 and are published by Synapse Information Resources, Inc. (1247 Taft Ave., Endicott, NY 13760, (607) 748-4115, toll-free 1-800-SYNCEM, <http://www.SynapseInfo.com>, sales-info@SynapseInfo.com). Minimum system requirements needed to run this software are an Intel 386 CPU (90 Mhz Pentium processor recommended), an SVGA Adapter with 800 × 600 resolution (1280 × 1024 SVGA, 8513, or a xGA recommended), a CD-ROM drive (4× CD-ROM or greater recommended), Window 3.1 (Windows 95, 98 or NT strongly recommended), and 4MB RAM memory (16MB recommended).

Supporting material for the CD-ROM is contained in the packaging. The handbook consists of five main sections: an online navigation guide for the CD-ROM, introductory material taken from the print version of the handbook, a trade name and generic name product lists in alphabetical order, cross-references and indexes for product names and CAS registry numbers, and an alphabetical manufacturer's directory for locating products. The screen for navigating the handbook has several frames. The top menu bar and command frame allows a user to perform a general search for information on a specific term of manufacturer and also allows the user to navigate previous search commands similar to a web browser. It also allows scrolling through the handbook text presented in the lower right frame. This text frame has a separate menu bar for skipping to each of the main sections of the handbook: trade and generic names, cross-references, manufacturers, etc. The third frame is at the lower left portion of the screen. It acts as a navigation guide/program manager. It allows you to navigate the hierarchy of indexes and files in the handbook. Because of these multiple frames the screen has a cluttered appearance, and it is not intuitive to perform a search. The search commands perform keyword searching on any term in the handbook. Additionally any section of the handbook can be searched separately (i.e. manufacturer's or generic names).

Both the trade and generic name lists contain CAS and EINECS registry numbers as well as a chemical description of uses and properties. Generally generic products are described in much greater detail than trade names. The manufacturers directory contains very brief entries—no e-mail or Web site addresses are provided. Also acronyms in company names are not spelled out. The cross-reference lists can be helpful in finding products that are used for the same purpose. Otherwise this information would be difficult to find in the database.

All search results are displayed in the right lower frame. On my 17" monitor this frame is still quite small and the text difficult to read. The type can be increased but must be adjusted each time the CD-ROM is loaded. Also the lower split frames can also be shifted to maximize the text reading area. Printing is available from the top menu bar. There is an option to print marked records, but no way to mark the records, and this could confuse some users.

Overall the CD-ROM product is usable, but the screen layout is not intuitive enough for a novice user to quickly perform a search. Also, the documentation in the CD-ROM does not seem to have many enhancements from the print version. This handbook material could be accessed more quickly in print form by a user. The left window "file manager" view of the CD-ROM helps in navigation but decreases the amount of screen size in which to read the handbook entries. One advantage of the CD-ROM is the ability to browse related topics more quickly than in print. With hypertext links between trade and generic names, comparison of different products from competing manufacturers can be done more quickly than in the print version.

Considering the amount of potentially useful material gathered in this handbook, the price is reasonable. However, the quality of the CD-ROM product is not high enough and the extra features not sophisticated enough to recommend it over the print version of the handbook.

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