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Even though the real estate market has slowed down (or perhaps for that very reason), the construction industry remains strong. Construction professionals, including contractors and subcontractors, continue to thrive in this tough economy, perhaps because many people are choosing to enhance their existing home rather than search for a new one. Whatever the reason, there seems to be no shortage of work for construction professionals.

Executive Summary

- A strong job cost module is essential for any construction-related business.
- Choice of software very dependent on type of business: construction, contractor, heavy equipment, service related, etc.
- Learning curve can be steep, particularly with some modular systems.
- If staffing is limited, ease of use becomes very important.
- Work Order/Service Board functionality is essential for those providing

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job cost functionality, the ability to track job cost expenses (including labor and overhead) and the need to keep a close eye on job budgets to ensure profitability. Every product reviewed here contains a job cost module or function in some capacity, with some being more comprehensive than others.

Other features and functionality a construction company may look for include an Inventory module to track materials, a scheduling board for sending out service technicians, the ability to track liability and workers' compensation insurance, and an equipment module to track usage and maintenance.

The type of business your client runs — construction, contracting, home repair, HVAC, plumbing, etc. — will make a big difference in what program you should recommend. Smaller companies or those just starting out would do well on an entry-level product.

While such products may lack many of the features found in larger systems, they are often priced for companies that might not be in a position to make a large software investment, and the company usually doesn't have a need for those advanced features anyway. Those with more established businesses would do well to search out a more sophisticated product that contains more of the features that will likely be needed down the road, even if they have no use for such features in the short term. This review considers the following six categories:

Learning Curve/Ease of Use — When looking to implement new software, this may be the area that many business owners and managers will look at first, simply because excessive training time means loss of productivity. How quickly can they have the product up and running? Is it easy to navigate or is significant training time required? Is there a sample database included with the product?

Modules & Functionality — While some of the products

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Productivity tools such as organizational tools, at-a-glance reports and document management can reduce the time spent processing paperwork, increase the time spent to grow the business' customer base and enable more efficient scheduling of service calls.

Import/Export/Integration — Can your client import information from that new estimating program? What about timesheets to attach to labor and expense reports? And most importantly, does the product work with existing products and processes the way it needs to?

Reporting — Reporting is always an important area no matter the industry. But a good reporting system should allow for the export of data to a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel, and it should offer a decent number of standard customizable reports and utilize third-party report writers such as Crystal Reports. The product should also allow reports to be easily e-mailed and converted to PDF files with the click of a button.

Support & Training — Since you'll only know how good the support staff is when you need them, this is a difficult area to assess in a review. However, it is important to know the support and training options available so that's what this section provides. Although some of the products reviewed here require little training, others will require a considerable amount of time for training.

Relative Value — This section basically assesses the price/value equation. Obviously, a product that falls on the high end of the pricing scale should provide many more features and options than a product that falls on the lower end of the pricing scale. But does it?

Every business will have different must have's, which makes it difficult

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Edition. Released in three separate updates, JobView 8.0 contains more than 100 new functions and system enhancements.

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[Aptora Corporation – Total Office Manager](#)

Total Office Manager from Aptora Corporation is designed for construction and service-related industries such as electrical and appliance repair, along with HVAC service.

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[Cougar Mountain Software – Professional Accounting](#)

Version 12.1 of Cougar Mountain Professional Accounting is the latest release of this popular accounting software product that features a variety of add-on modules including a Job Costing module.

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[CUC Software – Contractor Essentials](#)

Contractor Essentials from CUC Software evolved from EMS Construction Software and has since been completely revamped. The vendor continues to add product enhancements on a regular basis.

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[CYMA Systems Inc. – CYMA Accounting For Windows](#)

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[eTEK International Inc.](#)

[– eTEK Accounting](#)

eTEK International continues to provide the latest technology to construction-related businesses, including contractors, service companies and distributors. The newest release of eTEK Accounting for Microsoft Office 2007 is designed to run on Windows Vista, as well as Windows XP.

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[Intuit – QuickBooks Enterprise](#)

[Solutions 8.0: Contractor Edition](#)

QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions 8.0: Contractor Edition targets growing and mid-sized contracting businesses and comes in five-, 10-, 15- and 20-user versions. It has the capacity to handle the increased demand that a growing company has.

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[Management Information Control](#)

[Systems, Inc. – Builder Information System](#)

Builder Information System (BIS) is a fully integrated financial management system that is suitable for general contractors, construction companies, homebuilders, electrical, mechanical and other specialty contractors.

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[Sage Software – Peachtree By Sage Premium Accounting For Construction](#)

Peachtree has continued to strengthen its presence in the accounting software industry in recent years with the addition of several industry-specific versions of its popular software, including Peachtree by Sage Premium Accounting for Construction 2008.

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[Sage Software – Sage Timberline Office](#)

Sage Timberline Office continues to dominate the construction and property management industries with its comprehensive financial and operations software product. Offering upwards of 50 modules, Sage Timberline Office is aimed at larger specialty and service contractors.

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