The Notebook Spreadsheet Guide Introduction

What is a Spreadsheet?

A spreadsheet is the general name given to those utilities that lay out data, primarily numeric, in rows of lines and columns, similar to a balance sheet or calculation sheet written out on paper.

In the same way that the word processor in your Notebook offers considerable advantages in terms of power and flexibility over a typewriter, so a spreadsheet can provide you with all sorts of new time saving and useful features. It also lets you work on an electronic sheet that is far larger than any simple paper display could sensibly be.

By its very nature, a spreadsheet is more complicated to learn than the word processing function built into the Notebook. However, the Notebook spreadsheet does try to help you as much as possible and will always guide you as to exactly what you can type at any moment. As you make entries it will check what you are typing and as soon as you enter something incorrectly you are warned of the problem. At any time you may press the ▭ key to bring up a panel of help information that describes the function you are currently trying to use.

Although it may at first seem that there is a lot to learn you will find that the Notebook spreadsheet is just as happy multiplying 2*2 as it is solving complex engineering calculations. You should not be daunted by the size of the manual. The Notebook spreadsheet contains some very sophisticated features that allow extremely complex tasks to be tackled with ease but the information has been laid out such that you can quickly and easily find just those features that you require and can ignore the rest. We do recommend, however, that you familiarise yourself with all the options available. You may well discover that there are many built in shortcuts designed to make life easier for you.

As well as providing all of the traditional features that you would expect from a spreadsheet program, the Notebook spreadsheet has been extended in many ways to give you completely flexible control over your everyday data handling and calculation problems. You will find that it can often be used for things other than a spreadsheet is traditionally used for. For example, you could use it for storing data such as names and addresses.

No programming language will have to be learnt in order to use the Notebook spreadsheet, although for greater flexibility it incorporates some looping features found in high level languages. It will allow you to do most day to day calculations, book keeping and accounts right up to complex scientific equations. The graphics features allow you to produce many different options of graph and chart display which can be sent to a printer (Epson compatible), use some simple database-like functions such as sorting and searching the data. Date and time functions can be built into the sheets.

You will also find that the Notebook spreadsheet is one of the most 'intelligent' programs available. Most computer utilities waste an enormous amount of their potential working time just sitting around waiting for the user to decide what has to be done next. You will find that the Notebook spreadsheet works much harder than that. Commands or data that you enter are checked for mistakes as you type each character rather than when you enter the whole line, or even worse, when the program attempts to do a calculation based on the entry. The result is that there is absolutely no ambiguity about what you have done wrong.

This error handling extends far beyond a simple check of whether the entry is valid in terms of what commands and entries the computer will understand. The Notebook spreadsheet will also attempt to see whether the entry makes sense in terms of the whole sheet as it is currently set up. For example, in most spreadsheets it is important to avoid a forward reference when entering data in a formula e.g. it is usually impossible to enter a calculation in row A, line 1 that reads 2*B2. You will understand that you want the value in B2 to be worked out BEFORE that in A1 or it doesn't make sense but most programs will attempt to do it the other way around. The Notebook spreadsheet works out an 'Order of Recalculation' number for each item as it is entered which ensures that the logical results that you intended from your sheet are preserved without any need to re-organise the arrangement of the rows and columns.

These features may mean that people familiar with other spreadsheet programs will find that many of the restrictions they have been accustomed to simply do not exist.

The Spreadsheet Section of the manual

The section of the manual that describes how to use the spreadsheet has been divided into logical parts designed to make it as useful as possible for both novices and more experienced users alike.

It's impossible in any manual to be able to arrange the information to suit everybody. It is more important to present the information in a logical order and make it easy to find.

Part One(a) is a Getting Started guide giving details of various fundamental aspects of the program such as which keys can be used. It explains some of the special terms used when describing worksheets. It should be read by every new user of spreadsheets. After this, skip to Part Two, The complete Tutorial Guide..

Part One(b) is a Getting Started guide for users who are already familiar with spreadsheet programs and want to get going quickly with the Notebook spreadsheet. Such users will probably also find it worthwhile to read through Part Two, the Tutorial guide, though they may find the later chapters of more interest.

Part Two is a comprehensive Tutorial guide mainly aimed at new users of the spreadsheet. Experienced users may choose to skip to later chapters or Part Three. The tutorial will take you step by step through the various procedures involved in creating a new worksheet and entering and manipulating data. Not all of the various commands and aspects of the program will be detailed in this section. Certain of the later chapters can be omitted if the lessons within are not of interest but the early chapters are important in getting you used to the way that the program behaves and handles the data. Some examples of use are also given.

Part Three is designed as an overview of the spreadsheet and recap of the tutorial for those who have had some experience in the use of the Notebook spreadsheet or similar products and who wish to find details of some commonly used options in a hurry. References are given showing where more information on each section can be found. It is recommended that beginners use this only as a reference guide and supplement to the main index. If you find some of the subjects hard to follow you should read the tutorial section itself.

Part Four is the Complete Reference where full details of every command and feature are laid out in alphabetical order. This will probably be the most frequently consulted area of the book for those more experienced users who are aware of the program's capabilities and who wish to exploit more sophisticated routines.

Whilst we can teach you the various features of the Notebook spreadsheet it is not possible to give advice on all the many possible uses to which it can be put, though the tutorial chapters do give some examples.