Cloud Computing and Construction Management – What Can It Do for Your Business?

by: Jon Witty, Vice President
Sage Construction and Real Estate

What is Cloud Computing?
Being “in the cloud” is the latest catchphrase in technology discussions. It can refer to virtual servers that allow users to access stored data via an Internet connection. Providing access in this manner is frequently referred to as using cloud-based or Web-based services. Being “in the cloud” can also mean using an application outside of a company’s firewall, such as conducting business with a smart phone or tablet (iPads).

Cloud Computing and the Construction Industry
The construction industry must balance back-office functions – billing, paying invoices, running financial reports, payroll, planning logistics – with the physical presence needed on the job site or in a client’s office. Today’s technological solutions must be able to serve users in both work settings. Responses from Constructech’s 2011 IT survey show construction companies are reporting from the field, as well as “carrying out project management, scheduling, punchlists, and time tracking tasks out in the field today.”

Remote access allows staff to work from any location while still managing their workload throughout the day. With the amount of consolidation, decentralization of offices, travel-based positions, and project work being done in different regions of the country or even internationally, being able to offer solid remote access technology to employees is key for any successful construction company. For many companies, solving this challenge means moving some of its applications to the cloud.

One construction company, True Value Homes (TVH), based in India, is able to give any employee with proper credentials access to these applications through a secure, Web-based environment. Before the move, TVH was running operations on 17 sites, and employees could only work in the office, so all papers needed to be brought into the central office for processing and approval. Whereas TVH once had 100 personal computers for 100 employees, now 500 users can access its Web-based applications.
“We want to make sure that our employees get the best out of their workplace,” Arun Nehru, TVH's director, said. “What we are telling employees is that [wherever you need to work], the applications are available from the office, home or [onsite].”

Collaboration Between Contractors, Owners/Clients

Leveraging cloud-based services also extends beyond the workings of a single construction company. As Constructech’s 2011 IT survey notes, “today’s construction professional also needs to be highly collaborative. The word ‘team’ has taken on a whole new meaning in the construction industry. Every team needs to obtain a high level of transparency and accountability for the property owner. Overall, construction companies will be more collaborative, using technology to connect all project team members – from trade partners to general contractors to owners – in one central location.”

Yet, it is highly unlikely that each of the project team members uses the same back-office business management applications. So, as general contractors, trade partners and owners individually look to the Web to streamline business operations, identifying the kinds of technology that will enable the secure and timely exchange of project information between all involved should be determined at the planning stage.

Mobility

Constructech’s 2011 IT survey indicated that contractors will then take project information “out to the jobsite with mobile devices, as well as applying a host of applications on these mobile devices.”

The growing trend of utilizing mobile technologies in the construction industry supports the survey’s findings. However, the type of device varies. According to the survey, “the smart phone is still one of the most commonly used devices at the jobsite (81% of survey respondents). Laptops (69%) and tablets (26%) also receive a significant response.” Given the advances in and adoption of tablets such as Apple’s iPad over the past two years, growth is anticipated in the use of the tablet in the construction industry, as well.

Leveraging Today’s Technology for the Future

Does that mean that your construction company needs to scrap everything it’s using today for new cloud-based applications? In the current economy, many companies are looking toward extending the applications that they are using today into the cloud where it makes the most sense.
To enter invoices into Accounts Receivable (AR), you must first have your customers set up. To set up a new AR customer, in the AR module, select setup/customer. Enter a customer ID consistent with your company’s policy and tab to the next cell. For the name, use the binoculars to the right of the name cell to select your customer name from Address Book (AB). If the name is not there, it is best to go to AB and enter it to avoid duplicating entries in AB. This will pull any information that you have entered in AB, such as the address and phone numbers. Complete any other cells for which you wish to have the information. The two Key cells are user-defined sorting cells. You may change the title of the Key cells in Custom Descriptions.

Switch to the Status tab and enter the credit information if you use this or change the status. Select the Send statement or PO required buttons if you are use either of these. In the days before due cell, enter the number of days past the billing date that the invoice is due. The invoice due date will then be automatically calculated during Enter Invoices.

In the Contacts tab, select any contacts you would like to have for any of the descriptions in the list. You may add/adjust these using the Change Description button when the cursor is in the item. The contacts are set up using AR/Setup/Contacts.

In the Billing tab, enter the billing information. This ports to the Billing application. If the address is left blank, the address from the General tab is used by Billing. This is also the tab where you will set up your finance charge if you use it. Complete any other billing details you want to use.

Use the Tables tab to setup any rate, markup or add-on tables you want assigned to the customer.

In the Taxes tab, specify which categories are taxable or non-taxable. Select your tax group from the list (these are set up using Setup/Taxes). When this information is filled in, you are able to use the auto calculator to figure taxes when entering an invoice in AR. It is also used during invoice generation in Billing.

The balance of the tabs can be used to monitor items (Checklist), add text to invoices generated in Billing (Text 1 and Text 2), or track information for which there isn’t an available cell in AR (Custom Fields).

One other step that is really helpful when setting up a customer is to go to the related job in Job Cost and enter the customer ID in the AR Customer cell on the Billing Info tab. Then you always have a place to go to identify the AR tie when you are entering an invoice at a later date.
Have you, like many other PJ users, ever become frustrated searching for a report or inquiry over and over again? Some users navigate right to the correct report or inquiry with such ease and grace, while others, like me, can stumble around opening up several different reports or inquiries before finding the correct information or report.

Well fret no more. Simply adjust the PJ Toolbar to suit YOUR needs! Have all the important Tasks, Reports and Inquiries ready and waiting for your fast-action clicking motion to set them to work. If you don’t ever send Submittals, then you don’t need to see the Submittal button…and likewise, if you don’t input commitments, then there is no need for the Enter Commitment Function. So go ahead now; get rid of all that extra “noise!”

In the PJ Module, open Tools and then customize. Click on Toolbar and go through each of the menu items and activate only the items you wish to see. Now your Toolbar will reflect only the Task, Inquires and Reports that you use for your day to day work.

If you’re a Sage Desktop user, you can also put the same frequently used Tasks, Inquires and Reports on your Sage Desktop under “My Tasks.”

TUG Online WebEx Training and Open Forums

MAY 2012

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To attend an online event, please e-mail attendee(s) name and e-mail address to me@tugweb.com. You will receive an e-mail confirmation along with connection instructions once you are registered. These classes are free of charge and open to members only – one more benefit of belonging to the Timberline Users Group! We are adding more sessions every day. Check the Online Event Calendar at TUGweb.com for an updated list. If you have any suggestions on sessions you would like to see, please e-mail me@tugweb.com.
Multiple Labor Productivities

by: Scott R. Bishop, CEP
HDR Constructors, Inc.

Have you ever thought, “It would be great to have multiple productivity options for the same item?” You no longer have to wonder what that would be like; you can make that a reality right inside your database. You can create up to 10 different labor productivity tables. The productivity tables allow you to store values that Estimating can apply to labor and material costs for items in an estimate or database. For example, you can set up labor productivity tables. The productivity tables to store values that Estimating can apply to labor and material costs for items in an estimate or database. For example, you can if there is a particular area of a project that has a higher degree of difficulty; if you have to build a cast-in-place concrete wall underground and inside an existing structure, that would require a different productivity that if that wall was above ground and with no obstructions. You can set up a table for the difficult concrete work.

In order to use this feature you first have to set up your database up for multiple labor productivities. Before you can set up multiple labor productivities, you must activate the feature in Estimating. To activate the multiple labor productivities feature follow these steps: 1) Open the Database Settings window (Database > Database Settings); 2) Click the Miscellaneous tab; 3) Select the Use multiple labor productivities option; 4) Specify what Estimating should do when a labor productivity factor for an item is missing from a table; 5) Click [OK]. You are now ready to set up labor productivity tables.

To set up new multiple labor productivities follow these steps: 1) First open the Database Settings window (Database > Database Settings); 2) Next click the Productivities and Prices tab; 3) Then in the appropriate grid, enter the name, description and source of your labor productivity table. Note: The first row of the grid displays the productivity factor stored for the item in the database for the existing estimate. You can enter up to 10 labor productivity tables. Click [OK].

Note: After you build labor productivity in the Database Settings window, you must add the actual labor productivity factors for the database items in Database Editor. For more information on that refer to Database Editor Help. Note: To add notes to a table, right-click on a table row and select Notes. Then type your notes in the Notes window.

“Productivity tables allow you to store values that Estimating can apply to labor and material costs for items in an estimate or database.”

You can also change a labor productivity table from the Database Settings window. If you do change labor productivities this way, you must also adjust the estimate labor productivities in the estimate to update the items that use the table you changed or deleted.

To change a labor productivity, first open the Database Settings window [Database > Database Settings]. Next, click the Productivities/Prices tab. Then, in the appropriate grid, make the changes you want. Note: If you delete a table, Sage Estimating will ask if you want to remove the associated labor productivity from the database, click [Yes]. Once you make changes, such as modifying a table name, Estimating will remind you to adjust the items in your estimate when you complete the changes, click [OK] on this message, then click [Close]. Once you have completed these steps you are ready to adjust the labor productivities of you estimate and update the items that use the table.

You can adjust estimate productivities from productivity tables. When you select the option to adjust the estimate from productivity tables, you apply any changes made to the tables in the database to the items that use those same tables in the estimate. You can also adjust labor productivity tables in the estimate by a percentage. It is recommended that before you adjust the estimate productivities that you back up the estimate using File Tools.

To adjust the estimate from productivity tables, on the Pricing pull-down menu click on Adjust Estimate From Productivity Tables. Next, on the Replace/Adjust tab, select one of the available options to adjust the labor productivity tables in the estimate. Note: For help on an item in this window, click the “?” in the upper right-hand corner of the window and then click the item. Then, on the Ranges tab, select the labor productivity and phases you want to include. By default, Sage Estimating includes all tables and all phases when it adjusts the estimate. Note: An optional feature is to use the Font and Page Setup tabs to customize the Adjust Estimate from Productivity Table report that is generated after the adjustment. Once completed click [OK]. Finally, review the Adjust Estimate from Productivity Tables Confirmation window then click [OK] to adjust the estimate.

Tips and tricks: Estimate items that have a lump sum are not adjusted from productivity tables. If the takeoff unit and the labor order unit on the estimate item are the same, the labor productivity factor in the database is not applied to the estimate item. When you adjust a factor by a percentage, Sage Estimating enter a red triangle in the Labor Productivity column for any items affected by the change. This indicates that the item has a pending adjustment, which you can finalize or undo.

Perhaps this will help in your quest for multiple productivities.
Build a Better User — Sneak a Peek at TUG Annual Conference Highlights

Still haven’t registered for the 2012 TUG National Users Conference, May 15-18, in Kissimmee, Florida? Some of our session leaders volunteered to give you a quick sneak peek at some of the tweaks, tricks and tips you’ll be missing if you don’t attend!

Basic General Ledger

What You See is What You Get Choose

Most modules have settings that affect what and how GL transactions are created and appear in reports. As an example AP [File], [AP Settings], [GL Settings] not only contains instructions for which liability and discount/deduction accounts are affected, but also includes the Reference 1, Reference 2 and Description contents that AP attaches to the transactions. These are the fields that show up on your Current Ledger and Transaction Report. By tweaking these settings you can select whether the description line contains the name of the Vendor or the Description line from the Invoice distribution entry. Similar settings exist in almost all modules, including selections for which types of entries are summarized on the GL. Find out how settings in Property Management or Job Cost effect transactions in GL!

STO Concepts and Modules Overview

What Happens When You “Post?”

When you do a transaction in one application is it fuzzy as to when and where it goes from there? There are many Applications in Sage Timberline Office. Understanding the Data and File Structure, how the data flows within an application and interfaces with other applications is an important step in making sure that the information you retrieve is timely and accurate. The Post and Interface Settings dictate this transfer of data. Make sure you understand these settings and where the data goes. Attend the STO Concepts and Data Structure Session.

Real Estate Advanced Formula and Round Table

Building the Perfect Report

Do you want to impress your boss? Learn how to maximize use of the Property Management system and manipulate its multiple Master Files. You will learn: (a) “out of the box” techniques; (b) how to fully use the property management data base; (c) reduce dependency on spreadsheets and Word documents; (d) discuss challenges and solutions; and (e) improve your understanding of “how” the property management system works.

Estimating Database Set-up

Why Can’t We Get the Interface with Job Cost to Work?

It all starts with getting your estimating database set-up to correctly send information to Job Cost. We will review all the database settings so you can make the estimate information flow. As always, someone has to review the estimate to ensure all items are going to the proper codes. Attend other sessions and learn how to visually check your transfer before it happens!

Advanced Crystal Lab

Managing the Process!

We will be showing advanced formulas and techniques AND we’re going to be talking about “managing the process and becoming of more value to your company by making reports more useful”. What are the report design professionals doing to help companies get more value? YOU should be doing this too!

Everything Import in Core Modules

What are the “Gotchas” of Importing?

Tired of failed imports? Want to create the perfect import templates? We’re going to be sharing the gotchas and things we remember to think about after doing this for nearly 20 years. Learn from OUR mistakes!

Payroll

What Have We Learned from the Call Center?

This is a must have session for any Payroll user! We’ll be including topics we’ve been asked about for many years in the call center.

Paperless Office Issues and Solutions Sessions

Still Hiding Behind MOUNDS of PAPER? Do You Shuffle Invoices Daily? Is Your Storage Overflowing?

We will discuss how to clear our desks and businesses of all the paper. There are sensitive documents (HR and F/S) and not so sensitive documents (invoices). We’ll discuss the benefits and issues that surround going paperless. The sessions will continue with demonstrations and discussions of the many different solutions there are to GO PAPERLESS.

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Risk Management Roundtable

**What’s Your Company’s Potential for Risk?**

Are you covered? Have you done all you can do? Managing RISK is more difficult in today’s world. In this roundtable session we will discuss a number of issues that put your business at risk. From financial risk, to employees, to potential jobsite liability, explore the whole gamut of exposures. We’ll discuss policies that can be put in place and procedures that can at least help identify your risk potential. Bring your thoughts and ideas!

PM Setup

**When is it Good to Tamper with Application Settings?**

As a general rule, security should keep users out of application settings. You know, File > Company Settings > AP Settings, etc. Well, not so in Property Management. In fact, I encourage you to poke your nose into the boss’s office and tell him/her you need to have security rights to PM Settings. Here’s why: unique to Property Management, you can actually change the layout of the data entry screen in Cash Receipts, Miscellaneous Entries, Refund/Apply Credits and a bunch of other tasks. And all you have to do is click a button in PM Settings. Intrigued? Come learn about this and many other important setup steps at the PM Setup session.

Overview of AP Issues and New Features in 9.8

**Credit Card Management!**

The new Accounts Payable credit card management feature allows you to record and track credit card purchases, bank fees and miscellaneous charges. You can record credit card receipts, reconcile the credit card statements against the receipts, track your balances and select how you will pay the credit card issuer. In addition, you can record credit card payments or Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) against existing invoices.

Reconciliation Lab

**Do You Reconcile Your Bank Statement?**

Of course you do! How else would you know how much money you had in the bank? But what about the rest of your reconciliations? Now, if you’re saying, “What reconciliations?,” then you need to sign up for the two-part Reconciliation Lab at the 2012 TUG conference. You’ll find out what, why, how, and get some valuable tips that will make month-end and year-end go so much more smoothly. You’ll learn what a subledger is and why you should care (hint: it’s all about data integrity). And if you have to endure an annual audit, this session will help you be ready and able to survive the onslaught of the auditors. Also, a special addition to this session will feature reconciliation tips and tricks from a controller who really has some special solutions up his sleeve. See you there!

Join the TUG Committee Leaders for a Meet and Greet During the Conference

- **Real Estate Committee:** Lunch on Wednesday, May 16. Meet at the TUG Membership Booth at noon.
- **Local Chapter Chairs:** Lunch on Wednesday, May 16, in the Exhibit Hall near the stage.
- **PJ Committee:** Wednesday, May 16, after the Sage Town Hall meeting. Meet at Sunset Sam’s restaurant.
- **Construction Accounting Committee:** Lunch on Thursday, May 17. Meet at the TUG Membership Booth at noon.
- **Estimating Committee:** Thursday, May 17, at 5:15 p.m. Location TBD.
- **Publications Committee:** Thursday, May 17, at 5:30 p.m. Meet at the Sora Sushi Bar in the hotel lobby.
At the peak of the housing boom, a Denver-area homebuilder that we work with built around 140 homes a year (that’s around a $50,000,000 business). As the market softened, they recognized that the downturn in the market was a great opportunity to get their business processes in order. Although this homebuilder is based in Colorado, their experience has applicability on a national scale. Dozens of builders we work with – from California to the Carolinas and in hot Canadian markets, too – are now preparing for the uptick in the housing market with a new and revitalized approach to their operations.

These include builders starting a few as 50 homes and some with more than 1,000 starts. They’re right to prepare. After all, the housing downturn can’t go on forever, and predictions for 2012 new housing starts are coming in around 700,000 homes in the U.S alone, a real leap from even just two years ago. Like many of our clients, the homebuilder in question runs Sage Timberline Office for accounting and Sage Timberline Estimating. But like the smart homebuilders we know, this company has layered in additional software solutions to manage the idiosyncratic and high-fidelity activities that are so central to homebuilding. Collectively, these activities are called the workflow.

You have to ask why a homebuilder would implement Sage Timberline Office and Sage Timberline Estimating and then go looking for more software. To understand that, you need to understand how unusual, and unwieldy, the home building process has become. The reason it has gotten so complex is simple, and it’s no different that the workflow dynamics affecting other business operations in any modern economy in the world: homebuilders are increasingly doing business with specialized trades. Plus, the leading homebuilders are using 3D CAD and BIM systems in their sales efforts and model homes, and linking those images right into their estimating. This allows nearly every home to be a custom or semi-custom home, with buyers making changes to high-resolution digital renderings of their yet-to-be-built home.

Correspondingly, software to manage this “dance” of information, this workflow, has become super sophisticated. Today, Sage Timberline Accounting and Sage Timberline Estimating typically work in tandem with a Customer Relationship Management software (CRM) for managing the sales process – as it exchanges digital information seamlessly back and forth in real time – while also doing the same information exchange with the scheduling, work orders, purchase orders and the myriad other bits of information essential to profitably build a house. So, in addition to accounting, estimating and a CRM, most production homebuilders use a Workflow Management Suite, which serves as the central point...the information distribution hub that parses out essential information in real time to the various workflow, CRM, estimating and accounting modules.

What’s more, a Workflow Management Suite is critical path based, and it is designed to drive the schedule forward in time (as well as manage variances). Without a Workflow Management Suite, the data essential to the home builder would exist in silos that can’t “talk” to each other, and since there is no calendar function to Sage Timberline Accounting and Sage Timberline Estimating, those solutions would be static repositories of information that would not have high utility to the builder, unless the data was manually extracted by a labor-intensive process. So, when you think of Sage Timberline Accounting and Sage Timberline Estimating, it is essential that think of how to tie those solutions to your workflow, your schedule and your CRM, so you get a processed-based and predictably profitable home building operation. One very clear goal here is to drive down cycle-times, the amount of time it takes to build a home, where additional costs can run thousands of dollars per day, and even a small reduction can be meaningful.

“The result of our using a Workflow Management Suite (in our case it’s BuilderMT) is that we have lopped easily 10 to 15 days off our cycle time,” said one western-region BuilderMT builder. “And perhaps...
more importantly, we are able to focus on quality control and not damage control. We are not expending lots of man hours trying to figure out where we are. We know where we are now, and we can focus on making better houses.”

**Integration: A Determined Effort**

The integration between Sage Timberline Accounting and Sage Timberline Estimating has not come about on its own. Working on our Workflow Management Suite, BuilderMT has spent over 14 years (and no small sum of investment dollars) tightening and perfecting the data “round trips” that must occur among all the allied software systems. That data flow is very specifically designed to auto-populate all the required and appropriate data slots. To take one example, look at variance purchase orders. You may not think that something as simple as ordering a few new dumpsters or extra loads of gravel per community on the fly will muck up your systems, but those variances can reap havoc on your margins and your accounting. For those processes, and dozens of others, BuilderMT has mapped out where the data needs to flow – to work orders, purchase orders, accounts payable, variance reporting, scheduling, your trades and even mobile alerts – and we have completed that advance work for you.

“We determined exactly what each VPO (Vendor Purchase Order) was costing us,” said a large Canadian builder who uses BuilderMT. “We knew from analysis that the whole organization was spending 19 minute on each one, as it had to be hand-written and manually processed in the back office. Then we had the back-office staff faxing the VPOs to the vendor and manually entering the data in the various back office systems. After the vendor came back with a price, a new PO was created and sent out. Some of our employees spent their days just standing by the fax machine sending out VPOs. That’s a costly habit.

“BuilderMT has saved us a great deal of money already,” the builder explained. “Our cost for the variance tracking software was around $30,000, but we soon paid for the software platform with just this one VPO process correction, and we have plans for several additional BPM processes in the works.”

Clearly a workflow approach to home building – working in concert with Sage Timberline Accounting and Sage Timberline Estimating – will allow you to do what you got into this business to do: build and sell quality homes. After all, isn’t that why you got into the business in the first place? **TUG**

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**Take Advantage of Educational Opportunities, Discounts with CFMA**

Last fall, Sage Construction and Real Estate and the Construction Financial Management Association (CFMA) created a strategic partnership to further the educational opportunities for the construction industry.

If you are a construction financial professional, this organization is for you. CFMA is unique. As stated on the CFMA web site: “There are contractors. There are accountants. But, construction financial professionals are a breed apart. For them, day-to-day accounting is only part of the job. From job cost control and the contract lifecycle to risk management and surety relationships, CFMA is the only organization dedicated to the specific needs of construction financial professionals and service providers.”

Sage has sponsored several educational opportunities with CFMA. To learn more about these, go to the CFMA Web site at cfma.org.

All Sage Construction and Real Estate customers qualify for CFMA member-discounted rates for CFMA education workbooks and courses. You are also eligible to attend any of CFMA’s eight regional conferences at the member price. In addition to educational opportunities and conferences for the construction industry, this is a great organization to network with your peers.

If you are a new customer of Sage Construction and Real Estate since October 2011, you are also entitled to a free membership ($495 value). As a new customer, if you already belong to CFMA, you can add an additional employee. Please contact your Sage Business Partner to take advantage of this offer. Visit cfma.org/faq_sage for more information about this strategic partnership. 
Minimizing Duplicate Entries in Address Book

by: Val Steffens  
Dean Snyder Construction

Address Book (AB) interacts with a number of the other applications. It has direct ties to Estimating, Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable as can be viewed using the Use As box in an AB setup screen. Entries to AB can be made in the application itself or in Project Management (PJ/Setup/Company or Person).

A vendor or customer must be set up in AB as a Company whether this vendor/customer is an individual or a business. The Person setup is merely a contact that ties to an already existing Company setup. If you are using AB, a new contact, vendor or customer should always be set up in AB and pulled into the other applications using the binoculars available in the setup screens in each of the other applications.

Whether in AP or AR, enter the vendor/customer ID in the first cell and tab to the Name cell. From there, click on the binoculars to the right of the name cell and select your vendor/customer name from the Company list in AB. Some of the information will port over from AB and some you will need to set up as usual. The address is the physical location of the company. If you click on the arrow to the left of the address in AB, there is a listing of other addresses that can be entered. Use the Remittance Address for the AP mailing address. If you have pre-entered this in AB, it will prefill in AP when you set up the vendor using the binoculars to make the AP-AB tie.

If you do not use the binoculars and set the same company/person up as a vendor in AP, a customer in AR, a contact in PJ, etc., you will end up with multiple entries in AB. If you view the Use As pop-up box, you will see one tied to each of the applications. If you make the tie to AB using the binoculars when doing the setup in all of the applications, you will have one AB entry and the Use As box will show a tie to each for that single entry, thus eliminating the multiple entry issue in AB.

For information on adding Contacts directly from Project Management, please refer to the August 2011 and September 2011 TUG Pulse editions!

Be sure to stay abreast of the latest news relating to STO:

- E-mail exclusive for TUG members: tug@sage.com
- Follow Sage on Twitter: @SageConstruct
- Join the Sage Construction and Real Estate LinkedIn group
- Subscribe to the SageCRE1 YouTube channel
ODBC Part Two — Quick, Easy, Practical Uses

by: Eire Stewart
JP DiNapoli Companies

From the simple to the sublime, ODBC is an enabler of information. Think of Sage Timberline Office (STO) as a gold mine of data. ODBC is the mining shaft and in that mining shaft, STO has now provided you with an efficient, effective drill to break that data loose: Office Connector!

Office Connector provides a host of tools and wizards to make use of ODBC easier and more intuitive. The Excel tool bar, located on the Add-Ins tab, reads from right to left:

Open Timberline Data Folder, Save as Values, Edit Preferences, Refresh Timberline Data, Query Wizard, Query Editor, Select Query Table, Lookup Wizard, Find Wizard, Count Wizard, and Sum Wizard. The last two tools are only available with purchase of other Office Connector features.

When using Excel, Query Wizard prompts the selection of the various STO fields you may need to create, as an example, a Trial Balance schedule that includes both the most recent year end balances and the prior year end. Add some conditions to screen out Unit Accounts, insert a couple of columns for adjusting entries and revised totals and you have a document that can be sent to your CPA!

The ease of adding conditions to filter data in Office Connector is one of the keys to making ODBC easier to use. When creating conditions, Office Connect will link to STO fields and create a pick list to select from. The same or/and selection that exist in STO are available when filtering ODBC data through Office Connector.

ODBC is a great tool for pulling data from multiple modules. Some quick examples of uses for Office Connector include:

- Audit Working Papers – Use Query Wizard to pull the transaction data from GL and then use Lookup Wizard to add a check number and check date.
- Construction Draw Detail – Slip invoice detail into your Lender’s required format by pulling the transactions from Job Cost and adding the Vendor name from AP.
- Add address information to Tenant invoices created in Excel. Many of us still prepare CAM Reconciliations in Excel. Eliminate the need to verify Tenant Billing Addresses annually by linking the data directly to STO.
- Create a Rent Roll using Office Connector to pull data from all three PM master files and add vacant units as well as the next three rent increases and all Lease Options.
- Use Office Connector to export out monthly activity totals from the GL to Excel to create a basis for annual budgets.
- Make Management Information Visual by take STO data and creating graphs and pie charts.

ODBC has a ton of uses. The next step is to explore all the tools that Office Connector provided and start drilling! TUG
Most of the time you won’t have discounts on committed costs. The subcontractor or supplier will bill out the full contracted amount. On the rare occasions when there is a discount offered for quick payment, you will want to reduce the contract by the amount of the discount.

Entering the invoice in Accounts Payable (AP) in the normal way, taking the discount off the single line entry using the discount cell works great in AP. However, entering the invoice in this manner will post the full invoice amount to Job Cost and the net amount to the commitment log in Project Management. If you do not wish to pass the discount along to the job, this will still be the way to enter the invoice in AP.

Should you wish to reduce the job cost report to reflect the discount, you will need to adjust how you enter the invoice. The same general guidelines apply whether you are entering a purchase order or subcontract invoice. Enter the full amount of the invoice in Enter Invoices in AP. You will make two line entries in the distribution box to record the discount. On the first line, enter as usual, selecting the commitment, but use the amount of the invoice net of the discount in the amount cell. Enter a second distribution line, removing any commitment or job information. Enter your discount GL account number in the Account cell and the discount amount in the amount and discount cells. This will post the net amount from the first distribution line to your job cost report.

To track the discounts in Project Management, you will need to use change requests/orders and enter negative change orders for the amount of the discount(s). When you enter the invoice in AP, enter the net amount in the Enter Invoice amount cell. In the distribution box, select your commitment and enter the full amount of the invoice, including the discount. In the next line, select the commitment change order that was entered for the discount (or enter the amount that corresponds with the amount you are invoicing). This will not reflect an entry to the discount account in General Ledger, but the commitment log(s) will be correct, thus reducing the chance you will overpay the contract.

In this example, I have entered three invoices, using each of the three methods noted above. There is a 10-percent discount on each. I used $20,000 for the AP discount example, $15,000 for the change order example, and $10,000 for the job cost example for a total of $45,000 that should come off the contract if we take the discounts on each. We should pay out a total of $40,500.

Since each of these entries impacts the various reports differently, I am including the reports to show how each entry will look. You can then determine how you wish to account for discounts on your invoice entry.

This Billing Detail Report shows the full amount of the AP entry, the net Job Cost entry (since we didn’t record the discount distribution to a job), and both line entries for the change order example (since we applied both lines to the commitment in the distribution box).
The Paid Invoice Register report shows each of the invoices at the amounts entered, which is gross for all, but the change order example since that is entered net of the discount.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invoice</th>
<th>Bank Account</th>
<th>Check Date</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Paid</th>
<th>Discount</th>
<th>Misc. Ded.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3362</td>
<td>TestDisc CO</td>
<td>08/02/2010</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TestDisc JC</td>
<td>08/02/2010</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TestDiscount PO</td>
<td>08/01/2010</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vendor Totals: 43,500.00 43,500.00 3,000.00 0.00

Report Totals: 43,500.00 43,500.00 3,000.00 0.00

Notice the impact of each entry on the purchase order log. The amount paid is correct at $40,500. The invoiced amount is overstated by the discount on the AP entry example. The contract amount is overstated by the discount amounts on both the AP entry and Job Cost examples. The revised contract amount should be $55,500. The amounts invoiced and paid should both be $40,500. (The concept works the same if you have retainage.)

Please note that you lose the ability to track discounts taken when you use the Change Order method of entry. The subcontract or purchase order log will correctly reflect the contract balance but the discount will not post to the discount account in general ledger. Since the amount is correctly netted from the cost in the general ledger, the accounts payable balance is correct, but is shown net of the discount(s) instead of tracking gross and netting out the discount account.

**ESTIMATING TIPS & TRICKS**

**TO: THE Guru**

I’m an Estimating Models user with a minor irritation. When I’m doing the Models Interview, the help for the variable I’m on keeps covering up the variables above. Sometimes I need to see what was entered above to know how to answer this question.

– Tired of the Cover-Up

**TO: Cover-Up**

With a name like that you should be in politics. You’re in luck, the solution is simplicity itself. Just put your mouse on the help box, and drag the box to the location where you would like to see it. The help window will stay in that position (relative to the variables) for the entire model. It won’t stay there when you go to a new model, so you will have to move it for each model as you access it.

– THE Guru
Mad About Macros

by: Barbara A. Morse
Gorman Bros., Inc.

Here at Gorman we get mad about a number of things – the weather when we can’t pave, when budgets are late or get cut, but the one good thing we get mad about are MACROS! One of the classes I attended at TUG annual conference a few years ago was about Macros. I was familiar with Macros in Excel, but have never used the Macro feature in STO. Well, I was so excited I couldn’t wait to get back and share it with the rest of the office staff.

Needless to say, we use Macros now as an everyday function. One example is our sales representatives’ T&E monthly expense reports. I created a macro for each sales company and its reps. In each Macro is a Report Designer report for each sales rep which has their total T&E budget, lists the YTD expenses, and gives them a current balance. At the end of each month-end close, AP simply runs the Macro. The output is saved as a PDF and e-mailed to the sales rep.

Our assistant controller uses many Macros to run reports for intercompany accounts to reconcile GL. She also uses it for reconcile equipment labor to GL. Running the Macro to produce the several reports needed saves her so much time.

I personally use Macros to reconcile my IT expense accounts to GL. It is so much easier to create reports, put all your conditions in and put all those reports in a Macro. Opening and running a Macro takes a few minutes rather than opening up each report, putting in conditions, getting interrupted, forgetting where you are and starting all over again. Saves so much time! So, why aren’t you using Macros? Check it out. Take a class!

Sage Town Hall Meeting During TUG National Users Conference

by: Matt Weaver
President, Timberline Users Group

Hear ye, hear ye! Calling all Sage Timberline Office users to the annual Sage Town Hall meeting in sunny Florida. Once again, TUG and Sage have teamed up to provide our users with the opportunity to have a town-hall-style meeting with executives from Sage at the 2012 TUG National Users Conference, May 15-18, 2012, in Kissimmee, Florida.

The Town Hall meeting will take place in the Exhibit Hall starting at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 16, 2012. If you are attending the conference, this is your opportunity to present questions directly to Sage executives about all topics related to your Sage Timberline Office installation. Last year, we had a large turnout and received many great questions from users and many great responses from the Sage representatives; we expect the same this year. Be thinking about topics and questions for the Sage representatives. We will also have suggestion boxes setup during the conference for you to write in questions that will be presented during the meeting. Special thanks to Sage for providing this opportunity to the TUG membership.

Make your plans to attend. If you haven’t already registered for the 2012 TUG National Users Conference, now is the time! Register today at www.tugconference.com. We hope to see you there!

THERE’S STILL TIME TO REGISTER!

2012 TUG National Users Conference
May 15-18, 2012
Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center
Kissimmee, Florida

Visit tugconference.com today to learn more!