

MICROSOFT MONEY 2003 DELUXE

Microsoft Corp., Redmond, Washington

Web site: www.microsoft.com/money

Software package review by Jim Buxton

Recent Prices:

Staples (Crossville)	\$59.95 – \$20.00 rebate
Wal-Mart (Crossville)	(No Longer on Shelves)
Best Buy (Knoxville)	59.99 – 34.95 “
Fry’s Electronics (Internet)	59.99 – 20.00 “
Amazon.com (Internet)	52.99 – 40.00* “

* \$20 each from Microsoft & Amazon.com. Free shipping if purchases total more than \$25. Appropriate Tennessee sales tax and/or internet shipping cost not included.

Free offers available from within Money 2003 Deluxe:

- American Express Financial Advisors – Free initial consolation plus \$25 Gift Cheque to use anywhere
- Equifax – 1 year free credit monitoring service (24 hour notice of changes posted to your credit report) plus 1 personal credit report free.
- H & R Block – Do your taxes online & electronic file with IRS free.
- MSN Bill Pay – View and pay bills securely online, anytime, anywhere for 3 months free.

System Requirements

Processor – Pentium 166 (Pentium II 300 recommended) or equivalent.

Operating System – Windows 98, 2000, Me, or XP.

RAM – 32MB (64MB recommended).

Hard Disk Space – 85MB + 50MB for Internet Explorer if not already installed (IE 6.0 is on the CD) + 68MB if running instructional videos & audio prompts from the hard drive.

CD-ROM Drive – 2X or faster.

Graphics – SVGA card or compatible video graphics adaptor.

Color Monitor – SVGA with minimum 256 colors, 800 X 600 resolution (16-bit color recommended).

Pointing Device – Mouse.

Modem – 28.8 Kbps or higher-baud if using internet connectivity and online banking.

Audio – Board with headphones or speaker(s) if using audio feature.

Features & Use Summary

The program is an extensive money-management machine that can organize and manage one’s day-to-day finances, pay bills, track investments, rate and evaluate stocks, simplify and prepare/file income taxes, and create financial plans for the future. Once you enter your various account’s initial details (bank statement, department store statement, payroll stub, stocks owned, stocks and bonds being considered to buy, savings accounts, 401(k), IRAs, rentals, etc.) the program, with little effort, can easily keep your financial records up-to-date and readily available for review and further use. Once setup, paying bills (even while gone on vacation), tracking expenses and savings, tracking credit card use becomes easy and fast to review. Playing meaningful “what if” games with your finances such as: if I do this with

my savings account, or buy/sell certain stocks/bonds, or use an anticipated extra income for this or that (lucky you) – what would be the effect be on my taxes, or on my retirement income, or on my near term/long term debts?

Product Support & Documentation The best new and improved feature for the 2003 version is, in my opinion, the help and technical support. The following outlines what’s available:

- **Help Window** – available whenever in the program. Click **Help Contents** (gives full list of available topics, or click **Find** to search on a word or phrase).
- **Ask Money** – Type a question in your own words in the **Ask Money** box at the bottom of the **Help** window and click **Search**.
- **Audio Help** – Automatically speaks the first time you visit any page. Familiarizes you with the page and how to work with it. Only does this once with each page – recalling the page and using it later does not invoke the audio. If you want the audio again, click **Options, Tools, and Reset Audio Help** on the General tab.
- **Video Help** – Demonstrates key tasks and introduces new ways to use Money. These are located throughout the pages and in the Help topics. Click the icon in each Help topic to show a related video. A listing of all the videos is in the **Help** menu.
- **Help on the Web** – Click **Web Help** in the Help Window, click a link such as Microsoft Money Home Page or Frequently Asked Questions, or type “How do I get Help?” in the **Ask Money** box to find various ways to get help.
- **Money User’s Guide** – This one is in lieu of a printed manual or guide, typical of software products today. Click **Help** to get the menu and then click **Money User’s Guide**. Shows how to use the program and gives strategies and tips on keeping your finances in order. The only printed document is a small “Welcome and How to Install” booklet that also contains several other non-Microsoft service affiliations that can be used with Money 2003 via the internet.
- **Online self-Help Options** – Information online at <http://support.microsoft.com>. Try their FAQs, WebCasts, or search their Knowledge Base for articles related to what you want to know.
- **Call Assistance** – (425) 454-2030 for standard support, phone toll charges do apply. (800) 936-5700 for paid assisted support, Microsoft’s current prices would then apply.

Competitive Software – Intuit’s **Quicken 2003 Deluxe** – \$59.95 at both Staples & Wal-Mart. No recent rebates advertised or shown on boxes. See March 2003 Gazette, page 6, for Sue McBride’s review of **Quicken 2003 Premier**. Computer Shopper Magazine’s recent review gave Microsoft Money 2003 Deluxe a slight edge in recommendations over Quicken 2003 Deluxe. The negatives for each, per the article, were: Money Deluxe – “Cluttered display, Passport account required to access some features.” Quicken Deluxe – “Substandard financial-planning tools,

Web integration has regressed.” My belief is both programs contain essentially the same features and one would be OK with either. Being familiar with one or the other from past use would probably be the best way to choose one or the other. They both upload each other’s data, so jumping across programs should be no problem. Note that a Microsoft Passport for secure file protection is free of charge.

Installation Boot up the computer and be sure to disable all active programs running in the background, especially an anti-virus program. This is good advice for any purchased and sealed box software; however, it is risky when downloading from the Internet or using unknown history, unsealed box CDs where hidden evils can get into your computer and do bad things. All the disabled programs are re-enabled at the end of Money 2003 installation when the computer is re-booted to activate the Money files.

Automated startup of installation occurs by just inserting the Money 2003 CD into a CD drive. If it doesn’t, click **Start, Run**, then enter (type in) the proper drive and file execution instruction (example **D:\Setup.exe**) and OK or go. An installation Wizard appears on screen and guides you through the entire process. I chose the “Custom” installation to see what happens and to control what features I wanted and what ones I didn’t want. I ended uploading all the features available, including the audio prompts and the instructional videos. No problems occurred at all, but it would have been faster and easier if I had just chosen “Full” and let the complete installation happen automatically.

The Wizard walks you through configuring many types of accounts, scheduling regular bill payments (if you want, even paying bills when offline), setup online connections for stock quotes and company information, super secure your files with Microsoft Passport, and personalize Money 2003 to your financial priorities. The interface looks like and navigates like a Web site. Did note that there seems to be several extra “enhancements” that will probably be useful to only a small number of users – suppose that’s part of something for everyone. One of the enhancements was being able to compare income and spending over two different time periods. One caution: Money cannot automatically connect to the Internet if you’re using AOL. However, connect to AOL first then you can use Money in its full glory. Also, it’s easy to track each spouse’s finances, if one has the guts to try such a thing. An “Uninstall” for Money 2003 loads into the Control Panel, Add/Remove call up making it easy to dump the program.