Software Arts readies 2 new VisiCalc products

By Lauren Stiefel

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NEW YORK — Software Arts' plans to introduce two new VisiCalc-based products, at a time when VisiCalc sales are faltering, may startle some observers.

But chairman Daniel Bricklin is betting the consumer perception of VisiCalc as "the standard in spreadsheets" will generate sales of the latest additions to the VisiCalc family.

The name and product are a valuable commodity, but [VisiCorp's] poor marketing efforts contributed to poor sales. There's no pointing a finger at Lotus,' Bricklin said.

Commenting on the company's strategy as it introduces the VisiCalc Package for the Apple II line and Integrated VisiCalc for the IBM PC, Smith Barney first vice president Lloyd Kanev suggested "the historic strength VisiCalc had in the marketplace" may indeed fuel the new products' success. "If they are successful in capitalizing on the brand recognition, they may translate that into sales," he said, adding, "Certainly that is an uphill battle."

For the Apple market, where VisiCalc brand recognition is seen as particularly strong, Software Arts will market the VisiCalc Package. The $179 offering includes VisiCalc Advanced Version (VAV), plus VisiCalc.

"With The Package, we address all the major problems VisiCalc had in the market," Bricklin said.

The package's VisiCalc, especially designed for the IIc, is confined to one disk. It includes full word prompts, variable column widths and six models for home management and finance: household budget, car loan payment analysis, Individual Retirement Account analysis, future value of an investment, income averaging and checkbook balancing.

VAV, on two disks, features an introduction to spreadsheets that runs under VisiCalc.

The package gives consumers everything they need in one shot and retailers only one sku to stock, Bricklin reasoned.

The flexibility of the package is important. Bricklin assumes that consumers who begin with the IIc/one-disk version will "dabble with" the two-disk version when a second disk is available for the IIc. VAV users, in turn, may opt for the additional usable memory they get with the IIc version.

Due to ship July 25, the package will premier just after VisiCorp plans to unveil its competitively priced $99 FlashCalc for the IIc. Bricklin maintains, however, The Package will triumph over FlashCalc because it offers more features and "consumers ask for VisiCalc anyway" in one form or another, he said, alluding to consumers' perception of VisiCalc as the "standard" spreadsheet.

(Regarding FlashCalc, the latest development in the lawsuit between VisiCorp and Software Arts finds Software Arts' lawyers "looking very closely" at VisiCorp's right to market FlashCalc. FlashCalc was developed by Nereid Systems for VisiCorp.)

Employing the same attention-getting product packaging strategy used in designing TK!Solver's bright yellow box, the package will show yellow lettering on a black background.

Product advertising will commence in August, covering trade and Apple-specific publications, with some local print dealer tag ads, said Bruce Rampe, vice president of sales and marketing.

Not content with leaving the IBM PC market to Lotus, Software Arts is also introducing Integrated VisiCalc. "It has features no other company has announced, much less shipped," Bricklin said.

Integrated VisiCalc, due this fall, "will be positioned to be competitive," he said. Competitive with what? Bricklin offered no clues. Pricing has not been set.

Software Arts' foray into direct mail marketing, with its offer of a VAV IBM PC up-grade for $99, is no longer in effect. "We said we would do it and we did," Bricklin said.

No mention of the availability of the fully documented IBM PC VAV was made. (The company originally stated that after a direct mail campaign of two to four months it would offer such a product to retailers [C+SN, March 51.) Bricklin indicated that getting the newest products to market would take precedence over this product.•

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