RATINGS

A Project Planning Tool

Project KickStart
online, 2003
Experience In Software
800.678.7008
projectkickstart.com
US$129.95, one to four users

Online Trial
You can download a free
20-day trial and view the
guided tour at
http://www.projectkickstart.
com/html/downdemo3.cfm.

Recommendation
Project KickStart is a
low-cost, easy-to-use
solution for everyone,
including novices, involved
in project planning.

Reviewed by
Mireille Massue

The Need
A recent "Chaos Report," published by industry analyst Standish Group, estimates that one-third of projects can be deemed "a pass"; two-thirds are either "challenged" or "outright failures." Two years ago, Bombardier of Canada wasn't a believer in project management offices. It soon changed its mind when two large projects, worth US$100 million and $30 million, ran over budget by nearly 100 percent.

Planning enables you to decrease stress and increase confidence by giving you the flexibility and maneuverability to

* mobilize and energize the commitment and energy of your customer base, team members, executives, and stakeholders to work towards a common objective
* achieve a higher standard of excellence by delivering results on time and within budget
* tolerate uncertainty by allowing more risks and seeking more opportunities
* gain credibility by communicating strategy through purpose, understanding, and direction
* improve relationships throughout the organization
* simplify complex information into a "teachable point of view" (Noel Tichy, *The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Organizations to Win*, HarperBusiness, 2002)
* have fun and enjoy the process.

Project KickStart, by Experience In Software Inc., is an interactive software program that assists in the most important part of the project cycle—planning. The software integrates seamlessly with a number of software programs such as Microsoft Outlook and Project and Mindjet's MindManager.

When you open Project KickStart, a box appears with three choices: 1) Open a project to review or revise a project, 2) open your last project you used most recently, or 3) start a new project. If you're not sure how to start, you can click on Introduction and the Help menu offers you assistance in organizing your project.

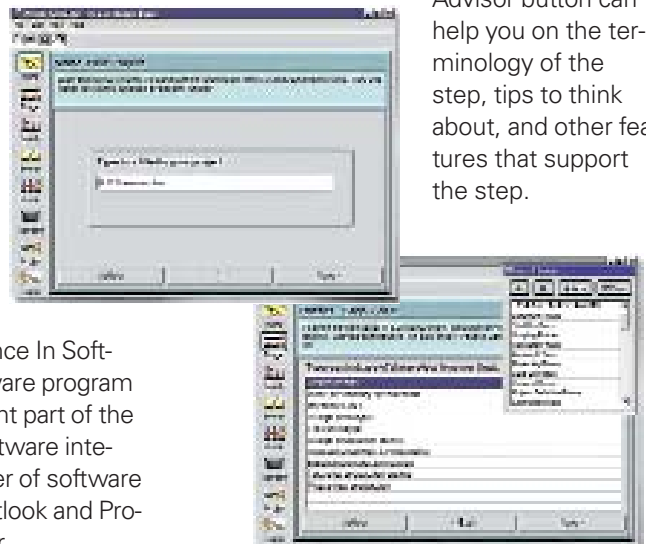On the top of the screen is the familiar Windows menu bar; on the left are the steps Project KickStart suggests in creating a solid plan:
* naming the project
* listing the phases of the project
* goals or tasks required
* a similar project you could review that might help you in this project
* people involved
* obstacles or constraints
* assigning people tasks.

Every screen includes a library of phrases that provide ideas for each planning step. You can also add your own suggestions. The Advisor button can help you on the terminology of the step, tips to think about, and other features that support the step.

> ### We liked...
> * integrates with other software
> * an introduction to help you organize your project
> * a library of ideas for each step.

Some of the steps have some interesting features that make Project Kick-Start a useful tool. The Similar icon lets you choose previous projects that might be similar to the one you're now working on, giving you the opportunity to borrow tasks from past projects and import them into your current project, saving you time and aggravation. The People icon lets you choose the people who'll be involved in the project. If you keep a contact list in MS Outlook, you can import names from the list into your project. The Task screen gives you an overview. In addition to editing tasks, you can interactively make assignments, add follow-up notes to individual tasks, and switch to the Gantt chart view, where you can schedule tasks and log completed tasks.

Cool Tool Within a Tool

Project KickStart's Gantt chart provides a quick graphical look at tasks and timelines, with two side-by-side displays: a list of tasks on the left and the graphical Gantt chart display on the right. You can also transfer tasks, assignments, and notes to other project management software. I linked to MS Outlook and launched it from Project KickStart. I see tasks in the Outlook Tasks view, grouped under a category named for each project. Better still, I can track and email tasks to team members.
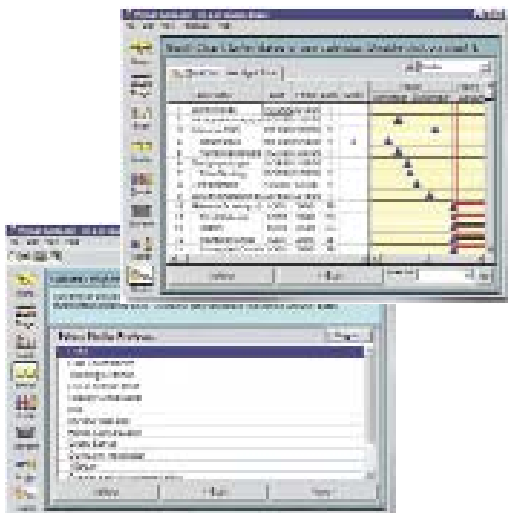
Linking to MindManager 2002 affords me better visuals and mind-mapping opportunities. The Link-to feature let me import my plan into Microsoft Project 2002, providing better Gantt chart functionality.

Could be better...
No major complaints.

Mireille Massue is a training executive based in Toronto, Canada. She has had years of experience in planning and implementing instruction and is currently pursuing an advanced degree in training technology; mireille@rogers.com.

Product evaluations are provided by Training Media Review and do not imply endorsement by T+D or ASTD. For more information, contact TMR at 877.532.1838; www.tmreview.com.

Project KickStart product rating

Presentation	👍👍👍.5
Production quality	👍👍👍.5
Ease of use	👍👍👍👍
Value of purpose	👍👍👍.5
Value of content	👍👍👍
Instructional value	👍👍👍
Value for the money	👍👍👍👍
Documentation	👍👍👍
Overall rating	👍👍👍.5

KEY	poor	satisfactory	good	excellent
	👍	👍👍	👍👍👍	👍👍👍👍