eview by Craig Cox

roduct: ClarisWorks Office
Version: 5.0
Manufacturer: Claris
List Price: $99 ($30 rebate for upgrades)
Genre: Office Productivity Suite
Contact Info: http://www.claris.com/

ntroduction

The long-awaited version 5.0 of ClarisWorks is finally here. The history surrounding the life of this product is a saga in its own right. New technologies, reversals, and corporate intrigue are all part of the tale.

ClarisWorks 5.0 (CW5) was originally envisioned as a killer OpenDoc application. This would help springboard this interesting technology to industry prominence. Alas, it was not to be. When budget woes forced Apple to axe products, OpenDoc was put in the "maintenance mode." CW5 was forced to pursue a more technologically conventional route.

ClarisWorks had always plowed the middle ground of software suites. While eschewing those very high-end features, they've provided a lot of product for the investment. Put another way, a lot of bang for the buck. CW5 is certainly no different in that regard. No 3-D and no animation — just a good solid product providing 95% or more of what 90% of users will need. I had

the pleasure of beta-testing this product for Claris and simply loved it, even in its beta form.

CW5 ships as part of the ClarisWorks Office package. While CW5 is the lead in this act, the cast is rounded out nicely with support from Claris Home Page Lite 2.0 and the JianBusinessBasics (Claris Edition) collection of business templates such as letters, agreements, spreadsheets, forms, etc.

As users of previous versions are well aware, CW offers a superb integration of 6 different capabilities — word processing, drawing, painting, spreadsheet, data base and communications (which allows you to communicate with another computer). CW5 integrates the web as well.

ew Features

Immediately obvious is the new button bar. It sports a new dimensionalized, more pushbutton appearance — more like Claris Emailer 2.0 than earlier versions of CW. Not only is the look new, but so is the philosophy behind it.

Customization's the name of the game here. To begin with, you may choose from one of four available button bars — default, internet, assistant, and document. You can add or delete buttons easily and quickly to any of these. If that's not enough for you, create additional button bars for everyone in the family or office. Want more? Create a custom button to run a sequence of actions. Top your new button off with an appearance to your liking.

he internet button bar is one way Claris integrates the internet into CW5. This button bar lets you launch your web browser or e-mail application, among other chores. This is accomplished via Internet Config (with its own button on the bar), which is installed with CW5.

Button bars may be positioned above, below, left or right of the document window, or viewed as a floating palette. The palette size is customizable. The number of rows visible in the button bar is also customizable.

Also obvious at first glance is the new scheme which presents text font, size and style — always. This is a very welcome change which eliminates those

maddening, frequent trips to the pull down menu to determine characteristics of highlighted text. This is a real time-saver for those of us, like myself, who use CW5 for laying out newsletters and presentations — this feature alone makes the upgrade worthwhile for users who drive CW hard.

Totally new in this version is the ability to link text and objects to somewhere else in the document, another document, or the World Wide Web. For example, in a presentation, you can turn a picture of an apple into a hyperlink to the URL for Apple Computer, Inc. When you click on the apple graphic, the web browser is launched and sent to that URL.

Other features include:

- Multimedia fields in databases
- Ability to run slide shows
- Preset styles in spreadsheets
- Name spreadsheet cells or range of cells
- Includes DataViz's Easy Open Translators and MacLinkPlus
- Documents can be saved as HTML files
- Editable textures available in drawing and painting modes

uick And Easy Web Integration

Using the combination of the new powers of CW5, the Jian business templates and Home Page Lite 2.0 give you a powerful home or office tool. As an example, you can use the "Business Hip Web Page Template," dress it up per your requirements with the wide selection of included clip art and save it as an HTML file. Adjust the file with Home Page Lite. Launch your browser with one click from the button bar and view your creation. Salt to taste. Voilà! A web page in minutes. It might not be the pinnacle of perfection, but it will be good enough for most.

ystem Requirements

Aesthetically and economically, the single greatest feature of CW5 may be the minuscule resources required to operate it. Where Microsoft Office sends you running for a RAM upgrade, CW5 is barely noticeable.

ith virtual memory off, ClarisWorks 5.0 consumes 4.6 MB of RAM. Excel, PowerPoint and Word combined wolf down 23.2 MB. For that tiny 4.6 MB, ClarisWorks also provides a paint and database capability which MS Office 4.2.1 does not. Comparisons with virtual memory on yield proportional results. This represents a greater overall capability at a phenomenal 20% of the RAM usage. To be fair, in some instances MS Office apps offer some capabilities that aren't present in CW5. These are also capabilities that will rarely, if ever, be called upon. Believe me, there are also capabilities in CW5 that the majority of users will never use.

CW5 occupies 40.5 MB of my hard drive's precious space and the 3 MS apps take up a total of 63.7 MB. This does not include the hard drive space required for additions installed into the Claris folder in the system, or the unbelievable number of extensions that MS Office installs.

inal Thoughts

I found ClarisWorks 5.0 to be much like Mac OS 8 in that it wasn't just one single thing that made it a "must-have" for me. It was the fact that all of the changes considered together made each product so much more enjoyable than their respective predecessors — a textbook case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

When I compare CW5 to MS Office 4.2.1, it's a no-brainer. I get more total capability with CW5 for 25% of the purchase price and 20% of the memory requirements.

CW5 comes with something else that MS Office doesn't — a real user's guide book. In addition to an excellent on-screen help program, you get a real book that you can take with you to learn more about the program. For instance, are you tired of staring at a CRT? Take the book and lay down for a couple of minutes to find the answer to your question. That's a real plus in my book.

Referring to an earlier version of ClarisWorks, Michelle Robinette, in her book Windows 95 for Teachers, called it "the best piece of software ever created." Well Michelle, are you ever going to love version 5.0! If I could have only one piece of software to run on my computer, this is the one I'd choose.

You can get a free trial download from Claris at http://www.claris.com/software/highlights/cwtrial.html. ClarisWorks Office is also available for Windows 95 and Windows NT.

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