

Contact Sage Pro™ (reviewed on 09/08/2003)

One of the unavoidable chores of the financial advisory business is Keeping Track - of clients, of the products we've sold to those clients, and of the advisor's interaction with both. It's a formidable task, and many systems have been devised to allow us to do it efficiently. Of course, it's also a marvelously lucrative opportunity, which is why the good systems focus, not just on record keeping, but also on allowing us to use that stored information, easily and quickly, in our **marketing**. A really good "client/asset relationship manager" (which is one label for the software tools which do all this) is a good **marketing** tool.

Contact Sage Pro™ is one such program. It was designed for financial and insurance advisors and agents and its layout shows it. The toolbar at the top (see Fig. 1) provides quick access to the tasks and content areas. The **notepad** and **remarks** tools are always available, and provide a handy means to record notes on client conversations (can you say "compliance"?). The **calendar**, while a bit odd-looking, is useful, and permits quick access to (and editing of) the appointments and contacts for those appointments.

One tool I really like is the **Investment Profile**. With the click of a button, you're presented with a neat, one-page summary of the client's investment positions, with a summary by Fund Family at bottom - without leaving the client's record.

The **reports** available in **Contact Sage Pro™** are entirely adequate, but I had a bit of trouble learning how to produce them. The procedure is not all that intuitive. That said, it would have been a lot easier if I had bothered to **read the manual first!** (Most of my consulting clients, like most software users, don't, so I generally, when trying out a new program, try to "jump right in", to see how easy (or hard) it is to learn the program that way. Almost every time, it's much more difficult than it would have been after even a quick read of the manual. **There's a Moral here!**).

There's no **offline Help** in Contact Sage Pro™. But the Manual, and a brief User's Guide (for those who insist upon getting up and running right **now** and who intend to ignore the above Moral) are available from the initial menu, along with a button for the Activities screen (which shows Contact Birthdays, Family Member Birthdays, Appointments, and a To Do List for any chosen date), and buttons for the Contacts, Reports, and Utilities screens. There's also a 65-minute multi-media tutorial included on the program CD. That tutorial is also available if you click on **HELP** while in Contact Sage Pro™, but you must be connected to the internet to use it.

Finding contacts, individually or in groups, based on specific search criteria, is easy, using the **SEARCH** function. Just select the values you want in the relevant fields, in the **Find Contacts** screen (see Fig. 4), and Contact Sage Pro™ will provide you with a list of contacts meeting your criteria.

Clicking on the **Reports** button produces a menu from which the user may select Contact Report, Commission Report, Premium Report, Status Report, and Labels. The reports, by the way, can be done in Windows® Notepad, Microsoft Word®, or Excel®. The reports can be selected to print any combination of fields in any order.

Click the **Utilities** button and you get a menu (see Fig. 5) that lets you do some **serious** customization of the program, to suit the way you want to use it. You can change the names of the insurance and investment fields (and choices for those fields) and add more of your own, as well as general User Defined Fields. There's a **lot** of functionality in this program.

But Contact Sage Pro™ isn't a full-blown Client/Asset/Portfolio Management program, and wasn't designed to be. It won't let you download from DST Fanmail® or other information provider. You must enter the values of the securities and insurance holdings yourself. If automatic download of unit values, transactions, etc. is something you require, this isn't the program for you. Try DBCams®, EZ-Data's "Client

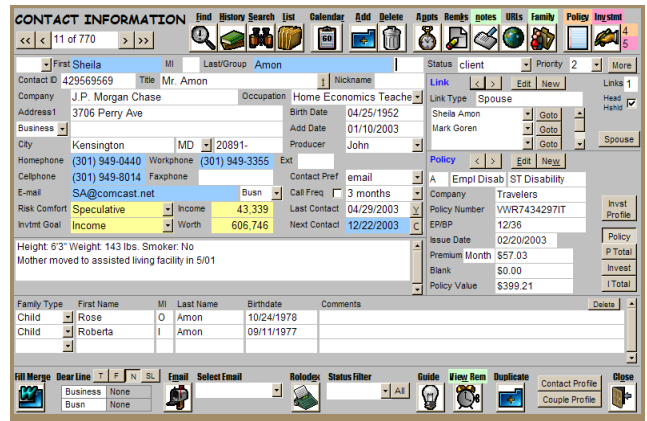


Figure 1 - Contact Information screen

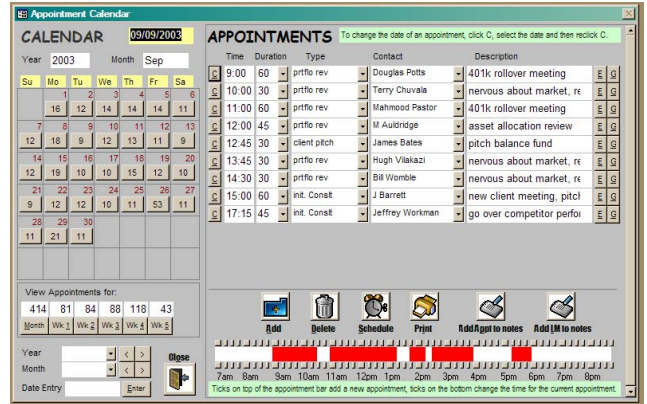


Figure 2 - The Calendar

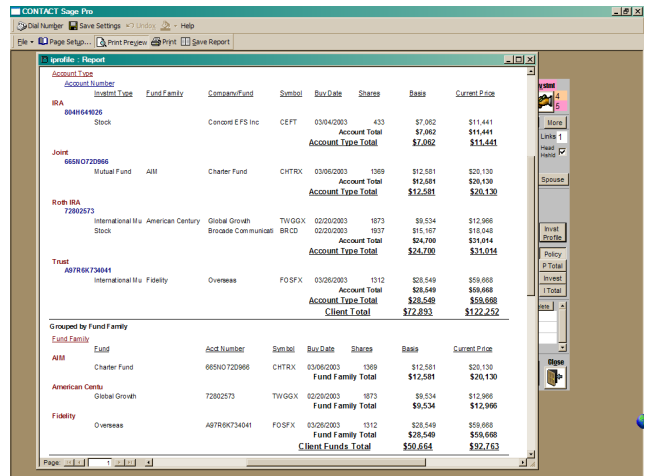


Figure 3 - Investment Profile report

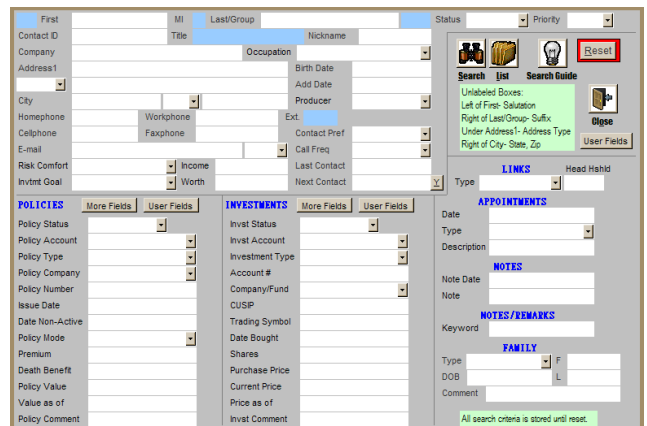


Figure 4 - Find Contacts screen

Data System®®, or the like. And figure on spending many times what Contact Sage Pro™ costs.

One thing Contact Sage Pro™ *does* offer which is normally available only in higher-end packages is a PDA Interface. It puts most of the information in the program in your Palm Pilot® or other “Personal Digital Assistant” device with a simple synchronization. I can’t tell you more about that particular functionality because my PDA is a Sony Clie® NX70V, which uses Palm® OS5, on which Contact Sage Pro™ hasn’t yet been tested. But when that’s been done, I’ll review the PDA functionality in a posting on the software forum I moderate on *Financial Planning Interactive* (www.financial-planning.com / Discussion / Software).

Contact Sage Pro™ is one of the best software values I’ve seen in a while. It’s not just a generic “contact manager” with a few customized fields. It was built for insurance and financial advisors. The developer, Bill Jacobs, takes that “custom built” part *very* seriously. I know, because he retained me to help with the design, and I will happily attest to the fact that the guy *listens!*

Contact Sage Pro™ costs \$295 for the system and support for the first year, and \$100 per year after that for the latest version updates and continuing support. The PDA module is a one-time additional \$95 (support for which is included in the annual \$100 support charge for the program). That’s an introductory price, and, like most (but not all) introductory prices, it’s a real bargain. Program information is available at www.contactsagepro.com

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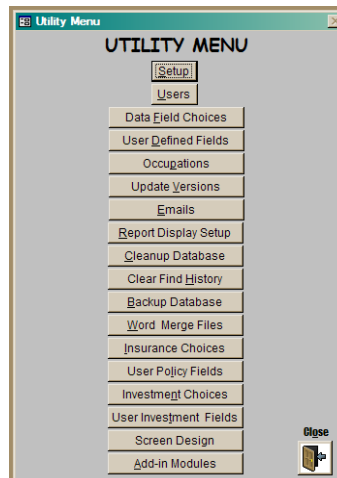


Figure 5 - The UTILITIES menu