

Honest Feedback from Real Users of NFP Software



Not-for-Profit

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There's nothing like real-world experience, told by real users, to help you choose among products. We asked vendors and their customers to share their experiences with the products they've chosen. They came through, giving us honest feedback on how the products reviewed here measure up on their "usability" scale.

Kristine Terrell, senior account executive at Boise, Idaho-based Cougar Mountain Software, said, "Fund Accounting by Cougar Mountain Software is a true Fund accounting package with the ability to track restricted and unrestricted funds as well as Due to/Due From Funds and allows for multiple fiscal years."

Trisha Cornwell, staff accountant for MECCA Services in Iowa City, Iowa, felt the application was perfect for what her organization wanted to do. "Cougar Mountain has given us the ability to track our expenses and revenues by each of our facilities, profit centers and funding sources without extra work from staff. The system is user-friendly and the software has given our management the ability to make timely and informed decisions without having to wait for support staff to gather information from an external source."

At Blackbaud, the need for transparency played a large role in how its application was designed. "Nonprofits face significant and growing demands for accountability and transparency from donors, government agencies and the general public," said Blackbaud Chief Executive Officer **Marc Chardon**. "The Financial Edge is designed to meet the unique needs of these organizations by enabling them to abide by donor and funding restrictions, improve their adherence to accounting standards, and easily complete accurate budgeting and reporting functions."

Marc Levinson is a believer in Blackbaud's latest offering. "Financial Edge allows more flexibility for reporting in all modules, but especially the GL. There are better links between the modules in saving time with posting, and we are able to find information easier and faster. The addition of payroll has created some challenges, but the product is a leap ahead of the former version. We save about \$10,000 annually by processing payroll internally; it takes less time and we have more control and flexibility as opposed to outsourcing payroll."

"Sage MIP Fund Accounting provides organizations of every size and budget with a comprehensive nonprofit financial management solution," says **Dan Germain**, vice president of product management for Sage Software's Nonprofit Solutions. "The newest version of the product, version 8.0, which recently became available, features a new Multicurrency module, enabling nonprofits to process foreign currency transactions in a true nonprofit accounting system versus using a commercial system with multicurrency capabilities."

Tim Grogan, CFO for the Seneca-Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma, raved about Sage MIP Fund Accounting. "When I arrived six months ago, the Tribe's accounting was being done in (Microsoft) Excel and QuickBooks, and records and controls were spotty or nonexistent. With MIP as the centerpiece, we have been able to rapidly create controls and systems that not only address GAAP, but are also required by several dozen grant programs. MIP has proven extremely flexible for the varying grant periods, including its ability to handle multiple grants simultaneously for the same program. In addition, MIP's report writer capabilities have greatly simplified the many quarterly, semi-annual and annual reports we must submit for our awards."

Peter Stam with AccuFund said, "The benefits of AccuFund include an easy-to-learn and use accounting system for the users, while providing the specific and varied reporting required to run a nonprofit organization. AccuFund's low cost of implementation and maintenance provide significant value to its nonprofit and government clients."

James Wheeler of ADVOCAP in Fond du Lac, Wis., believes his research has led him to the perfect solution. "In 23 years of accounting experience, I have never used any software like it. AccuFund is the best software I have ever seen. When we converted to AccuFund, I personally saved one week of time each month and my staff also saved significant time."

George Marcolini, Fund E-Z, said, "FUND E-Z benefits customers by offering the table driven chart of accounts, and real-world nonprofit features, to track programs, funders and grants at a very affordable price."

Aurel Feldman of the American Jewish Committee, New York, said his application is a customized version of FUND E-Z that does what he needs it to do. "It's a comprehensive package and works for us very well. This software will not give you the complications and complexities of another application, which you really don't need. On the other hand, it will give you all the sophistication you do need."

—By Lori Widmer

AccuFund Suite Offers Nine Levels of Functionality



By Lori Widmer

AccuFund's Accounting Suite has brought report writing down to the simplest terms. The company's goal to get results minus the complexity results in a less-than-three-step reporting process—by selecting fields, sorting them and subtotaling the options, the report is complete.

Features

There are nine levels of functionality in the core AccuFund Accounting Suite product, including cash receipt and bank reconciliation alongside general ledger and financial report writing. The system can be customized to fit the account structure of the organization.

Simple screens allow users to both view and add data to the system. Large icons at the top of the screen indicate specific functions within that sub-screen. One large icon displays a drop-down menu of choices between the various components of the system.

The Reports/Forms Designer allows users to get specific with the details. Instead of pre-formatted templates, users can define exactly the fields needed for their particular operation. The system does come loaded with templates for those wanting to evaluate what their needs are before building their own.

The AccuFund Accounting Suite works with Microsoft (MS) Windows 98, ME, 2000 or XP with a Pentium IV—500MHz, 128 MB of RAM and 150 MB of disk space. The application also runs in MS Terminal Services or Citrix environments.

For servers, the application supports Novell, MS Windows NT, 2000, 2003 Server and XP, and Linux servers running at least a Pentium IV 500 with 512 MB of RAM and 250 MB of disk space. Systems also need at least 50 MB of additional space for each year of history.

Annual phone support/maintenance contracts are available for 25 percent of the purchase price. The contract allows for unlimited calls to the toll-free support line between 9 a.m. EST and 4 p.m. PST weekdays. Support is required for the first year. The software also comes with simple-to-understand user



training manuals.

Administrators can set the system security from a password-protected screen, as well as user access.

Reporting couldn't be easier. On nearly every window that appears, a Report button allows users to choose from the information being viewed, or any other parameter, and create an instant report from that information. Reports can be printed or stored by electronic means. Options are plentiful—users can send the information to an MS Excel spreadsheet or a printer, or the information can be created in HTML and PDF. The application even attaches the information instantly to an email

in the form of a PDF.

Disconcerting is the big green button on the toolbar that closes the program. The button is green and has simply an arrow that is meant to indicate "close," but more closely indicates a forward motion. Since there are no rollover descriptions, I managed to accidentally close the program three times before learning to avoid the icon. Luckily, I had no data to lose, so it was merely a minor inconvenience.

I also wish the system had more identification of the icons. It took opening each one to determine what they were representing. A seasoned user wouldn't have problems with this, but a beginner would have to use trial-and-error to find the right screen.

Summary

Where this system truly shines is in its reporting functions. Without a doubt, it's the easiest reporting functionality I've seen to date. The system, in general, is easy to use and takes little effort to get used to. The handy training manuals make it simple to get up and running on all the functionality this system offers. ☺

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Accounting Module Creates Billing and Reports Instantly

By Lori Widmer

Armed with new deployment options, worksheets and allocation capability, Sage MIP Fund Accounting tools help take the pain out of financial reporting.

Features

With a variety of modules in the Sage MIP Fund Accounting application, Sage Software gives users the ability to accomplish many tasks, including manage financials, satisfy internal and external reporting requirements, calculate forecasted financial positions, and track and manage multiple grants.



System setup is a breeze—double-clicking on the Administration list item brings up a window from which users and user access can be defined. From this window, security levels can be set and the modules can be set up.

System compatibility is rarely a problem. The installation guide gives recommendations for both SQL and MSDE users, and is compatible with Microsoft (MS) Windows 2000 with Service Pack 3 or newer versions.

Help abounds for this product. Sage Software offers an online knowledge base to answer questions. Those requiring more training can register for training at Sage Software University, accessible from the application; real-time and classroom courses are available at varying prices. Product support is also available by phone from someone on the product's SCP-certified customer support team.

MIP Fund's Accounting module gives users the ability to create billing and reports instantly. The system can handle multiple grants and the reporting for each, and reports are generated from inside the system, so no external software is required. A Report Manager button links to a window that allows users to prepare and process lists, transaction reports, analysis reports, and financial statements. All can be bound by clicking the Report Binder icon.

Included in the application is the NightShift Scheduler. This module allows users to print reports, process data and post transactions during times when network traffic is lower. The module works behind the scenes, which allows it to function



while users are working.

Finally—a system that understands that not all users have IT degrees. The Sage Desktop is a sensibly-designed central launch point that allows database and web access to information and news. Clicking on any list item on the left menu will bring up that particular window. For instance, clicking on Accounting brings up the Accounting view.


The application's sub-windows open to a summary chart of information, as well as a left-hand menu of easy-to-understand navigation options. Clicking on the General Ledger Transactions button, for example, opens another window that displays graphic menu icons, such as a checkbook icon for writing

checks.

Requisitions are also easy to manage, though this window doesn't bear the same spit-and-polish of the other windows. The window displays a simple spreadsheet view of all requisitions, with drill-down capabilities for each line item. Double-clicking on any line item brings up a detailed record that can be browsed to see every request.

What works well in MIP Fund is the ability to open multiple windows in more than one module at a time. This allows the user to easily work between modules.

Summary

By far, MIP Fund was the easiest of the nonprofit applications to navigate. The simplicity of the icon-based menu items makes it easy enough for a novice to operate. Yet, that simplicity contains some function-heavy capabilities. The product is robust and user friendly. Kudos to Sage Software for putting real thought into the end user's experience. 

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Evaluation and Budgeting Tools Help Managers Make Better Decisions



By Lori Widmer

Sometimes breaking with tradition can be a good thing. Blackbaud has introduced its latest version of The Financial Edge, which the company says takes the focus off transaction management and puts it directly on management support. While the product boasts all the accounting functions necessary for nonprofits to run a business, it also adds evaluation and budgeting tools to help managers make better decisions regarding their programs.



higher and an SVGA monitor with 1024 x 768 resolution.

Blackbaud offers telephone and online support, as well as a glossary of help items and a FAQ section included on the application's active screens. Registered users may access support via an online form. The user's guide is also accessible through the Help icon on the system's screens. Blackbaud University offers training at the company's Charleston, S.C. location. Regional and onsite training are also available, as are online learning options. Though not required, Blackbaud also offers a wide-range of consulting services for implementation and installation.

The Dashboard view keeps the most important Data in one place.

Features

Blackbaud's newly upgraded package includes comprehensive reporting features; additional capabilities for projects, grants and endowments management; and five new enhancements, including general ledger add-ons, tracking and budgeting capabilities.

Users opening the application are met with a simple-to-read window that allows for effortless identification of specific areas



of the software program. Icons lead users to sub-screens, such as Records, Query,

Export, Reports, General Ledger Processing and more. The Query window shows a laundry list of choices users can specify as the search criteria: favorite searches, accounting fees, various transaction details and several others. Display results also can be specified in the Output tab on the Query screen. Queries are sorted by the same criteria.

Clicking on the Reports icon brings up a window with several reporting choices. The Allocation Report link, for example, takes users to a window where they can choose between pre-loaded reporting templates while the Pool Profile Report allows users to specify the criteria for each report.

The Financial Edge system also boasts visual chart organization, general ledger processing, allocation management and administration capabilities. The dashboard function offers an at-a-glance view of the accounts, assets, liabilities and other balance sheet information.

The company also recommends a broadband connection, MS Explorer 6.0 or higher, Macromedia Flash Player 6 or

The template-based reporting systems allows for more than 100 pre-formatted reports. These can be amended to suit the user's specific needs. The application gives users easy access to important data—and that data can be printed from the screen.

The Financial Edge boasts some rational design decisions along with some head-scratching revelations. The query function allows for the most flexibility in this system. Users can drill down to the most exact parameters imaginable in order to pull up more successful results. Also, the Reports window is sensibly designed and very easy to maneuver through. The straightforward links to specific reports makes it quick and nearly impossible to make a mistake. The Dashboard view of the organization's ledgers and transactions is a great overview of where things stand financially.

Summary

The Financial Edge has a good amount of usability for the nonprofit organization. The Dashboard adds the bonus of seeing the most important data in one place, and the ability to query through specific data fields is a valuable feature. This product offers real value and functionality. If nothing else, the simplicity of the application's reporting capabilities make this a must-have product. ☺

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Account Changes in One File are Mapped to Customer Files in Other Modules

By Lori Widmer

Cougar Mountain's FUND Suite offers complete accounting capabilities and banking reconciliation in one application. FUND Suite and Revenue Center, combined, have eight modules, including general ledger, accounts payable, purchase order, bank reconciliation, payroll, order entry, accounts receivable and inventory. R&R Report Writer is also included with the modules.

Features

All components of the FUND Suite are fully integrated; therefore any data changes are automatically updated across all modules. Account changes in one file are mapped to the customer files in other modules, such as an address change in accounts receivable that is mirrored in invoicing.

Backup is uncomplicated; a one-step process sends files and information to alternative storage units, such as hard drives, disks or other removable sources of data storage. Also, thanks to a three-year calendar, there is no need to close the books at year-end. In fact, the system allows

for forecasting two years out, allowing the user to create three-year budgets. The application also creates a unique accounting structure and all general-ledger information can be exported to Microsoft (MS) Excel.

The accounting application requires MS Windows 2000 or higher, along with a recommended 2GHz. Processor, 1.5 GB of hard drive space and 512 MB of RAM for optimal performance. It is also recommended that users have a VGA monitor and a CD-ROM Drive, as well as a UPS battery backup.

Technical support is offered through an annual technical support plan. Plans offer two, four, eight or 20 hours of toll-free technical support by phone. Those who renew their technical support contracts before the product's 30-day warranty expires will receive a reduced renewal rate for support. Cougar Mountain's online Customer Service Center offers tutorials and content on how to get the most out of the software.

Cougar Mountain does offer training either onsite, at Cougar Mountain headquarters in Boise, Idaho, online via telephone or



online through an e-learning connection.

FUND Suite complies with GAAP. Compliance is easy since the application includes categories that directly correlate with FASB classifications.

While the menu buttons are easily identifiable, the system took some getting used to. However, once I got my bearings, I saw just how useful this application can be. With clever use of both buttons and a quick menu of F-key functions, the

application helps even the most lost user find his or her way back to familiar territory. The menu is not self-explanatory beyond the color-coded paw-print buttons sporting abbreviations for each function, but again, there is plenty of help for the user. There is a substantial amount

of options for nearly any accounting function imaginable, all available through drop-down menus inside each accounting function.

A neat function is the ability to view invoices on the screen prior to printing, and the ability to track invoices and to search by invoice number or date. Bank reconciliation is just as easy—one need only click on the bank icon to bring up information on current balance and account numbers for all accounts the organization holds. More drilled-down information is accessible by clicking on tabs at the bottom of the general window.

Summary

This system is truly comprehensive. All modules in the Suite integrate organizational information easily. The only possible downside is the paid technical support package, which users probably will find necessary for the FUND Suite package. Still, once they are familiarized with this application, there should be little need to learn anything else. ☺

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Detailed Design Under a Plain Wrapper



By Lori Widmer

Perhaps working on the knowledge that complexity is overrated, Fund E-Z has created an accounting application that delivers simplicity to the end user and makes the most of basic functionality.

Features

With its new version and its on-demand video training center, Fund E-Z brings well over 100 training movies right to the user's desktop. There is a brand-new drill-down feature that allows users to get more information than with previous versions—right down to the source of the funds. Live web updates are new, and help extend the life of the product quite nicely without the added burden of re-learning new software versions. What's more, all upgrades are web-based and automatic—no technicians are needed. Numerous other features are available, including popup calendars, MICR check printing, new check forms, filter fields, copy features, mail merge, support for 2005 1099 forms and much more.

As one of the simpler applications available, Fund E-Z also has one of the least stringent set of requirements. Users need Microsoft (MS) Windows (any version from 98 to XP) to run the application, and all MS Windows networking products are fully supported. Users need a 450MHz or higher processor, 256 MB RAM (512+ recommended), 50 MB disk space for program files and a minimum screen resolution 800 x 600.

Fund E-Z has what it calls a “no wait” policy of support. With improved call-handling techniques that reroutes non-support calls, the company increased the availability of live technical help. The average call wait time is under one minute. In addition, the company has WebEx support, which allows technicians to take control of a user's computer to help resolve issues.

The general ledger report enhancements enables page breaks between accounts, as well as the ability to suppress accounts with no activity for the reporting period. Also, accounts receivable aging and open-item reports can now be grouped



by agency. Payments to vendors' reports have a new summary option that includes a range of total paid. Another added feature is that the application now has a preview screen added to most function screens.

From a rather bland beginning, Fund E-Z gives the user an extensive menu of options. This system is minus the flash and glitter of its competitors, but it is not without the functionality. Easy to figure out, each menu button brings up necessary

account information and each button also allows the user to see at a glance the organization's information, as well as the option to reconcile accounts.

The application I tested was downloaded from the Fund E-Z website and contained the training videos. I think the videos really are needed because there are no cute icons nor any step-by-step instructions that guide users along the way. While the speed buttons make it easy to see what information you access, what isn't apparent is where all the functionality is ... and the functionality is certainly there.

The training videos are priceless, pointing to any number of ways the system can be used, yet the plain vanilla wrapper doesn't do much to help users remember that functionality. The speed buttons help locate information quickly, but the process of, printing a cash receipt, for example, seemed a bit laborious because of the need for a batch number in order to complete the request. Perhaps that's the beauty of it—note that this product is not one that does all the work for you; rather, it requires much more user input and control. In a situation where accounts need to be modified, these processes could work well.

One shining feature: the reporting function was quite smart, and enabled the user to easily view and export the information. With one click, users are able to view a budget comparison chart, a purchase order register, vendor listings and more.

Summary

If you're hoping for bells and whistles, FUND E-Z is not the product for you. However, if you want a no-nonsense system that spends more time giving an organization what it needs instead of what it might not require, this could be your product. ☺

FUND E-Z Development Corporation

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