Is it time to move to Windows®-based Accounting?

ACCPAC® Plus™ Accounting users are asking themselves if it's finally time to move to Windows-based accounting.

Good Reasons to Move

Your current hardware and personnel know Windows.

Your business has changed significantly over the last several years, you have recently upgraded your accounting system hardware to current standards, and your recent recruits in the department only have experience with Windows-based systems. You find yourself clicking on an ACCPAC Plus field to update the information it contains.

Your current accounting system is unwieldy.

You have been struggling with your current accounting system, making use of numerous workarounds to implement the management information system you require. Newer, Windows-based accounting solutions directly address issues your company is facing.

All my other programs are Windows.

With companies making more use of the Internet and e-mail, users are becoming adept at using a mouse and the Windows conventions for data entry and navigation. Many printers today will not work without Windows, and updated printer drivers for DOS programs are hard to find.

Reasons to Stay Put

DOS works.

Yes it does, and faster than equivalent Windows programs. However, if a Windows program performs some function not possible in DOS, then the Windows program is infinitely faster. For example, it may be possible to "cut-and-paste" a financial statement directly into Excel in a Windows-based General Ledger. This feature is not available in your ACCPAC Plus accounting system. Windows features bring only a few benefits to the accounting department and some may not be immediately apparent. Windows accounting programs usually allow you to e-mail and fax documents – a great paper and time saver.

ACCPAC Plus programs are well supported.

There are hundreds of thousands of ACCPAC Plus users around the world, and thousands of companies and individuals that make their living providing support and expertise for this system. Such an ocean of expertise does not simply "disappear" overnight. However, very few programmers are interested in working in DOS any longer, and many consultants have moved to other platforms. While ACCPAC International may release upgrades to ACCPAC Plus, many companies rely on 3rd party add-ons to make their solutions complete.

Things to Consider

In Windows based accounting, you will want to print all your reports on a laser printer.

Checks, invoices, statements and other "specification driven" forms, as well as your batch listings and audit trails will be printed on laser printers, regardless of the Windows-based accounting platform you adopt. Windows (the operating environment) does not support dot matrix printers adequately for accounting applications. For a demonstration of the problem, locate (if you can) a Windows printer driver for your dot matrix printer. Then print a 2 page document from Word, or your favorite word processor, and measure the length of time taken. This will be the length of time required to print a similar accounting form. By moving to laser printing, you can standardize your filing system to 3-ring binders, and print your audit reports on both sides of the paper.

Heads down data entry is difficult under Windows

Windows requires a programmer to devote screen space to title and scroll bars, and other Windows-standard fixtures. This means that data entry forms must be split into multiple pages, making "heads-down" data entry difficult. Also, Outlook reminders and other Windows events can occur at any time, disrupting the data entry flow. Most accounting functions are "keyboard-centric" and any requirement to use a mouse is disruptive to the data entry process. The data entry standard for Windows also requires pushing the "tab" key to move from field to field in a form. The Enter key is used to close the form and save input.

Proprietary databases have advantages.

ACCPAC Plus and Adagio use a data access method developed for optimal data access in an accounting environment. It requires no additional licensing fees, other than those paid to license the application. Access to the data is available in several different ways that are external to the accounting system. Using a DOS (character based) interface, Quik Reports, Report Master and DynaView all allow users access to their accounting data. For Windows users, Quik Reports for Windows, Report Master for Windows, Quik Link for Excel, BRIO Query and ODBC Link all allow access to the accounting data in many different ways. Accounting systems that use standard access methods, such as SQL and Btrieve, let users bypass the accounting system's audit trail and field verifications using easy available tools such as Excel and Microsoft Access.

Software is a small part of the cost of moving to a different accounting platform.

Adagio uses the same data files as your ACCPAC Plus data, meaning that no conversion is necessary, and all your historical information is available. While ACCPAC International provides conversion tools for your ACCPAC Plus data, the conversion requires significant expertise and incurs significant expense. In addition, you will need to plan for its implementation and train your staff in its use and idiosyncrasies. Just converting your data, without taking advantage of the extended G/L account code size and segmentation, loses one of the major benefits of changing accounting systems. Don't forget – you cannot have flexibility without complexity.

The company that designs the "bulls-eye" chart chooses the bullets.

Just because a feature is ticked, does not mean that the implementation of the feature will be satisfactory for your needs. For example, some Windows-based Accounts Receivable modules allow you to print an invoice. Users of Quik Invoice Plus may believe that this A/R module will replace their need for Quik Invoice Plus if they change accounting systems. But make sure that your new system supports user-defined fields on the line items of an invoice. Your new system must also allow an invoice to have different formatting options in the detail section to provide a narrative section. If you are using any of these features in Quik Invoice Plus, you may not be satisfied with the invoicing provided in your new environment. Adagio provides all of the functionality you're used to in ACCPAC Plus (except multi-currency) and Softrak's add-ons – so you won't encounter any surprises.

Windows applications require lots of computing horsepower.

Users of ACCPAC Plus will find the performance of most Windows-based accounting systems sluggish on anything less than a 400MHz Pentium with 64 to 128 Mbytes of memory. (Needless to say, on this type of equipment, ACCPAC Plus runs quite fast too.) Carefully time the posting speed and output performance of functions that you run all the time to verify that the hardware / software combination that you have chosen is sufficient for your daily processing needs. Fortunately, the horsepower requirement will seem less and less of a barrier as time progresses and the computers in your accounting department are replaced.

Summary

The move to Windows-based accounting is a major undertaking and should only be attempted with the assistance of a consultant trained and experienced in the system you choose. Unless you choose Adagio, your data conversion may take several days, and, once converted, going back to ACCPAC Plus will be impossible. Make sure that the individuals in your company that regularly access the accounting system have sufficient computing horsepower and training to ease some of the frustration inherent in such a major conversion.

Make no mistake, at some point you will be using a Windows-based accounting solution. Changes in technology virtually guarantee that support for DOS-based applications will be unavailable in the future. However, your data is one of your most valuable corporate assets. Wholesale changes should be approached with caution and significant planning. Incremental changes and additions are easier for the company to absorb and integrate into its information management needs.

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