

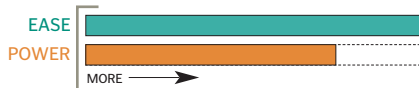
Databases for ALL Reasons

THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO TECHNOLOGY

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FileMaker Pro 6

\$299 list. FileMaker Inc., 800-325-2747, www.filemaker.com. ●●●●●



FileMaker Pro 6 proves that a highly capable desktop database needn't be complex and intimidating. With support for relationships between tables, fine-grained user privileges, XML import and export, and basic scripting, FileMaker includes the features you need for building lots of different kinds of business applications. Yet its interface is truly easy to use, whether you're designing forms and reports or publishing a database on the Web—which, by the way, only takes a click on a single check box. Experienced database jockeys may be more comfortable with software that exposes advanced capabilities more directly, but FileMaker is ideal for novice-to-midrange database users who don't want to mess with the intricacies of a product like Microsoft Access.

FileMaker is also versatile: It runs both on Windows and on Apple Mac OS 8.6 or later (natively on Mac OS X). And FileMaker Mobile 2.1 runs on Palm and Pocket PC devices, letting individual users synchronize data with their desktops. Finally, the FileMaker Web Server Connector runs on Red Hat Linux 7.1.

FileMaker successfully masks much of the complexity that underlies common tasks. At first glance, FileMaker looks deceptively like a flat-file database. In fact, it uses the term *database* to refer to a single data table and its associated information, such as layouts. We were easily able to set up relationships between tables, create reports based on the relationships, and use the WYSIWYG layout tool to embed a “portal” that exposed fields from

records in another table in an input form.

We found defining field validation rules simple, because FileMaker offers choices for common cases—such as ensuring that a number is within a particular range or that a text field contains predefined or derived values—directly through its interface. For more specialized validation logic, a full-blown expression editor is available, too.



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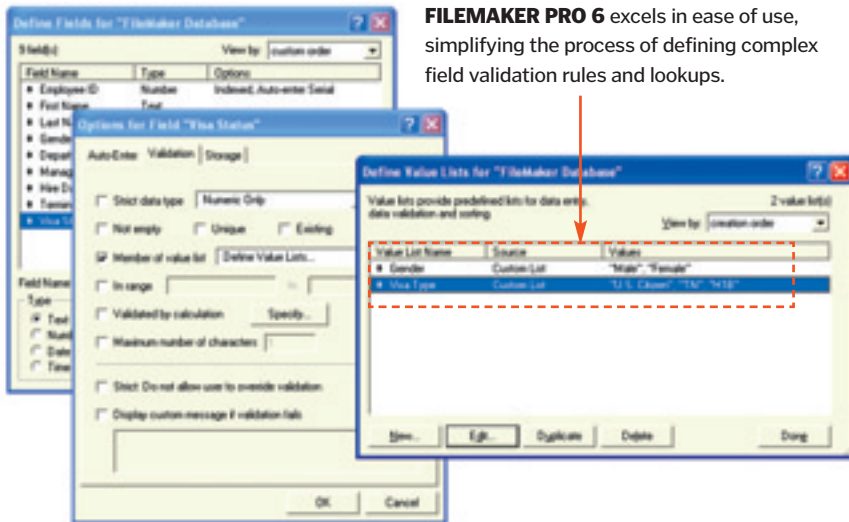
We rate each product's **interface** based on its ease of use and power, with an emphasis on the editing panes and workspace views. For **database design**, we look at table design builders, as well as the ease of setting field properties and validation.

The **search, query, and reporting** rating is an assessment of the tools for formulating simple and complex queries, as well as any included reporting tools. To evaluate **formatting and layout** capabilities, we consider the tools for creating and editing a variety of data entry screens.

Wizards can help both beginners and advanced users quickly put together a page, table, or frame set. The **security** rating encompasses the product's capacity to protect data via user passwords and the encryption of tables or individual columns and rows. The **overall** rating is not just an average but reflects our evaluation of the product as a whole.

	Interface	Database design	Search, query, and reporting	Formatting and layout	Wizards	Security	OVERALL
Alpha Five Version 5	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●
askSam Professional 5	●●●	●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●
FileMaker Pro 6	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●●
Microsoft Access 2002	●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●
MyDatabase 6.0	●●●	●	●	●●	N/A	N/A	●●
Paradox 10	●●	●●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●
QuickBase	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●	●●	●●●●	●●●●

RED denotes Editors' Choice. N/A—Not applicable: The product does not have this feature.



FILEMAKER PRO 6 excels in ease of use, simplifying the process of defining complex field validation rules and lookups.

Querying a database is also easy. You simply fill in fields in a form with the criteria you want to search for, and then you can incrementally revise queries to extend or constrain the original result set. This simplistic approach will seem tedious if you're already

comfortable with Boolean queries or SQL, and in order to save a query for later use, you must enlist FileMaker's scripting capability. (Scripting in FileMaker is macrolike: You choose a sequence of actions from a list and specify parameters rather than writing

actual code.)

With FileMaker, importing from most external data sources doesn't require ODBC. You can even drag and drop an Excel spreadsheet into FileMaker. FileMaker also supports XML import and export—though it recognizes only two of its own (well-documented) XML formats—*fmpxmlresult* and *fmpdsoresult*. To import any old XML documents, we had to construct XSLT style sheets to transform our data into one of these formats. The easiest way to do this is to modify the sample XSLT files supplied with the software or available in FileMaker's online XSLT library.

FileMaker lacks the analysis tools, direct connectivity to enterprise databases, and full-blown scripting capabilities available in Microsoft Access 2002. But for most desktop database users, its combination of midrange features in an easy-to-use package makes it a highly appealing choice.—*JC*

PDA Databases to Go

Database management is no longer just for desktops or servers. Handhelds are getting in on the action, too. pdas store mostly contact info, the occasional spreadsheet, and very specific data downloads, such as sports schedules, calorie counters, timetables, and music lists. But handheld databases also are starting to garner business uses as companies start to streamline their operations with mobile pdas. Field staffs and sales forces that have traditionally relied on paper forms and data input are now turning to pda database applications to link to the desktop database programs discussed in our main reviews.

If you already have a desktop database in place, you should consider a mobile database that can easily link to it. This will save you integration headaches, because little things like file formats can become large problems if you don't consider them

ahead of time. What good does your new mobile solution do you if it exports only CSV files and your main application imports only DBF? Here is a quick look at some of the more noteworthy database programs for handhelds.

FileMaker Mobile 2.1 (\$49 list) easily works in tandem with its parent database solution. For those already familiar with the desktop version of FileMaker, integration shouldn't be a problem. The learning curve also isn't as difficult as it would be with a brand-new application. FileMaker Mobile is also a multiplatform solution: The program runs on both Palm OS and Pocket PC devices. The software transfers databases of up to 50 fields (or the memory limit of your PDA) to your mobile device, where you can edit them. You can't, however, create new databases on your PDA with FileMaker Mobile. (FileMaker Inc., www.filemaker.com.)

