



Microsoft Business Solutions - Navision

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This product, formerly known as Navision Financials and Navision Attain, was renamed Microsoft Business Solutions ' Navision, to reflect its new ownership since 2002. Navision targets mid-sized companies with a suite that includes modules for accounting, manufacturing and supply chain management. It features a highly customizable development interface and multiple language options.

MODULES AVAILABLE/SCALABILITY - 4 Stars Modules available for Navision include GL, Fixed Assets, Sales & Receivables, Relationship Management, Service Management, Purchases & Payables, Inventory, Warehouse Management, Manufacturing, Capital Require- ments Planning, Resources, Jobs, HR, 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 The program's main work area has a navigator-style menu with a vertical list of hyperlinks for each installed module. Clicking on one of these items displays the applicable items for that module on the right-hand side of this window. These hyperlink items lead directly to query windows, data-entry screens and report lists. The program uses a combination of grids for list items and queries, and multi-tab data-entry screens for record details.

Screens generally have a couple of pop-up menu buttons that provide quick access to related queries. For example, from the customer screen, the Customer button leads to items such as Ledger Entries, Issued Docu-ments, 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.

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. Dimen- sion 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 development interface. The underlying codebase 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, 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. The latest version of Navision also includes support for XBRL-based financial reporting.

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 do not provide export capabilities. 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 and provides 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 who have 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 FAQs. 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 Microsoft Business Solutions ' Navision is priced as follows: Foundation Layer (\$6,250), Basic GL (\$3,010), Payroll (\$2,500), Basic Inventory (\$1,500), Sales Order Management (\$2,500) and Purchase Order Management (\$2,500). See the Great Plains review on page 51 for more information on the cost of updates/renewals and support/training.

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 mid-size business looking for a solid accounting package they will not outgrow soon.

2004 OVERALL RATING: 5 Stars