

INTEGRATING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE WITH PORTAL TECHNOLOGY AND CRM SOFTWARE

By Alice Burke

A Place for Everything

Technology people began talking about “silos of data” a few years ago and I always pictured a farm with data stored in tall, grey silos. One for the corn, one for the grain, etc. As long as the corn farmer can get into the corn silo and the grain farmer can get to his grain, everybody’s happy. Everyone’s crops are separate and secure.

It’s a similar scenario in many companies. You might have a contact database for customer data, a separate database for sales data, and a separate system for accounting, payroll, and financial reporting. Sure, you might have a few shared folders here and there to share documents, but for the most part the data is separate and secure. Just like on the farm, as long as the sales people can get to their information and the accounting people can get to theirs, everybody’s happy. Right?

Imagine, on one day during month-end close, the AR clerk gets 15 calls from the sales team asking for copies of invoices. And the credit manager gets 12 asking for credit status so that new orders can be placed. The purchasing person gets a dozen requests for vendor contact information and quotes. The payroll manager gets two requests for commission statements, one change of address, one direct deposit account update, and six questions about pay check deductions. And, the CEO and directors all want updated KPI’s by the end of the day.

Suddenly, there is a bottleneck coming out of one silo and a very stressed accounting team trying to keep all of the data flowing in the right direction. Where the vision that created this structure was to keep the data secure and manageable, the reality is that it has become an impractical model for delivering information to the people who need it. Luckily, there are new alternatives that can serve both purposes.

Portal Integration

For a few years now, financial management software systems have provided the ability for limited data to be served to non-system users through

a web-based portal. These web-based portals can give managers the ability to view real-time KPI’s and updated reports, without the involvement of a middle-man to continually update them. Employees can update their employment information such as mailing address, direct deposit, and W-4 withholdings. They can even view paychecks, enter time, expenses, and requisitions through the portal to be approved and routed to the appropriate system.

Integration solutions increase consistency and accuracy in billing and forecasting, streamlines operational costs and processes by eliminating redundancies, and promotes increased organizational efficiencies that deliver real returns.

Some of these integrated portals are even built on extendable platforms, such as Microsoft SharePoint, which allows them to be customized into full-fledged intranet, extranet, and document management systems. This allows businesses to put even more information, pulled from other silos even, into a single, web-based location for secure access. It allows businesses to collaborate more effectively with customers, suppliers and other business partners by granting secure access to business information such as order status, inventory levels, and payment data.

CRM Integration

Many companies use Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to manage customer sales and support data. But, for complete account management, CRM can fall short by not giving the customer facing representative (sales or support) the information they need to address many customer requests. Newer integrations between accounting and software systems, such as Microsoft’s Dynamics GP and CRM, are bridging this gap. A customer representative can

work within the CRM system to manage customer data, track interaction, and with the integration, view invoices and credit information that is pulled directly from the accounting suite.

No longer will fulfilling a customer order or invoice request require the interaction of the accounting team. Integration of sales order processing and tracking, inventory, and customer information between the two systems reduces errors and double entry. These solutions increase consistency and accuracy in billing and forecasting, streamlines operational costs and processes by eliminating redundancies, and promotes increased organizational efficiencies that deliver real returns.

The Vision

Farms and other businesses aren’t that different in terms of the reasons that data (and crops) are kept in silos separately. Improper access to the wrong silo can be detrimental, even disastrous, to both farms and companies. But carefully integrated silos, with the appropriate real-time data flowing to the appropriate location, can increase productivity and satisfaction. Through role-based security, you ensure that only the people who need to see it are granted access. And, by opening the flow of useful business information to your employees, you’ll reduce the endless stream of requests for custom reports and the countless calls for simple business facts. It’s time to free your accounting and IT resources to help drive your business forward.



Editor’s Note: Alice Burke is Sales and Marketing Manager for AIM Technologies. AIM is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner with demonstrated competencies in Microsoft Business Solutions and ISV/ Software Solutions. Our focus as a company is to provide accounting, financial management and e-business solutions for companies across a wide range of industries utilizing Microsoft Dynamics combined front office, back office and e-business solutions.

