

# DECISION CHALLENGE: CHOOSING BEST-FIT ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE

Don't get sidetracked in the search for the right products.

By Steve Antill

**W**hen contractors decide they need new accounting software, the Internet is usually the first place they begin their search. But do a Google search on "construction accounting software" and hundreds of options will appear—accounting software that does estimating; accounting systems that do estimating, accounting, and project management; and project management systems that do estimating and accounting.

The construction software industry has reached a point where many vendors are trying to be everything to everyone. Theoretically, this is ideal. After all, who wouldn't want a one-stop shop for all technology tools?

Realistically, though, every construction business is unique, and an all-in-one product may not be flexible enough. An estimating module built into an accounting system, for example, may not work for a specialty trade contractor since the estimating tool is too general. The real question is: When looking to replace an accounting system because it is too generic to meet the required needs, why consider an all-in-one system that was not designed with the specific business or trade in mind?

## PREPARATION IS KEY

So what is the best advice for new technology shoppers? Before taking any other steps, the company should develop a plan and stick to it. The best plans, by the way, are those that include input from all employees who will use the software or who may require information from the system.

When shopping for new accounting software, contractors need to prioritize their wish lists. The "must-have" list includes

features and functions the company cannot do without. Depending on the company, this list may include American Institute of Architects (AIA) billings, work in process (WIP) reports, certified payrolls, customizable report writers, and so on. Beyond must-have items, shoppers should identify items they could live without and, finally, those they simply do not need.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Companies often overlook functionality when shopping for construction accounting solutions. For example, why purchase an accounting system that includes a built-in, canned estimating module if the estimating module is too generic and may never get implemented? Wouldn't it make more sense to buy an industry-specific, third-party estimating software product that will integrate with the new accounting system, so the contractor can benefit from the best of both worlds? On top of needing to be prepared for a conversion, companies need to make sure the feature sets of the new system will work for them.

Wowed by cool, yet impractical features. Failure to plan.

Unrealistic expectations. These are just some of the reasons companies end up with a construction accounting application that offers them limited benefits. Overbuying is something companies often regret, and yet it happens because they get in over their heads and fail to focus on their true needs. It all comes down to one basic purchasing principle: Don't get sidetracked. Buy only what is really needed and what can realistically be used and implemented. ♦



ABOUT the  
AUTHOR

Steve Antill is West Coast regional sales manager for Foundation Software, developer of FOUNDATION for Windows construction accounting, project management, and scheduling software. For more information, call 800-246-0800, e-mail [santill@foundationsoft.com](mailto:santill@foundationsoft.com), or visit [www.foundationsoft.com](http://www.foundationsoft.com).