having served a construction-specific certified public accounting firm, Toolbox Software (formerly Informed Systems Corporation) places special emphasis on GAAP-compliant accounting and reporting to facilitate Percentage of Completion analysis and indirect cost allocation to jobs. Toolbox pricing ranges from $6,100 for a single-user system. The company also offers Toolbox Lite, which starts at $1,000.

Learning Curve ' 4.5 Stars

Installation is a well-designed process that simply involves loading the database engine (Sybase Adaptive Server Anywhere) and the programs from a single CD, using a wizard-based process. Sample databases are also provided for learning and testing purposes. The main window consists of a standard Windows drop-down menu system organized by module, plus a vertical shortcut bar on the left side of the workspace for one-click access to the program's most commonly used functions and data-entry screens. The program follows a consistent list design that is easy to understand and work with. For example, each major data table, such as jobs, vendors, customers and so forth, provides a list screen where you can quickly scroll through or search the desired record. Once you find the desired record, you just double-click the list item to open the data-entry window for that item.

Data-entry windows use a multi-tab layout with tabs such as Transactions, Setup, Defaults, Custom, Attach and Notes. The Transaction tab provides a quick list of transactions that are related to the selected record (job, customer, etc.). The Setup tab is where detailed information is entered for the record, such as job name, address, terms and so forth. The Custom tab is used for entering custom information, which can be used for a variety of purposes. The Attach tab is used for attaching external files to a record, such as documents or pictures. The Notes tab provides a free-form text window where you can enter any kind of ancillary information desired. The help screens are less comprehensive than other systems, but the company noted that its training and help requirements have been reduced by the automation of traditional

mechanical processes. The help topics are organized along the same lines as the

Scheduling. Modules use a single central relational database to eliminate data redundancy between modules. Several modules give you the ability to customize screens, change the order of prompted items, turn off items not applicable to your company, and modify forms throughout the system.

The job cost module allows for unlimited tiering of levels for phasing/cost codes, billing codes and change orders. You can set up cost codes and billing codes to match CSI libraries, or you can define your own set of codes. The change order system allows you to approve, unapprove, pending-include or pending-exclude items for both budgets and progress-pay applications. Indirect costs can be allocated to each line item cost or into separate line items based on the cost type. As well, you can retroactively allocate unallocated indirect costs to jobs in order to assure that indirect costs are fully distributed.

Toolbox also includes an estimating feature that lets you define and include assemblies from standardized item lists. Pricing changes at the item level are automatically reflected into all assemblies that incorporate that assembly. Work orders can be created from estimates, and you can copy estimates from similar jobs previously created.

Import/Export/Integration ' 4.5 Stars

The estimating module has an import feature that provides import for most other estimating software systems, including Timberline, HCSS and Quickbid, as well as Excel. The program uses an ODBC-compliant database, which could be used to programmatically export information from the data tables. As well, many reports are specifically designed for data export, and users can export or e-mail data by clicking the envelope icon from any report.

Support & Training ' 5 Stars

Support is available through the company's toll-free number and web site. A limited

drill-down and on-demand sub report functionality. Reports can be previewed, printed or exported to a number of different formats including *.PDF, *.CSV, *.RPT, *.RTF, Lotus, Excel and others. (The company noted that it has implemented a normalized relational data structure.)

Relative Value ' 4.5 Stars

Construction Management Toolbox is a reasonably priced program and has been on the market since 1996. It continues to see new enhancements and features with each release.

2005 Overall Rating: 5