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Acumatica Wins PC Magazine Editor's Choice Award!!



PROS

Easy navigation. Browser-based application makes it easy to use mobile devices. Non-user-based pricing easily accommodates growing company. Excellent reporting. Runs on various databases. Available in cloud, hybrid cloud, or on-premises deployments.

CONS

Some users will be able to use the customization tools, but many will need the partner to do this task. Pricing can be confusing.

BOTTOM LINE

With its easy-to-follow navigation, robust reporting, and unusual pricing model, accounting software Acumatica is a good choice for growing small to midsize enterprises (SMEs).

Like competitors NetSuite OneWorld and Editors' Choice winner Intacct, Acumatica was developed as a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) application intended to be accessed strictly through a web browser. This app is compatible with almost all current browsers including Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, and even Safari. The experience is excellent, with a feature-rich environment delivered through an intuitive interface. Its pricing model will confuse some customers, but that ding isn't enough to keep it from a well-deserved Editors' Choice award in the small to midsize enterprise (SME) general ledger accounting space.

Acumatica's unusual pricing structure is based on resources rather than per-seat numbers. Because it's available as a cloud service from Acumatica, in a public or hybrid cloud configuration (like installing it on servers hosted by Amazon Web Services (AWS), for example), or as a straight on-premises installation, Acumatica's pricing is based on the amount of app resources a company actually requires rather than a per-user fee. More details are listed below, but Acumatica states that a typical smaller company can expect to pay \$1,000 per month regardless of the number of simultaneous users. However, as with all of the vendors here working through a reseller/partner channel, that price doesn't reflect the charges that the reseller will add. And that's not optional as rather than offering the product directly to customers, Acumatica is solely available through its partner channel.

I reviewed the Acumatica Cloud version. For on-premises installation or to run it on virtual servers hosted in someone else's cloud, you'll need infrastructure running Microsoft Windows Server 2008 R2 on up and a compatible database. Acumatica runs on several popular databases including Microsoft SQL Server, MySQL, and Amazon Aurora.

All Roads Lead to the Same Place

As with SAP Business One Professional, NetSuite and others, Acumatica primarily relies on dashboards for navigation. Depending on a user's assigned role, he or she will be shown the appropriate dashboard upon launching the app. It's very easy to define roles and permissions since this is done by simply checking or unchecking the appropriate entries in configuration boxes. This simplifies navigation because only the areas in which a particular user is allowed are shown.

The look, function, and feel of various dashboards can vary widely, too. For example, the Controller dashboard on my demo system consisted of key performance indicator (KPI) widgets, while the Financial dashboard was a process chart with available tasks laid out along accompanying icons. It's also possible to create individualized dashboards for specific employees.

Navigation is just a matter of clicking on the task choices in a dashboard. There is also a double set of ribbon bars at the top of the screen, with the top bar showing broad areas of system configuration such as Organization, Finance, Distribution, and others; while the second layer shows tasks available under that top menu option. For example, under Finance there is General Ledger, Cash Management, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, and more. Choosing one of these opens the available tasks in a vertical pane on the left side of the screen.

Finally, you can get to a specific task by typing it into the Search box at the top of the vertical pane. For example, typing in "Trial" will bring up all the tasks that start with "Trial" and you can launch the one you want by clicking it.

Plenty of Custom Options

As with many of the SME accounting systems I reviewed, Acumatica has extensive customization capabilities. And, as with almost all of the others, you're better off letting the partner you're working with do the heavy lifting on this. You can do some filtering on many of the data screens and reports, of which there are hundreds available. I found some of the data entry screens just a little busy, and this might be one place you ask your partner to do a bit of tweaking. As with AccountMate, your license buys you access to all of the application's source code. The application is written under Microsoft .NET and if you have an IT Department they might be comfortable using Visual Studio to do a bit of optimization.

Import and export capabilities are easily accessed, and the system is Open Data Protocol (OData)-compliant so you can export data to other apps, such as Microsoft Power BI That's useful in case you need to do further analysis, render different data visualizations, or even satisfy a third-party auditing program.

Account structure is easy to understand. Accounts consist of a five-digit account code that locates where in the chart the account falls under (Assets, Income, Equities, Expenses, and Liabilities), and you can add up to 10 additional three character sub segments to these. Since Acumatica is capable of multi-company operations and consolidations, these subsegments or subaccounts can be used to define companies, divisions, departments, and more.

Acumatica on the Run

Because it's browser-based, I was able to access Acumatica on all three of my mobile devices by using the Chrome browser. While the display was considerably crowded on a 10-inch screen, it was usable by dragging the screen to the area that I wanted to access. For smartphone use, the browser interface is just too clumsy; fortunately, Acumatica offers apps for Android and iOS.

The mobile apps for Android and iOS are identical and have a very different interface than when you access the app in a browser. The app has icons for specific task such as entering time cards, expense claims and reports, and sales/purchase orders among others. I accessed the iOS app on an Apple iPad Mini and the Android app on a Lenovo Yoga convertible tablet, but they're really structured for smartphone access.

Unusual Pricing

Almost all of the apps I reviewed use some manner of per-seat licensing. Acumatica does not. Rather, license fees are based on resource consumption. When you subscribe to Acumatica, you're working on the SaaS model, which means you're accessing infrastructure running on Acumatica's Cloud servers. Acumatica is billing you based on how much of those resources your particular instance of the app consumes. The license fee is approximately \$1,000 a month (billed annually) for a typical small business with a moderate number of simultaneous transactions.

A Private Cloud subscription, which employs a cloud-style architecture but runs on your infrastructure (whether local or in a cloud setting of your own, such as a cluster of virtual servers hosted on AWS or Microsoft Azure, runs about \$850 per month, paid annually again with no user restrictions. The licensing fee limits CPU processing, so if you really push the processing capability of the application server, you can upscale by licensing more cores (assuming your server has more cores available). Finally, there's a Private Cloud Perpetual License for a one-time fee of about \$30,000, plus an 18 percent annual maintenance fee. Again, all of these prices are estimates I gleaned from Acumatica and are offered without the additional charges you'll incur from whichever value-add partner you decide to purchase the software. Partners will add fees based on services they provide, including installation, pre-sales consulting, customization, software configuration, and training to name a few.

An Interesting Approach

Acumatica's unusual pricing model is a little difficult to wrap your head around at first, but it really caters to a company whose user base fluctuates either through attrition, growth, or seasonal expansion. If those needs change, it's easy to transition from a cloud model to an on-premises installation or vice versa. Couple that with flexible navigation, robust reporting, and easy browser-based access, and you have a financial system that's very workable, provides a great value, and fully deserves our Editors' Choice award.