



C-U-C Software — Executive Management Software

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EMS from C-U-C Software is financial management software designed specifically for construction and contracting companies. The prototypical company



C-U-C Software

cost for EMS would be \$8,795. This cost includes training and one year of support. Annual support runs \$1,640, and no additional charges will be incurred.

Modules

The base system of EMS includes GL, AR, AP, Payroll and Job Costing modules. Additional modules available include Inventory, Service Management and Dispatch, Capitol Assets and Depreciation, Material Estimation, Marketing Manager, Task Manager, E-Service and Vehicle Maintenance. ★★★★★

Learning Curve

The master menu in EMS has a menu bar at the top with drop-down window functionality. Entering company information is easy. The entry screen is comprehensive, allowing you to set up operational specifications, such as what items to show on invoices, printer settings, account reference tables and

licensing information. Lookup lists are found in most of the data-entry fields by pressing the Enter key. Once job information is entered, it can be printed or e-mailed directly from within the program. List Maintenance is a comprehensive tool that allows you to define a variety of explanations for contracts, equipment, materials, employees, customers and vendors. You can define as much or as little detail as you like. Conveniently, EMS also produces AIA billings and Union reports. ★★★★★

Import/Export/Integration

EMS is a completely integrated system. Once data is entered into the system, it is distributed to the appropriate files. And because EMS Professional utilizes a Microsoft Access database, importing and exporting information to Microsoft products such as Word and Excel is easy. ★★★★★

Support & Training

Annual support agreements are available from EMS, and include all yearly program enhancements and standard phone support. Online support is available as well, as is online communication between EMS computers and your own. Training and first year support costs are included in the price of the software. ★★★★★

Security

EMS has one of the easiest security setup functions I have ever seen: Click on Security Manager, choose an employee from the employee list, and assign a user name and password. When finished, simply click on the appropriate available rights that are listed at the bottom right of the screen. ★★★★★

Customization & Productivity

Most system customization is completed during company setup. Checks can be completely customized to fit your needs, and an e-mail template can be customized for service calls. The Document Generator lets you create a variety of forms, including letters, contracts and billing reminders. You can also set up detailed customer service agreements and maintenance contracts. The list maintenance feature can also be customized to define classifications for everything from employees to service types.

I found some of the best productivity tools in this program. For example, a laptop interface is offered to transfer data back and forth. Also, a vehicle maintenance option lets you track everything from mileage to service. The service task manager lets you create tasks that are based on your own particular business. A direct interface with the Payroll module lets you post job times and labor costs directly to the appropriate employees. By far, one of the most impressive features of EMS is the Service Calls/Dispatching feature, which is an important addition to any company that dispatches service people for repairs and maintenance. You can also easily monitor on-site equipment and enter estimated service call hours to later be added to the appropriate employee timecard. ★★★★★

Reporting

Reporting options are excellent in EMS. You can set up default percentages to distribute overhead costs, and these percentages will then be distributed to the appropriate GL accounts. The

Continued on back



Construction Products Offer Basic Job Costing & More

By Mary Girsch-Bock

Once upon a time, there were three companies. Company A builds 10 to 20 homes a year. Company B handles upwards of 100 jobs a year, subcontracting out about 70 percent of its jobs and building a variety of projects. Company C is in development and handles most of its construction, but it also owns another company that handles the electrical work for all of their construction projects.

Aside from being in the construction industry, these three companies have very little in common. So when these three very different companies go searching for software to make their business more efficient and more productive, it's ridiculous to think that they would be looking for the same exact things.

The construction industry is one of the most highly specialized software markets. Companies, large and small, have to be able to efficiently track their job and material cost. Equipment must be accounted for and sufficiently maintained, and operating expenses must be factored in when looking for bottom-line expenses. It's helpful to have multiple billing formats, depending on your specialty. It's also helpful to have a system that won't take months and months and thousands upon thousands of dollars to implement.

In an effort to help you better identify how each of these products might meet the needs of one of your clients, we have established a prototypical company. Our prototypical company employs one estimator and three office personnel. Our company works with about 50 different subcontractors, and takes about 25 jobs per year, with the average job running about \$50,000. We have established that our prototypical company also requires the following modules in order to run their business effectively: General Ledger (GL), Accounts Payable (AP), Accounts Receivable (AR), Job Costing, Inventory, Purchase Order, Equipment Tracking, Reporting, Sales Order/Work Order Entry, and an optional Payroll module. For our scenario, we believe that training for one person will be needed, as well as one year of product support.

We have also obtained the cost from each vendor for this particular prototypical company. Since module requirements vary from company to company, we hope that this standardizing of product costs will help to clarify what each program will cost on average.

We also decided to look at the program in general, focusing on eight specific areas. By evaluating the same areas in each product, we hope to present a clearer picture of that product, its

strong points, and what, if anything, it lacks. This will help the small company find a product that will suit their needs, without paying for a dozen modules it will never use. On the flip side, it also helps the multi-million dollar company that is in the market for enterprise level software and does not want to upgrade their software every year.

The areas of evaluation were chosen based on feedback from software vendors, the editorial staff of the magazine, and this reviewer. They are as follows:

1. Modules — It's important to know what modules are included or available.
2. Learning Curve — Is the program easy to navigate? Is it user friendly?
3. Integration/Import/Export — Do all of the modules work together? Can you import information from third-party software or export to spreadsheet programs, etc.?
4. Support & Training — Good support and effective training are necessities.
5. Security — Is it multi-level? Module-based? Menu-based?
6. Customization & Productivity — Are there user-defined fields? Can you get the information you need? Will this product make your life easier?
7. Reports — What standard reports are included? Does the program offer integration with Crystal Reports, etc.? Does it have customization capability?
8. Relative Value — This is subjective, but is the program worth the cost?

It's important to remember that each of these programs stands on its own. We are not trying to compare them side-by-side, but rather point out their core strengths and let you, the reader, decide what you need, what you want and what you cannot live without.

The products reviewed here range from basic financial systems with a job cost module, to sophisticated programs with upwards of 20 modules and add-ons. They are all good programs, varying widely in both size and cost. But they all contain at least basic job costing capability, and many contain much, much more.

If there is a program that interests you, I suggest contacting the vendor or visiting their web site. Many of these programs offer downloadable demos or trial CDs, and there's no better way to choose a software product than to actually use it.

I've had the opportunity to use all of these products. I believe they are all high-quality products, and I am confident that you will find one that suits you. ■

Executive Management Software

Continued from front
Service Profitability Report can be run in detail or summarized. This comprehensive report provides detail on labor and materials, sales and gross profit. The Equipment Reporting option lets you view detailed equip-

ment reports that include model information and warranty expiration dates. The Job Report by Customer breaks down cost by shop, field, payroll, material, equipment and subcontract, along with many other categories. You can even produce a

report for your customers that details the cost of their equipment over the term of a service contract. ★★★★★

Relative Value

EMS is a terrific program with a user-friendly interface.

More importantly, it has the capability to handle the extensive detail that construction companies and contractors need. ★★★★★

2004 OVERALL RATING

★★★★★