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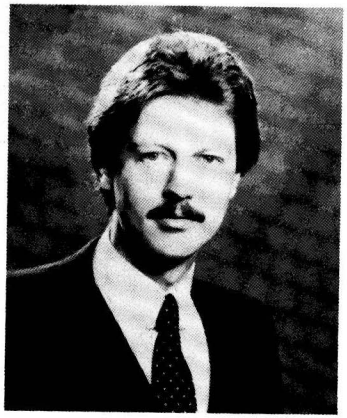
The CompuThink Guide To: SPREADSHEET SOFTWARE

Jesse Berst

THE COMPUTHINK GUIDE TO SPREADSHEET SOFTWARE



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THE COMPUTHINK GUIDE TO SPREADSHEET SOFTWARE

by

Jesse Berst

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you will find this book is organized so you can read only what you need.

Many chapters end with a simple SELF-HELP Checklist, so you can apply what you have learned to your own business and construct your own personalized shopping list. A written shopping list is the best way to avoid "paralysis by analysis"—the confusion that strikes buyers when they try to sort the dozens of available spreadsheet features, the scores of spreadsheet programs, and the hundreds of competing computers. Many people suffer from this "option shock" because they buy computer products backward. They start by going to a computer store. Immediately they are swamped by technical details and overwhelmed by the many different brands. If they buy anything at all, it is usually what the salesman wants to sell them.

If you take this book's advice, visiting the computer store will be the *last* thing you do. First you will make sure you understand spreadsheet software, and you will decide if it is worth your time and money (Part One of this book). Then you will determine *in advance* what spreadsheet features you need and narrow your choices down to a handful of brands (Part Two). Only then will you head to the store to test drive a few selected programs and decide which one is best for you (Part Three).

Ready to help yourself to the power of spreadsheet software? Turn to Chapter One to get started.

Jesse Berst

PREFACE

Spreadsheet software outsells all other kinds of business programs for small computers. More than one million people use it—accountants, managers, clerks, scientists, engineers. Why all the interest? The answer is simple. Spreadsheet software makes people better and faster at their jobs.

A spreadsheet is nothing more than a large piece of paper with many rows and columns. The rows and columns are used to organize and analyze numbers. Business people find spreadsheets invaluable for such things as budgets, tax planning, and financial statements (Fig. 0-1). Scientists and engineers use them to gather, organize, and interpolate data.

Spreadsheet *software* is an electronic version of the same idea. Numbers are organized into rows and columns, but on a computer screen, with far more speed and accuracy than can be gained by hand. When everything on the screen looks the way it should, a touch of a button can print out a professional-quality report.

You can be sure your competitors will be using spreadsheet software soon (maybe they are already). If you have not yet taken advantage of it, now is the time. With the help of this book you can put the power of spreadsheet software at your disposal, without previous knowledge of programming or mathematics—and without wading through complicated computerese.

This plain-English guide can help you avoid expensive mistakes. Many first-time buyers, for instance, spend their money on outmoded programs. (I know of a company that spent $800 on inferior spreadsheet software. The program was eventually shelved in favor of a more powerful product—which cost only $200.) Other buyers choose good software but find themselves restricted by the wrong hardware. Still others are stumped by the job of learning the software, not knowing they

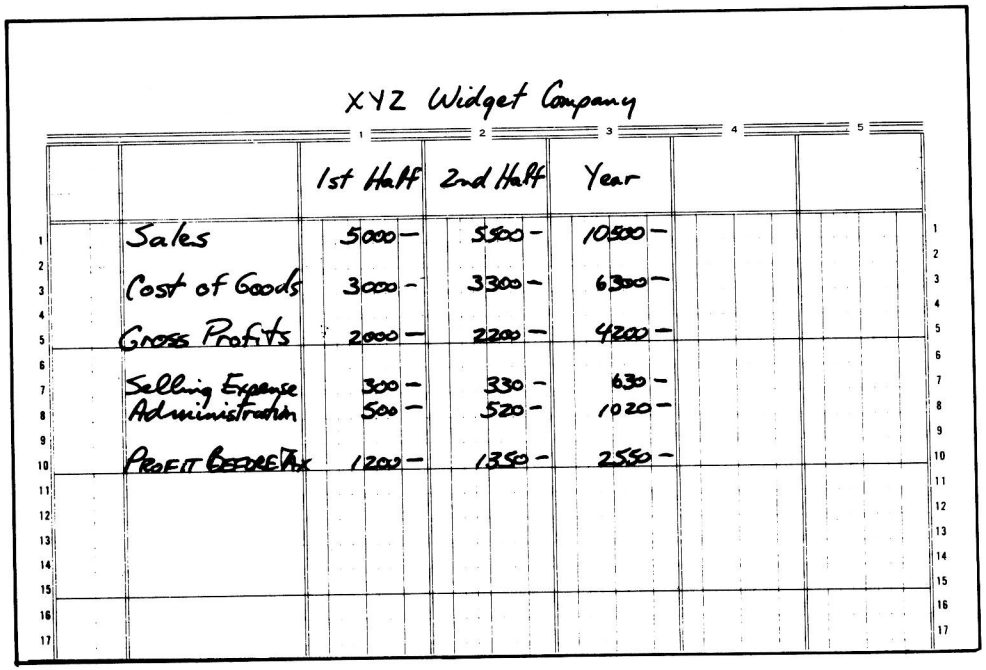

Fig. 0-1. Spreadsheet software is an electronic version of the traditional accountant's worksheet—but you do not have to be an accountant to use it.

can choose from a variety of low-cost learning aids and preprogrammed applications. (One office manager kept a hand calculator next to the computer—he did not realize spreadsheet software would calculate for him!)

You can learn to avoid pitfalls like these. Simply spend a few hours with this book *before* you start shopping. It contains everything you need to select spreadsheet software and put it to work:

- How to buy a program—and *whether* to buy one.
- Which features are crucial—and which ones are not worth an extra penny.
- What kind of computer hardware is best.
- How to get your money's worth out of a spreadsheet program after you buy it.

Like all the *CompuTh!nk Guides*, this book is for business people, professionals, and anyone else in a hurry. It is written in a no-nonsense style that concentrates on essentials, so it supplies the most information in the least space. Even if you do not know anything at all about computers, this book will take you through a step-by-step approach to buying spreadsheet software. If you already have some computer expertise,

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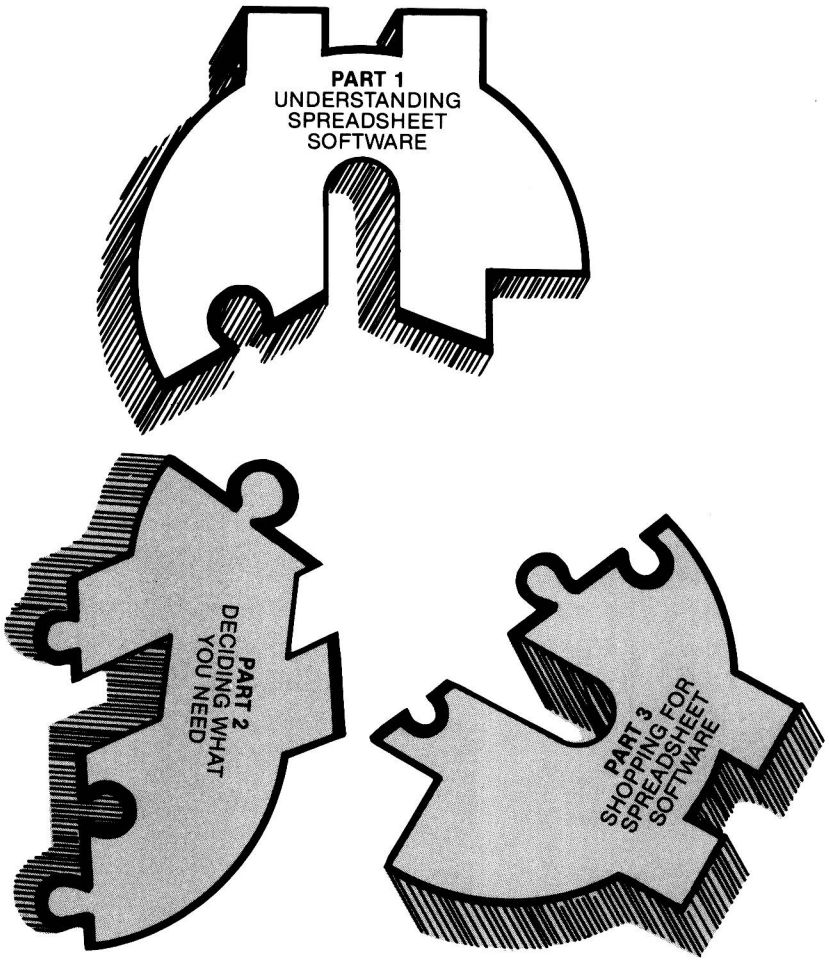

This book is divided into three parts plus an appendix. In Part One you will learn what spreadsheet software is, how people put it to work, and how to decide if it is right for you.

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