

# Software Review — Nutshell Plus II

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## NutPlus—The Relational File (Database) Manager



There is no single program that has captivated my attention and time as has **Nutshell Plus II (NutPlus)**. To me, **NutPlus** is as useful a software tool as the original **Lotus 123**. Like a spreadsheet, the potential uses for this elegant database program are limited only by one's imagination. Now that you know that this review is anything but objective about this product, let me explain why it is easy to become captivated by **NutPlus**.

Back in the *olden-days* of personal computers—circa 1983, a computer manufacturer named Leading Edge bundled a group of software products with each computer it sold. One of those programs was the first version of **Nutshell** — a flat-file database program. Though **Nutshell** has been greatly enhanced since then, its original attraction of being very flexible and a snap to set up and use has never been diminished. Today's version of this program has the following key features:

- Single database size limited only by the amount of free disk space available.
- Allowance for more than 20 links between files—The program's technical specifications say it is at least 20, but I have had more than 40 active at once. All those links do tend to slow down summarization and sort routines.
- Unlimited number of records per file.
- 60,000 fields per file/layout.
- 60,000 macros per file (a form of programmability).
- Field types: text, number, date, time, calculated, sub summary and grand summary.
- Text field size to 15 million characters and with automatic word wrap.
- Automatic indexing of all fields—In other words, the user does not have to predefine special indexes or key fields as in **dBase** and **Q&A** for each field that a search or query will be performed on; nor does **NutPlus** have to reindex upon updating the database.

There are many other features relating to finds (queries), sorting, layouts (record structures or views), printing, exporting and importing data, and the type of calculation formulas one can use. To date, after reviewing other products such as **dBase**, **Q&A**, **Ask SAM**, **Paradox**, **SuperBase**, **Reflex**, and **Revelation**, I have yet to find a database at any level that combines the speed; ease of use; flexibility; and, most importantly for me, the ability to manipulate text fields as **NutShell Plus II**. I keep looking for something better, but cannot find it.

Some more common ways that I have seen **NutShell Plus II** used are the following:

- As a mailing list manager—With **NutPlus**' text features you can create a simple but elegant mass mailing system.
- As a financial accounting package—I have seen simple **NutPlus** databases that do nothing more than act as a check register, all the way up to a complicated system that includes accounts payable, receivables, and payroll.
- An order entry and inventory system—This is where file linking is most handy.
- A project management system that includes schedule information, cost reporting, and cost control.
- A work-day calendar system to keep track of hours and appointments—This system was tied into an invoicing system for a service organization.

Projects I have worked on have required that we develop some unique applications for **NutPlus**. Some more *nonstandard* ways we have put **NutPlus** to use are the following:

- A document chronology system—In this system a synopsis of the actual document is a single text field (unlimited length). Other fields include the date sent and received, the parties it was sent to and who wrote it, and a field to put code numbers or words for fast searches. This system has successfully been used in projects involving hundreds of thousands of documents. The purpose of the chronology is to keep track of many documents and locate documents quickly, based upon any potential query.
- A CPM schedule management system—On a 4-year project that had a 4,000-activity CPM schedule updated monthly, we needed to analyze the change in the schedule activities (duration and logic ties) over time. By creating a single database for each schedule iteration and linking the files together, we could decide quickly which schedule activity changes were important to review.
- The CPM schedule analysis required for importing and exporting of data between **Lotus Symphony**, **WordStar**, **Primavera**, and **Nutshell**—**Nutshell** has so many ways of importing and exporting data that it was a snap. Since that project we have used **NutPlus** as an import/export platform for other programs that could not talk directly to each other.

**NutPlus** uses the idea of layouts (views or windows) that the user can easily define for operations such as data entry, browsing through records, and printing specific reports. Each layout is modified easily by the user to meet a particular need.