

The need for optimization: Getting the most from Microsoft Dynamics GP

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Microsoft Dynamics® GP is a powerful, full-featured enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that is used by more than 50,000 businesses and organizations worldwide. Whether you deploy GP on premises, in a private or public cloud, or a hybrid combination, your GP license provides functionality across the enterprise. The starter pack is designed to get you started with Dynamics GP and often provides all the required functionality. If you have more advanced manufacturing, project accounting or human resources/payroll requirements, extender packs are available to meet those needs. Regardless of the license you purchase, the modules and features available are extensive.

FUNCTIONALITY OVERVIEW

Starter pack

Financial management

- General ledger with advanced financial analysis
- Account level security
- Cash flow management
- Fixed asset management
- Intercompany
- National accounts
- Multicurrency
- Analytical accounting
- Revenue/expense deferrals
- Bank reconciliation
- Electronic banking suite
- Safe pay
- Cashbook bank management
- Electronic bank management
- Electronic reconciliation
- Payables management
- Receivables management

- Customer/vendor consolidations
- Lockbox processing
- Refund checks
- Grant management
- Encumbrance management
- Field level security
- Process server

Better reporting

- SmartLists
- Inquiry windows
- All in one document viewer
- Unlimited management reporter designer user
- Unlimited management reporter viewer user
- Analysis cubes library
- Advanced analysis cubes library
- Refreshable excel reports
- SmartList designer
- Office 365 workspace
- PowerBI dashboards and reports

Human Resource and payroll

- HR unlimited employees
- Payroll (United States) unlimited employees
- Payroll (Canada) unlimited employees
- Payroll direct deposit
- Federal magnetic media
- Payroll connect
- Position control
- Employee pay
- Employee profile
- HR time and expense management

Supply chain management

- Invoicing
- Sales order processing with advanced invoicing
- Extended pricing
- Order management
- Inventory control
- Bill of materials
- Purchase order processing/receivings
- Landed cost
- Purchase order generator
- Procurement/requisitions

Configuration and development

- Modifier with Visual Basic for applications
- Customization site license
- Integrations manager—conversions
- Service based architecture
- Identify management
- Workflow
- Customer and vendor combiner

Extended HR and payroll

Customization pack

- Integration manager
- eConnect
- WebServices
- Dexterity
- Software development kit
- Customization suite

Extended human resource and payroll

- HR advanced
- U.S. payroll advanced
- Paid time off manager
- Benefits management and enrollment

Extended pack

Supply chain management

- Advanced distribution
- Advanced picking
- Available to promise
- Returns management

Manufacturing

- Manufacturing bill of materials
- Manufacturing order processing
- Master production scheduling
- Materials requirements planning

Project management

- Project accounting
- Project time and expense

Customer relationship management

- Contract administration
- Service call
- Depot management
- Preventive maintenance

In most implementation projects, the focus is on implementing those modules and features that will enable the company to complete their essential business processes at go live. Time, money and resource constraints mean that additional features that are considered "nice to have" are relegated to a vaguely defined phase two or phase three project. Within that narrow implementation focus, training and testing tasks are further restricted to those with relevance to the desired end-state business processes. While that focus may be appropriate and necessary, and contribute to a successful implementation project, it can, in the long run, be problematic.

Furthermore, personnel changes and attrition can mean that even the limited knowledge gained during the initial training and testing phases erodes over time. Without retraining, users become less efficient, less aware of the features available to them and often more dependent on workarounds that circumvent the system and its controls. At the same time, business conditions may create the need to revise business processes. The system configuration conceived during the initial implementation may be wholly inadequate to support the new processes, but the original settings and configuration are maintained, because the users don't understand the impact and fear the consequences. Over time, the result may be an inefficient and vastly underutilized system.

Is your GP system underutilized?

Inefficiencies can manifest themselves in several ways. Among the telltale signs are:

1. Schedules and reports maintained outside the financial system — If users are relying on Excel to create reports or maintain schedules, chances are those reports or schedules involve rekeying data or combining Dynamics GP data with data from outside sources in a multistep process. Users will often say that they think what they need should be available from the system, but they don't know how to produce it.
2. Paper-based processes — If work flow involves reviewing and approving paper documents, and no one can say with certainty where a document is in the process, there is an opportunity to improve efficiency.
3. Complaints about the system — Users who are inadequately trained, or their managers, will often point to the system as the source of the problem. They recognize the bottlenecks and know a better way must be available, but believe they are constrained by the system's limitations.

Usually, the signs are readily apparent and both the users and managers know they exist. They simply struggle to figure out how to go about resolving the underlying problems.

How to address the issues

A large portion of perceived system issues can be resolved with additional training. Dynamics GP is a complex system, and to expect that any one user or group of users has a thorough understanding of not only what they have been taught, but also what other features are available, is unrealistic.

Another potential contributor to the training issues is Dynamics GP's adoption of Microsoft's Modern Lifecycle Policy (MLP). While the most obvious consequence of that change is that the release year is dropped from the product name, the real impact is that the number of software releases is increasing and the rate at which your GP system becomes outdated is accelerating. Microsoft is committed to releasing three product updates per year, with additional updates as needed. Each of those releases will include new features, many of which your business and end users could benefit from. For example, below is the extensive list of new features in the October 2019 release of GP, the first since the change to the MLP:

Financial enhancements

- Long description for payables transaction entry
- Expand the view of fiscal periods
- Show user who posted for journal entry inquiry
- Add class ID to fixed assets transfer
- Document attach available in bank reconciliation
- Visual cue for EFT vendor on edit payment batch
- Show check number in apply sales doc window
- Payroll option to not include additional withholding
- Payables integration to payroll enhancement
- Deduction/benefit quick assignment functionality
- Exclude inactive records for HR benefit and deduction lookups
- Employment history reason for change for all dates
- Payroll reprint pay statements by audit code

Workflow functionality

- User security workflow
- User workflow
- Security roles workflow
- Security tasks workflow
- Import workflow
- Export workflow
- Change approver for active workflow tasks
- Vendor approval workflow submit on hold or doc attach

System enhancements

- Compatibility with SQL Server 2019
- Compatibility with Windows Server 2019
- Compatibility with Office 2019
- Date options in SmartList
- Sort companies in user Access
- Search option in user access
- Filter inactive users in user access setup
- More than 32 sport options in report group

Top feature requests

- Copy report option
- Filter item stock inquiry by date
- Exclude inactive items on item price list
- Minimize transaction when "go to" is selected for PO that exists
- Save setting for display new PO
- Inactive field added to item SmartList
- Show user ID in the item master table
- Paste from Excel in web client
- History drop-down defaults to the most recent year

However, making sure that users are adequately trained is not just about new features; more importantly, it's about understanding their current issues and pain points, and developing a plan to address them. New features can be part of that plan, but just as often, it's a matter of employing existing functionality or changing a configuration option that provides real benefits. That's where working with an experienced implementation partner is essential. A good partner should be able to ask the right questions, understand your needs, differentiate training issues from true functionality gaps and work with your users to overcome them.

Training, however, is not always the answer; sometimes a tuneup is required. Bad or obsolete data may need to be removed or historical data archived in order to improve system performance and user efficiency. Duplicate, inactive or improperly entered master records can slow down data entry and reporting, as can historical transaction details that are rarely accessed. Tools exist that your partner can employ to resolve bottlenecks and improve the flow of data.

At other times, an overhaul may be more appropriate. Perhaps the format of the chart of accounts no longer supports the organizational structure, new entities or foreign subsidiaries have been added, or your basic business model has changed. In these circumstances, a fresh look at the business requirements and a new system design may be called for. Again, an experienced partner organization can conduct the requirements analysis, develop the design and manage the changes.

Finally, it may be time to add some new options. The constraints that originally delayed those phase two and phase three projects may have lifted, or a feature once considered a “nice to have” has become a “must have.” The types of features that we see the most demand for include:

- Business intelligence (BI) and reporting
- Business performance management (BPM)
- Document management
- Accounts payable (AP) automation
- Procure to pay
- Workflow automation

In recent versions, Dynamics GP has added significant enhancements in most of these areas. BI and reporting are enhanced with the integration of SQL Reporting Services reports and the integration with Power BI. Document management capabilities are improved now that attachments are stored in the SQL database, rather than as just a link to the document, and workflow is added to processes such as batch approval, purchase order approval and employee onboarding. Where GP fails to meet specific requirements, independent software vendor (ISV) products are available to fill the gaps.

No mid-market ERP product matches the number and variety of third-party products that are available for Dynamics GP, and that does not include products in the BI and BPM space that will work with virtually any ERP system. Navigating the options and selecting and implementing a solution may involve not only Dynamics GP knowledge, but also consultants experienced with integrating these products. Adding these types of features can be significant projects, and requires the same type of care and consideration as the original implementation.

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Conclusion

The investment you've made in Dynamics GP is significant, and maximizing it requires a periodic system review. Without it, the capabilities of the platform remain underutilized and both management and user frustration levels will increase. The goal of the review should not only be to uncover existing system issues, but also to understand how requirements or priorities have changed and what management's new vision for the system is.

The product of this review should be a picture of the current state, a picture of the future state, and a detailed plan and estimate for how to bridge the gap. The optimization process requires collaboration with your Dynamics GP business partner. Your partner should understand the issues and your vision, and bring the product knowledge and resources required to the table to help you reach your goals.