

## Microsoft Business Solutions — Navision

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From the December 2005 [Review of High-End Accounting Software](#) CPA Technology Advisor

Another in a growing line of products from Microsoft Business Solutions, Navision sports a more international feel, since its roots are in Denmark. Since acquiring Navision in 2002, Microsoft has continued to move the product along with user interface and functionality enhancements, as well as integration with other Microsoft business products such as Office, SQL Server and BizTalk Server. The product targets midsize companies with modules for financial, manufacturing, distribution, supply chain and customer management. It features a highly customizable development interface and nearly 40 language options.

### **Modules Available/Scalability - 5 Stars**

Modules available for Navision include GL, Fixed Assets, Sales & Receivables, Relationship Management, Service Management, Purchases & Payables, Inventory, Warehouse Management, Manufacturing, Capital Requirements Planning, Resources, Jobs, Human Resources, Payroll, and Commerce Portal.

Navision is a flexible program that is adaptable to anything from single-user installations to enterprise-level configurations utilizing Microsoft SQL Server. Installation varies accordingly, but in all cases is well organized and should be a relatively straightforward process for a professional computer technician. You have a choice of using the Navision Database Server for simplicity and economy or Microsoft SQL Server for power and scalability.

### **Ease of Use/Transaction Entry - 5 Stars**

With Version 4.0, Navision introduced a new desktop design that brings the look and feel of Microsoft Outlook 2003. A vertical Navigation Pane on the left side of the desktop has a series of buttons at the bottom that displays additional menu items for each functional program area, such as Financial Management, Sales & Marketing, Purchase, Warehouse, Manufacturing, Resource Planning, Service, Human Resources, Payroll, Administration, and Shortcuts. As these buttons are clicked, a tree-style menu for that area is displayed at the top of the Navigation Pane with choices for specific modules like GL, Receivables, Payables and so forth. The tree expands further to display items such as Reports, History or other data-entry screens. With the sheer number of areas and modules available within Navision, this system provides a nicely organized way to get to everything quickly.

Data-entry screens follow a simple multi-tab layout that is very intuitive. Pop-up buttons at the bottom of data-entry screens provide additional functions, such as searches and links to related screens. For example, from the customer screen, the Customer button leads to Ledger Entries, Issued Documents, Ship-to

Addresses, Sales, Jobs, and so forth that are related to the specific customer. A Sales button leads to items like Invoice Discounts, Prices, Quotes, Orders and so forth. Key fields within the data-entry screen use an up-arrow icon to open grid-style pick lists for valid field entries.

One of the most powerful aspects of Navision's design is its use of "dimensions." The chart of accounts lets you define an unlimited number of dimensions and dimension values at any time. A dimension is data that you can add to an entry as a kind of marker so that the program can group entries with similar characteristics and retrieve these groups for analysis purposes. Dimension values are sub-units of dimensions. For example, a dimension called Department can have sub-units such as Sales, Administration and so forth. This is a powerful concept and tool, allowing nearly unlimited configurations to meet the company's needs and business processes.

### **Customization/Security - 5 Stars**

Customization is provided through the program's extensive development interface. The underlying code base is a language called C/SIDE, which can also be used to extend and enhance any Navision module in an infinite number of ways. Using the Object Designer, you can make modifications to the application or create completely new application areas. Of course, this would typically be undertaken by an experienced Navision developer. Third-party consultants that are specialists in this area are available.

Another area of customization is in reporting. Reports provided can be modified using the built-in WYSIWYG report designer, or new reports can be designed using a wizard that lets you select tables, fields and layouts and then produces a new report that is selectable just like the other standard module reports.

Navision's security system is integrated with Windows 2000 Active Directory, providing "single sign-on" functionality, which simply means that once you are logged into the client workstation, your access to the program and permissions within the program can be defined using your Windows login credentials. In addition, users can be assigned roles, and you can also apply security filters that limit the permissions that you grant to each user or role so that they only gain access to information about particular customers, vendors, dimensions and so on.

### **Integration/Import/Export - 5 Stars**

Commerce Gateway, Commerce Portal and User Portal are add-on products that integrate and interface accounting system data with third parties, including customers, vendors and employees. Commerce Gateway provides business-to-business document exchange for things like sales orders and purchase orders.

Functions for the export and import of these electronic business documents are available right from the associated data-entry screens. Commerce Portal is a web-based tool that allows customers and business partners to submit and manage orders through a standard Internet browser. Web pages for things like

catalogs, items and prices can be managed from within Navision, without the assistance of Internet consultants. Automatic e-mail notifications can be set up for specific events, such as when a certain item becomes available. The User Portal is a web-based tool that allows employees to access information from the accounting system, such as customer contacts, order history, and bills of material based upon their role in the organization.

Navision also includes support for XBRL-based financial reporting. XBRL (Extensible Business Reporting Language) is an XML-based specification that uses accepted financial reporting standards and practices to export financial reports across all software and technologies to facilitate the exchange and analysis of financial information, especially in public companies.

#### **Reporting - 5 Stars**

A solid library of reports is provided across all modules. Each report provides various filtering options that let you select the specific data and detail level to be printed. Reports can be printed or previewed, but export capabilities are not provided. As mentioned above, a built-in report writer can be used to modify any of the standard reports or create new ones using a wizard.

#### **Support/Training/Help System - 4 Stars**

A nice context-sensitive online Help system can be quickly accessed from anywhere in the program, providing good explanations and links to related topics. A contents view lets you use the HTML-based system as you would a user manual, to topically peruse the entire volume. In addition, a comprehensive C/SIDE Reference Guide is provided to address Navision's customization and programming language.

Technical support is provided through Microsoft's web site to customers with an active support plan. Support resources are available through an online TechKnowledge database that contains technical tips, solutions to common problems, usability recommendations, and answers to frequently asked questions. Requests for assisted support can also be made to the support team for online responses. The lack of readily available live phone support is one of the things that concerns me the most about the Microsoft accounting products in general.

#### **Relative Value - 5 Stars**

This product covers a lot of territory, sports many powerful features and still maintains a user interface that makes everything seem simple. Navision has brought a lot of first-class software engineering to this product. It is a strong contender for any midsize business looking for a solid accounting package that they will not outgrow soon.

### **2005 Overall Rating - 5 Stars**