

Microsoft 365 Business Central

(Formerly MICROSOFT Dynamics NAV)

FINANCIAL & DISTRIBUTION SOFTWARE REVIEW BY SHELDON NEEDLE



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Executive Summary

Microsoft 365 Business Central (Business Central) (formerly Microsoft Business Central) business management solutions combines the functionality from the original Navision Financials, Navision Advanced Distribution, and Navision Manufacturing applications. The product continues to lead the industry with its fast performance and true Windows look and feel. Not only has Business Central combined financial, distribution and manufacturing rich features into one solution, the solution has been greatly enhanced with the built in customer relationship management (CRM) functionality with the tighter integration to Microsoft Outlook and the improved Service Management module. This latest edition of the Microsoft Navision Business Central product now has all the major functionality of a complete solution for nearly any business in a single product.

Business Central is an object-oriented, fully integrated, customizable accounting and business management solution and the new version uses wizards to further leverage the Microsoft Windows interface. Users familiar with Microsoft Office products such as Excel, Outlook, and Access will find Business Central easy to learn and be able to take advantage of its many flexible features. Input, processing and inquiry screens are consistent throughout the various functional areas of the system making cross-training very easy.

This system is especially appealing to businesses that need flexibility that requires program adaptation and customization capabilities. It also appeals to organizations that need to do extensive inquiries and research of orders, inventory, financial transactions, etc. The speed and ease with which a user can “drill down” is incredible. Data can be easily “filtered” and analyzed in almost unlimited ways. When the system does not, in itself, provide the detail level of analysis required, data can be exported with a single click of the mouse or copied and pasted into a spreadsheet or external database.

You can get around easily in Business Central by using a mouse or by using the keyboard – you will probably use both! Business Central uses a nice blend of menus, push buttons, and menu bar drop-down options. Arrow indicators conveniently identify fields with lookup options. The Navigation Pane displays one menu at a time. Menu buttons at the bottom of the pane enable users to switch from one menu to another. The menus are organized in intuitive, logical tree structures, just like the folder structure in Windows Explorer. Menus contain menu items for the windows, reports, and batch jobs that users have access to. To make it easier to navigate within a menu, related menu items are gathered in menu groups. The standard menus and workflow captures a “more-like-business” approach as opposed to traditional software that captures the programmer’s vision of business. For instance: purchase or sales order screens look very much like the printed document normally used in business.

Furthermore, input screen layouts can be easily modified to meet the specific needs of the individual business. For entering rows/lines of data on an order, invoice, journal, etc. each user may drag and drop columns into any convenient order and hide those that are not required. Once users achieve a minimal level of expertise, they “love” the flexibility Business Central offers and may be challenged to explore its many features – too numerous to describe in this summary.

Flexibility, however, comes at a price. Although on-line user manuals are provided with the software, they are not sufficient to implement the system. “Trial and error” will result in disaster! The solution is to work exclusively with your local certified solution center from which you will purchase the software, train, implement, support and customize the software as required. It is also recommended that you utilize the training material during this process, which is included for free with the purchase of an enhancement plan. Users can make modifications but these will need to be coordinated with your solution center for keeping versions of objects consistent. Purchasing software off-the-shelf does not relieve the IT (information

technology) department from involvement in implementing the solution. If the modifications are extensive, the business can purchase a license to have full access to the source code. If the business purchases the source code, it must take full responsibility for specifying and testing modifications, preparing workflow and user documentation, user training and day-to-day routine support.

One of the major concerns as you implement the system relates to data integrity and validation. Because the system is so flexible, there are significant limitations in how data is validated. There are virtually no fields that must be filled in when entering a new transaction. Most system-designated validation is performed during the actual posting processes – one field at a time – and that can make the posting process very tedious if there are multiple fields with data errors or omissions. In some cases, posting an invoice may be affected by a data inconsistency in a previously posted receiving/ shipping transaction.

In addition, you may produce a purchase or sales order with essential data missing (e.g. purchasing agent's name). In summary, validation rules may require a significant number of modifications. Fortunately, many modifications can be made in a matter of minutes/hours – the specification and tracking process may take longer than the actual programming effort.

Configuration and Pricing

With assistance from your Microsoft partner, you can choose from two editions of pre-selected (packaged) software functionality available for Business Central, as well as additional add on components. When you select an edition, you license the number of users you need to utilize the components.

If you need more functionality than is included in the edition you choose, you have the flexibility to add certain components to your selected edition.

Global Issues

Pros

- Excellent drill down capabilities
- Data filtering is outstanding
- Excellent user interface – screens layouts easily modified
- Version 3.6 forward has N tier G/L Dimensions capability with validations and cross referencing. No more missing information on the G/L transactions.
- Microsoft Outlook Menu structure.
- Capability to create your own Menu containing short cuts providing access that equates to each role within your organization.

Cons

- Non G/L validation rules may require program modifications
- Field changes overwrite original data – no save function unless Change Log Activated
- Sub menus still show inactive granules.
- Third party add-ons required for anything beyond light manufacturing

In this section, we will discuss system-wide, non-technical features that apply to the majority of the functional sections. Therefore, it will not be necessary to repeat them within each functional write-up. We will also discuss features that may make Microsoft Dynamics NAV more unique or that may require more attention as you evaluate this solution.

Since Business Central was designed to meet Microsoft standards, the look and feel of the user interface will be very compatible for businesses

that prefer Microsoft office productivity solutions. When you open Business Central and meet your security requirements – name, password and expiration date – the Business Central Main Menu is displayed.



The Windows Menu and Icon Bars appear on all screens regardless of how deep into the system a user may go. Most users will use the six items on the Menu Bar very little except to change from one company to another, change a password, or to change the default (work) date that makes it easy when a user is entering many transactions for a single date or a date in the past or future. The “help” item is beneficial for referring to standard Business Central documentation.

Menu Selections

The basic system includes twelve business operations and accounting functions that will be covered in subsequent sections of this review. Systems administrators can use the Navigation Pane Designer to configure the Microsoft Business Central main menu to suit the way their organizations operate. They can also assign users to menus so that employees only see menus that are relevant to their roles.

In addition to being able to perform design and configuration tasks, systems administrators benefit from the enhanced user experience in the same ways as employees do. They, too, can personalize their own menus, create shortcuts, and simplify their work environment.

Data Entry and Lookup Screens

The screen display for data entry and lookup is usually one of three layouts: [1] Card; [2] Columnar (columns and rows/lines); [3] “Combo” form (a combination of [1] and [2]).

1. The Card is used to maintain all information about the main subject of the function (e.g. general ledger account, customer, inventory item, fixed asset, etc.) Since the amount of data that can be maintained on a card can be quite voluminous, tabs are used to logically group data within the subject area. For instance, the Vendor Card has five tabs entitled *General*, *Communication*, *Invoicing*, *Payments*, and *Foreign Trade*. As with other screens, the system administrator may customize individual screen layouts. Additional tabs may be added. You may wish to add color to emphasize fields of special importance. When contents of a field require a specific value, an arrow on the field may be clicked to present a list from which the user chooses the appropriate value. You may also type part or all of a look-up code and tab through the field.

With proper permission, an item may be added to the drop-down list on-the-fly. In addition, you may find that when you click on a numeric field a down arrow is displayed and will allow you to see a complete listing of ledger entries (e.g. sales orders for a customer). Not only can you display the transactions, but you can press the Navigate button at the bottom of the screen and see complete detail that may include such things as an invoice, general ledger, inventory, tax entries, etc. If required, you can even print a duplicate invoice.

When you display a card, there are usually several buttons at the bottom of the card that allow you to add new information or review activity and history. For instance, on the Customer card, there are three buttons: Customer, Sales and Help. The drop-down list for the Customer button includes the following items: List, Ledger Entries, Comments, Bank Accounts, Ship-to Addresses, Prospect, Statistics, Statistics by Currencies, Entry Statistics, Sales, Quick Edit Customers. The Sales button list includes: Invoice Discounts, Customer/Item Discounts, Quotes, Blanket Orders, Orders. The Help button launches a list of fields in the applicable table. Using these buttons, there is an abundance of data available without leaving the card

2. A Columnar form is used for journals and lists where a limited number of fields are displayed. Actually, the only limit on the number of fields that may be displayed as columns on the form is the number of fields in the underlying table. The beauty of this type of screen is that each workstation may display only the columns that are necessary for the transaction and columns may be dragged and dropped in any order the user finds convenient. Once set, the order is maintained from session to session for every form the user has defined. Each user also defines column widths and row heights for title and input lines. Unfortunately, users must reset their preferences if the system administrator updates the system level form.

Data entry on individual rows is very similar to using a spreadsheet. Drop-down lists are available whenever necessary. In fact, you may be able to look at detailed information for a customer, vendor or item, etc. without moving from the field! Data from the previous line can be duplicated into the same column on the current line by pressing the F8 key. Rows can be inserted or deleted as required. Journal lines can frequently include data from more than one functional area (e.g. a journal entry can affect a customer account and the

general ledger on the same transaction line). Running balances are normal. An offset account type and number may be included on a line to minimize data entry. Prior to posting a journal, a test report may be printed and approved.

In a previous section, we discussed the use of filters. Filters can be applied to any and all columns of a form. If you need to take data “off-line” for analysis purposes, just highlight the rows and use the copy and paste functions to your spreadsheet, database, etc. Only the data displayed on the screen will be copied.

As with Cards, Columnar forms may include several buttons at the bottom of the screen. On journal entry screens, there are typically four buttons: Account, Apply Entries, Posting, Help. The Account button enables the user to look at the applicable card and/or the ledger entries. The Apply Entries is typically used with Customer or Vendor entry journals. The Posting button controls the viewing and/or printing of a verification test report; initiation of posting with or without printing the posting journal.

3. Combo forms are used primarily with Purchase and Sales documents such as orders and invoices. The top half of the screen (header) includes data from the Vendor or Customer card as well as specific data about the order (e.g. order number, dates, purchasing/sales person, etc.) Any data copied from the Vendor/Customer card can be modified for the specific order. New Vendor/Customer cards may be added “on-the-fly,” as well as making permanent changes to the card. Multiple tabs are normally included on the document. In addition to the General tab, separate tabs may be used for such things as Invoicing and Shipping data.

The bottom half of the form is made up of columns and rows for entering line items on an order/invoice. The features of the columns and rows are the same as those described above for

columnar forms. Columns on succeeding rows can be copied from the previous row using the F8 key making data entry very easy.

As with the other two types of forms, several buttons are included at the bottom of the form. In addition to allowing the user to drill down deeper into order and item data, and to control posting, other features will be included in later discussions.

Reports

The basic system includes over 700 predefined reports and documents. When you click on the Reports choice of the menu, all standard Business Central reports for the particular function you are using are listed. When you click on the Print button, filters may be applied for virtually any field/s included on the table/s being used. You may set options such as dates, level of detail, etc. The user may then click on the Preview or Print button. When you choose Preview, you are able to view the entire report and then make a decision on whether or not to print all or part of the report. From the Preview window there are options to save as HTML, which allows for easy e-mailing of reports while retaining the formatting and the ability to open the report in Excel and have the columns of data automatically formatted into cells for further analysis.

In all probability, the user will need to modify most reports to accommodate the specific needs of your business. This can be done by anyone with experience in such programs as Access or a similar database. There is a very basic report writer that may be used to develop a simple listing or as the skeleton for developing a more elaborate one. Report titles can easily be added, modified or deleted from the menu listing.

There is no “job stream” capability within the basic system. Parameters for each report are retained for each workstation from session to session; however, if selection criteria vary, the

user is required to reenter the filters each time a report is run.

Validation and Data Integrity

In the Executive Summary, there is a brief discussion of this topic. Those issues will not be repeated in the following discussion. Extreme care must be taken when a user is entering or updating data since changes become part of the underlying table when you move from the field that has been changed. This would include moving to a new record or to any other part of the form. However, with the new ‘Change Log’, you can document what the changes were and go back and restore them at any time.

There are essentially two types of validation in base Microsoft Dynamics NAV. [1] If you are using a drop-down list, the value may be blank or a value from the list. [2] When a transaction is being posted, Business Central may detect a blank or invalid field (e.g. department code, invoice number, invalid date, etc.) and prevent posting until the error has been corrected. If your business requires a non G/L field to be complete, a validation routine would need to be added to a report printing or posting function. This routine may become quite involved if you need to do cross-field validations. Business Central has built-in functionality that assures data integrity. “Version management” protects your company information from loss due to unexpected conditions such as a power outage, network errors, and other problems. All G/L transactions are validated with the new Dimensional based set up and validations. You can also cross-validate and prevent certain combinations of dimensions from posting.

Transactions must be completely validated before they are written to the appropriate ledger tables. "Version management" is also a unique and powerful mechanism to prevent users from being locked out of a multi-user system. If a user updates a record while another user is accessing the same record, a message is displayed indicating that the screen should be refreshed.

Information is up to date as soon as it is posted. There are no periodic posting procedures or batching of data; therefore users may see current data at any time. A transaction may be posted to multiple ledgers simultaneously. For instance, a sales order/invoice may affect the Sales, General, Customer, Item, Resource, Job, and Tax ledgers during the posting of a single transaction. You can look at any posted transaction and easily see its total impact. There is no provision to "undo" a posted transaction other than to make a reversing entry and re-enter a new transaction in its place. There is a handy option available to copy one document to another (e.g. copy of sales order to a new credit memo). This is usually quite reliable, but sometimes hidden fields are copied from the old document to the new one rather than substituting new information. There is functionality to undo shipments and receipts of inventory.

General Ledger

Pros

- Real-time posting – data is up-to-the-minute
- Multi-period posting – no monthly closes
- "Navigate" to source documents from chart of accounts
- Flexible financial report set up
- Dimensions can be added to any master record such as a G/L account or budget data and Analysis Views of these Dimensions creates real time reporting of

General Ledger data in any format you wish.

- Analysis Views can be exported seamlessly to Microsoft Excel.
- Any from can be export to Microsoft Word or Excel with the click of a butoon

Cons

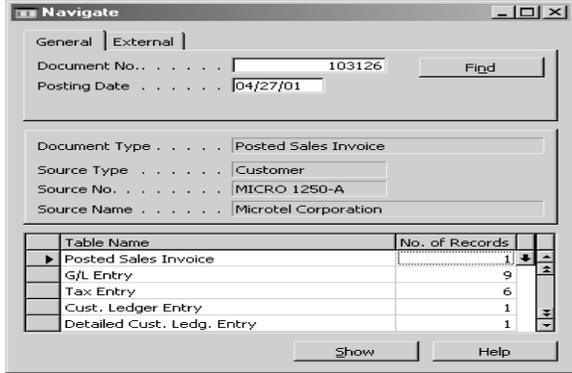
- Dimensional Analysis can be difficult to set up and maintain especially if you have more than four dimensions per account.

Chart of Accounts

Click "General Ledger" on the main menu; select "Chart of Accounts" from the sub menu; and you are presented with an accountant's dream – the Trial Balance and the facility to navigate and drill down to the lowest level of detail that comprises any balance:

No.	Name	I.	A.	Totalling	Net Change	Balance
40000	REVENUE	I...	B..			
41000	Sales of Jobs	I...	B..			
41100	Sales, Other Job Expenses	I...	P..			
41200	Job Sales	I...	P..			
41300	Total Sales of Jobs	I...	E..	41000..41300		
41400	Sales of Service Contracts	I...	B..			
41450	Service Contract Sale	I...	P..			
41500	Total Sale of Serv. Contracts	I...	E..	41400..41500		
42000	Sales of Resources	I...	B..			
42100	Sales, Resources - Dom.	I...	P..		-42,745.00	-42,745.00
42200	Sales, Resources - EU	I...	P..			
42300	Sales, Resources - Export	I...	P..			
42400	Job Sales Adjmt., Resources	I...	P..			
42500	Total Sales of Resources	I...	E..	42000..42500	-42,745.00	-42,745.00
43000	Sales of Raw Materials	I...	B..			

Click on one of the amount fields; then on the down arrow; you will see ALL of the transactions that make up the balance.



Click one of the detail lines and see the original transaction:

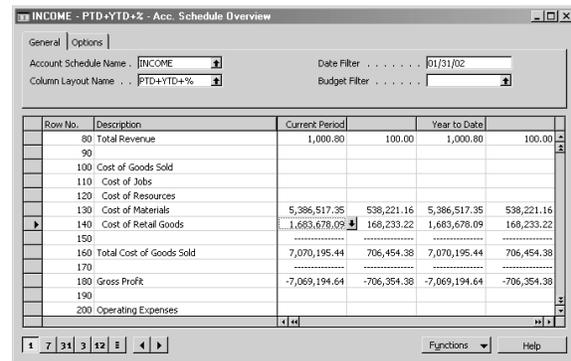
Bank Accounts

Business Central provides for an unlimited number of bank accounts that are added with an account card. In addition to general information about the account, current account balances are displayed in both US dollars and local currency. When you click on one of the balance fields, you can see every ledger entry for the account – both open and closed.

Bank transactions are posted to the Bank Account Ledger and to the General Ledger simultaneously. A separate bank ledger makes statement reconciliation both different and straightforward. 365NAV Bank Reconciliation mirrors spreadsheets normally used with forms for clearing outstanding deposits and another form for clearing outstanding checks. A third form allows for adjustments and variances from the bank statement and are easily added or modified to both the Bank and General Ledgers. Business Central supports A/P ACH fund transfers and Payroll direct deposits with the proper set up of the Bank Account card.

Account Schedules

Financial reporting is completely flexible, virtually unlimited in presentation options and user controlled. The Account Schedule feature on the G/L menu enables you to separately define [1] columns and [2] rows and filters by row or column. Then you may select the Account Schedule from the list of available reports and specify the column and row layouts you wish to see on your report. An Overview screen also allows for powerful and intuitive on-screen review of financial statements with the same drill-down that is so popular in the low-end QuickBooks product from Intuit: Once created, you can export the report to Microsoft Excel with the click of a button.



When you want to set up or modify a column layout, you have options to select from six different amount types (net change, balance, year-to-date, etc.), budget amount, or to define a formula. Columns may also be rounded as described in the Chart of Accounts section. Dimensions can also be added to provide even more filtering and flexibility. With 'Comparison Period Formula' activated, you can create trended financials quickly and easily.

Row definitions then determine what and how each line on the report will be presented. Each row is either a total of a range of posting accounts, a total line from the chart of accounts, or a user-defined formula. Pagination, underlining, bold face and print control are also specified at the row level. Up to four dimensions can then be added to the rows (department, project, and two others) to provide unparalleled reporting capabilities.

Budgets

An unlimited number of budget plans may be defined and used to compare to actual in your financial reports. They can be broken down by days, weeks, months, and quarters or as a total for the year. All, or individual parts, of a budget may be copied from one budget to another. When you manually enter a budget, the amount for each period must be entered period by period since there is no facility to duplicate entries for multiple budget periods. For instance, you cannot enter an annual amount and have it evenly distributed to each month. However, you can set the budget up in Microsoft Excel and import the budget to Business Central from there. If you use the Business Central Budget template generated from Business Central to Microsoft Excel, you can import multiple budgets and duplicate entries. The new facility allows for either replacing of entries, or adding to the existing entries. You can also keep up to six dimensions on your G/L account budgets and your Account Schedules and Dimensional Analysis Views can create management reports to show actual to budget with variances.

Setup

Prior to using Microsoft Business Central there are many tables that must be completed within the G/L setup menu. There are a few that are especially critical to the user, not only when setting up the system, but on an ongoing basis.

Document and transaction entry numbers are significant for Business Central users. One table controls scores of numbering requirements from customer numbers to posted general ledger transactions. Not only are specific numbers assigned to each type of transaction, but they may be controlled by start/stop, and/or date range. In some cases, you may need to manually assign numbers – this, too, is an option in the numbers table.

One of the most valuable pieces of information a business may require is to know how certain groups of businesses (e.g. customers and vendors) perform in relation to your various groups of products (e.g. raw materials, services, finished goods, etc.) To ensure consistent posting to general ledger accounts for most sales, purchasing and inventory transactions, a two-dimensional table is used. A general ledger number is assigned to each combination of business and product. When a new customer/vendor is added to the system, the appropriate business group is assigned to the customer/vendor. When a new inventory item is added to inventory, a product group is assigned. This feature relieves your clerical staff of having to worry about G/L numbers and links the sub ledgers of Business Central to the General Ledger.

Sales tax tables can handle virtually any requirements based on types of products, jurisdictions, minimum/maximum, etc. Unfortunately, calculations before posting may not be consistent with what is actually posted to the tax ledger because of a significant number of rounding calculations required for a single transaction to post to several ledgers and remain in balance. This rounding difference can be a problem if you have precalculated an invoice and posted the payment. This has gotten better in newer releases of the product and is virtually nonexistent in the newest version.

Dimensions are available for each G/L account and are unlimited— each dimension code may be up to 10 alphanumeric characters. The G/L account number may also be up to 20 alphanumeric characters. There is no built-in provision for segmenting the G/L account number – users would need to develop their own scheme and manually set up if segmentation is a must. Of course, you could set up an input mask to control segmentation. Business Central does make provisions for very tight control of the relationship of dimensions to a G/L account. A G/L account may be dedicated to a single dimension, or an account may either require or reject transactions in relation to dimension codes.

For some types of transactions (e.g. expenses) you may require a dimension code, but offset balance sheet account may not need the code. With certain types of transactions, especially sales and purchase orders/invoices, both the debit and credit transactions will automatically carry the dimension; thus requiring the user to allow codes, particularly in balance sheet accounts, even though they may serve no useful purpose. One other valuable G/L account feature is that you may require all transactions posted to certain accounts be processed through a subsidiary function or ledger (e.g. sales, bank account, etc.), not directly using a G/L journal entry.

Foreign Currency

Business Central has full support for the EURO. In addition, the system supports unlimited currencies using the international currency code standard. Since this system was developed in Europe, Business Central has excellent exchange rate capabilities, with last date-updated stamps. The user would set up both unrealized gains and losses, and a realized gain or loss. During the exchange rate adjustment routine these COAs are affected. It even has multi-language capabilities for invoice printing (e.g. print your invoice in

French and adjust to francs. Business Central allows you to develop a foreign language library as well. When customers are tagged with the foreign language code, and the items being invoiced have a language cross-reference table, the invoice will print the items in the customer's language. In addition, Business Central is fully FASB 52 compliant.

Sales and Purchases

Pros

- Purchase requisitions can be created during sales order entry
- Discount structure is very extensive
- Easy to move between functions – can have both open at one time
- Item line columns can be organized at each work station – drag and drop, hide and show, to suit each user

Cons

- No standard repeating orders (can copy document though)
- Orders may be printed with missing information. Information is easily added with the design tools.

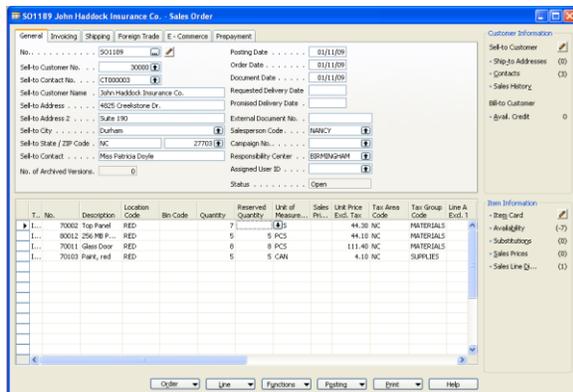
When you look at either the Sales or Purchases (S/P) sub menus they look very similar to each other since these functions frequently interact or work in the same way except that you may be referring to a customer versus a vendor, sales/purchase order, item shipping/receiving, etc. In a number of instances, Business Central uses one table to serve both functions (e.g. Sales/Purchases People; Payment Terms; Payment Methods; Shipment Methods; Shipping Agents, etc.). For the most part, this makes set up and maintenance of tables more efficient and consistent.

Sales and Purchases Document Approval

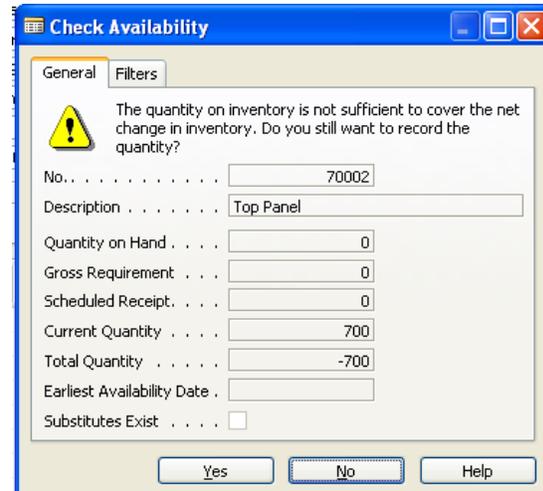
You can speed critical documents through your sales and purchase processes, standardize approval workflows, and enforce approval limits. With Business Central, you can set up e-mail approval chains, define approval limits, and even substitute approvers to keep critical business processes moving. Once the document is approved you can link documents to related purchase and sales order documents using the Record Links feature and Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services. Approvers can easily view the information necessary to complete an approval.

Sales and Purchasing Integration

We will trace a sales order that requires the purchase of additional stock. The sales order form looks very similar to a printed purchase order you may receive from your customer making data entry straightforward.



When the quantity ordered exceeds the quantity on hand the sales person receives an error message that shows the inventory and S/P status for the item. Drill down and see full detail on any total.



To begin the purchase process, simply click the [1]Functions button and [2]Calculate Plan. The system will estimate a delivery date based on lead times set up for the item and record the promised date. The product can then be ordered through the Requisition worksheet, automatically selecting any items that fall within the parameters or have been promised.

The Requisition, accessible from the Purchases and Payables menu, is completely editable and ready to be converted to a purchase order to be sent to the vendor. The sales order and purchase order are cross referenced so that product can be sent to the customer when it is received.. Business Central also makes provision for drop shipments to be coordinated through the P/S functions.

Statistics

When you are looking at the Customer or Vendor card, press F9 to see an extensive display of statistics. When you click on the General tab, you will see account totals showing the balance, open orders, etc. You may click on any amount field and drill down and see transaction level detail. The Sales or Purchasing tab will show several types of totals for four periods of time – current month/year, last year, and inception to date.

Customer or Vendor Card

Business Central has good flexibility to record multiple addresses for each customer or vendor. In addition to the “main” address, a separate address may be used for invoicing, and an unlimited number of shipping addresses can be maintained. The Countries table controls formatting of addresses where you can specify the order of “City, State and ZIP.” Sales tax follows the shipping addresses so less correcting entries will be made due to changing a shipping address. Sales Tax adjustments are easy to make through the Sales Journal or Cash Receipts.

Service Management

Pros

- Well integrated with Inventory & Manufacturing
- Tracking of service level obligations with follow-up

Service Order Management

Maintaining strong relations with your customers after the sale requires managing issues including service requests, services due, service orders, and repair requests. Service management provides this

level of customer care. Service requests can be initiated by your customers or automatically according to the terms stipulated in your service contract. Data can be entered in the service orders by a call-center employee or by your repair shop. You can also use Service Management for ad hoc or ‘one-off’ service orders. In Service Management you can register and manage loaner equipment, lent out to customers. A complete history of your service orders and service order quotes is also available through the Service Order Log.

Service Item Management

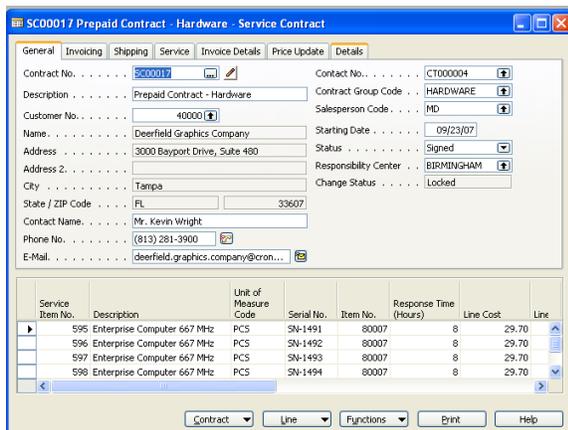
Item management allows you to keep track of your service items and spare parts, as well as any replacement equipment technicians may use. You can record all your service items and parts, including contract information, component management, BOM reference and warranty information. You use the service item Trendscape Analysis feature to view key performance indicators on the service item in a given time frame.

Service Contract Management

Contract Management is used to set up an agreement with the customer concerning the service level that will be delivered. It is also used for warranty management on service items and spare parts. The Service contract management feature holds information on contract history, contract renewal, and contract templates. You can also record details on service levels, response times, and discount levels as well as the service history of each contract, including used service items and parts and man-hours. Additional features include contract profitability measurement and contract quotes.

Service Price Management

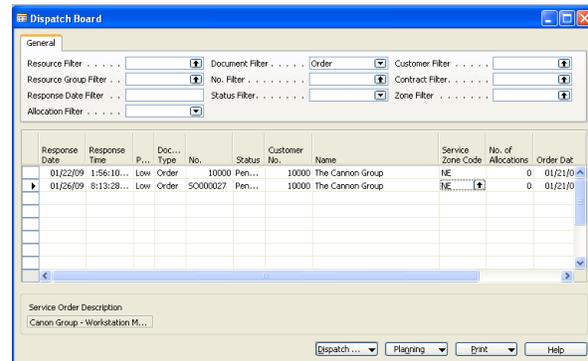
Service price management allows the set up of service price groups to take into consideration the service item (or service item group) as well as the type of fault the service task involves. Service price groups can be set up for a limited period of time, and/or for a specific customer or currency. Price calculation structures can be used as templates to assign a price to a service task. For example, this makes it possible to assign specific items included in the service price as well as the type of work included. And to ensure that the right prices are applied, it is possible to assign fixed, minimum, or maximum prices, depending on agreements with customers. Service price group reports allow you to keep track of the profitability of each service price group.



Planning and Dispatching

Planning and dispatching is used to assign personnel to work orders. You can log details such as work order handling and work order status. You can also use it to filter service personnel and field technicians according to availability, skills and stock items. Functionality in Planning and Dispatching helps you gain an overview of service

task prioritization, service loads, and task escalations.



Job Scheduler

Job Scheduler automates service tasks. For example, you can have the program automatically generate service contract renewals, or service contract invoices. The program can be set up to perform automatic checks on whether there are any batches to be processed on a specific date. The Job Scheduler is not dedicated to the Service Manager. It can be used to auto generate any Report, Dataport, or Code unit that you already have a license to use.

Accounts Receivable

Pros

- Complete customer history available
- Comment field to record extensive notes such as collection history
- Can reprint invoice at any time
- Easy to set up pre-payment or pre-approval process

Cons

- Account payments require minus sign

Customer History and Query

Business Central stores the entire invoice, as well as shipment history, in case the order had multiple partial shipments. As mentioned previously, all related data within the database is linked together. Reporting on almost any combination is possible, including specific item sales, or product lines by ship-to address or region, with costs and commission calculations. The posting process in Business Central is the single process that sends the information out to all the appropriate locations (e.g. a sales invoice posts simultaneously to the customer ledger, the item ledger, the tax ledger, and the general ledger). If posting is kept current (and there is no reason to delay posting) the entire system, including financial reports, will be current on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour basis.

Cash Application

Payments are made through a deposits template. The cash application form is very straightforward. You can apply a single cash entry to multiple invoices with complete audit trail of the application prior to posting. Once posted, the check is clearly connected to the applied invoices by an applied-to-ID and a posted deposit report can be printed for historical deposits at any time.

Credit and Collection

Customer invoice and payment history is contained in the Customer Ledger Entries table. By entering the Credit Management window, you can immediately view all the relevant credit information:

Customer contact, aged receivable balances, credit limit, comments and open orders can be accessed

from one place. Additional comments can be made, the terms can be changed or the customer can be blocked from shipping, invoicing or both. By clicking on the over due balances, the collections department can drill-down to the customer ledger detail and navigate to the past due invoice. Once on the invoice, it can be reprinted, faxed or emailed to the customer to expedite payment.

The system is programmed to check for overdue invoices and credit limits that are about to be reached when entering a quote, order, or invoice. If a warning appears, the operator can continue (provided security rights have been granted) with the process or view the customer ledger for more information. This process could also be set up to require a manager to release the quote for order entry.

The customer record is also equipped with an unlimited comment screen for further notes you might want to keep on credit history which can be accessed from anywhere you have a customer number. The credit and collections department can use the standard aging reports to identify past due accounts, the credit managers can view the customer ledger screen and easily answer any questions regarding which payments were applied to which invoices. They can also respond to inquiries regarding any transaction by simply clicking on the Navigate button.

Comments on the customer record and comments on actual invoices are possible. Reminder notices are built into the system with customized messages depending on the extent of delinquency. Faxing delinquency notices and any other printed documents from Business Central can be done in conjunction with standard fax interface software.

Customer Relationship Management

Pros

- Powerful features for managing sales, direct marketing and email campaigns.
- Integration with customer and vendor data
- Efficient sales activity planning and follow up
- Wizard driven interaction creation
- Tight integration with Microsoft Word
- Complete integration with Microsoft Outlook for remote synchronization.

Relationship Management is a powerful tool to assist with tracking and managing interactions with contacts. A contact can be a person or a company and can be linked to customers, vendors and/or bank accounts. An unlimited number of individual contact persons may be tracked for each company. It is also possible to define relationships between contacts such as supervisor or even a contact in a different company like the audit manager at a CPA firm.

Contacts can be created from customers, vendors or bank accounts. Additionally, when a contact becomes a customer/vendor/bank, setup information can be copied and cross-referenced to the customer/vendor/bank card. From that point on, sales, purchases, and contact information can be accessed from within any function. The duplicate check function automatically alerts you if you enter contact information that already exists.

By using TAPI (Telephony Application Programming Interface) compliant telecom devices, you can call a contact by clicking a button on the contact card.

Campaigns

Campaigns are organized based on segments created by you. You can segment your contacts based on specific criteria, such as sales, contact profiles and interactions. It is also possible to reuse existing segments or segmentation criteria. You can expand and reduce your target groups as often as you like, honing the selection criteria until you arrive at the perfect target group for your sales or marketing effort. Target group selection can be made using all information on prospect cards and their associated contact cards.

Integration with other Business Central application areas also lets you take advantage of sales history in selecting your group. For example, you can target a group of individuals that purchased a certain item within a given period. That information could in turn be used to target a group that includes all customers who have an item with a guarantee that is about to expire. Customers who have already purchased a service agreement can then be eliminated, and the end result will be a group consisting of all customers who need and have not yet purchased a service agreement.

Once you define a target group, you can email them, print mail merge letters with products such as Microsoft Word, as well as print mailing labels. Using C/ODBC, you can directly read the formatted addresses for the target group from other programs such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. In addition you can import names of prospects from an external database. Names may also be exported from your database.

Tasks

Relationship Management has features to help you more effectively plan and follow up on sales tasks. You can organize the tasks related to your sales and marketing activities by creating to-do lists for yourself and assign tasks to other users or teams of users. You can create automatically recurring to-dos and activities consisting of several to-dos. Activities, that can include such things as scheduled phone calls, visits and mailings, can be created individually for a given contact, or can be automatically generated for a target group with a campaign. When you complete an task, Relationship Management suggests the option of selecting a follow up activity, giving you complete control over the sales cycle.

Lists of the day's activities are always easily accessible, as are schedules for any other period you specify. You can easily see all planned and completed activities for a prospect or contact, so you can be brought quickly up to date for a short notice meeting or phone call. The Create To-Do Wizard allows you to set up future activities on a regular schedule (e.g. weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc.) so that you will be reminded when a task is due.

Market Groups

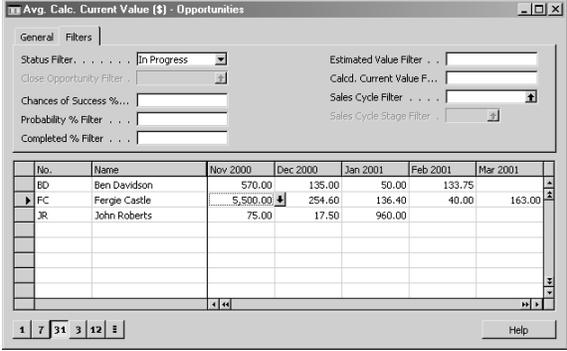
You can assign prospects or contacts to any number of market groups. This lets you precisely define market segments and assign prospects or contacts to mailing lists. Using these groups, you can manage the distribution of such things as catalogs, price lists, greeting cards and newsletters. For companies with diverse product lines, market groups come in handy for denoting segments with common interests.

Industry Groups

You can use industry groups to categorize all your prospects into industry-oriented market segments. You can define as many industries as you want and assign one or more industries to each individual prospect.

Opportunity Management

You can record each of your of sales opportunities to give you a sales pipeline overview. You can section your sales processes into different stages that you then use to manage your sales opportunities. Each opportunity can include a quote including actual items, a value, timeframe and a probability of closing. This is a terrific tool for forecasting revenues by rolling up each opportunity and even weighting the opportunities by probability.



No.	Name	Nov 2000	Dec 2000	Jan 2001	Feb 2001	Mar 2001
BD	Ben Davidson	570.00	135.00	50.00	133.75	
FC	Fergie Castle	5,500.00	254.60	136.40	40.00	163.00
JR	John Roberts	75.00	17.50	960.00		

You can use this granule to record all the interactions that you have with your contacts, such as telephone calls, meetings or letters. You can attach documents to interactions, for example, Microsoft Word documents, Microsoft Excel files, or .txt files.

Interaction/Document Management

You can also have the program automatically record interactions when you perform other actions in Business Central Attain. All interactions can be recorded whether they involve e-mail, correspondence, telephone calls, invoicing, reminders or services. Logging emails is done using Microsoft Exchange Server.

Microsoft Outlook Integration

Synchronize your to-dos and contacts in Business Central with meetings, tasks and contacts in Microsoft Outlook. You can decide not to synchronize some to-do categories, for example holidays or private appointments. Then receive a notification e-mail in Outlook to inform you that you were assigned a new to-do. You can also create, update, cancel and delete records in one program and the other program is automatically updated. With Microsoft Exchange integration log all your e-mail correspondence – inbound or outbound by logging your e-mails sent through Business Central or sent through Microsoft Outlook. The server-based solution can keep your e-mails in their natural environment.

Contact Search

This search functionality extends the usability of our solution as it becomes possible to search for all information related to a specific contact – for example, an opportunity, a contact address, or even comments on this contact. We have introduced fuzzy logic in this feature to make the search overcome misspelled words in the comments and other areas.

Reporting and Documentation

Relationship Management includes numerous standard lists and analytical reports for documenting and analyzing contact information. Reports such as the Contact Profile give you ready access to important information about prospects, including their sales history and marginal profit.

Accounts Payable

Pros

- Quick and complete payable information
- Can cut refund checks to customers
- Detailed information on items purchased from vendor
- Easy to use
- Easy to set up pre-payment or pre-approval process

Cons

- No default Chart of Accounts code for vendor
- No quick print feature for checks

Vendor Payments and Query

Like customers, vendors have a demographic information card. With the use of a function key, you have access to a line-by-line history of all invoices and payments for that vendor. To see the details on a particular invoice, you would highlight the entry in question and click on the Navigate button. You may see all areas within the database that have reference to that transaction. You can reprint the purchase order or the payment invoice, if needed. Each vendor has a comment screen for any information to be recorded.

When selecting invoices to pay, Business Central uses a Suggest Vendor Payment function to assist in selecting vendors to pay. You use a request window to select vendors based on user defined selection criteria. When you are ready to print checks, you have the option to print a check per invoice (vendor) or consolidate all invoices (for that vendor) on one check. The system also tracks payment terms discounts and discount due dates. Checks are easily voided and reinstated as outstanding invoices.

Issuing checks between your regular check runs is more difficult. There is no easy way to generate one check at a time. Prepayments on an order require a manual check to be issued so that a credit balance will post to the vendor account. When the order is complete, the credit can be applied to the vendor's invoice.

Audit Trails and Reports

Special reports are designed to assist you in your month end reconciliation process. The reconciliation reports available in Purchases and Payables and in Inventory identify adjustments needed to account for discrepancies resulting from merchandise received into inventory but not yet invoiced by your supplier.

Cash flow projections can be provided in many forms. Payment selection is very flexible. Your bank account and your cash account will always be current due to the fact that Business Central posts all transactions real-time. Effective use of statistical windows provides cash flow analysis based on your company's specific criteria.

Integration

The purchase order line detail includes quantity received and quantity invoiced so that there is a clean separation between the two activities. You do not need to delay receiving and selling items because you haven't received the vendor's invoice. Once the items are received and invoiced, the invoice information goes directly to the vendor ledger for payment.

Purchases and Payables is also integrated with Job Cost. An invoice (or PO) can be posted to a job as a whole, or you may specify job information on a line-by-line basis. A one-time post will send the cost information to the jobs, as well as to the vendor ledger and the general ledger.

Inventory Control

Pros

- Full featured with few limitations
- Historic and statistical information
- Easy access to data
- Value entries can adjust cost after initial posting

Cons

- Requires a two-step process for valuation of inventory.

Pricing and Costing

If your pricing methods have any logical basis, Business Central The standard package comes with a matrix, pricing table that allows a customer or customer group to get a special price on an item or item group. The pricing matrix is date sensitive so it can trigger a price change automatically based on a predefined date.

Business Central provides for pricing based on items, item groups and quantities. You can set up quantity discount schemes or you may choose to use flat invoice discounts. Modifications would allow for company-specific pricing adjustments, if necessary.

Business Central allows for LIFO, FIFO, Specific, Average and Standard costing methods by item. Serialized items would cost as specific, while cost for other non-serialized items use another method.

Each purchase or production of inventory is recorded in the item ledger. All sales or adjustments are also recorded in the same area. Quantity on hand can be immediately audited by viewing the item ledger, and serial numbers and quantities available can be reviewed at any time. Business Central is excellent for tracking exactly what inventory items were used in production or sold even when serial numbers are not involved.

Physical Inventory and Adjustments

Physical inventory reports are available by location and bin number. The standard product allows for basic positive and negative adjustments to inventory. Minor modifications to the data entry worksheet enhance the physical adjustment process.

Cost Accounting

Business Central does a good job of tracking cost variances and making adjustments to general ledger between actual and standard costs. Any difference in the estimated sale cost versus actual cost is created and posted during a process called Adjust Cost – Item Entries. It creates a new entry so inventory can be valued in the past. At any time, a report can be printed to evaluate the potential difference between physical inventory and the inventory value in general ledger. This report accounts for items received and not yet matched to vendor invoices.

Valuation of Inventory

Microsoft Business Central has resolved the problem of determining the accurate inventory value in the general ledger. It is very common to receive vendor invoices several weeks after the product arrives. Under this circumstance, Business Central allows you to receive and sell product at an "estimated" cost. To account for the variances in cost from the estimated amount to the actual amount, you may run a process called Adjust Cost – Item Entries. This batch job creates a new line netting the cost on item entries when necessary. A second process called Post Cost to GL will post the variations in cost of inventory from purchases and sales to the relevant GL accounts. Separate Value entries now allow Business Central to report on inventory valuation in the past.

This two-step process will allow you to correctly value inventory on your financial statements. Item costing to general ledger is very accurate; however, Business Central does not make the same cost adjustments to invoice history and job costing - those areas still contain the estimated cost.

Business Central also tracks job cost inventory in work in process accounts until recognition takes place. Recognition can be tracked by a percentage of completion or a completed contract method.

Reporting, Purchasing and Sales Analysis

Due to the complete audit of inventory transactions in the standard item ledger, the need for many conventional inventory reports is eliminated. However, Business Central does include a full complement of standard and advanced managerial reports. With the new dimensional analysis tools, you can tag any sub ledger, including inventory transactions, with dimensions and report on them in the General Ledger.

When you refer to an inventory item card you may press the F9 key and see complete statistics on each item. When you click on the general tab, you see totals for quantity on hand, on purchase and sales orders. Click on any of these total fields to see full detail. On the sales page, totals are displayed of quantities, dollars, cost of goods and profit margin and percentage. Each total is displayed for four time periods – current month/year, last year and total since inception. The purchases page also displays applicable totals for the same time periods.

Warehouse Management

Warehouse Management is used for communication between the sales and warehousing functions. It provides the basic functionality to assist warehouse employees in recording the receipt of inventory, arranging orders for picking, picking items for shipments and making shipments. All released orders (sales, purchase, transfer and production) can be handled in the warehouse.

Payroll

Pros

- Quarter/Year end reporting available without closing tasks
- Can split one employee earnings to multiple GL Accounts
- Posts employee PR burden to Job Cost
- Payroll Control Report Writer can produce any payroll report necessary to run business.

Cons

- The initial setup provides flexibility but can get complicated
- Some state and all local reports will have to be written.
- All local tax payroll controls will have to be created.

Employee Master

Business Central handles employees who live in one state and work in another and those that work in multiple states. If Job Cost is required, the system can track employees working on multiple jobs across multiple states. Vacation and sick leave can automatically accumulate.

Setup of employees is based on groups. Once the groups are established, employees are assigned to a group. Group setup eliminates setting up each employee individually. The F3 key inserts a new employee record. To setup a new payroll group you simply copy another group and then make adjustments as needed.

Deductions and additions

There are unlimited numbers of deductions, which can be established both globally and individually. You can also establish a maximum amount for a deduction. Setting up pays and adding new pays is a simple process. Business Central is designed in such a way that its flexibility will handle all types of special pay and withholding plans, such as 401K and cafeteria plans, and will allow you to have multiple types of earnings on a single check.

Timesheet Entry

There are several ways to enter time in Business Central. However, it may be advisable to create company-specific data entry screens. Any field can be preset with a default value. The development tools can also be used to change the movement of the cursor to suit your data entry needs.

Reporting

Government reporting such as 941's are printed using the built-in report writer that is customizable. Business Central payroll also supports MMREF-1 reporting for federal and state W-2's. 1099's are handled through the accounts payable system and can also support magnetic media reporting.

The system automatically posts all payroll tax accruals to GL for Social Security, Medicare, etc. Transactions by department or division are supported. You can view on screen quarter-to-date and year-to-date figures for each employee, as well as all deductions. Human Resources

Pros

- Complete employee records
- Separate confidential information
- Equipment issuance tracking
- Applicant Tracking

Cons

- Limited benefits tracking

Employee Record

A complete information file for each employee centers around an employee card where you record basic information. This includes personal information about the employee and various administrative status codes. Among these codes is one for employment contracts, which you can use to assign standardized employment contracts or levels. A generic statistical grouping code is also available that you can use to freely categorize by any criteria.

Each employee file includes a table of qualifications that you can assign from a user-defined table of qualification codes. These can include educational credentials, continuing education certificates and professional certifications. This information, along with the statistical codes, assists you in identifying employees that fit the profile of a job opening or project assignment.

Separate Record of Confidential Information

Confidential information for an employee is tracked in a separate table attached to the employee card. This lets you give relatively broad access to basic employee file information, while placing tighter security restrictions on the confidential file.

Confidential information can include such things as salary, insurance coverage, stock options and computer access codes.

You can also track equipment issued to employees, such as keys, credit cards, company cars, portable computers, cellular phones and pagers. There is even a place to attach a scanned employee photograph, as well as a list of alternate addresses.

Absence Tracking

The absence tracking function lets you create your own unique absence codes. These can then be used along with statistical codes, department and project codes to provide multi-dimensional reporting of absence history. Trends or patterns can thus be easily identified and quickly addressed.

Documented Records

Comment sheets are provided throughout the human resources area so that all aspects of the personnel file can be properly documented. Comments can be attached to all employee records including absences, qualifications, equipment, issuance and confidential information.

Reporting

Human Resources includes reports that list and analyze your records. These include employee lists, labels, absences by employee, absences by reason, birthday lists and various statistical reports.

Jobs

Pros

- Good detailed cost breakdown
- Versatile
- Interfaces well with A/R and payroll

Cons

- No specific industry focus
- Limited standard reports
-

Job Code

The job code supports twenty characters, which could be used to designate multiple sub units. However, Business Central provides three additional fields for tracking these sub units: phases, tasks and steps. Cost types are broken down by items, resources, and direct expenses. Resources are further broken down into labor and equipment. Reporting is not as complete as in other areas of the system.

Business Central has taken a “horizontal” approach to the jobs function. Some companies can use jobs out of the box; however, some modification may be required to meet your specific requirements. The jobs module provides a good foundation from which more comprehensive functionality can be developed.

Job Estimating

Business Central provides a fairly simple means to budget costs at various levels of detail. The system includes comparison reporting of budget versus actual. There is also facility to copy the budget from an existing job to a new job.

Transactions

Invoicing for jobs is accomplished through the sales and receivables module. The invoicing portion of sales and receivables provides a function to get job transactions flagged as chargeable. You may have entered labor and material in a fairly detailed format and the system can summarize the "like" transactions in a more concise billing format. There is no special process for handling retainage other than using some of the standard job subdivision for these allocations.

Tracking specific information on subcontractors and general contractors is not built into the standard product, but could be added.

Reporting

Job Cost reporting is basic and straightforward. Business Central has provided a very capable report writer and access to all existing reports. Specific reports can be developed by modification of existing reports or creating entirely new reports.

Fixed Assets

Pros

- Real-time fixed asset management, analysis and reporting
- Flexible definition and grouping of assets
- Choice of standard or custom depreciation methods
- Real-time statistics giving a complete picture of individual assets
- Integration with A/R & A/P for one step process when purchasing and selling of fixed assets

Cons

- Few predefined depreciation methods
- No validation between tax rule and defined depreciation
- Weak handling of leases, Section 179 deductions, special situations

Fixed Assets

You can keep track of all information relevant to fixed assets, such as maintenance costs, acquisition costs and insurance policies. In addition, the real-time nature of fixed asset facilities means that your periodic income and expense figures are always accurate and up-to-date.

With fixed assets, you can define information for an asset in a number of ways, including: number, description and serial number. A fixed asset can also be specified as a budgeted asset. In this case, you can include the fixed asset in the budgeting process as a projected fixed asset that is then used for budgeting purposes alone. You can record information that is used for tracking the maintenance status of fixed assets.

A number of posting options are offered, such as asset classes, subclasses and location codes. Integration with the general ledger is defined in the fixed asset posting groups where you have a range of options for setting up a number of different accounts (e.g. acquisition cost, depreciation, maintenance or disposal).

An asset can either be set up as a single entity, or as a set of components that make up a composite fixed asset. This lets you control the level of detail you need in your fixed assets reporting. It also lets you record master file information applying to the entire component list in one place.

Depreciation

For each fixed asset, you can define an unlimited number of depreciation books. These describe all the required depreciation conditions for a fixed asset. The flexibility of depreciation books is valuable in many situations: for example, it can help you meet the demands of local accounting and tax conditions - whatever your location. You can also define a depreciation book for internal depreciation calculations. And if the company is a part of a multinational company, you can set up a depreciation book to fulfill the currency demands of the parent company.

In each depreciation book, you can decide whether or not the book should be integrated with the general ledger. You can also specify how the fixed asset is to be depreciated, as well as the desired frequency of depreciation calculations. This frequency is completely user-definable.

For each depreciation book, there is a ledger entry list with all relevant information such as book value, depreciation basis, accumulated depreciation, disposal, gain/loss, user ID and source code.

The fixed assets application area provides several standard depreciation methods. These include, straight line and declining balance, as well as various accelerated methods and unlimited customized methods.

Each depreciation book for fixed assets offers you a statistics window, which will quickly give a live status overview of a fixed asset. All information defined for a fixed asset can be simultaneously viewed on screen. Each main asset has its own statistics window that gives you a complete picture of what is happening with a fixed asset. For example, statistics can include the book value, the depreciation basis, accumulated depreciation, gain/loss and disposal.

Maintenance

You can record a wealth of information for an asset, such as maintenance, service and expense information. You can include photographs of assets. All this helps you to keep track of each asset and gives you the information you need for analysis and decision making related to the renewal of fixed assets. Maintenance expenses recorded in fixed assets are integrated with the general ledger.

Insurance

Numerous insurance facilities are available including the ability to monitor the insurance coverage and annual insurance premiums. This facility makes it easy for you to see whether your assets are under or over insured.

Allocations

You can allocate depreciation to combinations of departments or projects. This facility is normally used when several departments in a company share a fixed asset.

Reclassification

A fixed asset, or a part of a fixed asset, can be reclassified. This is done by moving the asset, or part, from one classification to another (e.g. from one department to another). A reclassification journal logs changes to provide an effective audit trail.

Reporting

Fixed Assets includes a number of standard reports that document all recorded information. These include reports required for legal purposes. A variety of simulation reports are also offered. These show how the book value and depreciation will develop in time. They are particularly useful for budgeting purposes.

Report Writer

Pros

- Very capable & complete access to data
- Reports become part of standard system
- Simple reports are easy to do

Cons

- Complex reports require some basic programming skills
- Complex reporting requires training

The Report writer is built into the system. All Business Central reports are accessible to the report writer. New reports are often just simple modifications of existing reports. Simply copy an existing report and then make your changes.

Extraction Criteria

The report writer has full access to data throughout the database (e.g. one report can contain data fields from many different tables). Sorting is available on most fields. Additional sorts (keys) can be added to system. Business Central prints reports quickly due to its strong use of sorts (keys). The use of predefined sorts (keys) eliminates the need to reindex the tables every time a report is run.

Request panels appear before printing, allowing the operator to select criteria for output. Business

Central supports the use of Boolean operators, date ranges, and field filters in defining your selection criteria. It is easy to add other fields for selection purposes when needed.

A description of each report is available at any time prior to printing. The description is user definable. The description can describe the purpose of the report and perhaps any special parameters that are important for your company. Report formats include current year, prior year, future periods, actual to budget, etc.

When in the print preview mode, you are provided full screen handling tools. It is a modified version of the standard windows print preview. You can click from the first page to the last with a single mouse click. You can also "flip" through the pages one at a time. You can display up to 3 rows and 3 columns of report pages at once. You can "zoom" into the page to see the detail. Additionally, you can print the report to a printer from the print preview by clicking the print button.

Formatting

The report writer is a very powerful tool, but may appear complex to some end users. However, the results can be as professional as the most sophisticated report program. Moving fields around and controlling field formats is easy. Text titles are simply typed into their appropriate position.

The creation of a basic column type report is a simple process. However, the creation of report totals, including group totals or the creation of variables and special calculated fields will likely require some formal programming training.

Integration with Desktop

You can use the C/ODBC tool with other applications that can retrieve data from the Microsoft Business Central database through the ODBC interface. With C/ODBC, you can use all the information in the database with programs you often use in your daily work, such as word-processing and spreadsheet applications. With C/ODBC you have many options for using the data with other functions besides those in Business Central. C/ODBC can be used with any product that supports ODBC.

Quick Mode Capabilities

The standard report writer provides a “quick report” feature that will step you through the creation of a basic report.

Database Compatibility

Any report can be printed to file, to fax, or to e-mail. Business Central sends data out in standard ASCII text format. Most any database or spreadsheet can read these files. The system can also accept ASCII text in comma delimited or fixed formats. Business Central has the unique ability to be able to accept transaction data as well as master file information. In addition, Business Central is a MAPI compliant product, allowing you to attach any report to e-mail for routing.

Creating an import routine (DataPort) that receives data is very much like using the report writer. Importing and exporting data can be built into a batch process or made part of a report process. For example, if you want to print a report and export the data once a week, building the export process into your report will complete both tasks.

XML Document Exchange

XMLport objects in Business Central allow you to easily exchange documents with your business partners. In addition, XMLports improve the overall performance of the solution when handling XML document exchange and enable easier customization of data exchange with Business Central

XMLports are used to create XML documents containing Business Central data. Once in XML format this data can easily be sent to and read by another application. For example, an XMLport can be created containing your product catalogue and price list and this can easily be sent to your business partners regardless of the platform and database they use, just as long as they can read XML documents.

General Information

Pros

- Supports commit/roll-back for data integrity
- Efficient simultaneous access
- Extensive on-line analytical processing

General

Business Central utilizes the latest technology. A great deal of attention was devoted to the development of the Business Central database. This database ensures a high level of reliability. A feature similar to “commit/roll-back” called “Version Management” protects your company’s information from loss due to unexpected conditions such as power outage, network errors and other problems. The use of “optimistic concurrency” prevents users from receiving record locks and allows for near perfect multi-user

access. The Business Central database not only stores your data but presorts data and stores transactional based statistics in specially patented fields called "Flow Fields." Benefits are "fast" access to data on large databases and virtually "non-stop" end of month procedures. Because Business Central designed its database especially for accounting and business management, it delivers hard to beat performance and almost unlimited flexibility.

The base package has a broad range of features that can be used by a wide variety of businesses. To make the system "industry" specific, you simply add the features that you require.

Modifications can be preformed by the end user based, or by one of the Business Central Solution Centers situated throughout North America. Business Central Solution Centers provide a wide range of services including, requirements analysis, custom programming, data conversion, implementation, training, and support.

Security

You are given full control on securing access to all areas of the programs. Typically you establish security groups, and then you assign individuals to a group. You may also establish rights by the individual user. Business Central supports the ability to give read only, read/write access, insert, modify, delete and execute permissions to all areas of the program. A separate menu can be created for each user, providing access to only the menu items that are applicable for that user.

Backup and restore functions are built into Business Central using "Version Management" which allows you to backup the system while the system is still in use.

Posting

Business Central posts all data in full. Posting is a one-step process. A system of registers maintains an audit trail of every posting, including the user's name. Test reports are available to print prior to posting.

Business Central has virtually eliminated the tedious task of "closing" periods. In addition, "Sum-Index-Flow" Technology (SIFT) eliminates the need to maintain "buckets" to store accumulated balances, like account balances, sales totals, etc. In most other accounting solutions, these "buckets" must be zeroed out at the end of a month. In Business Central, SIFT fields (Flow Fields) can give you balances by any period on demand.

Import/Export

Business Central has especially good import and export capabilities. It is possible to import master and transaction records. If importing is going to be a regular process, such as importing electronically transferred orders, you can setup batch routines to simplify the process. The system supports both comma-separated, fixed length ASCII formats. Or XML.

Business Analytics

Business Analytics provides two offerings: basic and advanced. Both offerings enable deeper understanding of information generated from Business Central and help ensure that everyone in your organization has easy access to the same accurate, current data.

The Basic offering delivers Microsoft Business Central information in predefined or customized information units called Online Analytical Processing (OLAP) cubes directly to users'

desktops. Users can access and analyze data—within a familiar Microsoft Office Excel interface or another front-end solution. Users can easily define, customize, save, and re-use OLAP cubes.

The advanced offering supports businesses that have more complex reporting and analysis needs while maintaining the simplicity and ease of use that are hallmarks of Microsoft Business Central. Working within a graphical interface that is similar to Microsoft Office Outlook, users can gain a 360-degree view of business.

Record links

In Business Central, you can add links to any web site or file stored on the document management system such as Microsoft SharePoint. For example, you could create links from an item in Business Central to a product web site, a video demo of the product, images of the product, or to other documents created in Microsoft Office. Links can be created in any form in Business Central.

Record links can also be moving links. This means that when the same information is automatically moved from one area in an application to another, the link will follow. For example, links created in quotes are automatically copied to the relevant sales order when it is created, and to the invoice when it is posted.

Integration to Microsoft Windows Live Local Search

Integration to this feature expands on your business solution to give you access to a valuable, time-saving function. You just click a button next to the relevant address in Business Central, on the customer card, for example, and then follow the

simple driving directions on the screen. You can also print out a map and step-by step directions. You can view, print out maps, and get driving directions between any two addresses stored in the system.

Integration with Microsoft SharePoint along with Office 365

You can easily store and share information from Business Central with your people. For example, if a manager wants to make weekly sales reports available to salespeople in the field, the manager can maintain the list in just one place. The relevant salespeople (who have been given access rights) can then view the sales report via Employee Portal. Employee Portal connects Business Central to Microsoft SharePoint to give people a simplified view of important business data on their own personalized intranet home pages without having to be trained in Business Central.

About Sheldon Needle



A former CFO, consultant and software designer, Sheldon Needle has authored or co-authored more than 20 books on software selection and has contributed articles to major publications, including the *Journal of Accountancy* and *Nation's Business*. CTSGuides.com has the distinction of being the very first company to do hands-on, independent evaluations of software for the middle market.

Sheldon speaks with business owners and managers every day about software selection and makes personalized recommendations based on their needs and budget. He is widely known and respected throughout the business software community for his independence, integrity and expertise.

As part of registering for our free software selection kit, you receive a 15-minute consult with Sheldon. Sheldon understands financial and business issues and speaks your language.

He knows the leading software companies—how they compare, their strengths and weaknesses, where they fit into the market and which ones would be suitable for your business.