

REAL ESTATE COMPUTING

MODULE NAME: REA ESTATE COMPUTING

MODULE CODE: ABH503

DISCIPLINE CODE: 0903205

MODULE PURPOSE

The purpose of this module is to enable the participant to use real estate software packages for real estate sales, listing and property management.

PREREQUISITES AND/OR CO-REQUISITES

Real Estate Industry Overview ABH500
Introduction to Sales ABH501
Introduction to Property Management ABH502
Computer Operations - Fundamentals NOS143

CONTENT SUMMARY

- Use of sales and listing packages
- Use of property management and body corporate packages
- Use of integrated packages

ASSESSMENT CONDITIONS AND RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

For this module, learners will require access to hardware and a selection of current real estate software packages. This may be either in the workplace or in a classroom.

You should approach your nearest friendly real estate agent and ask for access to his/her computer and dedicated software to complete the work modules. There are a number of dedicated software programs used by agents, some examples are attached to this module. If you have a problem in gaining access to an agent's computer/software you are to contact your supervisor who will arrange access or alternative work modules for you.

Assessment will be carried out by your supervisor on the computer printouts submitted for each task.

DEDICATED AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Real estate agents generally, use "dedicated" software programs because they are written directly for the use of the agent. That is, the agent has little input in the programming and probably knows little, and needs to know little, about how the program is written.

This is different from the use of *generic* software programs such as a range of spreadsheet programs. The agent with a little experience and expertise is able to set up his/her specific spreadsheet programs suitable for his/her particular business. This has the advantage of giving complete control and access to the spreadsheet and programming using *macros*. On the other hand, dedicated programs allow the operator little control over the program as it must be used according to the handbook. However, a well written dedicated software program is easy to use ("user friendly") and does all that an agent requires. This is particularly important for people with little knowledge of spreadsheet construction and *macro* programming. The *Law of Comparative Advantage* states that the agent should concentrate on and try to exclusively devote his/her time to that in which he/she is most expert. For a real estate agent this is selling, marketing and managing property, not computer programming.

Each Australian state and territory has different property, real estate and consumer legislation as well as property types according to its historical, political, social and economic environments. Therefore, the following tasks are always subject to the laws and regulations of the state or territory in which the participant lives. It may be that the controlling body of real estate agents requires a certain format in account printouts, particularly in regard to trust monies. Each provider will need to add/ select and/or develop resources appropriate to his/her state or territory.

LEARNING OUTCOME 1

Use a (or range of) real estate sales and listing software packages.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

1.1 ENTER AND RECEIVE, GIVEN DATA

1.2 USE OPERATING MANUALS

1.3 USE ON LINE HELP WHERE IT IS AVAILABLE

The work for this module is based on the following rent roll:

LANDLORD: Your Name

TENANT'S NAME	DATE OF COMMENCEMENT	DATE OF COMPLETION	RENT PER WEEK	BOND - WEEKS	COMMENTS/ CONDITIONS
Mr Lawrie Denver	1.1.1996	30.6.1996	\$200	4	
Mrs Jan James	28.2.1996	27.2.1997	\$250	2	Maintain grounds
M/s Julia George	10.1.1996	9.9.1996	\$220	4	Maintain s/pool
M/s Liz Stefanof	13.3.1996	12.9.1996	\$210.50	3	Paint interior
Mrs Anne Cameron	12.1.1995	11.1.1996	\$210	2	
Mr Garrick Anderson	30.6.1995	29.6.1996	\$220	4	
Mrs Marcia Bowden	20.1.1996	19.4.1996	\$250	2	Maintain grounds
Mrs Liz Anderson	29.2.1996	28.2.1997	205.50	3	Maintain grounds

COMPUTER MANUALS

When carrying out the tasks below you will refer to the User's Manual so as to determine the correct procedure. The advantage of dedicated real estate programs is that the learning curve or procedure followed in the manual is short and easy to follow. This is because the program has been written to a small number (comparatively speaking) of jobs. The program should be able to "walk" you through the procedure of setting up the rent schedule above. Therefore, when you follow the instructions in the manual of setting up the schedule they will be easy and simple to follow. As with computer programs, manuals are becoming more user friendly in that they use a friendly and relaxed style of writing (although the Americanisms can be quite "jarring" to a number of people) and recognize that the operator may know nothing at all about computers.

Similarly, once the rent schedule has been established, the necessary calculations and printouts should be a simple procedure for dedicated programs. On the other hand universal spreadsheet programs are much more difficult to learn (a steep learning curve) but when mastered allow the operator much more flexibility and versatility.

Computer manuals are of two types:

REAL ESTATE COMPUTING

- Incremental and sequential; or
- Case study.

The incremental manual gradually builds up the user's knowledge and use of the dedicated program until he/she is able to perform the necessary tasks required in a real estate agency. This has the advantage of learning the procedures in small increments but minimizes an understanding of the final outcome or the "big picture".

Case study manuals on the other hand work on a different basis. They start with a model or dummy outcome (for example, the rent schedule above) already setup. The operator need only change the data to achieve the final outcome. This system minimizes the learning needs of the operator and he/she fully understands the outcome as it's basic structure is already there. Another advantage is that the operator becomes productive in the agency office more quickly. The disadvantage is that the learning outcome is only in the starting format and structure. If the operator wishes to change the format and structure he/she if then required to learn the necessary procedures as well.

A good manual should be a combination of both systems. Typically, a modern operator's manual will allow the operator to go either of the above routes. In one manual the operator is given the choice of taking either the "scenic" (incremental) or "express" (case study) route.

ON LINE HELP OR HELP BUTTONS

All windows programs now include a help button. The help button has become so universal that in some modern programs it has replaced the manual. Check the Manual's directions with the Help Button if available. The advantage of using the help button is that it is always available and good Help programs are "context sensitive". That is, they automatically determine the relevant Help procedures from the Commands entered by the operator. The Help Button is found on all Windows programs and should work in a similar manner to the Help Buttons on Word and Excel programs.

Help buttons have become more expansive over time and the help file is often the largest file in the program group. This expansion of use has tended to replace the need for manuals. This is illustrated by modern help buttons having an index or search feature for browsing.

The modern extension of the Help Button on modern programs is a Help Wizard. This is a series of task boxes that "walk" you through the necessary procedure step by step. Again, the expansion in use of Wizards has reduced the need for manuals.

SELF HELP QUESTIONS

- What sort of manual is used for the dedicated program you are studying? Do you think it is "user friendly" in approach and the use of jargon?
- List the directions or keystrokes necessary for you to set up the above rent schedule. Do you think these are excessive for a dedicated program ?
- How can manual and program improve on the directions given and the required number of keystrokes. With regard to the latter, can the program be more automatic than it is?
- Does your program have a help and/or Wizard buttons? Is the help button context sensitive? Does it have a browsers' index.? How useful did you find the button when setting up the rent schedule above? Did you prefer the use of the button or the manual?

TASK 1

If necessary to complete these tasks, you can assume any extra information that the program or locality requires. Please state any assumptions you make to help your supervisor in assessment.

Enter the above rent roll into a dedicated property management program. Print out the Rent Schedule in table form, similar to that above. Include the landlord's name (your name) on the schedule and submit the printout to your supervisor for assessment.

TASK 2

As in Task 1, but as at the 1.3.1996. How are periodic rents shown on the printout? Is this a satisfactory system?

TASK 3

As in Task 2 but assume that Mrs Cameron's flat is now vacant and she has asked for a refund of the bond money. However, you require one week's rent that has not been paid from the bond. How does the subject program determine and advise the landlord of this situation? Is it clear and adequate?

LEARNING OUTCOME 2

USE A (OR RANGE OF) REAL ESTATE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE PACKAGES.

TASK 4

Carry out Tasks 1 to 3 on at least one other dedicated property management software program. Submit the printouts to your supervisor;

- OR you can carry out the following alternative TASK 4:

ALTERNATIVE TASK 4

If your subject real estate agent has a computer listing service, analyze the program as follows:

- List the functions and services that the program provides
- How important and relevant are each of these?
- What is the opinion of the agent? In what areas does he/she think the program could be improved?

LEARNING OUTCOME 3

CUSTOMISE A REAL ESTATE SOFTWARE PACKAGE FOR THE USE OF A SPECIFIED BUSINESS

3.1 DEFINE THE COMPUTING REQUIREMENTS OF THE BUSINESS

3.2 IDENTIFY AVAILABLE SUITABLE REAL ESTATE SOFTWARE TO MEET BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS.

3.5 ENTER AND RETRIEVE GIVEN DATA - covered in learning outcome 1

3.6 USE OPERATING MANUALS - covered in learning outcome 1

3.7 USE ON-LINE HELP WHERE AVAILABLE - covered in learning outcome 1.

REAL ESTATE COMPUTING

For this learning outcome you are to determine the most suitable software package for your subject real estate agency for listing and analyzing potential buyers and sellers of real estate in your area. To do this you can refer to samples of such software packages attached to this module or any other such programs that the agent may be using or intending to use. The steps in analyzing the needs of the business are as follows:

- A real estate agency's computing requirements are generally, a function of the size of the business and/or the number of sales per annum. If it is a small agency whose income is based largely on property management, it will probably not need dedicated software to analyze the sales side of the business. It is necessary to firstly, pick those programs that carry out the functions that the agency requires. This should be based on the existing system that may be a manual card system or an older computer system.
- Do not forget that although the new programs are sophisticated and complex they are basically a database program with all the features and attributes in the Database Fundamentals and can always be largely emulated on spreadsheet programs such as Excel. A new computer program should at least enable the agent to do what he/she is doing now but more quickly and cheaply. Further, a good program should allow the agent to analyze sale prospects in a more scientific and sophisticated manner.
- The next consideration is the expense of the software as a ratio of the turnover from the sales department. Obviously, if the soft- and hardware exceeds \$100 000 it is not economical for a business where sales yield only about \$10 000 per annum. Using a work life of about 5 years for the computer system, the payback period can be used as a rule of thumb for comparing different systems. The computer system with the shortest payback period and with everything else equal, is the best option. Other matters to consider are rental versus buying where the taxation advantages of a rental system may outweigh the risk of being tied to a longer lease period.
- Another way of analyzing the potential programs is by way of the use of a grid covering the required features. The features are then given a score out of 5. Each cell in the grid is then weighted according to the importance of the feature to the agent and the weighted totals are added up to give each rival program a score. The total score is then divided by the cost to give a final score/dollar of cost. The program with the highest score is the best one for that agency. This method has the colloquial name of "bangs per buck".

TASK 5

Construct a weighted score grid as described above to evaluate and compare 2 dedicated software programs used for analyzing sale prospects. You can assume any part of the analysis that you do not have the particular information for. However, clearly state any assumptions that you make.

This task is to be forwarded to your supervisor for assessment.

3.3 ADAPT SOFTWARE TO MEET BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS

ADAPTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Generally, the more "dedicated" the software, the less able it is to be adapted to the specific needs of the agent. Ideally, the program should not be so rigid that the agent cannot adapt it to meet normal agency requirements. If the agent has a number of particular and specific requirements he/she may have to pay extra for the computer company to adapt the software or revert to a more generic method such as the use of spreadsheets that have the highest adaptability/flexibility. However, the construction of suitable spreadsheet requires a member of the firm to be expert in their use.

TASK 6

Discuss the problem of adaptation with your subject agent. Does he/she see a need for unusual changes to the dedicated software? Do not submit this Task.

3.4 WRITE CLEAR OPERATING MANUALS

The agent or staff member may have to write operating instructions or an alternative manual to that provided by the computer company. This is because the generic manual cannot always cover the necessary procedures and requirements of a specific office. For example, it may be office policy that that all sale prospects created by a dedicated program for that purpose be subdivided into localities suitable for processing by each branch office. This will require a system and instructions for the operator because:

- they may not even be in the generic manual
- they may be difficult to find in an extensive manual
- the instructions may be too complex as written in the manual.

Therefore, it is necessary for the agent to be able to write a clear operating manual or instructions for the operator.

TASK 7

Using the necessary procedures for Task 2, write an operating manual for the use of a person new to the operating system that clearly describes and lists the necessary procedure to be followed. Restrict the procedure to one A4 page only.

Submit to your supervisor for assessment.