



Vigilant Reviews

VIGILANT BUSINESS SOFTWARE

by Franco Alfieri, B.Com., CGA

I am always fascinated by technology. Learning about new software companies, their products and how they are applied to a given business is the most interesting part of my job. If you ever walked into a store, be it for clothing, shoes, electronics or any other type of merchandise, you have probably noticed a point of sale or sales order computer system when paying for your purchase. You probably also noticed additional components such as credit card authorization, barcode readers and debit card keypads. While these particular systems are not my areas of expertise, it's always interesting to know what hardware and software requirements are needed to keep track of merchandising, sales and purchase order processing, and receipts tabulation (cash/check/credit card/debit card) at a high volume capacity.

Vigilant Business Software is an accounting solution for such enterprises. This system is beyond small business accounting packages that you would normally get over-the-counter from Future Shop or Business Depot. It may surprise you to know that it still runs on DOS and has quite a loyal following.

Is there a Windows version waiting in the wings? Yes, but only for demonstrations at computer seminars and I, unfortunately, was unable to get a demo or beta copy. That may sound disappointing, but a majority of retailers and wholesalers still operate on mainframes or DOS. In any event, the mantra I always preach is that if a computer system is reliable, efficient and can perform in the capacity in which it benefits the enterprise and its clientele, it's a good system.

The focus of this article is on Vigilant's current product line: The Point of Sale system and the SalesOrder system. I also included a brief description of optional add-ons and what to expect from the 32-bit Windows version to be released next year.

The Common Features - While I was cruising through the demo versions of Vigilant's system, I experienced a case of *deja-vu*. The DOS-like screens and menus were back; I haven't seen old-fashioned fonts and graphics like this since I was trying to learn beginners' C++. Once I overlooked that aspect, I concentrated on the more important issues.

The Point of Sale and Sales Orders packages share the same standard features:

General Ledger - Since Vigilant operates on a real time basis, accounting periods are open over a span of three years. When year-end financial statements need to be prepared, accountants and auditors will be very pleased by the audit trails and accounting records generated. Unlike some accounting packages that follow the GIGO philosophy (garbage in, garbage out), I found Vigilant's reporting clear, concise, and easy to interpret, despite the boring Courier font. Again, that does not determine the quality or functionality of the system. The information that one is

able to retrieve and use is what's important.

Data entry is extremely flexible, with standardized, repetitive and reverse posting. Transactions can be posted over 36 different fiscal periods, lending Vigilant to accept complex transactions in other modules, such as post-dated checks.

Bank reconciliations can be performed for any bank account and at any date. This feature actually works well when compared to other accounting programs. I have encountered some applications where the bank reconciliation feature has numerous glitches and causes data to be corrupted.

Accounts Receivable - The menu contains fields pertaining to standard customer information, as well as their credit terms and discount availability. Each employee or company sales representative can be set up to earn commissions based on a specific product line or price structure. Canadian or US funds can be defaulted, or interchanged depending on the sale.

The total history of any customer can be recalled at an instant in full detail. Because the system operates in real-time, all vital information is consistently updated. Customers can be organized by alphanumeric ID# or codes. When customer receipts need to be processed, detailed fields provide for accurate data entry. Types of transactions include payment, check reversals, deposits, NSF checks, or miscellaneous A/R ledger transactions. Methods of receipt allocation are extremely flexible. For example, if a customer sends a check for \$5,000, Vigilant queries the user from the drop-down menu whether to pay all the invoices, pay the oldest invoices, or manual selection. Reporting includes master customer listing, aged receivables, sales register, cash receipts journal, sales analysis, annual sales, and customer labeling.

Accounts Payable - Similar in style to the A/R menu, the vendor profiles are easily accessed and organized according to vendor ID#. The total history of any vendor's account can be obtained, in great detail. Consider this module a mirror image of the A/R module.

The A/P module is capable of recording payables per transaction type: invoice, debit adjustment, credit adjustment, or miscellaneous A/P ledger entries. The Vigilant system checks to ensure that nodouble posting of purchase invoices occur.

Cash disbursements can be treated as a payment, check reversal, partial purchase deposit or a one-time miscellaneous transaction. A \$3,000 payment to a supplier, for instance, can be used to pay all outstanding invoices, only due invoices or a manual selection. Reporting includes master vendor listing, aged payables, cash disbursements journal, and vendor labeling.

Inventory Control - This module is the solid backbone of Vigilant Business Software. For businesses that generate high-volume activity, this module is the reason why a good quality system should not be forsaken. Quantity amounts indicate items on hand, back-orders, lead-time, and minimum stock levels. Inventory analysis is provided with a FIFO (first-in, first-out) costing system to ensure costs and profit margins are accurate. Average unit cost and recent purchase cost help the user to determine the value of merchandise by its unit of measure (e.g., each, dozen, gross, lbs., etc.).

A nifty feature at the bottom right corner of the Inventory Management menu is the selling and break-even points analysis. Depending on the number of bulk items your enterprise sells, say, 10, 25, 50, or 100 items, profit margins can be displayed for each scenario, as well as a minimum selling price to break even.

Selling prices can be adjusted according to product line, series of products, or by

vendor with multiple criteria. Printouts such as inventory lists for stock counts and physical inventory worksheets facilitate the process. Inventory cost and quantity variance reports are sufficiently detailed for smooth decision making.

Budgeting - Budgets can be created for all G/L accounts. Time frames can be customized for period budgeting or for comparative purposes, such as current year and subsequent year. Four formulas of budgeting are incorporated into the system: growth percentage, value, incremental, and constant.

Security Measures - Each user of Vigilant's application defines a unique password. Nine levels of password protection are available, thus various points of information are filtered to the appropriate user. Businesses with larger staff requirements will welcome this feature for peace of mind.

Point of Sale - Retailers requiring accurate stock control and real-time processing may find Vigilant's Point of Sale an interesting discovery. This accounting solution contains a user-friendly POS data entry screen that flows smoothly. The POS terminal processes numerous forms of transactions such as counter sales, returns and discounts, layaways (deposits, pick-ups and/or cancellations), gift certificates, and petty cash expenses.

Using an employee code, transactions are entered by a given sales representative. Keeping the user informed, the bottom of the screen displays the latest inventory status of a particular stockback-order, on order, committed, and its unit of measure.

Payment options are flexible according to customer preference (cash, check, various credit cards, gift certificates, credit notes, or customer account). New customers can be added on-the-fly for those one-time miscellaneous sales. Petty cash expenses obtained from the cash register can be posted to specific expense accounts.

Due to detailed fields of the POS menu, financial reporting is rich in content. Sales reports can be grouped by type of receipt, allowing the company to know its customers' preferred method of payment. Commissions can be paid out with information collected from a reports segregating daily revenues by the sales clerk. Layaway status reports keep the enterprise abreast as to the movement of stock.

Vigilant recommends the Point of Sale accounting solution for retailers, be it a chain store or franchise. Specific ventures include, but are not limited to, gift shops, building supplies, hardware, clothing stores, and home accessories.

Sales Orders - Importers, wholesalers and distributors will find Vigilant's Sales Orders accounting solution more up their alley. The menu uses a more familiar data entry screen, which processes sales orders and utilizes shipping and billing information. Generating reports from the Sales Orders package are detailed and useful to the entity's powers that be. They include booked sales orders, shipping schedules, quoted customer pricing reports and special inventory price lists. Contractors for residential, industrial and commercial properties would find this system a great blessing, as well as distributors of food, toys and various equipment.

Add-On's - Depending on your entity's daily operating structure, Vigilant offers additional modules that cater to your specific needs. Here is one that stands apart:

Multi-Site Polling - Corporate offices and their respective branch locations can utilize this module in order to transfer data back and forth. Procedures can be implemented on a demand basis or completely automated. Head offices can download inventory modifications, such as a price adjustment list, modify product availability (new products or discontinued items), and obtain inventory status

display options for all locations. The advantage with this module is the ability to prepare consolidated accounting records for a global perspective of the company's activities.

Great Expectations - With a corporate existence of over 15 years and a stable presence in the marketplace, Vigilant has managed to anticipate the needs of small to medium-sized businesses by staying one step ahead of the game. Despite my initial reaction to the bland DOS graphics, what counts is the timely recording of financial information and the ability to use it. I greatly anticipate the release of Vigilant for Windows; it looks very promising. For DOS users, Vigilant hasn't forgotten you. Single-user versions are \$895, while Local Area Network packages are priced at \$1495. Interested buyers should expect to pay extra for each add-on, ranging from \$195 to \$1545 per module.