Organization is in the cards

Corex's CardScan makes easy the business of storing names and addresses / Simson L. Garfinkel

G O TO A CONFER-
ence, an afternoon
seminar, or even a
high-powered din-
ner party, and
you're likely to come home with a
fist full of business cards. A quaint
holdover from the 19th century,
business cards are actually one of
the primary ways to circulate
names, addresses, and contact in-
formation in the modern world.

Business cards are incredibly
flexible, and decidedly low-tech.
You can be simple and just put
your name, address, and phone
number on a card. Or you can get
fancy, and populate your title
piece of real estate with a logo,
two addresses, a company slogan,
and more. Today's business cards
increasingly are filled with Inter-
net-related information, like e-
mail addresses and Web sites.

While business cards are a
great way to transmit information,
they're not terribly practical for
information storage. They're easy
to misplace, and it's hard to search
through a stack of cards to find
somebody in particular.

One approach that I have used
in the past for dealing with busi-
ness cards is to photocopy a dozen
or so cards onto a big page, punch
holes in the paper, and keep ev-
erything in a three-ring binder.
The cards that I find myself refer-
ring to again and again get typed
into my computerized address

book.

Another way to manage your
business cards is to scan them into
your computer directly, then man-
age the information using
CardScan, a nifty product by
Cambridge-based Corex Technol-
ogies. Stripped-down versions of
CardScan ship with some scan-
ners, such as Visioneer's
PaperPort. Corex just shipped
Version 4.0 of its full-strength ap-
plication, priced at roughly $80.

CardScan is actually two pro-
ducts in one. The first is a
Windows 95 contact-management
program that is specially opti-
mized for managing scanned
business cards. The second part of
the CardScan equation is the
CardScan 300 business card scan-
ner. This $270 device connects to a
Windows-based computer through
the parallel port and lets you scan
cards directly into the CardScan
application.

The CardScan application
program is a pleasure to use. The
address book creates a little data-
base with the fields for each of the
pieces of information that goes on
a business card. Although I prefer
free-format address books to
those based on fields, CardScan is
flexible enough to store many dif-
ferent kinds of addresses.

For each business card,

CardScan stores an image in its
database. The program then ana-
lyzes the card, looking for the
person's name, address, phone,
and other information. The
program automatically recognizes
words like "Fax" and "Pager" and
assigns the information to fields
with these labels. Slogans show up
in a field called "Other."

Once a card is scanned into a
database, you can go back and
proofread the information. As you
correct it, CardScan will automati-
cally display the particular part of
the card from where the informa-
tion was scanned.

CardScan has a great "Quick-

Search" feature that lets you
quickly find the entry for a person
by just typing a few letters of
their name. By default, the Quick-
Search screen displays the
person's name, company and
phone, although you can custom-
ize this. To see the person's full
record, just click on the name. You
can also click on a little icon of a
telephone to dial their phone num-
ber or click on an envelope to send
them e-mail.

There are a few rough edges
here and there. The CardScan
program crashed on me frequent-
ly: I never lost information, but
programs shouldn't crash. The
program doesn't let me click on
URLs and automatically open
them in Web browsers, and it
sends e-mail using Microsoft's

MAPI system, rather than just us-
ing the "mailto:" system that
Internet Explorer and Netscape
use.

But my biggest gripe is with
paper envelopes. It would be nice
if I could just click a button and
have an envelope come off my
printer with the address, bar code,
and return address. You can do
this with CardScan, but it's diffi-
cult.

Although CardScan's software
can work with conventional scan-
ners, the optical character
recognition does a much better
job when used with the company's
special-purpose scanner. Cards
that I've scanned with my Vision-
eer PaperPort routinely have
scanning errors. Card images that
I scanned with my PaperPort and
transferred to the CardScan appli-
cation also have a way of
occasionally making the applica-
tion program crash.

Cards that I scan with the
CardScan 300 scanner, on the oth-
er hand, normally scan with no
errors. The scanning process is
smooth and simple. And unlike
other scanning applications that
I've used, you can do all of your
scanning at once, then leave your
computer alone while it does the
optical character recognition in
the background.

The new 4.0 version of Card-
Scan allows you to transfer your
cards into more than 40 different
applications, including ACT!, Day-
Timer Organizer, Lotus
Organizer, and Microsoft Outlook.
You can also synchronize the
CardScan application directly with
a 3Com Palm Pilot.

For more information, check
out the Corex Web site at
http://www.corex.com.

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