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The American Contractor from Maxwell Systems is a construction/contractor software product that contains a series of system modules designed specifically for construction companies and contractors. Pricing for our prototypical company is \$14,373.70. This price also includes onsite training and the first year of software support.

Modules – 4.5 Stars

General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Payroll, Job Cost Tracking, Catalog of Resources, Estimating, Purchase Orders, Equipment Costing, Inventory, Work Orders, Contact Management, and the Command Center are all included with The American Contractor.

Learning Curve – 4 Stars

The American Contractor is written in Visual Fox Pro. My experience in navigating Fox Pro has always been awkward, and The American Contractor is no exception. System setup can be somewhat intimidating, with extensive setup required in order to begin using the system. A drop-down menu bar at the top of the screen provides easy navigation, but finding exactly what you are looking for requires some practice. Luckily, The American Contractor provides new users with a demo company for exactly that reason. They also include a series of training lessons that takes you through a typical construction company day. System setup is accomplished by clicking on Program | Utilities. This is where you enter your chart of accounts information, profit and loss, and transaction entry options for AP, AR and cash postings. You can enter up to three AP types: Trade, Subcon and Retention. You can also choose multiple distributions per invoice. The American Contractor's batch entry system allows you to enter large quantities of transactions at one sitting. You can also set up recurring invoices for automatic payment, and when ready to pay, use the Enter Payments on Account option. Job tracking codes can be chosen by using

the pre-defined list, which includes Electrical, HVAC, Paving Contractor, Plumbing

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The American Contractor provides new users with a certified trainer to guide you through the installation and setup process. You are also provided with a specific number of training hours. As mentioned above, a series of training lessons is also included with your software, as is an extensive F1 Help system.

Security – 4 Stars

System security is multi-level, with all users assigned access to specific areas. Level access is also assigned. Once this is completed, users are then assigned to a security group.

Customization & Productivity – 4.5 Stars

The American Contractor has excellent customization capabilities. By utilizing the System Tailoring option, you can customize the program levels to best suit your specifications. The Productivity feature lets you enter labor figures for items that use formula units per hour. The Labor factor calculates how many hours are required to install an item. And the Estimating module will assist you with estimation of job and work order costs. The Project Manager Command Center, a new feature, gives you a summary of Jobs Information, a Jobs Summary, and AP and AR totals. These areas also provide links to more detailed information, as well as fast access to a variety of system functions. The Catalog of Resources maintains an active list of items such as inventory items, purchase order and work order items, estimating, and time & materials. The Estimating module also lets you create two levels of proposals: Select and Complete.

You can define up to five custom cost types to reflect costs necessary for your company. Those costs can then be applied to the appropriate work or job order.

Reporting – 4 Stars

A wide variety of financial reports is available. Reports specific to contractors include

a variety of job cost, work order, equipment, sub-contractor and purchase order

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The areas of evaluation were chosen

based on feedback from software vendors, the editorial staff of the magazine, and this reviewer. They are as follows:

1. **Modules** ' It's important to know what modules are included or available.
2. **Learning Curve** ' Is the program easy to navigate? Is it user friendly?
3. **Integration/Import/Export** ' Do all of the modules work together? Can you import information from third-party software or export to spreadsheet programs, etc.?
4. **Support & Training** ' Good support and effective training are necessities.
5. **Security** ' Is it multi-level? Module-based? Menu-based?
6. **Customization & Productivity** ' Are there user-defined fields? Can you get the information you need? Will this product make your life easier?
7. **Reports** ' What standard reports are included? Does the program offer integration with Crystal Reports, etc.? Does it have customization capability?
8. **Relative Value** ' This is subjective, but is the program worth the cost?

It's important to remember that each of these programs stands on its own. We are not trying to compare them side-by-side, but rather point out their core strengths and let you, the reader, decide what you need, what you want and what you cannot live without.

The products reviewed here range from basic financial systems with

a job cost module, to sophisticated

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