



Choosing Your Construction Management Software

Part 2 of a series



by Eileen Dunn, CPA

The decision to purchase a construction management software package is vital, long lasting, and will impact the processes and future of your company. There are hundreds of software products available. Evaluating different products can become confusing and overwhelming. It is essential that a process on how to proceed through the selection of software be followed.

Construction management software is a tool for your company's operations. You would not hesitate to purchase a backhoe or truck if the job could be completed faster or easier. The same should be true for the office. If you were shown how to save time, money and make the job easier, wouldn't you jump to purchase construction management software?

The selection process begins with selecting a company representative to oversee the selection and implementation of the software. Choose someone who has a thorough knowledge of your company's operations and future plans. The software product must be able to support your company's expansion.

Locate construction software vendors. Trade magazines, the Internet, other contractors, and your CPA are good resources to locate vendors. A software company should have an Internet site. I would be leery of buying software from a software company that didn't have an Internet site.

Contact the software vendors and request brochures and company literature. Reviewing product brochures will help you determine whether the construction software contains features required by your company.

The software vendor's reputation is an important consideration. You are buying an investment for your company. You want to make sure the vendor will be around to provide product updates and support. Training options are also an important consideration. Everyone learns differently. Some employees will be able to pick up a software book and be able to operate the program. Some employees will need someone to teach them how to use the software. Classes available over the Internet are also a great

feature. Your staff will not have to travel to a training center.

All this research should narrow down the software vendors. Of the remaining vendors, request a product demonstration. Some vendors will demonstrate their products' most popular features. Other vendors will offer to perform a needs analysis.

A needs analysis is an interview of all personnel involved in the construction process. It determines how your company handles the construction process and what program features are critical for your company. It is an excellent tool to determine whether a particular software product meets your company's needs. A needs analysis is followed by a product demonstration that highlights the software features that will help your company meet its needs.

After all software products have been researched and demonstrations are finished, it is time to make a decision. It is best to make the decision within thirty days. Waiting any longer will cause you to have to refresh your memory regarding product features.

Today there are many reasons to use construction management software. With a tight economy and an increasingly competitive market, contractors are forced to do more with less. Integrated software packages are a great tool to save time, money and labor hours. They also provide valuable information at the touch of a button. It makes sense to take advantage of today's technology. ■

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