



dataflow

**An independent review by Alan Day
for the Dennis Keeling Partnership**



dataflow~32 is the 32-bit client/server Windows95 and NT suite of accounting software from Dataflow UK Ltd., the authors of the well established dBFLEX character based system.

Dataflow started in 1981 and has been providing robust, packaged but tailorable business accounting solutions, typical, to 5-100 user sites and can claim over 1,000 clients. Dataflow spent five years, over twenty man-years, writing **dataflow~32** from scratch, taking advantage of the new technologies available and their considerable experience. Clearly that decision has positioned **dataflow~32** up with the best of the Windows-based accounting software. It is written using Delphi, Borland's Rapid Application Development tool for Windows and is available on today's standard databases, including Microsoft SQL Server and Borland InterBase. Dataflow also have plans to deliver an Active X tool-kit.

dataflow~32 is an intelligent Client/Server system, taking the best of both worlds from Fat-Client and Thin-Client technologies. Printing is managed by the Windows print manager. The latest release of **dataflow~32** includes System manager, General Ledger with Cash Book and Management Reporting, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, Order Processing, Multi-Locational Stock Control and Invoicing, and true Multi-Currency including Multiple Base Current functionality. The system also offers Multi-Company and Consolidation, Cost Centres and Direct Debiting facilities.

As with Dataflow's character based system, **dataflow~32** is also designed to integrate with other applications and existing operational systems. Third party specialist modules integrated with **dataflow~32** include Fixed Assets, Payroll, Manufacturing, Membership Contact Management, Job Costing and Road Haulage.

Due to the 'open' nature of the product and the import/export routines built in, just about any data can be easily electronically handled, at the same time safeguarding its integrity.

Additional reporting is achieved with the **dataflow~32** Analyzer module, which extracts data from the database and delivers presentational reports in MS-Excel, with drill back capabilities. An instant refresh icon updates reports with the most up to date data. Files are Excel workbooks, providing all the features with which accountants are familiar.

Gone is the need for fixed hierarchical accounting structures

dataflow~32 Customizer is a module that allows system tailoring to individual customer requirements. Screens and databases can be modified and processing can be added with DLLs. Report layouts can be changed with custom built fields automatically.

Customised changes to the standard product are automatically saved away and then written back to the system as and when upgrades are taken.

All upgrades are part of the support agreement and available from the Dataflow Web Site.

This new generation of accounting software offers access to information from any PC by users with a modicum of Windows knowledge. **dataflow~32** takes full advantage of those possibilities, while retaining the ability to use the keyboard rather than the mouse if desired.

Depending on the modules required, **dataflow~32** has no limit to the number of companies, with different calendars and account codes, that it can manage.

Multiple languages can be used within each company down to each user. Many improved standard Windows functions are incorporated throughout the system. Split screen processing is incorporated, for example, to show details of each highlighted line as you scroll down the list.

Menus are tailorable and of the drop down type, with regularly used menu items selectable and dropped as icons on a task bar for instant access.

Transaction amounts can be highlighted and using the right mouse button will offer options, one of which is to sum the items. Drag and drop functionality is available everywhere in the system, including to and from external applications such as MS-Excel.

Security features are incorporated down to account level, and because the system is configurable per user, permissions do extend to specific functions.

Gone is the need for fixed hierarchical accounting structures. An account code is merely a label which can be changed at will; all transactions are attached automatically to the new label. A general ledger account has a 10 digit alpha/numeric code (longer if required), but is not a fixed length code. Therefore, meaningful codes (or labels) can be used; Sales, Bank, Postage, etc.

All searches are performed by selecting from a drop down list in a window or, as each digit of the code is keyed, the required account is narrowed down and found for selection. Accounts are designated as P&L or B/S for year end purposes and are assigned with three groups for reporting.

Accounts can move groups at any time. For example, a bank account can be grouped with current assets until there is an overdraft and can then be grouped with current liabilities.

There is a facility to select transactions in a GL account and spread the amount over selectable periods of time to a designed account; i.e. advanced invoicing, prepayments, accruals etc. Also, each account can be flagged as a reconcilable account, which invokes a simple X against each transaction. As items are matched, a tick is displayed. The unreconciled items make up the account balance; an accountants 'essential'.

If Cost Centre functionality is required, there are up to five levels available with a 'tree' relationship that can be attached to a general ledger account, which prompted at document entry, can have postings restricted to the lowest level, or a selective but fixed relationship or a totally free selection, with different rules applying within each prime ledger.

The Accounts Payable and Receivable ledgers are equally rich with facilities to improve accounts management. Each account can have separate general ledger control accounts, as well as separate accounts for discounts, commission, exchange differences and adjustments. By account, specific document types can be assigned and there is no limit to the number of documents. Users can design any document, again using the simplicity of Windows.

The package represents another major advancement in computer accounting

Dunning letters prepared in **dataflow~32**, are an example where MS Word can be invoked to use the word processor functions for spelling, grammar, layout, tables etc.

There is excellent use of the graphical user interface to display all statistics in user definable colourful graphs.

In all ledgers, there is a particularly interesting correction facility that can be used to reverse a batch or journal, as well as create credit notes and replacement invoices. This is achieved by copying an existing document; journal, invoice, credit note, selecting the appropriate action and automatically creating a new document to be amended as required. A full audit trail is maintained with actual documents being created.

Another extremely useful feature is a simple de-allocation of cash, which reverses all or part of the initial transaction, reinstating the invoice and the unallocated cash on the ledger account.

The Invoicing module caters for not only straight forward invoices, but also scheduled invoices using a windowed calendar, pages of text, and a Product file containing attributes that enable a pricing matrix by customer to be created with comprehensive discounting and price break capabilities.

A GL account code can be attached to each product. Suppliers can be linked to the Product File and images of products can also be imported.

The Order Processing and Stock Control modules take the product into another sphere. The functionality available in SOP includes complex pricing/discount matrix by product, pack size, quantity, weight and customer, on line customer history at order entry, one order multiple deliveries, consolidation of orders for deliveries or deliveries for invoicing, back to back ordering with POP, where capabilities will meet all standard operational demands. The Stock system is no less short of functionality, handling such complexities that multi-locational stock in one or many warehouses present. There is also full and easy to use batch and serial number traceability.

The **dataflow~32** suite of accounting software boasts a sophisticated try multiple base Multi-Currency capability. It is EMU compliant and can handle any number of specified base currencies. Additional base currencies can be added at any time.

Transactions are calculated in all base currencies on entry, and are instantly available for enquiry and reporting by clicking on the alternative currencies. Invoices and cash can be entered to an individual AR or AP account in any currency, matching any currency transaction with any currency payment.

Where group companies operate in their national currency and additionally report in alternative currencies separately or together with other group members, **dataflow~32** reporting features manage these requirements with ease, ensuring any currency differences are recorded in designated GL accounts.

The logo for dataflow 32 features the word "dataflow" in a large, lowercase, italicized sans-serif font. To the right of the word, the number "32" is displayed in a stylized, blue, three-dimensional font that appears to be floating or attached to the end of the word.

Alan Day

Alan Day is a Senior Business Systems Analyst and Accounting Software Consultant with considerable Commercial Management experience at Director level within a cross section of industries.

As an independent consultant, he reviews and evaluates the leading accounting and business software products and manages a Portfolio of Profiles on those packages for publication by The Dennis Keeling Partnership.

He conducts system reviews, specifies requirements, identifies solutions and assists with implementations.

He is also an accountant, with extensive experience of directing and managing the accounts and administration functions for a variety of businesses.

Dennis Keeling Partnership

The Dennis Keeling Partnership was set up in 1983 and today Dennis Keeling is one of the leading authorities on business and accounting software in the UK. Prior to setting up his consultancy, he spent 15 years in General Management controlling some very large organisations and therefore speaks as an end-user and not as a technical developer.

Dennis writes for most of the leading newspapers and magazines as a freelance journalist, including The Financial Times and The Daily Telegraph. He has been analysing software for over 10 years. His first book - The Thesaurus of Business and Accounting Systems - was jointly published in 1989 with The Institute of Chartered Accountants. Today, he undertakes in-depth reviews, called Profiles, of all the leading international business systems. He has developed his own methodology for analysing the differences between the packages, covering over 1800 items of features and functionality.

He helped found BASDA, the Business and Accountancy Software Developers Association, in 1993 and today acts as its Chief Executive, representing 250 of the leading international software developers.



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