sky-end accounting

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Star Rating

Master file maintenance offers the ability to cross-reference one record to another within the same table
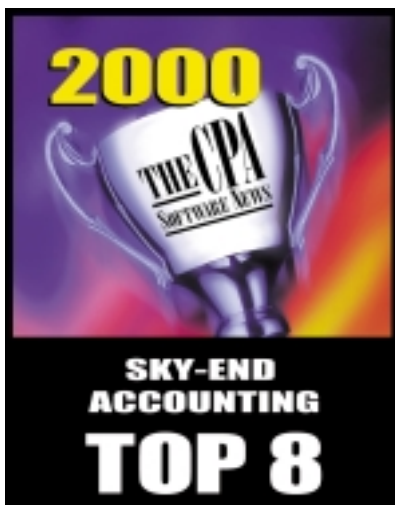
Accura Allows For An Unlimited Number Of Budgets

By Michael Roselius, CPA

Accura Applications Version 5 is the straightforward and unpretentious name for the comprehensive suite of
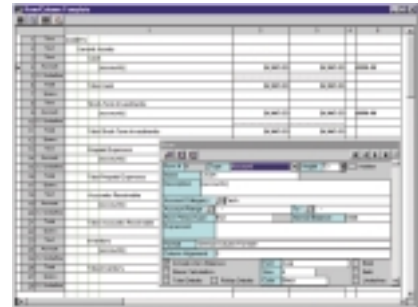
accounting and business software released in September 2000 by Accura Software, Inc. Besides the General Ledger, other modules included are AP, AR, Payroll, Human Resources,

Fixed Assets, Purchase Order, Sales Order, Inventory Manufacturing, Cash Management, Contact & Sales Management, EDI (electronic data interchange) and Executive Information System. The vendor's target customers are medium-sized businesses, defined here as $5 million to $300 million in revenues. Accura claims about 150 installations with over 3,200 users. Installation was very easy from the CD; the only mildly tricky part was setting up the initial configuration, which includes connection to the database engine. There is a sample database included, and the installation process took care of making that available.

The Accura interface is written in PowerBuilder, a well-known fourth generation object-oriented technology. It requires either a separate relational database engine, such as Oracle, Sybase or Microsoft SQL Server; or the included Microsoft Data Engine (MSDE) can be used. The database can be run on a separate server under various operating systems, including Linux. The concept of separating the database from the interface is becoming more popular and has some significant benefits for the user organization. If a database license is already owned, or if there is a preference, then that decision is independent from the application selection process.

Problem resolution does become a little more complicated, but that is offset by the flexibility and scalability options offered by changing database engines. Having the data in a standard relational database also simplifies the

processes of reporting, importing, exporting and interfacing with other applications, including the Internet.

The client software itself operates under Windows 9x and later client operating systems. The user interface presentation is a little different from most typical Windows applications but is well designed to provide commonly needed functions and the ability to navigate quickly by keyboard. The user is presented with the Application Navigator window on the left side of the main window, with expandable and collapsible nodes on a tree. Each node represents an application such

Accura Interface Written In PowerBuilder

as GL. The applications and options the user sees here are totally under the control of the system administrator. User groups can be created to standardize the setting up of this menu tree, but the administrator can also add and subtract permissions granted any single user from a group membership.

The presentation hierarchy begins with the application (such as AR), then data-entry windows, reports and inquiries. A common design philosophy was applied to windows with similar functions. Selecting a typical master record update will open a window with a toolbar on top and the fields underneath. The toolbar shows record navigation arrows (first, previous, next and last), then add record, clear screen and save record buttons. Each data field will have a record lookup button where needed, and for many types of records, a binary object file can be associated with that record (i.e., descriptive notes or OLE objects). To enable some flexibility in record navigation, Accura provides a button to change the field used to seek the next record. Yet another toolbar button allows the user to copy a record and use it as the basis for a new one.

To help with user training, right clicking over a button will pop up a window explaining the button and the keyboard shortcut. One unique feature in master file maintenance is the ability to cross reference one record to another, within the same table, for whatever reason the user might want. Overall, the user interface is compact, powerful and designed for quick keyboard navigation. The navigation and appearance is unique but will seem very natural with a little usage. For me, personally, the windows seemed small and used small fonts, making them harder to read than on other programs, even with a mid-sized monitor.

In the GL, account numbers may contain up to 32 characters, with user-defined segmentation, and even the segment separator character is user-defined. The order of segments does not necessarily control the sort order on the predefined financial statement reports. Accounts can be either financial or statistical and can be associated into user-defined categories. Accura GL is a full online system, allowing for transactions to be posted to any fiscal period (as permitted by the administrator), with balances immediately rolled forward, and more than one period can be open. There are unlimited years, and up to 365 fiscal periods per year, which should be enough for anyone. There is no period-end closing process required, and financials for any prior period can be

produced at any time with no additional processing. Transaction posting, again, is under user control, with either immediate posting or by entering into a batch for later editing and posting.

The multi-company features of Accura GL include automatic balancing of intercompany postings and easy consolidation following a user-defined hierarchy. Budgeting can be a big issue in some businesses and is commonly done offline using spread-

> "The multi-company features of Accura GL include automatic balancing of intercompany postings and easy consolidation following a user-defined hierarchy."

sheet systems. Maintaining these types of systems can be tedious and error prone, so Accura addresses this by allowing for an unlimited number of budgets, within the GL application. Budget amounts can be quickly generated from existing balances by the use of percentages and other quick methods.

Financial reports are created using Accura's proprietary, graphical report generator, which uses templates to define the accounts included, the calculations made and the appearance. (The company noted that these are row templates, column templates and entity templates very similar to FRx.) Of course, with the open database concept, any other report writer can be used that is desired. Unfortunately, FRx does not have an interface to Accura at this time. (The company clarified that while FRx may not have a standard interface with Accura at this time, FRx can be configured by the user to work with Accura.)

The Cash Manager application helps manage bank account activity. For example, receipts recorded through the AR application will be organized into deposit tickets. Miscellaneous cash receipts and checks are also handled through this function.

The Inventory application supports 32-character item identifiers, serial numbers, lot numbers and multiple locations. The Bill of Materials function manages kitted products

with support for multiple levels of kits. Component quantities are automatically adjusted when assembling and disassembling kits, down through all levels. Normal inventory quantity adjustments are done through the Purchase Order and Sales Order programs, but manual adjustments are permitted.

All of the documentation is online, in a Windows-style help system, complete with hyperlinks and pop-up boxes to describe

terms. Besides basic reference type material, there is a tutorial on every module, with screens shots and step-by-step instructions for common tasks. Overall, the documentation appears very detailed and complete.

Customization and modification of the applications would be done using the same PowerBuilder tools used to create the application but were not included. Most screens provide a displayable window, which shows the SQL statements being generated by that screen and provides some view into the program logic.

Accura Applications has the look and feel common in newly developed, complex packages. It uses the latest database and development technologies, so it is not carrying any design legacies from earlier versions. It makes full use of the powers of the relational database concepts. There is a consistent look and feel, again giving the feel of having been developed within a short time frame. The next planned release of Accura Applications is June 2001, which will contain Microsoft. NET components with ASP+ (application service provider) and XML (extensible markup language) technology. But the current release would be a viable base system for a company that wants to do extensive custom modifications within a comprehensive and integrated accounting and business package. ■ ★★★★