

The Northern California Technical Communication Competition

Sample Comments - 2

Entry Number: 2001101
Entry Title: Home & Business Guide to Business Tools
Category: Technical Publication : Software Guides
Judge: Tejashree Uppala
Award Rec: No Award
Rank: 4 of 4

Touchstone



2001

COMPLIMENTS

The handy size of the book promotes easy accessibility for reference.

Well-formatted instructions have supplemental information separated from actions statements.

Chapter start pages:

- Very neat presentation with useful chapter introductions.
- Repetition of chapter contents promotes good navigation.
- Use of colored graphic creates visual interest and distinguishes the start page from the contents pages.

Color distinguishes the illustration callouts from general text aiding quick visual location.

The appropriately placed tabulated pointers highlight and direct the users to relevant online help topics.

SUGGESTIONS

The guide could use a developmental edit to logically reorganize the chapters and their contents from users point of view. Consider the following:

- Converting parts of chapters 1 & 9 into an introductory chapter.
- Changing Chapter 10 into an appendix.
- Chunking the chapters - with Chapters 1 & 2 under one section - separating them both from Chapters 3 through 8 that deal with actual use of software features.

In the introductory chapter, include:

- The Audience (user) profile
- Guidelines for using the book effectively
- Reference to - and use of - online help.

Text presented as a series of monotonous-looking paragraphs makes heavy demands on the reader's ability to grasp the contents and tends to hide vital information.

- Make the sentences more concise
- Increase the use of white space through shorter paragraphs of information.
- Use different font styles or formats to highlight software-specific terminology, examples, and unusual or unfamiliar terms (For example, "Owner's draws," pg.43).

The font used for the body text seems inappropriate as it tends to hinder ease of readability. Consider using a font with more obvious descenders (for p's and q's) or a serif font such as Times or Times New Roman for the text and illustration callouts.

Using sentences for illustration callouts that repeat parts of the text, could confuse the user. Rewrite using more concise callouts. Alternately, you could number the callouts to correspond with the numbered instructions within the text.

Increase the number of entries and cross references within the index.

A glossary would be very useful.

Heading levels 2 and 3 within the chapters are difficult to differentiate. Consider using one or more of the following:

- *Increasing the difference in font sizes by 2 or more points.
- *Using varying indents for differing heading levels.
- *Highlighting heading level 2 with graphic elements such as colored background.

Try to reword chapter headings using parallelism to encourage quick comprehension.

For example,

Chapter 4: Using Quicken for Accounts (bills) Payable

Chapter 6: Using Quicken for Resale Products

Chapter 7: Using Quicken for Assets and Loans

Since chapters conventionally start on the right side pages, consider reversing the left and right running footers to match reader expectations.