

Lotus® SmartSuite, Release 9.7 Millennium Edition

Software Review
by Peter Kaufmann

Lotus SmartSuite is a fully integrated software package of powerful computer programs designed to accommodate most if not all home or office applications. The suite is manufactured by the Lotus Division of the IBM Corporation. The program is provided on CD ROM. I was unable to find the program on the shelf of any of the known software resellers however; IBM does have a number of ways to purchase IBM software. Orders can be placed via phone, e-mail, fax, direct download or order from an authorized IBM reseller. The price for the complete suite package is around \$224.00 and an upgrade would run about \$168.00.

Major applications include:

- Lotus 1-2-3, a spreadsheet program
- Lotus WordPro, a word processor
- Lotus Approach, a database program
- Lotus Freelance Graphics, graphics presentation
- Lotus Organizer, a personal information manager
- Lotus FastSite, used to build and publish WEB sites
- Lotus Smart Center, a quick access master control for all suite programs and activity

The CD has several other programs in the Extras directory, the major ones being Screen Cam, a show and tell screen activity utility and Via Voice, a speech recognition application. SmartSuite has many other powerful, valuable, interesting and exciting features; future exploration will follow as experience with the suite progresses.

System Requirements: Millennium Edition (minimum)

- Pentium class processor, VGA adapter and monitor, CD-ROM drive, mouse
- Windows XP, ME, 2000, NT or 98
- 268 MB hard drive space
- Memory: 128 MB-XP, 64 MB- 2000, 48 MB-NT and 16 MB for ME/98

System Requirements: IBM ViaVoice for Lotus WordPro and Lotus 1-2-3 (minimum)

- Pentium 150 MHz (MMX) or 166 MHz (without MMX), VGA adapter and monitor CD-ROM drive, Creative Labs Sound Blaster 16 and a noise-canceling microphone
- Windows 95/98/ NT4.0, WordPro ver. 9, 1-2-3 millennium edition
- 32 MB RAM (Windows 95/98), 48 MB RAM for NT
- 110 MB hard drive space

Installation:

The install program was easy to follow and went without incident. Select "Custom" to pick and

choose applications or my choice “Complete” for a total install. Help is just a click away for each step of the installation. To play it safe, I deleted the older version of 1-2-3 first and also deactivated most of the running TSRs. Of course you end up with a bunch of new TSRs. The installation proceeded and completed taking an estimated 5- 7 minutes to load. The uninstall feature which allows for a full or partial removal is accessed from the Windows control panel.

Applications:

Smart Center - The installation put a taskbar across the top of the screen. My initial misgivings about this ended quickly as I sampled quick access *to* the internet, calendar, addresses, reminders, and a reference for a dictionary or thesaurus. Operation of the center is like a file cabinet with drawers and folders. Click on a drawer item and the drawer opens (with sound effects) and various folders are exposed for further selection. Files may be opened directly from the center. Check on investments, make travel reservations or generate world maps or detailed street locations.

123- I've used older versions of this spreadsheet program and was quite comfortable moving into version 9.7. Worksheet files are updated as they are accessed and saved. This new version provides new Internet features and improves compatibility with Excel. The Excel menu finder gives a quick assist moving from Excel to 123. The quick demos feature accessed from the help menu is first rate. Select an operation and you are literally taken by the hand and walked through to completion. Install Via Voice and you are also talked thru. Spreadsheets or worksheets are a ledger record consisting of columns and rows called a workbook with built in mathematical ability to accomplish various analytical situations. Math formulas are designed in the software from the very basic add and subtract to the most sophisticated. It's fast and accurate. A workbook can have a single or multiple worksheets with more columns and rows that you will ever need. 1- 2-3's SmartMaster includes an assortment of templates covering loans, budgets, sales, expense, etc.; or you can do your own thing. SmartLabels such as AutoTotal perform automatic calculations across a spreadsheet simply by typing in the word Totals and this can be expanded to create and recognize other formulas. Menus are easy to follow and for diehards, there is access to the old classic menus. I played around with templates for loan amortization and expense records. Just plug in your numbers and the calculations are made. With ViaVoice data can be dictated into a spreadsheet. 123 is a pioneer spreadsheet program and in many ways is superior to any of the competitive applications.

Approach: Approach is the database application in the suite package. A database program is used to store large amounts of information. The data can be organized, manipulated, formatted, queried and searched for selective presentation. Setting up the fields properly make finding this information a snap. Approach is a welcome user friendly change compared to earlier versions of database programs. I set up a basic address book record. Starting with a blank database sheet, the file was named and then setting up field names, i.e., name, address, phone number, nickname, birthday and hobbies. Fields may be further configured for data type, size and any formulas or options. Now that the database was set up, a search for (assuming a large list) for a first name

that starts with the letter “P.” In an instant that record was highlighted. There are thirteen ready-made SmartMaster templates available. Examples of these include: Loan Amortization, Checkbook Register and Artists and Music Collection. I also experimented with a template for a contact list and the music inventory. The help file in the Approach section was found to be most helpful, particularly the getting started section. If you are into working with large amounts of data, this application is the tool to organize and manage the information in a professional manner.

WordPro: the word processor segment of the suite in this new version furnishes new Internet capability and the option to use voice recognition software. Switching from my previous word processor to WordPro was almost uneventful and the transition was successful. This application has all the features to produce a professional document. Create a new document from scratch, open an existing document or use one of the ready-made templates where you fill in the blanks or flesh out the outline presented. There are standard modes for inserting text, typing over text and edit marking. Several keyboard shortcuts are also available. Text can be changed, resized, moved deleted or undone if revisions become necessary. When the document is completed, spelling and grammar can be checked or the thesaurus can be consulted. The document can be further dressed up saved to drive, floppy or exported and then to the printer. Help is available along each step. Ask the expert or consult the help index. If ViaVoice, the speech recognition program, is installed, it is a separate program and may be brought in or out via its’ own menu in WordPro. Several small documents were produced as well as a SmartMaster template for a letter where there was click on queuing for the recipient’s name, address, greeting, text and closing. Other features provide for format conversion and menu customization.

Freelance Graphics: provides the tools necessary to create a presentation, organizing and formatting the information and producing an accomplished result. Program features incorporate designs to create on screen presentations with special effects and transitions, create speakers notes, create title pages, bulleted lists, charts and tables. SmartMaster template sets allow for a quick start. This review covered a template for a Team Meeting with a Buttons look. My opening page was the Mission Statement completed with bulleted lists, added clip art, increased text type and size along with speaker notes. Next was a Target Market Profile also with bulleted lists, clip art and speakers notes.. Optional advice for each is just a click away. On line help is there, but a Guide Me feature is also very helpful. Available menus range from “ where am I to what would you like to do.” All pages can be reviewed and modified on a single screen. Next a preview of the presentation was run and then a timed rehearsal. A slide show for team review can be set up and work can be saved in several formats including JPEG.

FastSite, Internet and the WEB

FastSite is the SmartSuite utility used to create and maintain multi page WEB sites. Templates are used to create a home page look along with features for easy user navigation. On-line help is all that will be needed for most tasks. Menus and related instructions within FastSite simplify site creation. Once the pages for a site are completed, the program plays a major role in getting the site posted on a server. Internet WEB pages are designed into the suite. WordPro is particularly

equipped to create and edit and add WEB pages as well as to convert file formats of existing documents posted on the WEB. Similarly, 1-2-3 can import WEB data into a worksheet. Worksheets can be formatted for conversion into a WEB document. An overview page gives an excellent description of terms and orderly steps for building and managing your site.

Organizer is a personal information manager used to arrange and access data on people, places, events and things. The program is well designed. An on screen calendar pad is cleverly integrated with a To Do list, Address Book, Phone Call manager, Planner, Notepad and Anniversary Reminder. A brief description of Organizer activities:

- Calendar section to note activity and set alarms
- Create and prioritize tasks in the To Do
- Keep track of addresses and telephone numbers in address
- Track in and out calls in the Call section
- Monitor events in the Planner section
- Notepad for special notes and ideas
- Special event reminders in Anniversary with audible alarms

I set up the planner to include planned vacation times, fictitious meetings, and three projects. Events were automatically shown through to the calendar. Events are laid out for view by year or quarter. For Internet use, Organizer supports MS Explorer and Netscape Navigator.

ScreenCam is included as one of the extras on the CD. This program is listed as a utility to accomplish PC screen recording. A show and tell communication tool that with the proper hardware installed, a narration in your own words can be included.

Help, Documentation, Support is generously available on line as you progress with each application. This assistance is in the form of standard help indexes, quick demos, SmartCenter help, cross application help, ask the expert and guide me access buttons. Direct access to Lotus for support and updates via the Internet can be accessed from the various application help menus.

Summary:

SmartSuite is an all-inclusive program package having great application for the single user but even more useful in a team environment. Should there be a need to share work with others or collaborate on a project, suite provides the necessary features. Users of other software applications will find assistance for converting commands. All applications were found useful but favorites still centered on 1-2-3, Freelance and Organizer. A noise canceling headset microphone is included with the package for use with the ViaVoice program. Registration was submitted when prompted by a reminder opening the opportunity for tips, updates and other information forwarded periodically.