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Aug. 29, 2005

From the September 2005 [Review of Mid-Range Accounting Software](#)

Microsoft Great Plains offers a comprehensive accounting and business management system that is scalable to nearly any size business. However, it excels at the mid-market level, providing advanced control over financial accounting, sales, inventory, e-commerce, customer relationship management, manufacturing, job-costing, retail and human resources. The highly customizable system is offered in modules that are available individually or as bundles geared toward specific industry needs. Core financial modules include a GL, AP and AR, as well as cash flow management and bank reporting and reconciliation.

Great Plains is offered through Microsoft resellers who provide sales, installation and training support, and therefore have control over exact pricing. The approximate cost for a one-user license that includes the core financial modules with bank reconciliation, sales order processing, inventory and the system manager is \$6,500. A similarly featured five-seat license is about \$9,500.

EASE OF USE/TRANSACTION ENTRY – 5 Stars

The Great Plains interface looks and operates much like Microsoft Outlook, with list-based navigation and streamlined menus. It opens within a well-designed and functional window that utilizes large intuitive icons and pull-down menus for accessing modules and primary system functions such as transactions, performing queries, reporting and setting system security and preferences. The program prominently displays the name of the company whose files are being worked in along with

user information. Users also have the option of displaying an Explorer folder

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quantity, pricing and other options. Posting of transactions is facilitated by a Transactions icon on the toolbar that jumps directly to an input screen, allowing the selection of the type of transaction along with entry of additional information about the transaction. All such screens maintain a consistent interface.

The program is very customizable, with the ability to determine interface components such as a shortcuts menu and selection of which fields are displayed on data-entry screens, with the ability to rename fields. Great Plains includes how-to screens and wizards to assist in configuring the GL, including setting up default entries and preferences, and setting up single and divisional retained earnings accounts. The program also includes several other guides and wizards to assist with various tasks.

NOTABLE FEATURES – 5 Stars

Great Plains includes substantial security options that enable task-level user rights, user groups, departmental security and other options. The system allows copying, voiding, deleting and correcting of transactions while an audit trail maintains system integrity with a history of transactions and system changes. Posted journal entries can be corrected by backing out of the originating entry and making the necessary adjustments to a copy of the original entry, with the audit trail still tracking all changes.

The program's financial applications support multiple currencies and adhere to U.S. and European GAAP, and provide additional tools that enable analysis of critical financial information. The inventory system in Great Plains offers great depth. While providing the basic ability to track by serial and lot number and LIFO, FIFO and average costing, the system also helps manage distribution and manufacturing processes by allowing tracking of items by serial or lot number, which then shows where and when that item appeared in bills of materials,

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to export reports to Excel pivot tables with just a few clicks, or use “analysis cubes” in Excel to enhance data analysis. The program can also export to a variety of other formats, including ASCII, XML and HTML, which lets users view budgeting, planning and reporting through a web browser. Data can also be imported from many third-party products.

REPORTING — 5 Stars

Through the system's FRx analytics capabilities, users can easily create customized financial reports and balance sheets, as well as “report books” that incorporate Excel charts and graphs, PowerPoint presentations and Word files. Books can either be distributed via e-mail or shared via the Web. Additionally, more than 200 pre-built reports, invoices and lists are available, all of which can be customized or adapted to business needs and are available to preview prior to printing.

SUPPORT/TRAINING/HELP SYSTEM – 4 Stars

The internal help utility is excellent, with tutorials, how-tos, context-sensitive help, right-click menus and a fully searchable database of help documentation. Microsoft also provides an extensive online resource system and user forums. Several support plans are available, ranging from pay-as-you-go Flex Support to comprehensive unlimited support. Most technical assistance and training, however, will likely be handled by a local Microsoft Certified Partner or reseller.

SUMMARY

Great Plains offers an exhaustingly comprehensive business accounting suite that is perhaps more accurately described as a mid-market ERP (enterprise resource planning) system, providing integrated controls over financial management, distribution and supply chain management, manufacturing, retail, HR, payroll and e-commerce.

It can even be specially designed for non-profit and public sector accounting

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