NoteSmith News 2024

April 2024

Deferring payments

Should you decide to defer payments from your customers during difficult times, you can follow these instructions: If you are deferring both the payment and the interest, you can edit the account and then change the interest rate to zero. Now you can record zero payment(s) for the deferred payments and they will not accrue interest but will advance the payment counter. Once you are ready to accept payments again then go back into the edit screen for the note and change the interest rate to the default rate, the payments remaining, and the maturity date.

No fooling!

Don't forget that Monday is April 1, aka Fool's Day. Don't get fooled! I am not fooling when I tell you the IRS modifies the 1098 form almost every year, and you can bet that the 1098 you will need to file in 2025 will be different than the one from 2024. Most of the changes are to format and organization, but some years bring other surprises! In any case, NoteSmith 2025 will be prepared for the changes. You will once again need to report the number of properties that are secured by each of your 1098 loans. If that number is other than one (1) for any of your accounts, store that number in the customer's Notepad. Also expect to have to report information on loans originated or acquired during the tax year, including outstanding principal and acquisition date.

High Resolution Displays and Printing

One feature we added "under the hood" a while back concerns newer laptops and tablets with high resolution (high DPI) displays, in the neighborhood of 1900x1600, 3200x1800, or higher. NoteSmith may appear in too small a window under such high settings.

Go to File, Setup, the Program tab, and a font sizing box should appear near the upper right corner. Try 125%. If it does not appear, go to Help, Technical Support, Update. Be sure NoteSmith 2024 is designated as a trusted program in your firewall and security software.

High DPI monitors also render some printing far too large for a single page. If your print previews show only the upper left corner of the page, there is a Shrink Reports checkbox near the font sizing box. This also speeds up multi-page print runs that take too long.

Over Thirty Years of NoteSmith

We are currently working on NoteSmith 2025, *which will be our 38th anniversary*, but we accept suggestions all the time for new features. There is still time for a suggestion to be added if it applies to a significant number of users.

Ransomware

I mentioned ransomware last month. The source may be an unintended visit to a malicious web site or an attachment to a bogus email. Whatever the source, the result is all your files are encrypted. You then see a message that you can unlock your data by payment of a fee, oftentimes in Bitcoin, not in dollars.

A customer recently sent their NoteSmith data to us when they could not access it. Two other customers let us know they, too, were infected. One was caused by someone on a workstation opening an infected Word document. It quickly encrypted all files on their network, including backup copies of data!

Please realize that this is *not* a NoteSmith issue, it is a computer issue, and these customers lost *all* their data, not just their NoteSmith data. Ransomware encrypts an entire hard drive, not just one program!

Aside from preventing infection, the only cure is to have your data backed up to a remote location or to removable media *that you remove* after the backup completes. It would save you time to image your hard drive so the entire drive can be restored at one time. Windows has drive imaging software built in but you have to use it before an infection and store it on removable media *that you remove*!

25-year features

There continue to be occasional misunderstandings with features that have been in the program for nearly three decades! That would be prior to WindowsXP, ME, 98, 95, and even 3.1. That's right: features in the program since DOS.

- File, Setup, Import: At the start of the year, you must "import" your old data to the new program so if anything goes wrong, you can use the old program temporarily until the matter can be resolved. If we modified your old data files, as some programs do, you risk not being able to use either the old or new program. You cannot "restore" your old data files to the new program because they lack the necessary data fields to take advantage of new features.

- IRS 1098 Copy A: Print *all at once* selecting All Remaining from Print Options. Do *not* put 1 piece of paper through the printer 3 times. Even with 100s of forms, printing Copy A should take 5 minutes. All Remaining is the only way to generate accurate 1096s.

- IRS 1098 payors: Go to Accounts, Edit, Investment and select 1098 from the IRS Forms drop down list, then Save. These are the only accounts that will print 1098s. You do not have to select each account at tax filing time or generate complicated configurations and filters. Remember that 1098s are for reporting home mortgage deductions and require a Social Security Number (SSN). They do not apply to partnerships, corporations, or even sole proprietors if the Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) is an Employer Identification Number (EIN). If you have reporting questions, you should first check the relevant IRS publication for an explanation.

- Print Options dates: Do you change 1/1/2000 to 1/1/2024 every time you print a payment history or other report? For the past 20 years? Go to File, Company Configuration and enter this year as the calendar year. That is what Print Options uses. A shortcut: type the letter J for January in the starting date and, voila, 1/1/2024 appears. Type D in the ending year for December. A list of similar shortcuts appears in the printed and PDF manual.

- File, Company Configuration: This is designed to hide or show data based primarily on taxable entity.   A configuration called All Notes with a blank Investor field will show all accounts and is installed by NoteSmith automatically. Enter an Investor code and everything disappears except accounts "branded" with the same code.

- Marking: A feature added in 2015, you can mark (check) only specific loans from Accounts, Lookup to appear on reports or letters. Mark All before printing full company reports. You might mark accounts, for instance, if you wanted a quick report on notes due from a specific subdivision without having to create a filter. If you unmark all accounts before printing, NoteSmith will display "no data was found that matches your request."

Update program file

We occasionally make modifications to NoteSmith based primarily on user feedback. Some minor feature enhancements that will appear in next year's version are put into this year's if the code changes are small and

riskless. Go to Help, Technical Support, Update and choose Connect. The window will display the file dates of your local file compared to those at our web site. You can download the updated files.

Updating is much easier on a network than was the case years ago, so give it a try. Because the program file is guarded by the Windows firewall, start NoteSmith by right mouse clicking its icon, choose Run As Administrator, and the program then can update itself. Exit and restart the program normally. The program guides you through this.

If the program will not connect to our website, it is because your firewall is blocking it. Under Windows 10/11 Settings, find Allow An App Through Windows Firewall, click the Change Settings button, scroll down the list and find NoteSmith (NSWin.exe), and check Private networks, optionally check Public networks, and be sure to click OK. If you are using a different firewall, please refer to our FAQs pdf and your firewall instruction.

Email

We started supporting NoteSmith by email in 1996. Yes, for over 25 years! When you send us a message, expect a response the same business day. If you do not have a response by the next business day, do not assume we are ignoring you! Assume our reply is in your spam filter and look for it there. No luck? Send us another email or a fax. Sometimes email servers just will not talk to each other or one assumes the other is sending spam. Check for directions on 'whitelisting' with your email provider and add our email address.

Daisy McCarthy, Manager of Licensing and Support

March 2024

Ransomware

Ransomware has become all too familiar. The source may be an unintended visit to a malicious web site or an attachment to a bogus email. Whatever the source, the result is all your files are encrypted. Unfortunately, the decryption key is safely stored in, most probably, another country and you see a message that you can unlock your data by payment of a fee, oftentimes in Bitcoin, not in dollars.

A customer sent their NoteSmith data to us when they could not access it. They had to resort to typing in all their data from scratch. Why? Because no one had made a backup to either removable media or to our web site where it quickly could have been restored to a new hard drive or new computer. A backup on the infected computer was useless because it, too, was encrypted by the ransomware.

Please realize that this customer lost *all* their data, not just their NoteSmith data. Ransomware encrypts an entire hard drive, not just one program!

Yes, it happens, and yes, you can readily recover from it if you have been proactive with a backup. Read on!

File, Online, Backup/Restore

NoteSmith has offered double password-protected, online backup since 2002. A significant number of customers have wisely opted for this feature, which has 'saved the bacon' of quite a few of them over the years. The password-protected online data is backed up once a month to our office computers, then to flash drives that are stored separately for additional safety. Additionally, we offer two separately-hosted servers for backups so you can alternate backups between the servers. Be aware that there is no back door to this function because we did not want to leave a back door to a hacker. If you lose or forget your own chosen online password, or if the only employee who knows it leaves your company, we *cannot* help you. Our intent is to give each user confidence knowing their data is safe.

We offer you all this security and safety for less than the price of one latte a month.

We discovered an important misunderstanding about backups based on questions from two customers. In almost all cases, NoteSmith users should keep their data in one (1) folder, the default folder installed by NoteSmith called Data. Some of you have more than one data folder for various reasons. The online backup sends a copy of your data from *only* one (1) folder, the one you are working in at the time you upload. Do not think that all your data is copied if you have scattered it among multiple folders.

There is little or no reason to have multiple folders, other than possibly an Archive folder to store notes closed years ago to clean up your normal Data folder. The File, Company Configuration feature in NoteSmith can easily separate your portfolio into separate taxable entities. It was added in 1988 for just that purpose. Additional data folders were offered as an alternative many years later *only* for customers with more than 1000 notes and, even then, *only* if they had some other special need. If you have multiple folders, you need to back each of them up, you need to recreate them in each new annual version of the program, and you need to import the data from each old folder to its corresponding new folder. Basically, your work is tripled and can be avoided merely by using File, Company Configuration instead.

NoteSmith for Mac

We occasionally get requests to release a Mac version of NoteSmith. Our software is very well received in a niche market. A Mac version, requiring a 100% rewrite just for Mac computers, might be used by 10% of our customers,

and half of those would already have the Windows version. Rewriting an entire program for 5% or even 10% more customers, doubling the variety of technical support questions in the process, simply is not viable.

Old programs, Pro programs

When you pay a discounted price to renew your support with us, you are licensed to replace your old program with a new one. You do NOT now have two licenses, which means you do NOT have rights to give your old program to your associate or your relatives. Treat the old program as if it no longer exists because in terms of software licensing, it does not exist.

NoteSmith Pro allows TWO fully functional installations for ONE person, such as using NoteSmith in the office and taking the data home to make collections calls in the evening. The updated data is returned to the office the next morning and the home NoteSmith sits idle. The NoteSmith license states plainly that there is NO two user license of any NoteSmith version. Further, this means that you cannot use one installation to record payments and give the other to your CPA to run reports at the same time. You would need two licensed programs, just like you need two desks, two computers, and two copies of Windows.

Online passwords

NoteSmith has a requirement in File, Online, Backup for passwords. Those who are backing their data up to our web site need to be using secure passwords. That means at least 8 characters using at least one number, one lower case letter, one upper case letter, and one punctuation mark.

Remember, you are not trying to protect your data merely from someone in your office, but you are trying to protect your customers' data from professional and possibly international hackers. Type "passwords" into your favorite search engine and visit some pages that discuss the topic. It is valuable background for protecting your data.

Oversized attachments: read the FAQ file

Due to the popularity of smart phones, we had a flurry of emails where people took a photograph of their two-sentence error message and attempted to email the 12 MB picture which is suitable for poster sized framing. Our email server treats such messages as spam. From Help, Technical Support, Update, click the blue FAQ link to read about a variety of common ways to pass error messages or other screen happenings to our support staff. These are not new, nor are they NoteSmith specific, and will help you to communicate with others using Windows and the internet.

For instance, the text in all NoteSmith pop up messages can be highlighted with your mouse and copy/pasted into an email. Add some short explanation of what you were doing and your email is about 1/10,000th the size of the aforementioned picture.

Anti-virus and backup

We identified a small number of customers who have been struggling with their overzealous anti-virus software. NoteSmith opens and closes up to 14 files when it records a single (1) payment. If you tell your anti-virus software to scan every file as it gets used, NoteSmith will never get access to the files it needs and you will see a message similar to "file access denied" or "file not found." Although the error appears in NoteSmith, this is not a NoteSmith error. It is Windows telling NoteSmith that a file it needs cannot be used, or found, and is a result of the virus scanner tying it up too long.

The Help, Technical Support, FAQ file has suggested settings for protecting your computer while letting your software work as normal. If you are still running NoteSmith on an XP computer, realize that current anti-virus software requires more hardware horsepower than what that older computer has built in.

Updating your program file will cure some of these issues. Some recent changes to NoteSmith have it look for files your anti-virus software mangled and recovers them.

Finally, click Start, Computer (or open Windows Explorer) and go to this folder:

C:\Users\Public\Princeton\NoteSmith2024

Look for any files with the file extension of .OLD and delete them. Your anti-virus program prevented NoteSmith from deleting these temporary files, which in turn may prevent you from downloading an update.

NoteSmith 2025

We are already working on features for next year's NoteSmith based on feedback we received over the last few months. If you have an idea you would like to see incorporated into the program, now is the time to send it to us. When the summer begins, we will start testing and it will be too late to make significant code changes.

Daisy McCarthy, Manager of Licensing and Support

February 2024

Some of our customers may be reading our monthly newsletter for the first time. So welcome to all, but especially if you are a first-time reader. We try to keep this file short, timely, and relevant to current NoteSmith issues.

1098 and 1099-INT

Because of the number of questions we receive on 1098s, we ask two things of you. First, check the instructions in the NoteSmith manual, and also the answers to frequently asked questions. Second, if you have an issue around what information appears where on the form, you will have to quote us the text from the relevant IRS instructions, including title, page, and paragraph. Please do not tell us you don't want the account number to appear in box 4 or that your CPA wants forms printed using a special font. Unless you show us where the IRS instructed you otherwise, we cannot make a change to the program that will affect all our other users.

Check your address and Tax ID number for accuracy. Make sure you are using the 2024 program, which is the only one that has the Tax Year 2023 forms in it. Enter SSNs for your individual payors and do not try sending 1098 forms to corporations. Although this is not the problem that it was years ago, your printer may not be able to print the account number in the bottom form if it is outside the printer's margin. You must be using forms you received directly from the IRS. See the manual for other tips.

Consider filing electronically in the future, avoiding the nuisance of printing on IRS 1096, 1098, or 1099-INT original forms. New procedures for applying for electronic filing were implemented in 2021 and again in 2023, so be sure to review the latest updates at irs.gov.

A 1098 form is designed to give to a homeowner, who naturally is a cash basis taxpayer with a Social Security Number (NOT an Employer Identification Number). USRule (see Accounts, Edit, Note) is a cash basis method of amortizing payments. Non-USRule (unchecking the USRule box) is an accrual method of accounting. NoteSmith will discourage you from unchecking USRule if the 1098 form (Accounts, Edit, Investment) is selected. If you select 1098 forms on that tab, the program will check USRule. This is deliberate.

Other current NoteSmith 2024 items

New NoteSmith Users and Company Configurations: Due to recent changes in operating systems and anti-virus programs, some new NoteSmith users get an error when setting up their Company Configuration after first-time installation. To avoid this error, we recommend that you install the program on your computer, add the Media Key when directed to do so, then run Maintenance (click on File, then Utilities, then Maintenance). Running Maintenance reliably prevents/fixes this error. However, if after running Maintenance you still experience an error, please contact NoteSmith Technical Support for assistance (support@notesmith.com).

FAQ: A companion to this newsletter file is the Frequently Asked Questions PDF. The file you are reading or the FAQ can be viewed by clicking the link at Help, Technical Support, Update. The FAQ file is like a companion booklet to the manual with items added as other NoteSmith users ask questions. Being a PDF, you can search for any text. If you experience an error message or a feature does not seem quite right, search the FAQ first.

Update: You always should update your program file immediately after installing the program. We make changes throughout the year based on customer feedback and these improvements are free to you. Go to Help, Technical Support, Update and use the buttons to update various files based on their dates. If NoteSmith cannot access the internet, it is because your internet security software is set to block NoteSmith. See the NoteSmith FAQ file or your internet security support for ways to allow NoteSmith, and other software you use regularly, to function normally.

Origination Date: For proper filing of 1098s, the IRS now wants the date your loan documents were filed at your county records office, not just the Date Bought (aka Date Opened) that you put them on your books. Store this date in Accounts, Edit, behind the CrBureau button on the first tab. The requirements for Origination Date and related dates and amounts have been changing over the last few years, so be sure to review the IRS instructions and enter the required information into NoteSmith.

Report Size and Font Size: Go to File, Setup, the Program tab. Look for Shrink Reports and also for Font Size. Shrink Reports will properly format a report when you are on a high definition monitor, such as the Microsoft Surface Pro laptop/tablet. If Print Preview doesn't fit on the page, check this box. Font Size allows you to increase the fonts for legibility. Windows controls the fonts on title bars and menus so see the Windows Help for changing these settings. NoteSmith controls the rest from this box.

NoteSmith Online Backup and customized user Web Site

Our optional web site (for you, your investors, and/or your customers) is only $99 per year. That includes the $49 online backup, which saves a few data disasters every year! Reduce your incoming phone calls with our web site and reduce the anxiety of a hard disk crash or office break-in for just $8 a month.

Verify your backups are doing what you want them to do: For all users of the NoteSmith Online Backup, we recommend that each year, after installing your updated program, you do two things: 1. Verify that the backup settings are what you want (automatic, etc.); and 2. Manually initiate a backup and watch that it completes without errors. Each year we hear from people who thought they had a backup but did not because their anti-virus program and/or firewall were blocking the backup. An error of "remote file not found" is an indication that your online backups are being blocked.

Thanks for the history

Our staff works hard supporting NoteSmith every day. Some of them have done so for 20+ years. Our customers work hard, too. Some have been with us 20 years, some are second and even third generation NoteSmith users in their families. From all our staff to all our customers, please accept our thanks for your loyal support of NoteSmith over such a long time.

Daisy McCarthy, Manager of Licensing and Support

January 2024

NoteSmith 2024 handling

NoteSmith 2024 will be distributed in this sequence for those who already paid their renewal:

Batch 1 Express Download: Emailed instructions and Installation Guide will arrive before January 7 assuming you provided us a correct email address. Check your spam filter and all your email addresses. Add our Support email address (support@notesmith.com) to the "white list" of your email program.

Batch 2 Regular Download: Emailed instructions and Installation Guide sent around January 20. This is the same as Batch 1, but two weeks later. Again, check your spam filter and all your email addresses.

Batch 3 Regular Postal Handling: Includes a hard copy of the Installation Guide and flash drive of the updated program, and will be mailed around January 20. Check your PO Box if you ever provided that as an address to us. If you ordered a manual, remember to look for your FlashDrive in the package.

Note to those paying by check: Checks mailed in the last few days of December run a significant risk of not being received before the December 31 deadline. Checks received after December 31 no longer qualify for the $50 November-December discount and will be returned to you if they are not for the correct, January amount. Other reasons for checks being returned to you include such things as: incorrect amount, incorrect payee, mailed to an incorrect address, or were not signed. Renewals paid after December 31 are more expensive because they are filled individually by support technicians instead of in bulk.

Online features: You can add the online backup or personal web site from NoteSmith.com, Order, Current link.

Paying late: Print an invoice from Help, Renewal Invoice. Mail a check for the amount shown or use it at NoteSmith.com, Order, the Renewal link, to order the same items at the same price shown on the printout.

NoteSmith 2023

This is the last newsletter that will be downloaded by the NoteSmith 2023 program.

We continue to support the 2023 program for those who ordered 2024 renewals until their expected delivery date. Once you receive your 2024 package, install it immediately, import your existing data, and start using the new features available to you. Support emails/faxes will be answered during weekends in January for those with questions about IRS printing or electronic filing.

If you did not renew for 2024, your program will continue working as long as your hardware and operating system are kept healthy. NoteSmith 2023 cannot print the new year IRS forms, export to the credit bureau, or continue access to online backups or web sites. Most importantly, it will not be supported. Go to NoteSmith.com, Order, and choose the Renewal link right away. Renewal prices are approximately double after February 14.

Thanks

Thank you for choosing NoteSmith to manage your portfolio.

Daisy McCarthy, Manager of Licensing and Support

December 2023

NoteSmith 2024 order confirmations

We email confirmations of your renewal order in December. This is done so you know we received and processed your order. Some people will get confirmations more than once but please understand that many of our users rely on these confirmations.

Your order is due in our office – not *postmarked* but **due** – December 31. We hold all checks until January so mail your invoice and check today. Renewal prices increase on January 1.

Windows Operating Systems

NoteSmith 2024 will run normally on Windows 7, 8, 8.1, 10, and 11. Windows XP is no longer supported by Microsoft so you should not be servicing the loans of other people on such an unsecured and outdated platform. NoteSmith will run on XP but the manual dropped explanations specific to XP.

Current address!

Please use our current address for orders and correspondence:

Adagio Systems, LLC/Princeton Investments,
1001 E Harmony Road, Suite A-110, Fort Collins, CO 80525

Common issues

During December and January, we always see the same issues. Please, please, please help reduce the time you spend and the delays starting your new program by following the instructions in your Installation Guide EXACTLY.

Installation: The most common set of questions we see has to do with installation. The Net program is designed NOT TO WORK if the directions are not followed exactly. Share and map the PRINCETON folder.

Activation: The second most frequent set of questions we see has to do with program activation. You cannot activate the first few days the program is installed and there is no reason you should deactivate it either. It is fully functional and will warn you when you need to activate. The activation directions should take an experienced NoteSmith user 2-3 minutes.

1098s: In January, a frequent question has to do with IRS Form 1098. The paper and electronic filing directions are in Help along with the most common causes that a form does not print for one of your customers. You will need NoteSmith 2024 to print and file your 2023 payment data.

Online backup

If you have an online backup with us, NoteSmith can send the data automatically to the NoteSmith.com site once a month and the NoteSmith.net site on a different day each month, giving you two locations, two different dates. And Yes, it can be done automatically.

For those who may not have an online backup with us, it is only $49 for the year and gives you the capability to make a compressed, encrypted copy of your data and store it at our web sites. Add your own password, the program adds another password, and upload to our password protected site so your data is TRIPLE password protected. If your computer is lost, stolen, vandalized, or crashes, your data is safely stored off site. If you have

technical support issues with your data, provide us your password and we can have a look at your data and provide assistance.

NoteSmith licensing questions

Each year we get a number of questions about NoteSmith licensing. The best resource is the NoteSmith End User License Agreement (NEULA) in the front of the manual, from pop up help, or at our web site. Here are answers to two common questions.

If you will be renewing your support for 2024, you receive a new package (physical or via email) with new program files on a FlashDrive and a 4 page Installation Guide. For a small fee, we can include a printed manual. The files on the FlashDrive and the download are the program files we will support for the coming year. You receive a significant discount over ordering a new NoteSmith because your new installation replaces the old installation, it does not double your user licenses. The old media is not meant to be given to an "associate" or other acquaintance. It needs to be securely retired. Someone else using your old software while you use the new software violates federal copyright law and the NEULA.

NoteSmith Pro is single (1) user, two (2) installations, the main one for daily use and a second as a backup so you are never down if something happens to your computer or office. Both installations need to have the exact same data and input should be done only on the main installation. There is **no** two (2) user license of **any** NoteSmith version.

Holiday schedule

This season, from December through Valentine's Day, is the busiest time for us. Our renewal orders are processed and shipped only during this time of year, which necessitates hiring temporary help and pressing our normal staff to help with once-a-year orders. We still expect to respond to all technical support requests within one business day although you might experience additional turnaround hours. We will be answering support on weekends during January to help with installations and IRS forms.

From Christmas Eve through New Year's Day, we will be on light duty. This is a time for all of us to spend with our families and our friends. Please be safe this holiday season and have a fun, relaxing visit with your loved ones.

Thank you

As always, all of us here thank you for your continued support of our software.