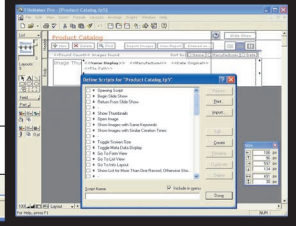


Adding keywords for descriptive fields is especially easy, using the pop-up box on the right



Straightforward tool palettes for list views, and ScriptMaker to automate database processes

New import filters in version 6 mean you can share information with all sorts of other programs. For example, it includes import and export facilities for XML, as well as two-way ODBC connectivity, so you can pool data from any ODBC source including SQL and Oracle.

Other new features include the ability to import a complete folder full of files with just a few mouse-clicks. And what's more, the files can be in a wide range of formats, from humble text to multimedia files that include JPEG, MOV movie clips and MP3 music. You can also drag and drop Excel files for conversion into full FileMaker databases.

Improved data handling
When it comes to finding specific data in large databases, the words 'needle' and 'haystack' often come to mind. FileMaker makes the going comparatively easy though, with new data handling tools. A 'Constrain and Extend Found Set' tool lets you set up complex search routines without having to go all over the place in order to find specific data, and do everything in a series of frustrating steps. For the bigger picture, there are also some handy new Global Find and Replace features, with which you can replace selected text throughout an entire database at a stroke.

DATABASE SOFTWARE

FileMaker Pro 6

The world's easiest database package gets enough new features to launch it well and truly into the big league

INFORMATION
PRICE £252 **EX VAT** £215
SUPPLIER FileMaker
PHONE 0845 603 9100
WWW www.filemaker.co.uk

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
 Pentium 90, Win 98 or higher, 32MB RAM, CD-ROM

ALSO CONSIDER
MICROSOFT ACCESS
 www.microsoft.com/uk
 PC Plus 178

FileMaker Pro has made its name on ease of use, enabling even database illiterates to design coherent systems that businesses can depend on. The new version retains the simple approach, but adds more power through a host of new features.

If ever there was a black art of software programs, it would have to be the database. Even building a simple flat-file database can be fraught with problems, and relationship database creation is normally best left to professional programmers. In fact, many businesses use spreadsheets for functions that are far more suited to database apps, simply because they're easier for office staff to get their heads around. However, from its first release a decade ago, FileMaker Pro is a database program that rewrote the rules.

Ease of use
 One of the things that sets FileMaker Pro apart from the crowd in general, and from Microsoft Access in particular, is its easy, almost DTP-like simplicity for creating databases. Even the uninitiated can sit down with the program and build a simple but fully functional office database within a couple of hours, with minimum referral to the on-screen help facilities (which are, incidentally, very good).

One of the things that makes FileMaker Pro so easy to use is that you can access all manner of database field types quickly and efficiently, and create forms on-screen, on the fly. And if you'd rather take a back seat in the design process, there are stacks of ready-made templates which you can simply modify to suit your exact requirements (the new version includes 20 new templates). Creating a variety of forms, or views, for highlighting and showcasing different information within a database is equally straightforward and switching between forms, or utilising list views, is a breeze.

Quiet sophistication
 Don't be fooled! Just because FileMaker Pro is a doddle to use, doesn't mean that it's lacking in power. Relational databases let you cross-reference information and pull in data from just about any other source. Networking aspects are fully sorted in Version 6, making it ideal for sharing data over a network, and providing the accessibility you need for workgroup productivity.

Moving on up
 Database designers won't be able to resist playing with the new toys once they've got rudimentary systems in place. A new raft of visual design tools includes Format Painter which is excellent (and time-saving) for copying and applying attributes to blocks of text or other objects. Similarly, Layout Themes takes the hard work out of applying a consistent look and feel across an entire database. And for more serious programming, even advanced database solutions and complex relational properties can be simplified using the built-in ScriptMaker. All in all, the new version of the always-good FileMaker Pro is something of a classic.

Matthew Richards

PC Plus verdict
FILEMAKER PRO 6

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| FOR | AGAINST |
| ✓ Simple, yet powerful and sophisticated | ✗ Nothing, at this price |
| ✓ Compatibility features | |
| ✓ Apple Mac-friendly | |

