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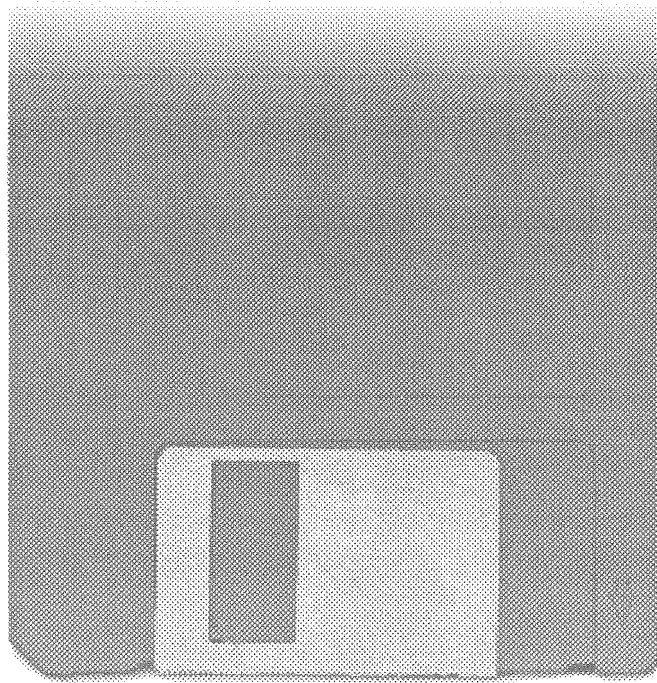
# WHEN IS THE BEST SOFTWARE

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A key issue to be considered in the software selection process, specifically with respect to spreadsheet and database management application packages used in teaching introductory level courses such as business computer applications, is, "How good should the software be?" The introductory classes constitute the majority of students enrolled in application-oriented classes because these classes are required of all business majors. The courses are generally taught on DOS-based (IBM/compatible) machines and generally focus on spreadsheets such as Lotus and database managers such as dBASE-III Plus.

Great strides in technology have significantly aided and encouraged developments and improvements in software as we have witnessed in both spreadsheets (Lotus versions 1.0 through 3.1, Quattro 1.0 through Quattro Pro 4.0) and in database managers (dBASE through dBASE IV and Paradox versions 1.0 through 3.5). With respect to productivity, new versions of



## TOO GOOD?

software packages offer tremendous flexibilities and capabilities. But from a parochial (teaching the basics) point of view, one can ask the question, "Are we managing technology, or are we being managed by technology?"

Giving full recognition to the truism that people are "naturally" resistant to change, I would like to submit the proposition that simple resistance to change is not the issue here. A salient point for consideration is that to deviate from a well-intentioned objective simply because technology makes it possible, may not be prudent. An attempt is made here to distinguish between making the most of new technologies and being driven by them.

The position being taken is based on the fact that at KSC, we teach on a

10-week quarter system in which part of the first week is spent "greeting" students and the last week must include saying "good-bye" to them. Considering also that sometime during the quarter there must be some evaluation, we only have roughly eight and one-half weeks to help the students get acquainted with the application packages. Newer capabilities accompany the newer releases, which means that additional elements

should be incorporated into lesson plans so students utilize the "extended" features. The downside of this dilemma is that the new features generally do not significantly enhance the utility of the base package. We feel the impact of the competition among software vendors in their quests to ensure that their products are indeed the "best." It should also be noted that the new releases are accompanied by upgrade costs for owners of earlier editions and by increased prices for new owners.

The basic question for consideration here is this. Where should the line be drawn regarding upgrading application software that is used for basic instructional purposes; or more succinctly, when is the best software too good? ●