



## Quick! Help Me Choose Good Software!

**Y**ou may already know that the number one selling point for any computer is “Does it run the software I need?”

However, for many teachers this question probably evokes the following response: “How would I know what software I need?”

Perhaps you’re wondering why this should be a problem. After all, aren’t there countless excellent software programs specifically designed for use in schools? Indeed, there *are* thousands of programs available, but the quality of many of them ranges from mediocre to awful. In fact, a new software guide prepared by the editors of *School/Tech News*, a newsletter on technology for educators, finds that there are “only 113 programs, out of more than 8,000 available, that receive high grades from three or more evaluation services.”

In trying to decide which programs will be useful, you can check your local bookstore or public library for publications that categorize most of the software available with a paragraph or two summarizing each package and what it purports to do. Some even rate each offering, giving helpful comments and criticisms.

One source of information on highly rated software is *Only the Best: The Discriminating Software Guide for Preschool-Grade 12*, available for \$15.95 from Education News Service, P.O. Box 1789,

Carmichael, CA 96509. This catalog lists the educational programs that have received high marks from three or more evaluation services and offers descriptive information for teachers and school systems.

Although these sources are useful, they are still somewhat like buying a recipe after having seen only a picture of the dish you want to make. With software, you rarely even get a picture of the program! Your chances of getting exactly what you thought you were getting are slim indeed.

You can improve your odds, however. The best way to decide whether you want a particular software package is to obtain some professional assistance and spend a substantial amount of time actively using the program. Unfortunately, in most cases, the chances of your having been thoroughly oriented to the package you want are rather slim.

### Improving Your Odds

If you don’t have the software yourself, or don’t own a computer, the next best solution is to go to a computer store or a friend’s home and survey one or more packages you think you might be interested in. Although time consuming, hands-on experience is one of the best ways to determine whether you’ll be happy with the program you choose. Typically, the orientation time for a new software package ranges from one hour for a simple program to hundreds of

hours if you’re dealing with sophisticated integrated software.

Just gaining access to a software product and the brand of machine that runs it can be no small trick. However, there are mail-order software rental shops that allow you to test-run a package for a fraction of the purchase price. Also, some community libraries and user clubs are getting into the business of loaning software, usually for a week or two at a time.

This brings me to the third alternative: Talk to people who own or have used the software package you’re interested in—other teachers, members of local computer users’ clubs, students who played with the package at another school. Vicarious experience is the next best thing to being there.

### Reviews Can Help You Choose

If you lack the human resources listed above, you’re pretty much stuck with reviews as a source of information. Some electronic data-banks are currently evaluating software releases, and most of the 300-plus computer magazines on the market review software (and hardware). Reviewers spend from one to a hundred hours orienting and playing with new software releases, then put their reactions in print. If no one seems to have reviewed the package in which you’re interested, write a letter to the editor. (Don’t expect an evaluation by return mail; however, you might get a comprehensive review

The author is publisher of *The Journal of AMCA (Adventist Microcomputer Concepts and Applications)*.

in an upcoming issue of the magazine, if you can wait that long.)

One other, though somewhat suspect, source of information is software publishers, who offer descriptive information about their programs. The problem with this source is that you're stuck with whatever information the software publisher chooses to supply. While such summaries are generally informative, they must be viewed with a certain amount of skepticism regarding what you are *not* being told.

Another hazard of buying software sight unseen is determining whether it meets Adventist standards. What sort of "whistles and bells" are inserted to make the software interesting to users?

Several problems that you may find include: (1) references to evolution, which figure heavily in most of the science programs; (2) allusions to gambling that appear in a number of math programs; and (3) rock music and questionable lyrics. One fitness program even includes strippers who "take it off" if you pedal hard enough on the stationary bike attached to the screen!

### Guide to Buying Software

In summary, the following points should be considered when buying software:

1. Does this software package do what I want it to do?
2. Do I have to dramatically change my teaching style and cur-

riculum to utilize it in my classroom?

3. Does the software itself, or the documentation that comes with it, include easy-to-interpret instructions?

4. Does the package take into consideration the abilities of its intended target audience? (Reading level, motor skills, eye-hand coordination, working vocabulary, and so on.)

5. Is there another program just as good that costs less?

6. Can I make a backup disk easily or do I have to send the original back to the publisher if it becomes unusable?

7. Does the publisher provide a telephone number I can call if I have problems?—Dave Ruskjer. □

## ASSOCIATION OF ADVENTIST PARENTS FOR DRUG-FREE YOUTH A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

The Association of Adventist Parents for Drug-Free Youth has recently been organized specifically to help Seventh-day Adventist youth and families avoid chemical dependency, or deal with it in effective ways if it occurs.

For schools especially, the association can be of service either as a resource or referral agency. It can recommend or provide resources for teachers or educators to use for reference, information, or support in their effort to prevent, reduce, or eliminate drug use. In the area of referral, the AAP is gearing up to provide valid information to anyone who requests assistance in meeting drug problems in the family, school, or community.

The AAP is affiliated with the National Federation of Parents for Drug Free Youth, and can draw from that organization's materials and expertise. However, the program and services of the Adventist organization will be beamed especially toward SDA members and institutions.

The AAP is encouraging the formation of local chapters in which parents can cooperate with schools in addressing the problems brought about by drug use. The first such chapter was formed this past summer in the northern New England area.

The board of directors for the association consists mainly of lay persons who have experienced drug problems in their own families. At its November meeting in Washington, D.C., plans were laid to organize regional training seminars for parents and teachers across the United States. Francis A. Soper, recently retired after some 30 years as editor of *Listen*, is serving as chairperson of the board.

The AAP invites input from teachers, principals, and administrators on how the organization can best serve the church's need in this important area. The primary emphasis is not condemnation or ostracism of young people who have become involved with drugs, but a search for methods to bring the good news of God's saving power to overcome, and ways to express concern and love for those who need help.

For further information about AAP, write to

Association of Adventist Parents for Drug-Free Youth  
Box 3723  
Silver Spring, MD 20901  
Telephone: (202) 722-6726 (*Listen* office).