PCComputing

TOOLKIT

By BILL HOWARD

The tools you reach for most often at home are a hammer and a screwdriver. But when you're faced with an unusual job, you're glad you also have snap-ring pliers, an electronic stud finder, and a miter box—special tools for special purposes.

Organization charting programs are the snap-ring pliers of PC software: you don't use them every day, and they're good for only one special task. You could get the job done eventually with a generic tool—but why should you? Your time is worth more than what one of these programs costs, and nothing else does the job as thoroughly or efficiently.

Spend half an hour with a program like Org Plus, and you can crank out a crisp visual representation of who works for whom in a 30-person department. That's a mixed blessing: overuse of organization charts can be one symptom of a company hung up on management by memo. But org charts also give you a quick fix on where a new or transferred employee fits in, in a way that a flat file of names, titles, and phone extensions never can. Org charts also explain the structure of your workgroup or department graphically to your VP. And if your regular receptionist is out sick, the visual nature of an organization chart (with a phone extension under each name) makes it easy for a temp to direct calls.

the manner of the First Corollary of Home and Auto Repair: When your hands are holding together two reluctant pieces that are poised to spring apart, *anything* within arm's reach can and will be used to fasten them to-
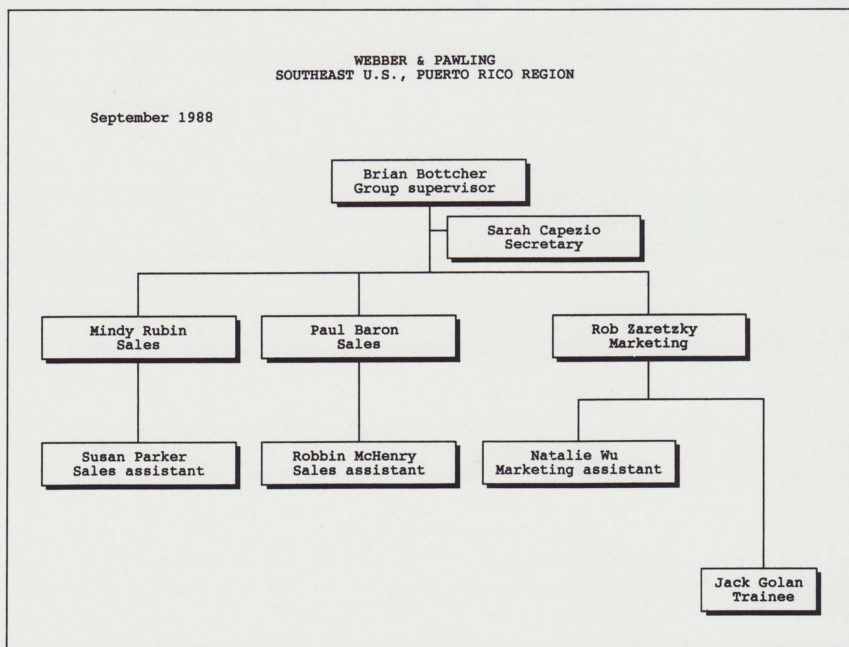
Why do organization charts the hard way? Org Plus is the right tool for the job.

gether. So you adapted word processors and spreadsheets, making heavy use of the vertical bar and hyphen keys as line-drawing tools. It was a slow, awkward process, but it worked—sort of.

Graphics software also worked, sort of. When you weren't using AutoCAD to draft building plans, you could use it to craft org charts (you could represent almost one floor's worth of the Pentagon's staff on an E-size plotter print); the only problems were slow speed and a $2,850 price tag. Paint programs were closer to the mark, provided you could get the names centered in the boxes, align the boxes evenly within the rows, and not overshoot your connecting lines. In other words, you had to have an artist's touch.

Org Plus, a single-purpose, $79.95 organization charting utility from Banner Blue Software, just about idiot-proofs the process. You enter names and titles, usually starting with the top gun and working your way down. Org Plus automatically creates all the boxes and connecting lines, and it lets you choose how the output will look: single- or double-border boxes, perspective shadows under the boxes, and your choice of several horizontal or vertical arrangements for the names at the lowest tier.

For each person on the chart, you can enter six lines of 25 characters each for names, job titles, and comments.

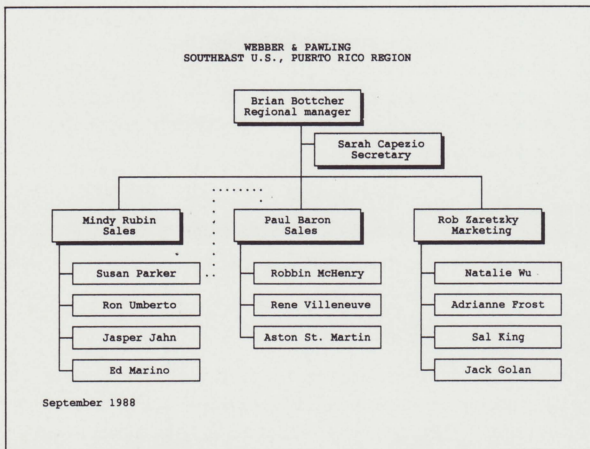**Organization charts are a great idea—unless you're the one assigned to borrow a T-square and draw the boxes and lines. Org Plus produces crisp drafts and includes finishing touches like drop shadows.**

Before PCs, you had to use a straightedge and a pen to finish off org charts begun on a Selectric. Or you just did without. Then came PC software that wasn't intended or suited for org charting—but you made do with it, in

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You choose which lines you want to print. If you have too many names to fit on a page, Org Plus will try to shrink the chart by removing spaces between boxes or using compressed type (on a laser or dot matrix printer); if that doesn't work, the chart spills over onto multiple pages, which you can tape together. (Org Plus supports Sideways, a dot matrix printing utility from Funk Software that does just what its name implies—often a necessity with charts. Sideways is another worthy addition to your PC utility tool chest.)

grasp but more limited in its features. It's $79.95, too.

The biggest competition for Org Plus comes from presentation graphics programs. Most of the major players and some of the others have org chart modules, including the top two sellers: Harvard Graphics, $495 from the Software Publishing Corporation, and Freelance Plus, $495 from the Lotus Development Corporation.

Harvard, the best all-around graphics program, offers two pluses and one big minus compared with Org Plus. Har-

Another shortcoming of Org Plus is that you'll need workarounds to deal with unusual hierarchies. Org Plus works better if your organizational complexity approaches the level of "me Tarzan, you Jane." If an executive secretary (a staff-level position) has an as-

> Org Plus works better if your organization is about as complex as "me Tarzan, you Jane."

sistant (another staff position), or if two people comanage a department, you've got problems. Ditto for a long name like Priscilla Fitzgibbon-Zaretsky, because there's no easy way to break it into two lines, or to abbreviate the first name automatically.

Warts and all, an org charting package belongs in the toolkit of every savvy PC user. And once you've used one for its intended purpose, you may find other uses, such as making tree diagrams for engineering work, preparing bills of materials or parts-cost rollups (using the math features), or even diagramming a family tree.

Check your graphics program for an org charting module, or take a stab at making a chart from scratch with a paint or drawing program. Each will work up to a point, but eventually you'll find it pays to have a well-stocked tool chest. Odds are you'll have a place for the likes of Org Plus.

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You get another six lines in Org Plus for financial information, which might be salary, sales, or commissions, and you can calculate totals and averages across levels or up and down workgroups. While Lotus 1-2-3 is in no immediate danger from Org Plus, some users will find the program's calculation tools handy for seeing how workgroups stack up. The screen display of the money amounts can be toggled off, but files are not password-protected—a drawback.

The program has been available since 1985, and each iteration has added a few features. The current version adds a tabular reports option (the output looks like a listing from a traditional database or spreadsheet). You'd use it for sales or salary summaries, or to create an internal phone book that shows names, titles, and phone numbers but not the visual rendering of the pecking order. An advanced version, due this fall, will add a freehand drawing module for line-and-text annotation; the price will be $129.95.

Org Plus has one standalone competitor: Terrific! Organization Chart Maker from KD Systems in Raleigh, North Carolina. Terrific is slightly easier to

vard creates its own fonts on the fly (including proportionally spaced fonts, so you get more names on a single page), and you can have different fonts and sizes for chart titles, employee names, and employee titles. Harvard supports film recorders, the devices used to make presentation-quality slides, while Org Plus is limited to fixed-pitch output from printers and plotters. You can make Org Plus overhead transparencies on a laser printer (stick a sheet of clear acetate in the manual feed tray), but the characters will be too tiny to read. Harvard Graphics' drawback is that it isn't very robust as an org chart maker: chart types are limited, and you get one name, one title, and one comment per person. Still, Harvard may be enough for many users.

For that matter, Org Plus isn't without its foibles. For instance, even if you have a graphics monitor, you can't see the finished chart onscreen in its entirety—just one-character-wide blinking squares. (You can print to disk and then view the disk file, but that's no faster than using a laser or fast dot matrix printer. And viewing big charts onscreen is like reading a road map from half an inch away.)

Org Plus Version 3.0

List Price: $79.95

Requires: 320K RAM, printer, DOS 2.0 or later.

In Short: A competent single-purpose tool for creating organization charts. Not perfect, but better than org chart modules in most graphics programs and the best of a very small group of org charting programs. Not copy protected.

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September 1988

The dotted line from Susan Parker to Paul Baron indicates that she assists Baron as well as Mindy Rubin. It also points out one of Org Plus's weaknesses: logic dictates that if Parker works for Baron, the dotted line should connect to the bottom of his box on the chart, not to the top.