

Showbiz Budgeting

Review by Norman C. Berns

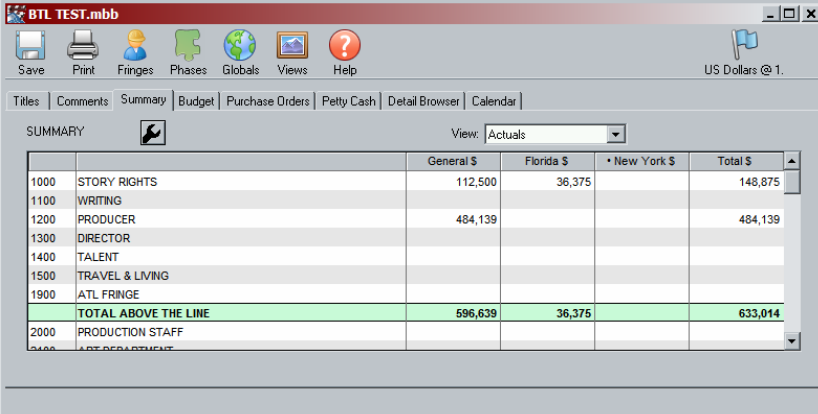
WHAT YOU SEE

Showbiz Budgeting is lots more than monitor-candy. Unusually smart and clever, it manages budgeting tricks like you've never seen before.

From its roots in budgeting commercials, Showbiz has become a chameleon, assuming whatever look (and style) is needed. To the usual film templates, add AICP and AICE, plus forms for foreign productions, animations, stills and documentaries. Future plans call for templates (as well as the program itself) to be written in Spanish, Russian and French.

Oddly, it's pretty face comes undone at the Top Sheet (here dubbed the "Summary") where gray replaces a rainbow of colors.

Come work time, you'll have to fetch your own budget – your latest work won't open by default with the program. Too bad.



The screenshot shows the 'SUMMARY' view of the Showbiz Budgeting software. The window title is 'BTL TEST.mbb'. The interface includes a menu bar with 'Save', 'Print', 'Fringes', 'Phases', 'Globals', 'Views', and 'Help'. Below the menu bar are tabs for 'Titles', 'Comments', 'Summary', 'Budget', 'Purchase Orders', 'Petty Cash', 'Detail Browser', and 'Calendar'. The 'Summary' view displays a table with columns for 'General \$', 'Florida \$', 'New York \$', and 'Total \$'. The table lists various budget items and their costs across different regions.

	General \$	Florida \$	New York \$	Total \$
1000 STORY RIGHTS	112,500	36,375		148,875
1100 WRITING				
1200 PRODUCER	484,139			484,139
1300 DIRECTOR				
1400 TALENT				
1500 TRAVEL & LIVING				
1900 ATL FRINGE				
TOTAL ABOVE THE LINE	596,639	36,375		633,014
2000 PRODUCTION STAFF				
2400 ART DEPARTMENT				

WHAT YOU GET

Other budgeting programs give you their unique view of the work process; Showbiz delivers an entirely new paradigm. There is nothing else like it because of two fundamental advances it has made.

To begin, Showbiz doesn't just ACT like many different programs, it actually BECOMES those programs, with varying styles, formats and work flows. The feat is achieved by reinventing the role of the column. And the impact is huge.

Traditional budgets list one item per row, breaking the item into smaller and smaller units (from Categories down to Accounts, Details and Sub-Details). Columns have always been used to *enumerate* things – how many, how much, how long.

Showbiz has tucked all that information into a breakdown form that sits below the budget. Separating all the details into a separate section creates a new way of looking at a budget. And the view is refreshing.

You can see more of your budget. And you can do new things. Once column are freed from the minutia of math, they can be repurposed to group all sorts of data. And the results are wonderful.

Columns (in this example) are used to isolate General costs (green), production in Florida (blue), a shoot in New York (peach) and a Totals column (pink). Not restricted to locations of course, columns might isolate TV episodes or production units, or prep vs. shoot, or....

The screenshot shows the 'BTL TEST.mbb' window with a menu bar (Save, Print, Fringes, Phases, Globals, Views, Help) and a toolbar. The main area displays a budgeting table for '1000 STORY RIGHTS'. The table has columns for Code, Line, Note, General \$, Florida \$, New York \$, and Total \$. The data is as follows:

Code	Line	Note	General \$	Florida \$	New York \$	Total \$
1001	STORY RIGHTS	This is a note on Story Rights	25,000			25,000
0002	SONG RIGHTS		62,500	25,000		87,500
1003	OTHER RIGHTS		25,000	21,375		46,375
	Sub-Total		\$112,500	\$46,375		\$158,875
	Fringes			\$3,202		\$3,202
	Total		\$112,500	\$49,578		\$162,078

Below the main table is a 'Detail' view for '1003 OTHER RIGHTS' showing 2 items in Florida (US Dollars):

Type	Vendor	Description	Fringes	Factors	Sub-Total \$	Fringes \$
Local Rights Inc.	Regional Costs	All PR		1 allow @ 5,000 x 3	15,000	3,202
Competitors	More Local Stuff			1 allow @ 6,375.12	6,375	
					\$21,375	\$3,202

At the bottom right, there is a status bar showing '1 Florida' and 'GT: \$49,578'.

Almost every program can whack a budget into sections (called "subgroups" in Movie Magic and "SubBudgets" in ProductionPro), but no other program can display every "sub" in an array like this. Adding a Totals column (on the right in pink) turns this view into a major winner, delivering breakdown information that's easy to understand at a glance.

Showbiz's second remarkable feat is its ability to do Actuals. That is, it tracks real costs against estimates, showing exactly where you stand vis-à-vis the budget.

Of course, any budgeting program can track actuals – it's an old indie trick that's been around since MM ran in DOS. Showbiz, however, turns that old plum into a full subset of the program, adding serious tools to track Petty Cash, write Purchase Orders and access vendor information. This is a major advance for every self-contained show.

WHAT'S GOOD

A chameleon at heart, Showbiz shifts from AICP (Association of Commercial Producers) forms to feature budgeting, with every essential doodad intact.

Instant adaptability makes it ideal for every production office that shoots features today, commercials tomorrow and industrials the day after

Details can be entered into the below-the-budget form. Or directly into the budget at the Account level. That's

The screenshot shows the 'DemoCommercial.mbb' window with a menu bar (Save, Print, Fringes, Phases, Globals, Views, Help) and a toolbar. The main area displays a budgeting table for 'A CREW - PREPRO AND WRAP'. The table has columns for Code, Line, Note, Fringe, Global, 8h, 10h, 12h, 14h, 16h, Rate, OThr, Estimated \$, and Actual \$. The data is as follows:

Code	Line	Note	Fringe	Global	8h	10h	12h	14h	16h	Rate	OThr	Estimated \$	Actual \$
1	Producer		f				16			1,000		16,000.00	2,000.00
2	Asst Director		d				1			950	4	1,662.50	5,000.00
3	Dir of Photography		u				2			3,000	4	7,800.00	
4	Camera Op		u	P		2				600		1,200.00	
5	Asst Camera	checkout	u				1			600	2	780.00	550.00
6	Art Director		u			4				900	8	4,680.00	7,500.00
7	Prop Master		u			2				600	4	1,560.00	
8	Prop Asst		u			2				600	4	1,560.00	
9	Prop Asst		u			2				550	4	1,430.00	
10	Inside Prop Asst		u			2				500	4	1,300.00	
11	Electrician	tech scout	u				1			600	2	780.00	
12			u							575			
13			u							550			
14			u							550			
15			u							550			
16	Grip	tech scout	u				1			600	2	780.00	
17			u							575			
18			u							550			
19			u							550			
20	Mixer		u							600			
21	Boom Man		u							400			
22	Recordist		u										

At the bottom right, there is a status bar showing '1 Estimated' and 'GT: \$804,207.29'.

revolutionary and a huge timesaver when your only details are “allow” or “flat.”

WHAT'S BAD

Exploring new paradigms may be exciting, but getting your head wrapped around Showbiz requires some serious mental adjustments.

The difficulty isn't helped by inconsistencies in the program. Some items, for example, sort with a click on the column. Others move with an up-down arrow. And some can't be sorted at all.

Help isn't much. There are no Tool Tips or context-sensitive F1 help. Icons and toolbars can't be changed.

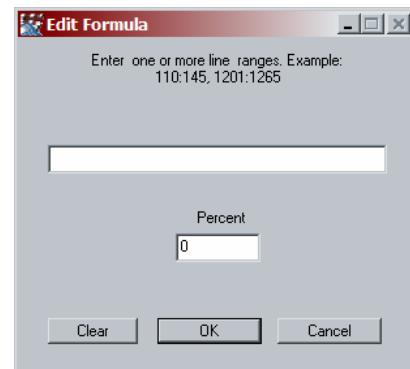
Globals won't do math; not a lick. They merely accept a single number. There's no way to total various shooting phases like PREP + SHOOT + WRAP and call it ALL for easy budget entry (and updates). Globals can't even do math within the budget. That leaves no way to enter a late-arriving assistant for PREP/2 weeks.

Globals and math are so tightly integrated that it's amazing how a program this good could have missed something so basic and essential.

BONUS

Columns in Showbiz can reference a range of other columns. That allows the budget to calculate across any group of Accounts. Use it for finders fees or a surcharge or a per-episode portion of amortized costs.... It's handy, versatile and (as far as I know) unique.

Company-specific headers and entire lists of vendors can be moved from job to job. That's ideal for anyone who shifts about, estimating *here* one week, shooting *there* next.

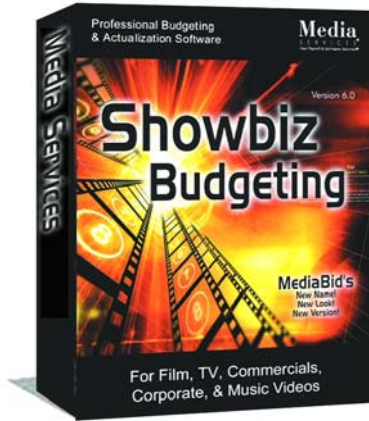


Look for an upcoming interface with QuickBooks. Expect (minimally) an easy export of the Chart of Accounts plus (presumably) the budget numbers and any actual costs.

WHO'S IT FOR

Use Showbiz Budgeting if your work shifts between commercials, docs and features. It's the only program that can track actuals and handle petty cash. And it's for anyone who wants to explore a new, more effective way to make a budget. .

Look for frequent sales to buy this impressive program. You'll need extra time to learn its myriad features and know that the next upgrade will likely turn this into a top-tier program. If you prefer, pick up the free 30-day trial first. Either way, it's worth the effort.



Company Info

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Product Info

Showbiz Budgeting, v7.07

MSRP: \$399

30-Day Free Trial

<http://tinyurl.com/o3yru>

Software Support

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