

#### Product Information

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List Price: \$40 (\$50 with Pilot sync capability)

For some time now, I have, as have many Mac users, been awaiting the release of a new contact and time management program. I have continued to use DateBook and TouchBase Pro, despite their antiquity, because I have not yet encountered potential replacements.

Consultant, a product from Chronos LC <<http://www.chronosnet.com>>, is the most promising new contact and time management program I have seen. Not only does Consultant represent a more modern and up-to-date product than do the other choices on the market (Now Contact/Up to Date and DateBook/TouchBase Pro) but it also offers synchronization with the Palm Pilot from 3Com <<http://www.palm.com/home.html>>. While Consultant doesn't offer everything that TouchBase and DateBook do, and while its Palm Pilot Synchronization leaves a lot to be desired, overall it is a solid package that offers a host of new features and a modern design.

## What Does it Do?

Consultant is both a contact and time management package, which means it not only serves as an address book, but as an appointment book and sophisticated alarm clock. Consultant can handle individual events, recurring events, multi-day events and to-do's. It can also organize your contacts, and associate information with them; specifically it can link your contacts and your appointments together nicely.

## 3-2-1 Contact

With regard to what a contact management package is supposed to do, Consultant passes most of the required tests and criteria without much difficulty. It successfully imported my contact databases from TouchBase with no complications. The contact management feature set is adequate, which is to say that Consultant provides all the fields it should, among them "custom" fields, and enables the user to organize the contact database appropriately. Consultant does a nice job with custom lists, whereby the user enumerates a list of criteria (first name must contain "fred", and state must equal "VT") and Consultant then displays the results.

onsultant also has a really great feature which enables batch modification of contacts. For example, a user could change the category of fifty contacts from "Friends" to "Bad People" in one step. There are numerous other possible uses for this feature. It's much like a "Find and Replace" feature for contacts, although it's not quite as sophisticated. However, considering that most every contact management application I have ever used lacks "Find and Replace" or any other derivative, this feature is a welcome addition.

A great new feature is the chronograph. Every contact has its own chronograph, which enables time tracking for individual clients. This is a feature I have been searching for and attempting to simulate using my own less elegant methods.

However there are several shortcomings to Consultant's functionality concerning contacts. For example, there seems to be no way to alter the "tab order" for data entry. Furthermore the "Find" feature is extremely weak. The user cannot specify which field to search specifically, or even whether the search should be performed in the contact list or in the appointment book. Also missing, although this is fairly petty, is a functionality I much appreciated in TouchBase, which provided several custom check boxes for each contact. This was very useful for custom lists. For example, I have a check box in one of my TouchBase files entitled "Balance Pending" which makes it trivial for me to quickly devise a list of contacts with outstanding balances.

onsultant does come with some templates for envelopes, labels and other forms. However I must say that while Consultant does perform these tasks it is no match for TouchBase. Not only does TouchBase have more templates, but it also can handle printing a page of labels all at once, and can start from any offset. TouchBase is generally far more flexible with printing than Consultant is, but if your needs are modest, Consultant may suffice.

Overall I would say that Consultant's contact management is adequate but certainly not especially impressive, when compared to TouchBase.

## A Hot Date

Consultant's performance in the arena of time management is far more impressive. Not only does Consultant offer all the functionality of DateBook Pro or Now Up To Date, but it expands on these features as well. Consultant breaks down commitments into three basic categories, "appointments", "events," and "to-do's". Events and Appointments appear on the calendar itself, whereas to-do's actually appear on a separate list in the same window. Consultant has nice drag and drop support; for example, dragging an event off of the calendar and onto the to-do list will change the commitment to a to-do. Likewise, dragging a to-do onto the calendar will change it into an event. As expected, changing the duration of start and end points of an event can be achieved by simply dragging the event around on the calendar. Dragging a contact onto an event or to-do, or visa versa, will create a "link" between the two.

Consultant has a wonderful assortment of views for calendars: day, multi-day, week, month, year, list, and gantt. Multi-day is flexible in that it lets you choose how many days to display and manages to fit in all the information you get in the day view. The week view is not all that useful in my opinion, but perhaps some people will find use for it. The monthly view in Consultant does something I wish all time management programs did: it allows the user to scroll through a day's events right then and there, if the events don't fit in that dinky little square representing a day. Gantt charting is supported, which I can appreciate, but there is no color support which is a bit lame.

onsultant also offers zoom in and zoom out for the many of the date book views. This flexibility prevents the user from ending up with dozens of tiny little events which can't be read or distinguished. Likewise the user can then zoom out and see a more meaningful view

of the day's or week's commitments.

In a similar note, Consultant seems to offer the same level of functionality at any level. For example, in the monthly view, a user can change the status of a to-do with a simple click. Essentially Consultant attempts to preserve functionality at all levels, which is to say that if the user can execute a task in day view, he should be able to do it in any of the other views as well.

In these respects Consultant outshines all other time management applications. Consultant will even read the day's commitments to you using MacinTalk, which is a really cute feature.

have few complaints with Consultant's time management feature set. One cutesy little feature I enjoyed in DateBook was the ability to place icons on the little squares in monthly view. This is essentially useless but makes printed calendars look cuter. I wouldn't mind being able to resize the columns in some of the views but on the whole these are very very petty complaints.

So overall, Consultant really shines in the field of time management.

## The Three Faces of Inter

Reaction to Consultant's interface is likely to be a personal matter. Quite frankly I dislike it in many respects. As discussed earlier, drag and drop is well supported, and there are controls everywhere they are needed. Generally speaking, the interface is fairly intuitive, which is to say that double clicking on a day in month view will open up a window with that day in day view, for example.

However, the floating window used to enter new events or appointments drives me up the wall. Sometimes it doesn't even work correctly. For example, if I tell Consultant to make an appointment from 3 PM to 2PM it doesn't even complain or indicate that there's a problem. Rather it creates an event from 3 PM to 4PM, hardly ideal behavior. There are other aspects of the interface that bother me as well, but I imagine most of them are fairly personal and characteristic of my nitpicky nature. Overall I just find the look and feel of the application unattractive and clunky. Through the use of the Preferences dialog the user can select from a variety of textures which will serve as a background for windows but this does little to enhance the interface in my opinion. Playing with the fonts for various views can enhance the look of the application a bit I suppose.

## Additional Features and Functions

Consultant offers some features and functions not always found in contact and time management applications. It has a journal feature, which provides the user with a fairly solid word processing environment. The same interface is used for editing memos for the Palm Pilot (more on that momentarily).

A really great little feature is the Translate feature. Type a phrase such as "Meet Tom tomorrow from 9 to 1" and Consultant will automatically generate an appointment at the appropriate time. Pretty snazzy. If there are several Toms it will let you choose one. It's really a great little feature!

## Palm Pilot Support

I was truly excited when I discovered that Consultant offers synchronization capabilities with the Palm Pilot. I love my little Pilot and use it all the time (no, not just for Tetris). Unfortunately, the Pilot Desktop software is so horrendous I'd rather not even mention it. While Now Synchronize is better, it's hardly a stellar piece of software itself. So one can imagine my excitement upon discovering that Consultant could sync with my Pilot.

Unfortunately, I cannot report that Consultant deals with Pilot synchronization very well. I did manage to get Consultant to send contacts and commitments to the Pilot, but when I made changes on the Pilot, they were never carried over to Consultant. I am not talking about little changes. I'm talking about removing events or deleting entire memos. Changing times, words, names, phone numbers, etc. didn't work either. I made sure that the Consultant Conduit in HotSync was set to synchronize and tried several times with all the other conduits shut off. No luck. What was odd was that Consultant didn't reinstate the memos or appointments I had deleted; it simply acted as if nothing had changed. The Pilot wasn't altered, but neither was the Consultant file.

While Consultant did manage to update the Pilot when I added new events, appointments, memos, to-do's or contacts, it didn't seem to modify them on the Pilot if I made changes to them. For example, if in Consultant I changed the state in which Bob lived in from VT to NY, that change wasn't carried through to the Pilot. However, if I added or deleted a contact in Consultant, upon synchronizing the appropriate change would be made to the Pilot.

So essentially Consultant is great for "installing" contacts and events onto the Pilot, and for removing them as well, but it doesn't "synchronize" with the Pilot. This is truly a pity as it would make Consultant the clear choice for Pilot-carrying Mac users.

## Conclusions

Consultant is truly a mixed bag. On the one side it offers outstanding time management features, on another it offers contact management which is lacking in certain areas, and in terms of Pilot synchronization it fails miserably. The interface varies from highly intuitive and slick to clunky and poorly designed. Consultant has fairly modest disk and RAM requirements, it's fairly zippy in terms of performance, has only a handful of bugs, and only crashed a few times on me. For the price (\$40, \$50 for Palm sync capability) it's a good deal. If you've been waiting for a good piece of time management software you're in luck. If your contact management needs are limited and you're more interested in linking individuals to your appointments rather than vice versa, Consultant will likely serve you well. Consultant does a decent job with printing labels and other such templates but it doesn't excel in this field.

I can really give no better advice than to go to the Chronos web site <<http://www.chronosnet.com>> and download a trial copy of Consultant. Use it for a while and see if you like it. You may find that it is everything you have been wanting in a contact and time management package, and you may not. Regardless you will have lost nothing in the process.

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