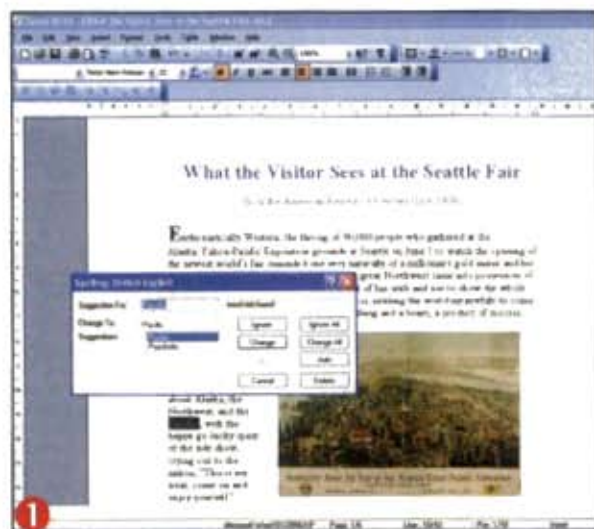


Tesco Software

Tesco enter the world of software distribution with six packages for home users.

● A family of six software packages from Britain's favourite supermarket

In detail



1 The word processor is called Write and it mimics Microsoft Word right down to the items on each menu and the options available in dialog boxes.

2 The spreadsheet mimics Excel and can handle multiple-sheet workbooks selected via tabs at the bottom of the screen.

3 The presentation package creates slide-shows and can open files from Microsoft PowerPoint.

TESCO'S FORAY INTO the world of software distribution isn't as crazy as it seems — the company already has its own internet service and an online store through which it sells computers and peripherals. The first six Tesco software products have been brought in from outside sources, then re-packaged and re-branded.

Star turn

Complete Office is a gem for £20. It's based on Ability Office Small Business Edition, which costs twice as much, so Tesco's version is a real bargain. It provides all the key facilities of Microsoft Office Professional through its five main modules, which cover word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, database management and picture management.

The word processor is called Write and it mimics Microsoft Word right down to the items on each menu and the options available in dialog boxes. Files are saved in Write's own format, but it can also save in Word format and open documents created in just about any other word processor that has ever existed. It has everything you'd expect of a professional word processor, including spelling and

grammar checking, mail merging and auto-correction as you type. It even includes an equivalent to Microsoft Word Art in the form of Write FX.

The spreadsheet mimics Excel and can handle multiple-sheet workbooks, selected via tabs at the bottom of the screen. After importing a ten-sheet Excel workbook with cross-references between the pages, everything worked perfectly, with all formatting preserved and even the cell notes intact. Other workbooks containing complicated macros or conditional cell formatting needed tweaking in Tesco Office, as did the formatting of certain dates.

The presentation package creates slide-shows containing pictures and graphics for use in business and educational presentations. It can open files from Microsoft PowerPoint and save them in both PowerPoint and PDF formats. It's easy to use and includes a wide range of transitional effects between slides. The database isn't quite a clone of Microsoft Access, but it's close. Most users will have no use for it because basic list-making and record-keeping is easier to do in the spreadsheet, but it's a powerful tool for anyone who has database experience. The least significant module is a picture manager called PhotoAlbum, which is used to view, organise and print pictures downloaded from



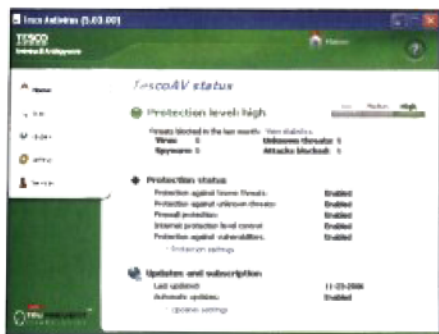
PhotoRestyle is a version of Ability Photopaint, so it complements Complete Office very well.



PhotoRestyle also includes a simple photo manager that lets you browse your image collection as thumbnails.



The database isn't quite a clone of Microsoft Access, but it's close.



Antivirus & Antispyware, also includes a firewall, anti-phishing safeguards and a blocker for dialler hijackers.

digital cameras or created by other programs, such as Tesco PhotoRestyle.

Perfect partner

PhotoRestyle is a version of Ability Photopaint, so it complements Complete Office very well. It's an image editor that can be used to create artwork from scratch, but will more often be used to enhance pictures taken by digital cameras. Pictures can be edited in layers, so that changes made to one part of a picture don't affect another, and it has the usual tools for correcting bad pictures, removing flash red-eye and applying special effects.

Protection and detection

For Tesco to devote a third of its six software titles to protecting its customers against internet threats seems excessive. The two products on offer are Internet Security and Antivirus & Antispyware. Both are variants of products from Panda Software, a firm with a good record in this field.

The cheaper of the two is Antivirus & Antispyware, a name that doesn't quite say it all because the program also includes a firewall, anti-phishing safeguards against websites that try to con you out of personal information, and a blocker for dialler programs that try to hijack dial-up modems for nefarious purposes.

Virus and spyware detection is performed both by scanning hard disks for existing threats and in real-time by maintaining constant vigilance against new intruders whenever the PC is switched on. The main detection tool is a database of virus identification 'signatures' that is updated when you first install the program, and regularly thereafter, plus Panda's TruPrevent technology which detects viral programs for which no signatures exist, but which are behaving suspiciously in other ways.

The firewall is not a very sophisticated product and if you're running Windows XP, you'd be better off using its own built-in version. For a more configurable, protective firewall you should choose Tesco's dearer product called Internet Security. Though broadly similar to Antivirus & Antispyware, it adds features such as anti-spam control for email messages and a bar against passwords and other confidential items being transmitted over the web.

Probably the most convincing reason for buying Internet Security is to protect other users of your computer. It provides three levels of filtering (for children, teenagers and employees) to restrict them

from viewing unsuitable material on the web. Each user is assigned an individual password and level of access. The purchase prices of both security programs include updates for 12 months — thereafter you'll have to pay an annual subscription.

Money matters

The programs mentioned so far have been so thoroughly Tesco-ised that they seem like original programs, but the origins of Tesco Personal Finance are not so well disguised. Its original name, Moneydance, appears in its File > Open dialog box.

This traditional double-entry bookkeeping system is optimised for personal rather than business use, but it can be used to run a small business. To anybody with experience of financial managers like Microsoft Money, Tesco Personal Finance looks primitive, but hidden beneath its austere surface are tools to plan and track budgets, calculate loan repayments and schedule payments in and out of your accounts.

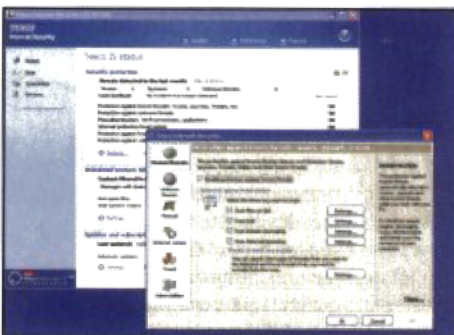
What's missing is a sample data file to help you get the feel of things before committing yourself to setting up your own finances, and it would be nice to have a 'getting-started' wizard and some tutorials to help you through the early days.

Burning issues

Easy Record is Tesco's program for creating CDs and DVDs. These can be copies of existing discs or you can make compilation audio CDs based on audio files stored in MP3 and other formats on a hard disk. Data discs containing any type of file can be created on both CDs and DVDs, and the program is also able to store an image of a CD or DVD on hard disk, so that a physical disc can be burned in the future.

Easy Record is based on a Sonic Solutions program called RecordNow and of all the Tesco programs, it's the one with biggest split personality problem. Clicking on the Upgrade options takes you to Sonic's site where you're offered Sonic, not Tesco, products. If you view the web tutorials, you'll see Tesco Easy Record at the top of the page, but everything else refers to RecordNow and some of the features described, such as making jukebox CDs, are not even possible in the Tesco product.

Most computers and CD/DVD drives come with free programs for burning CDs, and if you've already got one of these it's probably better than Easy Record, which is limited in scope and confusing in execution. We can't recommend it. **PW**



The dearer Internet Security provides three levels of web filtering and anti-spam control.

verdict

A complete mix of programs, ranging from the superlative Complete Office to the lacklustre Easy Record.

Antivirus & Antispyware

£10 inc VAT

FEATURES ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

OVERALL RATING



Complete Office

£20 inc VAT

FEATURES ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

OVERALL RATING



Easy Record

£10 inc VAT

FEATURES ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

OVERALL RATING



Internet Security

£20 inc VAT

FEATURES ★★★★★
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OVERALL RATING



Personal Finance

£10 inc VAT

FEATURES ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

OVERALL RATING



Photo Restyle

£10 inc VAT

FEATURES ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

OVERALL RATING



FURTHER DETAILS

www.tescosoftware.com
www.tescosoftware.com

REQUIRES These vary between the packages, but a 300MHz Pentium-class processor and 128MB of memory, with Windows 98SE onwards will be fine.