

CircusPonies Notebook Review

by Jim Tetzlaff

Well, I got lucky again and won a piece of software at a TNWoU meeting. Hey, what the heck, let me try this one. What I picked was an application called Notebook. The CD label says "Powerful Outlining and Organizing for Your Ideas!" Okay, I know I'm anything BUT organized. And as for outlining, well let's just say that I avoid plagues with less zeal. Then, I had to say I thought the name the company chose was a bit quirky. Circus Ponies? Yeah, they're out for \$millions\$. Who knows, maybe it'll catch on. This is a shareware program, selling for \$49.95 in its most recent version, currently 2.0-V232. Since getting hold of the program, I believe there have been at least 10 updates, most of them to overcome some hindrance due to Tiger.

I'm gonna try using NoteBook to write this review and see how I fair. (Yes, Word is right behind it—just in case...

(Okay, I had to switch to Word to get this review done. I tell you why in the next paragraph.)

Note-Taking & Organizing



Organize your information using a familiar notebook interface, complete with pages and tabs. Arrange notes hierarchically in each page's outline,

in ways that make sense to you. Collapse or expand hierarchies to hide or show detail. The problem is you have to learn what goes first, followed by what and so on. In other words, Page 1 is NOT necessarily Page 1. So I guess I'll take a look at the Quick Start Guide. Oh my, 19 pages. If I remember correctly, the quick start guides for similarly perceived 'small' programs is right around 4 pages. Hmm...

Oh, Page 1 of the guide speaks to gathering and managing snippets of information gathered from, say, anywhere...the Internet, other applications, media files and so on. Okay, right from there, I have to guess that using NoteBook as simply a word processor is probably NOT what the application is intended for.

Annotation



Annotate your notes with keywords, stickers and highlighting. Add an action item checkbox, set a due date, or assign a priority. Just in case you need to know what you've done, when, and if you need to follow-up, these notes and keywords are for yourself and appear to the left of the clipping you're working on.

Clipping



Copy text and other content directly into a Notebook without leaving the application you're working in. You can pre-edit clippings before sending them on to your Notebooks. Okay, I'm working in Word right now, so let's see if this works. You're supposed to highlight what you want to 'Clip', go to the Services tab under the App name, select NoteBook and...OOPS, hang on, nothing is highlighted for me to select. Let's just try something else. Well, it works, but as you might guess, NOT directly from Word. If I copy text, then click on the Desktop (Finder) and select Services from there, it works just fine. But, I might as well simply Copy and Paste as usual if I need to do so.

Searching



View all of the words in your Notebook and where they appear. Or all of the keywords, stickers, highlighting and other attributes - Index Pages make simple searching as easy as clicking. Use NoteBook's Super-Find panel to perform complex searches involving multiple words and attributes. I have to admit, I did not try this feature. This is my first go-round with this software and everything is in the Notebook I'm working on; nothing complicated.

Importing

Transfer photos, images, film clips, and sound files directly into a Notebook from your digital camera, or scans from your scanner. Then use Media Frames to enhance your images with special borders, drop shadows, rotation, and scaling. You can even add in video clips or movies, complete with a standard playback control strip for convenient viewing or replay. Okay, I ain't so sophisticated with film clips, so I'll skip that. As for photos and images, I prefer to edit them before using them and I do that (usually with the help of my wife) in Photoshop. But, the ability to bring in the media files is great. You can also do that with later versions of Acrobat, but that application is a lot more expensive.

HTML Publishing



Export your Notebooks to the web to share with non-NoteBook users. Use the default export options, or customize the look and structure of the exported pages to fit your project. The problem with this feature is if you have added those film clips, images and sound files, you've got yourself a huge file.

My Bottom Line

Circus Ponies Notebook is a pretty nifty application. It has many features of several much more expensive ones, all combined! You can do similar Clipping functions and publish them with Flow. Flow comes in at \$99.90. As I stated, you can combine media files within PDF files made with Acrobat. That app goes for \$299.00 for a fresh copy and updates for it are the source of many complaints against Adobe. As I have these other applications, I don't think I'll be switching to NoteBook. BUT if you need to gather a lot of information and files in one place, this application does and pretty well. For the money, you can't go wrong. On a 5-star rating basis, I give it 4 stars.

