



User's Guide

Getting Started With Data Decisions MICROCOMPUTERS

The micro market is growing faster than any segment of the computer industry has ever grown before. It has already surpassed the mini in dollar value of current shipments and it is expected to exceed the dollar value of mainframe sales by 1987.

Because micro units are smaller and relatively inexpensive, more decisions are being made by more people than ever before. And since the number of choices is greater, more questions are raised and more information is needed. All corporate micro buyers, whether end users or DP professionals like yourself, have two basic needs:

1. Accurate, current, up-to-the-minute, easy-to-access information.
2. Consistent expert product evaluations based on hands-on experience.

Data Decisions' MICROCOMPUTERS is designed to give you both. It contains three big loose-leaf volumes—updated each month—and filled with all you need to know about micro hardware and software products for business.

HOW WE DESIGNED MICROCOMPUTERS—TO SERVE YOUR NEEDS

We contacted hundreds of known business users of microcomputers in person and via telephone, with questions about their use of personal computers and their needs for information: what kinds, what form, about what, when, etc. We held interviews with industry experts and learned their views. Then, with some good ideas about the design of a product that would meet user needs, we prepared a mock-up and took it to organized focus groups. The views of business reviewers were gathered separately in many group sessions conducted by professionals whose business it is to learn facts from potential users of new products. We learned facts.

All that we learned has gone into what you see today as the Data Decisions' Microcomputer Service.

What did we really learn? It was universally agreed that the most important information needed was hands-on evaluations of Microcomputer Software. And there is no other viable source of this key information. So we made that one of two themes that will permeate the entire service. You'll see our "hands-on" symbol on every page of our service; on the spine of each binder; explained behind a red tab at the front of each volume; on the product report (A-Z) tabs of our Software Product Reports where this special information is reported; and on the section of each Software Product Report entitled Hands-On Evaluation.

We also found out that much additional, useful specification, guidance, and rating information was needed; but it would be most valuable only if it was current and easy to use.

We responded by creating the information service you are now reading—MICROCOMPUTERS.

And that's where we got our co-theme: MORE. More reports, more analysis, more products covered, more current, more comprehensive, and easier to use.

FUTURE COVERAGE

In coming months we will flesh out the service with hundreds of additional in-depth, hands-on evaluations of key business software packages; thousands of reliable user ratings of key software and hardware products; full product write-ups of vital peripheral products; additional survey reports that will cover literally thousands of additional Microcomputer hardware and software products, and tutorial guidance from recognized experts in how to utilize the newest technology in the burgeoning microcomputer industry.

There's never been an information service like this one, and it's ready for you to use now. Let's examine some of its key sections more clearly.



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WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT MICROCOMPUTERS?

- **Analysis.** Hard-hitting analysis that highlights specific strengths and limitations of mainstream hardware and software products, and which discusses the suitability of these products for use in a corporate environment.
- **Hands-On Evaluations.** Independent testing of key software products by seasoned DP experts at Data Decisions' own labs. (Please refer to the detailed discussion of the highly-structured, scientific evaluation methodology found behind Tab 800—Software Packages-by-Vendor and behind the red tab with the hands-on symbol at the front of each binder.)
- **Corporate Focus.** The information—and outlook—business buyers need to make smart purchase decisions and handle new issues raised by the spread of PCs.
- **What you Need to Know to Grow.** Information on interface boards, memory extenders, modems, LANS—on all the products you'll need tomorrow as well as today.

WHAT DOES MICROCOMPUTERS COVER?

- **Microcomputer Systems**—Everything you need to know. Desktops; high-level intelligent terminals marketed as independently programmable standalones; multiuser UNIX-type based systems; executive workstation/"professional" computers; integrated office automation workstations; supermicros; kneetops; portables/transportables . . . and MORE.
- **Software**—Spreadsheets; word processing packages; graphics; financial packages; independent operating systems; DBMSs; office automation; communication packages . . . and MORE.
- **Expansion/Extension Cards**—Controllers; clocks; A to D converters; extra quad boards; interface boards; solid state disks; memory boards; processor enhancement; auxiliary processors . . . and MORE.
- **Communications**—Micro LAN networks; micro modems; micro terminals; terminal emulators; main-frame-to-micro downloading; database access packages; electronic mail . . . and MORE.
- **Peripherals, Accessories, Support Equipment**—Printers; plotters; monitors; floppies; hard disks; key-boards; tape drives; OCR, bar code readers, sensors; power supplies; power surge protectors; cooling fans . . . and MORE.

WHAT KIND OF REPORTS WILL I FIND?

There are four basic types of Data Decisions' reports:

- **Far-reaching technology reports** that give you the background you need to understand issues and tradeoffs and make intelligent choices.
- **Broadbased product surveys** that show you what's available in a format that quickly guides you to specific products that are right for you.
- **In-depth product analyses** that highlight the strengths and limitations of every major mainstream micro-computer hardware and software business product. Software products are tested at Data Decisions' own labs and we evaluate them in live hands-on usage.
- **Accurate, reliable user ratings** that let you see how products measure up in actual use.

WHAT ELSE DO I GET?

- **Monthly Newsletters** that highlight late-breaking industry happenings, discuss new product announcements, and provide a calendar of events. The MICROCOMPUTERS Newsletter also contains two special features:

"Magazine Roundup"—calls your attention to the best articles published in the burgeoning microcomputer trade press during the previous month, and

"This Month's Test Results"—capsule versions of the key findings of this month's hands-on product analysis.



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- Vendor Directory with thousands of informative profiles on companies offering microcomputer products and services of all types.
- Unlimited Free Telephone Consulting by microcomputer experts whose only job is to provide quick answers to your questions.

HOW IS MICROCOMPUTERS ORGANIZED?

MICROCOMPUTERS is divided into three monthly-updated volumes:

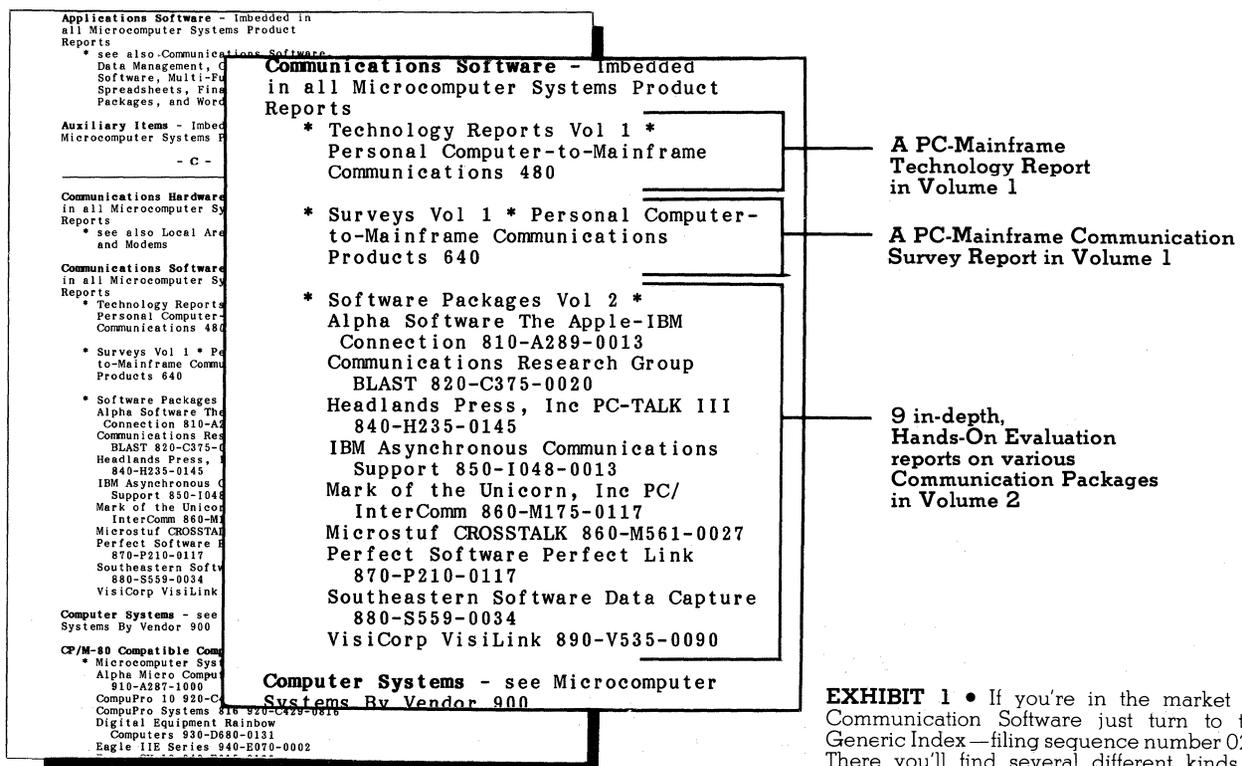
1. Volume 1 contains indexes, a monthly newsletter, technology reports, user ratings, and software and hardware surveys.
2. Volume 2 contains software evaluation reports arranged alphabetically by vendor name.
3. Volume 3 contains product reports on Microcomputer hardware systems and peripherals arranged alphabetically by vendor name, a vendor directory, and microcomputer case studies.

As a convenience to users, all three volumes begin with a table of contents that covers the entire service.

TABS AND PAGE NUMBERING STRUCTURE

Each major section of MICROCOMPUTERS is identified by a tab. Within each section, except for the final software and hardware "Products-by-Vendor" sections, all reports are given 3-digit filing sequence numbers beginning with the same first digit. For example, the filing sequence number for the Local Area Network Technology Report is 425. These numbers, printed at the bottom of each page, are not necessarily consecutive since space must be left for future reports. Each page within an individual report is also numbered for your convenience.

In the hardware and software "Products-by-Vendor" sections, the filing sequence numbers begin with a 3-digit code based on the first letter of the vendor name, followed by a hyphen, the first letter of the vendor name, followed by a 3-digit code, a hyphen and a 4-digit number based, whenever possible, on the model number. Thus the filing sequence number for the Apple Lisa is 910-A551-0010.





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MICROCOMPUTERS contains the following tabs:

Tab Name	Sequence Number	Tab Name	Sequence Number
Contents/Index	100	Software Packages By Vendor	800
Newsletter	200	Packages • A-to-B	810
User's Guide	300	Packages • C	820
Technology Reports	400	Packages • D	830
User Ratings	500	Packages • E-to-H	840
User's Brand Preference	510	Packages • I	850
Software Ratings	530	Packages • J-to-M	860
Microcomputer System Ratings	540	Packages • N-to-R	870
Peripherals Ratings	550	Packages • S	880
Surveys — Microcomputer Software	600	Packages • T-to-Z	890
Operating Systems	605	Microcomputer Systems By Vendor	900
System Utilities	615	Systems • A-to-B	910
Data Management	620	Systems • C	920
Spreadsheets	625	Systems • D	930
Word Processors	630	Systems • E-to-H	940
Graphics	635	Systems • I-to-L	950
Communications	640	Systems • M-to-N	960
Multifunction	645	Systems • O-to-R	970
Surveys — Microcomputer Hardware	700	Systems • S	980
Microcomputer Systems	715	Systems • T	990
Disks	720	Systems • U-to-Z	995
Printers	725	Peripherals By Vendor	1000
Monitors	730	Peripherals • A-to-B	1010
Local Area Networks	735	Peripherals • C-to-D	1020
Modems	740	Peripherals • E-to-H	1030
Expansion Boards	745	Peripherals • I-to-J	1040
Auxiliary Items	750	Peripherals • K-to-N	1050
		Peripherals • O-to-Q	1060
		Peripherals • R-to-S	1070
		Peripherals • T-to-Z	1080
		Vendor Directory	1100
		Case Studies	1200

WHERE DO I START MY SEARCH?

Just about anywhere! Almost every section of MICROCOMPUTERS is designed as an entry point that will lead you to the information you need. So, when planning to make a purchase, you can:

1. Start with the index for the broadest possible view.
2. Look at the newsletters for recent enhancements and new product announcements.
3. Read the technology reports for background and for the pointers on evaluation, purchase, and installation that you need to successfully integrate a new product into your shop.
4. Examine the user ratings to see which products others like best.
5. Study the surveys to discover your options FAST.
6. Turn directly to the product reports for comprehensive factual information and hard-hitting independent analysis by the industry's largest and most experienced analyst/editor staff.



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TYPICAL USES OF SERVICE

Listed below are some frequent, typical uses of our service. Along with these major question types, we are including simple step-by-step instructions for answering each of these inquiries.

Task	Solution
A. What type of products does a particular vendor manufacture and how can I contact him?	Consult Vendor Directory for specific company information.
B. How can I locate information on the major spreadsheet packages in the marketplace today?	Consult Generic Index for a complete listing of reports under spreadsheet category.
C. How can I find in-depth information on multi-user microcomputer systems?	Look up multi-user systems in Product By Vendor index.
D. What were the most significant micro-computer announcements made last month?	Read the current newsletter. If a specific product is on your mind and you don't see it, check the index and then call Telephone Consulting if necessary.
E. Are there any good trade shows being scheduled for the coming months that will give me an opportunity to examine new equipment?	Read the current newsletter. The last section lists a Calendar of Events.
F. How can I get a quick, clear picture of the differences between the various models of Eagle 16-bit systems?	Access product report on Eagle 16-bit systems. Read systems overview section of hardware.
G. What would a medium scale configuration of a Burroughs B20 cost?	Access product report on Burroughs B20 Series. Locate <input type="checkbox"/> Packaged Systems section of <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HARDWARE section for detailed pricing.
H. How can I educate myself about LAN (Local Area Network)?	Consult the Local Area Network Report of the Technology Section.
I. I need a 3270 emulation package for my CP/M-based system. What packages are available?	Look in microcomputer software surveys under communication section (640). Consult dot chart under terminal emulation and PC operating systems supported.
J. I'm looking for information on 160 cps dot matrix printer. Where can I find this information?	Refer to the printer dot chart in the Printer Survey Section to find products that are available. Then turn to survey section for more detailed information.
K. I'm considering the Apple Macintosh. How can I interface it to an IBM environment?	Reference <input type="checkbox"/> I/O & Communications section of the Apple Macintosh Product Report.

WHAT IF I CAN'T FIND THE INFORMATION I NEED?

If you have researched the solution to your problem with the aid of our Master Index, Supplementary Index, and the Generic Index and still cannot locate the necessary information, then why not contact us directly? If the answers to your problems are less time-critical, you can jot down your questions or problem on the INQUIRY SERVICE FORM following this User's Guide. Our job is to make sure that none of your information need go unanswered, and our analysts will research your problem and respond with the required information, either by telephone, telex, or by mail. As a subscriber, you can be assured that all your information needs will get our immediate attention.

Of course, if your problems are time-sensitive, you can telephone our consultants directly, FREE of charge. Our phone number is (609) 429-9393.



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TECHNOLOGY REPORTS

Data Decisions' technology reports are designed to give you the background you need to put your purchase decisions in perspective within the larger information processing picture. They tell you what products can and can't do—and explain how they'll fit into your overall operation. They also tell you what to look for when evaluating and purchasing products and how to install them with a minimum of interruptions and a maximum productivity increase. The technology reports include market studies, management advisory reports, and tutorials on technical topics like microprocessor chip technology, hard disk cassette drives, modems on a chip, color printers and networking PCs.

USER RATINGS

Because you want to know how a product measures up in actual use, Data Decisions continually surveys the user community to bring you statistically valid user ratings on product efficiency, reliability, installation time, ease of use, vendor support and a host of other capabilities that vary, depending on the type of product being examined. This information is presented in easy-to-read bar charts that let you quickly compare the products you're interested in with similar products from other vendors (see Exhibit 4).

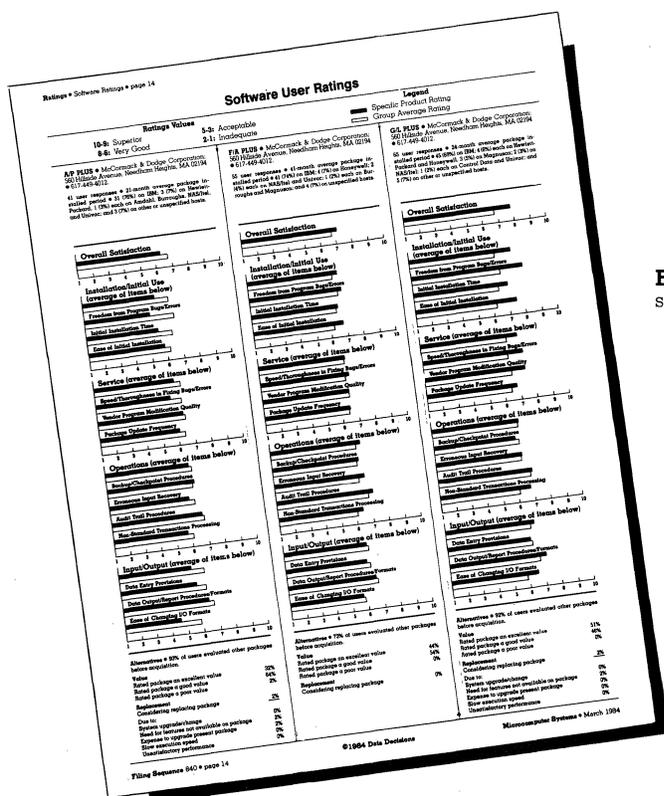


EXHIBIT 4 • The bar charts let you quickly see how similar products compare.

SURVEY REPORTS

Whether you're looking for a micro, a specific spreadsheet, or a modem, MICROCOMPUTERS survey reports show you what's available and help you to narrow your search.

Each survey begins with a quick-reference dot chart that lets you zero in on appropriate products. For instance, the chart for a survey on personal computers gives you easy-to-absorb information on operating systems supported, processor type, number of users handled, base configuration, hard disk capability and price. A final column points you to the page where you will find the full specs (see Exhibit 5).



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- B. Analysis**—this section details the package's capabilities and contains an incisive, hard-hitting commentary that highlights the relative strengths and limitations of the lab-tested products.
- C. Hands-On Evaluation**—this section judges the product on the following criteria: environment, documentation, functionality, ease of use, support, system interface, and vendor experience.
- D. Product Overview**—included in the software overview are the following: terms & support, component summary, computers & operating systems supported, minimum operating requirements, features (functions of the package), and an optional "other facilities" section used to describe add-on or extra cost options provided with the package.

Alpha Software — The Executive Package
Management Decision Support Training

PROFILE
Function • provides a structured environment for the development of management professionals in the use of spreadsheet programs and the BASIC programming language.
Compatible Operating Systems Supported • IBM Personal Computers and PC-DOS, of compatible systems running MS-DOS.
Configuration • any configuration capable of running VisiCalc.
Current Version/Version Revised • 1.0/first specified on product of Lotus 1-2-3.
Number of Installations • no known product provides word count.
Optional Associated Software • none.
Vendor • Alpha Software Corp., 30 B Street, Burlington, MA 01803 • 617/229-2624.
Price • \$145 retail purchase.

ANALYSIS
The development of true computer literacy, implying at least a limited ability to manipulate the computer to perform tasks is a goal of many professionals and managers in business. Achieving that goal is often hampered by a requirement to invest considerable time in learning basic skills before tasks with any true significance can even be considered. Traditional teaching and tutorial material is difficult to relate to business problems and frustrating to use because it tends to treat seasoned professionals as children just because they are not computer experts.
The Executive Package approaches the problem differently. It presents the business professional with a set of very basic computer tools to solve business problems, including both programs written in the BASIC programming language and module developed using the popular VisiCalc spreadsheet program. These modules are probably simplest in terms of real corporate needs, but their brevity is useful. The material is presented in a format similar to a Harvard Business School case study, and includes the application in that manner the business professional.

STRENGTHS
The primary strength of the Executive Package is the concept. Rather than teach a business professional computer applications by leading through cutsey games and simple exercises, it starts with the basic computer support for a business application and develops both concept and computer support in an almost "live" environment.
A wide variety of case studies are presented, each demonstrating computer power through a different business problem. By selecting the proper vehicle for instruction, specifically any professional can work in an area which is familiar and topical.
Some of the material provided is useful even in its current form. There are "utilities" which compute depreciation by all popular methods, find the systematic risk of a common stock, or apply three-on-three smoothing to a series.
An audio tape is used to introduce the user to the package and its purpose, a technique which goes a long way toward ensuring a positive attitude at the start of the session and which helps define the way in which the product is used. It even takes the user through a sample case study.

PRODUCT QUALITY RATINGS

DEVELOPMENT	1
DOCUMENTATION	2
FUNCTIONALITY	3
EASE OF USE	4
SUPPORT	5
SYSTEM INTERFACE	6
EXPERIENCE OF VENDOR	7

PURCHASE PRICE RANGE

Alpha Software Executive Package \$145

Microcomputer Systems • February 1984

EXHIBIT 6 • Independent, Hands-On Evaluation of important software products points out the strengths and limitations of each package. The Product Quality Ratings show at a glance how we rated the software package.

The Microcomputer System Product Report (see Exhibit 7) has four basic elements:

- A. Profile**—Included in this brief overview are the following most important aspects of the product: operating system, data management, communications/networks, models, CPU (processor by name/model number), memory parameters, chassis slots, ports, mass storage, terminals/workstations, printers, first customer shipment date, systems delivered, comparable systems, vendor profile information, Canadian address, and the type of dealers/distributors. In addition, the product's general price range is represented by a bar graph which illustrates configuration details making up small and large configurations.
- B. Analysis**—this section contains an incisive, hard-hitting commentary that highlights the relative strengths and limitations of every mainstream product; this is not a rehash of the vendor's documentation and sales brochures. Pertinent historical facts on the product's evolution are often included.
- C. Software**—this section of the report describes the major software offered by the vendor and includes terms and support information. Pricing is supplied for each separately-priced software package component.
- D. Hardware**—this segment of the report lists and describes the hardware offered by the vendor and includes terms and support information. For each hardware component, basic configurability is provided including a statement of its attachability requirements along with a description of the facilities it provides. Pricing is supplied for each separately-priced hardware component.



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COMMITMENT TO EASE-OF-USE AND CURRENCY

Data Decisions pledges to you, our subscriber that the information in this service will be kept current and that every aspect of the service will ensure ease-of-use. We pledge ourselves to the timely updating of every product report so that no product report is ever more than 12 months old; updates will be performed sooner in case of significant product changes within that time period. Reports are revised immediately on a best effort basis, generally within 90 days of a major announcement. Newsletters will carry important event reports within 30 days. Our consultant service, which is FREE to subscribers, can be contacted by telephone. The telephone number is (609) 429-9393.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR SERVICE?

This service was designed for the corporate buyer and/or user of microcomputer products. If you have any suggestions on ways to improve our service, we are more than willing to seriously consider your valuable ideas. Following the Inquiry Service Form at the back of this User's Guide is a self-mailing USER COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS form. Our Editorial Review Board will welcome your input. In particular, we'll be especially pleased to hear from you about specific software or hardware products that you'd like us to evaluate. Call the Microcomputers Managing Editor, (609) 429-7100 for even faster, more direct input.

OTHER DATA DECISIONS SERVICES

In addition to this monthly updated MICROCOMPUTERS reference service, Data Decisions publishes a comprehensive, monthly-updated three-volume service on Computer Systems with an emphasis on coverage of mainframes, minis, vendor-supplied software, program development aids, terminals, and peripherals—all the interacting components of an actual system.

Our monthly-updated Communications Systems service provides 3 volumes of coverage on digital transmission, voice, image, electronic messaging and office automation, timesharing, public data bases, carriers and other voice and data communications products and services.

Our monthly-updated three-volume Software information service reports on and analyzes thousands of vital, currently available software packages.

Please call or write for details.

• END

INQUIRY SERVICE FORM

Dear Subscriber:

Our job is to make sure that none of your microcomputer information needs ever go unanswered. If the answer you seek cannot be located in our published reports, then you can contact us directly to get the required information. Please state your information needs as concisely as possible in the space provided. Identify yourself and then simply fold this form, seal it, and drop it in the mail. Our analysts will research your problem and contact you directly, either by telephone or by mail. You can be assured that all your questions will get our immediate attention. If your information needs are time critical, you can telephone us directly.

(ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON BACK)

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

I am a current subscriber.

I am evaluating the service for a possible subscription.

(SIGNATURE)

PLEASE USE THIS SPACE FOR COMMENTS

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First Class

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New York, N.Y.

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Data Decisions™

20 Brace Road
Cherry Hill, New Jersey 08034

Attention: MICROCOMPUTERS Consultants

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USER COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS

Please evaluate our Service from these four perspectives:

ACCURACY	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
CURRENCY	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
EASE OF USE	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
COMPLETENESS OF COVERAGE	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

(Please circle; 10=Excellent, 1=Poor)

Comments & Suggestions (About any aspect of our Service):

(ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON BACK)

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

I am a current subscriber.

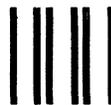
I am evaluating the service for a possible subscription.

(SIGNATURE)

Upon completing this form please fold it on the dotted lines, seal it and drop it in the mail.

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Permit No. 3838

New York, N.Y.

Postage will be paid by addressee:

Data DecisionsTM

20 Brace Road
Cherry Hill, New Jersey 08034

Attention: MICROCOMPUTERS Consultants

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