

# Mamut makes **good** businesses **better**

Mamut's award-winning integrated management software helps your clients run their businesses even more efficiently.

Mamut software seamlessly connects and manages their **accounts, CRM, web, stock, payroll, project and time management** with one solution.

Easy to use and with powerful functionality, Mamut offers unbeatable value for money for small businesses.

To see for yourself how Mamut can help your clients' businesses run better, call freephone **0800 389 1819**, email **info@mamut.co.uk** or visit **www.mamut.co.uk** for a free trial.



# HOW TO

## BUY SMALL BUSINESS SOFTWARE

### SMALL PACKAGES

THERE IS A BEWILDERING ARRAY OF SMALL BUSINESS SOFTWARE PACKAGES ON THE MARKET AND THERE WILL BE ONE IDEALLY SUITED TO YOU, DENNIS KEELING EXPLAINS

Typically, a company's business system is made up of many different applications – often from different suppliers. In some cases these systems are integrated, but many small organisations just operate on a stand-alone basis – with an accounts system, sales database and payroll. There are many sophisticated packages available for small organisations but I am still surprised to see how many still use the spreadsheet for most functions.

The leading small business packages provide a complete suite of modules from finance to distribution and in some cases to basic assembly and manufacturing.

Some have their own payroll and

a few have more sophisticated HR systems.

The leading integrated packages for small businesses would be

Access Accounting,  
Hansa, Mamut,

**The key to finding the right solution is to document your requirements beforehand. This isn't the long complex specification we used ten years ago, but a short statement of your requirements. For example:**

- **The scope of your requirements – the modules you require (Finance Suite, Payroll etc.)**
- **The operating platform you require – normally MS Windows or Mac OSX**
- **The number of users accessing the system**
- **Your industry requirements, e.g. hotel, construction, charity, etc.**
- **Your specialist requirements, e.g. carbon footprint recording, membership management, etc.**

Microsoft, Moneysoft, MYOB, Pegasus, Sage and Quick Books. These are generic integrated suites of software but some specialist businesses may want software specifically written for their industry.

From over 800 accounting systems 15 years ago, today there are less than 100 in full development mode available in the UK. Consolidation in the industry, by giants like Microsoft, Oracle and Sage, has curtailed the variety of business systems available.

Many business software developers have gone out of business – unable to keep up with developments in modern Windows and Web technologies. There are of course many developers hanging-on by providing support to their legacy applications, but these products are now in maintenance-mode, with little chance of any significant development.

Recent estimates, from *Computing*, of the size of the wider business software market, show that there are over 2,000

**1** Once you know what you need you can send this out to potential suppliers. In some cases they could be the software author or in many cases a local reseller that will not only provide the software but also the associated hardware and implementation. Beware though, the software industry employs some very astute salespeople. This is why you need to say what you want before they try to sell you their product, which may not fully meet your requirements.

**2** Implementing new software is always a traumatic experience and can disrupt your business considerably – I equate it to moving house. So test the software before you commit to buying it. Try out some of your own data and let your staff try it also. It's often too late to find that the package is not suitable after you have installed it.

**3** The government tries to implement software using the 'big-bang' approach and we have seen the disasters along the way. Most sane organisations prefer to implement their systems in parallel. That is bringing the new system up to speed alongside the legacy system. It may mean duplication of data initially but it does mean that you can resolve the many implementation issues as they occur out of view of your customers and other staff. It takes time to implement and get a new system fully operational, therefore you need to ensure it does not disrupt your business and customers along the way. So how do you start? It's not easy finding the ideal solution but there is help at hand.

specialist business software developers in the UK. Some of these are typical software developers offering a complete integrated suite of applications, either directly or indirectly, through resellers to their customers. However the majority are specialist 'value-added' developers who have bolted-on specialist modules to existing business systems.

These VARs, value added resellers, provide vertical industry solutions for say hotels, car hire and retailers.

Many will use industry standard systems to host their applications, such as Sage and Microsoft Dynamics, which they sell and support with their own applications.

Estimates from the Professional Computing Association show that there are over 3,000 resellers in the UK but not all will have their own software products. So a customer could be looking at huge number of suppliers.

*Dennis Keeling is chief executive of Business Software Intelligence. He was a founder and former CEO of the software industry trade body BASDA.*

#### WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

The conundrum for those wanting to buy specialist systems is 'how to find them?'

Typical software shows and exhibitions, like Softworld, specialise in product sectors like Accounting & Finance and HR & Payroll. These exhibitions allow delegates to attend short demonstrations of a wide range of applications.  
[www.softworld.co.uk](http://www.softworld.co.uk)

Many software selection sites, like Accounting & Finance 365 specialise in solutions for small, mid-range and corporate solutions, but tend to be dominated by the leading suites of applications.  
[www.accountingandfinance365.com](http://www.accountingandfinance365.com)

Vertical markets are served by the Evaluation Centre's web-site but the range of vertical markets is not comprehensive.  
[www.evaluationcentre.com](http://www.evaluationcentre.com)

The ICAEW has a software accreditation scheme and is currently developing a software directory. It has extended the scheme from typical accounting products to eCommerce, Document Management, etc.  
[www.icaew.com](http://www.icaew.com)

Computing Market Intelligence provides a comprehensive list of IT suppliers, the list can be searched on for vertical applications.  
[www.computingmi.co.uk](http://www.computingmi.co.uk)

The fail-safe for all specialist enquiries is to use one of the main web search-engines.



# Nurture your clients...

## ...and grow your business with PTP Accounts and PTP CT Platform

PTP is well known for tax software, but did you know you can also get PTP Accounts for all your sole traders, partnerships and limited company final accounts.

- **Easy to use** - PTP Accounts and PTP CT Platform have the same look and feel as the PTP suite
- **Excellent support** - friendly, helpful support, including upgrades at no extra cost!
- **Integration** - seamless links between PTP Accounts and PTP CT Platform provide greater efficiencies
- **Reliable** - PTP Tax products consistently top\* surveys for performance, reliability and on going service
- **Great value** - PTP Accounts and PTP Tax products from only £115 + VAT

**PTP Accounts and PTP CT Platform from only £115 each!**

**Sow the seeds for a healthy future and branch out with PTP**

**To BUY or for a FREE trial...**

☎ 01865 370470

@ sales@ptpsoftware.co.uk

🌐 www.ptpsoftware.co.uk

**Professional tools for your practice**



## GETTING IT RIGHT

BUYING SOFTWARE IS JUST THE START. MAKING SURE YOU USE IT PROPERLY IS JUST AS IMPORTANT, EXPLAIN **JOHN COURT** AND **SIMON HURST**

Software for a smaller practice falls into two main types – specialist practice software and general applications. The specialist applications help run the firm's own systems and deal with specific service areas such as bookkeeping and accounts production, tax, bureau payroll and company secretarial work.

Practices will also need to use the 'normal' office applications that most other businesses use to cover word processing, email and personal information management, web browsing and of course spreadsheet modelling.

Whether considering the specialist or the general software, many of the principles are the same. One of the most important areas to consider is training and implementation. Most organisations would be better off buying the wrong software and implementing it properly and providing the right training than they would be by choosing the best software but failing to make sure their staff know how to use it. Choosing the right software with correct implementation and training is the ideal approach. Specialist applications are going to need continuing support and updating – particularly in a profession that is so much at the mercy of external regulations. It's crucial to have confidence in the ability of the supplier to support and maintain its application adequately.

One element of the evaluation that should never be ignored is contacting other users of the software, preferably users of a similar type to your own firm and who are likely to use the software in a similar way.

There are some specific issues related to accountant's specialist applications. Deadlines for online filing both of tax and accounting information are rapidly approaching.

The way the system will cope with developments in online filing and XBRL will be crucial. In addition, a good document and knowledge management system could have a substantial and direct effect on the quality of client service.

Those buying software for practice have always faced the choice of buying an integrated system from a single supplier or going for the 'best of breed' approach, which is likely to involve products from several suppliers. Hopefully, the xAPL standard for sharing data between products from different suppliers may eventually allow practices to choose what they consider the best individual packages without sacrificing the benefits of integration.

**1** Software choice has recently become a lot more complicated, because the growing importance of online solutions and software as a service should not be under-estimated.

For a smaller practice, an online solution could be ideal, replacing the need for extensive initial and ongoing investment in complicated IT infrastructure and maintenance with the ability to access the required systems from anywhere with any computer capable of running a web browser. The other main benefit of this approach is the ability to easily share data with other members of the organisation, or clients.

**2** There are drawbacks – it does mean

entrusting the firm's own data and that of its clients to the internet – although there is probably a good argument that it might be safer there than on an internal server connected to the internet. The firm also becomes dependent on the reliability and speed of the available internet connection. For now, the biggest drawback is probably the lack of purpose-written online solutions for the specialist applications.

**3** As well as online solutions there are open source options – though the desirability of compatibility with clients' systems and with specialist software packages, as well as the familiarity of existing and future employees with Microsoft Office make it difficult not to go with the Microsoft option. Incidentally, any small practice that is intending to use Microsoft should investigate the Microsoft Action Pack although eligibility requirements may not be entirely straightforward. One of the most popular open source options is Openoffice.org, which is broadly used as an alternative to Microsoft Office.



*John Court is head of the ICAEW's IT Faculty and Simon Hurst, vice chairman. The xAPL standard is an XML based standard for the interchange of client information agreed between the major suppliers of practice software in the UK with the participation of the ICAEW's IT Faculty.*

### RESOURCES

- Several software suppliers have 'clubs' aimed at practices that provide beneficial access to software and support in return for promotion of products to the accountants' clients. See Microsoft, Sage and Iris for examples.
- For more on IT purchasing go to [softworld.co.uk/af](http://softworld.co.uk/af)
- The ICAEW's accredited product scheme includes several categories of software specific to accountancy practice ([icaew.com](http://icaew.com)). The ICAEW IT faculty conducts a periodic survey into the usage of software in accountancy practices which includes a recommendation rating based on the responses of hundreds of accountants in practice.

### SCHEMES/FORUMS/PROGRAMMES

It may be the case that the 'traditional' approach to software selection, involving detailed analysis of requirements and the creation of an extensive invitation to tender, is now little-used – particularly in smaller organisations. But some of the reasons for this approach are still every bit as relevant. Attending product demonstrations without a clear idea of what you need a system to do for your particular organisation can increase the danger of being seduced by clever product features to the detriment of addressing the basics efficiently.

Accordingly, it's a good idea to put together a shopping list of requirements against which each product can be evaluated. While it's sensible to take little for granted, current software products are likely to be able to cope well with standard requirements, so the shopping list should concentrate on particularly important areas, or areas where the business considers its requirements to be in some way different to those of other companies.

When compiling the list of requirements, it's sensible to consult widely. A system imposed on users who feel they've had no say in its choice is far less likely to be a success than one where everyone feels committed to making it work.