

Better Together: Microsoft Business Solutions, Microsoft Office a Powerful Pair

By Philipp Harper

Are you getting the biggest bang possible for your business software buck?

To answer that question you've got to take into account not just how you're using individual programs, but whether those programs are working together as efficiently as possible. You want the whole of your software to be greater than the sum of its parts.

The name of the game is synergy, and it has become much easier to achieve thanks to a new release of Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains, a robust system to help you manage finances, sales and purchasing, manufacturing processes, inventory, and even human resources and payroll. It provides plenty of grist in the form operations data, but you'll likely find that most employees prefer another program to view and present the information so front-line workers can act upon it in ways both strategic and mundane.

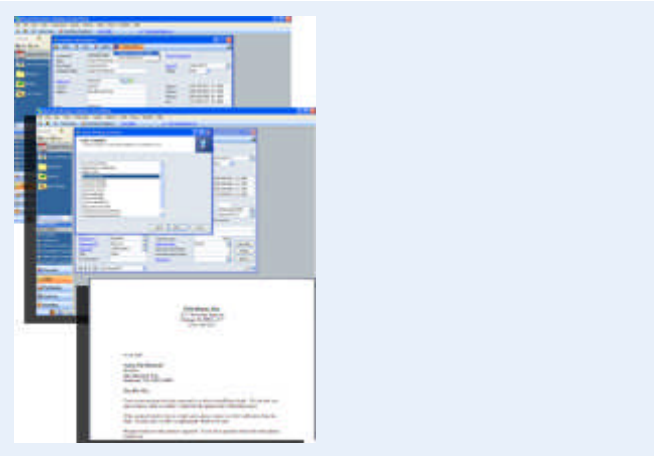
Enter Microsoft Office. In previous versions of Microsoft Great Plains, some integration points already existed between the two suites of applications. Microsoft Great Plains 8.0 achieves even greater integration by simplifying the exchange of data between the two programs. Consider these enhancements:

Generate Data-Filled Documents Automatically

The Letter Writing Assistant in Microsoft Great Plains allows the user to export information from Microsoft Great Plains into a specified Microsoft Word template and send it to select individuals or groups of individuals.

All manner of communications can be sent this way simply by pulling down the Letter Writing Assistant menu from the Microsoft Great Plains toolbar and clicking on the type of letter required. The appropriate document opens automatically in Word, complete with the name and address of the recipient and other pertinent data—say, details concerning a pending shipment.

Watch a demo or view a screenshot to see how: For multiple recipient mailings, simply choose the range of customers or vendors in Microsoft Great Plains, and the letter you have chosen to build will be populated with their contact information.



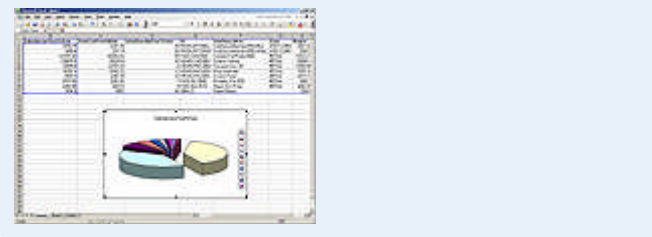
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Pull Financial Data Directly into Excel Spreadsheets

Using Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics–FRx, the de-facto financial reporting engine for Microsoft Great Plains, it's easy to create financial reports and balance sheets for delivery to "key consumers of the data"—company officers, board members, lenders.

Watch a demo or view a screenshot to see how: Microsoft Great Plains 8.0 makes it easy to pull data from Microsoft FRx into Microsoft Excel Pivot Charts and Pivot Tables, where it can be sliced and diced and synthesized to measure performance according to different variables.

Screenshot



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Deliver Comprehensive "Report Books" to Desktops or Boardrooms

Previously, financial reports created in Microsoft FRx were often delivered stand-alone to officers, and the accompanying Excel pie-charts and Microsoft PowerPoint presentations would be created later and shared in a meeting or passed around via e-mail. But since these pieces are all ultimately designed to complement each other, the latest release of Microsoft FRx makes it easy to create, group and share this information, all in a single Report Book file.

Now, with Microsoft FRx Report Manager, available with Microsoft Great Plains 8.0, it's easy to create a "report book" that incorporates Excel, PowerPoint, and Word files. The book can either be distributed via e-mail message or, more efficiently, shared via the Web.

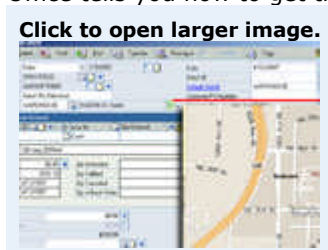
[See the three steps for creating a report book.](#)

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Never Again Get Lost, Thanks to MapPoint

Here's a feature that has the potential to save your sales and deliver staff or contractors hours of driving around and tracking down clients.

View a screenshot to see how: Click on an address in Microsoft Great Plains and, voila, MapPoint in Microsoft Office tells you how to get there.



If this feature doesn't seem to have the heft of the letter writing or Microsoft FRx integrations, don't tell that to sales or service personnel who spend their days tracking down clients.

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Sharing Your Work Is Easier than Ever

Microsoft Great Plains and Microsoft Office are compatible with Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services, meaning information from each can be shared and collaborated upon via the Web. Relevant and real-time business information can be added to SharePoint sites using pre-defined templates that are integrated with Microsoft Great Plains.

Meanwhile, compatibility of Microsoft Office with Business Portal for Microsoft Great Plains can greatly streamline a company's internal housekeeping chores. For example, an employee's request for time off sent in a message via Microsoft Outlook automatically sets up an action item for his boss. Then, if the request is approved, there is an updating of both the worker's Outlook calendar and his payroll records in Microsoft Great Plains.

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The Bigger Picture: How Microsoft Great Plains Works with Other Microsoft Technology

Microsoft Business Solutions are ready to work with widely-used productivity applications, like Microsoft Office, and top technologies like Microsoft SQL Server, Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services, and Microsoft Project Server.

