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Commercial Systems. It offers a full suite of integrated modules for medium to large architects, engineers, contractors, and construction companies. It features a solid user interface and underlying database technology worthy of high-volume, multi-user and multi-location enterprises. StarBuilder has a base price of \$8,000, ranging to \$30,000. Although not reviewed here, the company also offers a lower-level product called The Construction Manager (TCM) with a solid set of integrated job cost and financial accounting modules for the small construction company. TCM provides a well-designed user interface and open database (Microsoft Access) structure that makes it easy to learn with the additional advantage of data accessibility for customized reporting, data analysis or data export. TCM has a base price of \$2,600, ranging to \$10,000.

### **Learning Curve ‘ 4.5 Stars**

Installation of StarBuilder is a multi-step process, as might be expected of a product such as this. Since it relies on Microsoft SQL Server, you'll need to separately purchase and install the database engine. The product can also be run using the free MSDE database engine for a very small number of users or trial installations. Even though I am experienced with both SQL Server and MSDE installations, I found the StarBuilder installation process to be quite difficult and the documentation somewhat lacking. For most installations, this process will require the assistance of qualified IT personnel, coordinated with Geac technical support. Once SQL Server is properly installed, the database must be initialized and updated to the latest table definitions.

The user interface is very consistently organized and surprisingly easy to learn. The main work area is divided into two sections, with a list of modules on the left half of the screen and the applicable functions for each module on the right side of the screen. When a module is selected, a set of sliding/overlapping windows on the right

side provides access to that module's Maintenance, Entry and Processing, Inquiries

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Contracts, Progress Billing, PowerNotes, Purchase Order, Subcontracts, and Time & Material (T&M) Billing. At the heart of everything, the Job Cost module provides cost tracking with up to four different levels. The information in the Job Cost module is collected and updated from all of the other modules, making it a centralized management tool for project managers and accountants alike. Jobs are initially set up by entering information into a data-entry screen that has tabs for Job Master, Job Billing Data, and Job/Phase/Cost Activity Estimates. Costs can be tracked by job, phase, cost code and cost type. An informative and powerful function within the job cost module is the Job Cost Inquiry function found within the Inquiries and Reports submenu. This window has six tabs that let you see critical management information: Income and Cost Summary, Gross Profit Summary, Cost Activity Summary, Cost Activity Detail, Transaction Detail and Labor History Detail.

The summary tabs display job totals in a grid format broken down according to the tracking categories set up for each job. The detail tabs show transaction detail lists that let you double-click on any item to see detail about that specific transaction. Geac offers several other optional add-on products to enhance StarBuilder's information management and analysis capabilities. StarProject and StarProject for Notes provide project management tools. StarProject for Notes is based on the Lotus Notes platform and includes collaboration features for the entire project team. Servicon (previously ServiceWorks) addresses the service management aspect, with dispatch control and job scheduling. StarViewer is an executive management tool to provide quick access to critical information about customers, vendors, financials and job/project status.

### **Import/Export/Integration ' 4 Stars**

StarBuilder offers several data import and export options. Invoices can be imported into the AP module using ASCII or \*.DIF files. Time entry detail can be imported into the Payroll module, and journal entries can be imported

into the GL module. There are no built-in data export

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technical information. In addition, Geac maintains a Professional Services group to provide implementation assistance, on-site consulting, custom Crystal Report development and even custom program modifications.

### **Reporting ‘ 5 Stars**

StarBuilder's modules include more than 150 professionally formatted reports. The reports can be previewed, printed or exported to numerous formats. There's also a Report Wizard that allows the user to define many different parameters to produce customized reports. Since the program is based on the SQL Server database, nearly any third-party ODBC-compliant data mining or report writing program (such as Crystal Reports) could be used as well.

### **Relative Value ‘ 4 Stars**

StarBuilder is a solid solution that brings with it a lot of flexibility and powerful cost management functions. Each module's consistent design reduces the learning curve, in spite of the necessary complexity of any job cost package. As noted above, the installation process is formidable, and will require significant administrative maintenance.

### **2005 Overall Rating: 4.5**

Technology

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