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Headline News

In 2006, Sage Software earned the prestigious Support Center Practices (SCP) Certification for the ninth straight year. Comprehensive, onsite audits check approximately 100 business elements. SCP Certification quantifies the effectiveness of customer support based upon a stringent set of performance standards and represents best practices in the industry.

Product Extensions

See page 4 for more info!

Leveraging The Power Of Business Insights Explorer

Accounting and business management software has steadily become more and more powerful. Today companies can automate virtually any business process using the tools provided by enterprise resource planning systems such as Sage MAS 500 ERP.

Understanding that data is only useful if it is easily accessible, the Sage MAS 500 development team released an excellent tool to address these requirements—the Business Insights Explorer module. It is included with the System Manager for Sage MAS 500 versions 7.0 and above. If you haven't made use of this tool in your organization yet, don't delay any longer. It can enhance productivity, customer service, and decision-making effectiveness in all areas of your organization.

Let's take a look at some organizational areas and how each can benefit from the Business Insights Explorer module.

Customer Service

When a customer calls, it's anybody's guess what they may need. They could be calling to place an order, add a contact to their account, request a return authorization, check their credit balance, find out what was purchased on an outstanding invoice, add a ship-to address, check product

availability—and the list goes on—you can probably think of a dozen more specific to your organization.

Your customer service staff has the challenging task of handling all these diverse needs quickly and efficiently. The Business Insights Explorer module is the perfect tool for quick access to all your customer-related information.



Enhance productivity and customer service simultaneously using the Business Insights Explorer module.

The screen is laid out in three sections. On the upper right is the main Customer grid view, here the customer service representative can quickly locate the relevant customer account. Once the customer record has been found, routine account information, such as credit limit and outstanding balance can be accessed right in the main grid.

In addition, the representative can quickly locate other customer-related information using the unique secondary or detail grid on the bottom right

of the screen. The contents of this grid can be changed simply by clicking on radio buttons contained in the Navigation bar on left side of the screen. From the Preview option on the Navigation bar, your staff can choose any of the following details to display in the secondary grid: quotes, orders, invoices, return authorizations, addresses, active memos, last activity—even

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Compliments of:



Leveraging The Power Of Business Insights Explorer CONTINUED

open projects if you own Project Accounting, or open work orders if you own manufacturing modules.

Using the **Manage** option on the Navigation bar the representative can launch tasks such as Order Entry. With the **Drill Into** option the representative can dig into deeper and deeper layers of information, such as payments applied to an invoice or lot expiration dates.

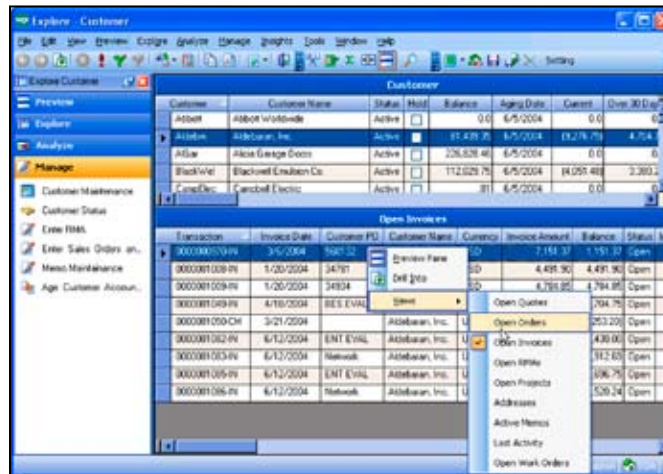
Each representative can personalize their grid so that the information is organized in the way that is most useful to them. For example, if the quickest way to look up a customer account is by using their telephone number, that column can be moved toward the left side of the grid so that it is immediately visible. Clicking on the column header allows you to sort the grid by that column. Or you can use Query and type in the customer number so the account instantly appears at the top of the grid.

The Business Insights Explorer module places all the tools and data the customer service representative needs into one easy-to-navigate user interface, empowering them to handle virtually any question the customer has quickly and efficiently. You can:

- ▶ Correct customer address, contact, and ship-to information. When a customer calls you can easily assist with all branches of their business without delay.
- ▶ Quote customer-specific pricing and product availability—you can view the price matrix, price specials, and contract pricing so that you can offer the lowest possible price while maintaining your profit margin.
- ▶ Revise an open order. When viewing an order in the secondary grid, a simple right-click launches Sales Order Entry where you can make modifications to the order.
- ▶ Convert a quote to an order.
- ▶ Verify available credit—view real-time credit and aging information.
- ▶ View payment status. You can give the customer the invoice numbers that were paid by a check and when it was applied.

You can handle virtually any need the customer may have, and provide the requested information or action promptly and completely using the streamlined access provided by Business Insights Explorer. Not only will you have addressed the customer's needs, you will have saved them time, a priceless commodity in today's hectic business world.

Your staff will be able to handle a larger volume of inquiries as well, potentially lowering your overall cost of business while improving customer service.



A right-click of the mouse button provides instant access to Drill Into and a host of other options related to the current record.

Collections

Whether you have a full-time person assigned to collecting past due amounts, or it is simply a part of a staff member's overall responsibilities, Business Insights Explorer is an excellent tool for expediting the necessary collection task.

For collections, you will want to start with one or more personalized customer views. Using the filtering capabilities, you can create a view listing only customers with past due amounts. Another view could display only customers with amounts over 60 days. Or perhaps your concern is mainly large past due amounts. Another view could display only customers with amounts past due over a certain dollar amount.

Once you have the subset of customers you want to work with, you have a variety of options. You can:

- ▶ Sort the list by any column to prioritize the

order in which you follow up, by largest amount over 60 days, for example.

- ▶ Use the list to make telephone calls, and add memos regarding the conversation right from the Manage section of the left navigation bar.
- ▶ Export the list to Microsoft Excel with the click of a button, if you prefer to manage collections using a spreadsheet.
- ▶ Perform a mail merge with the click of a button using Microsoft Word to create dunning letters that include specific past

due amounts—ready to mail, e-mail, or fax.

Sales

Sales staff can quickly view the activity for individual sales staff and top customers.

Personalized views of your customer list for sales management might include a customer list sorted by salesperson, with subtotals on current and past activity amounts. They may also want to see a list of top customers by year-to-date revenue, and compare that activity to prior year.

The **Analyze** option of Business Insights Explorer is very useful for managers. The subset of data created using the filters can be presented in a graphical view with the click of a button.

The graphical view allows you to quickly spot trends. Is Jane's sales volume double what it was last month? You can give Jane a call to congratulate her and pass the secrets of her success on to others. Have sales to a top customer dropped off since last year? Early detection enables you to identify and resolve customer satisfaction issues before you lose the customer altogether.

These are just a few examples of how Business Insights Explorer can be leveraged to improve productivity, decision-making, and customer service. Give us a call to discuss how you can use this powerful tool to streamline your business processes. ★

Fifteen Ways To Improve Your Cash Flow

Did you know that more businesses fail for lack of cash flow than for want of profit? Has your business experienced the cash flow crunch at one time or another? The root cause of the problem is simple—you assume the cost of purchasing or producing goods or services in advance of receiving payments from customers. The solution, while not quite as straightforward, is achievable with a little effort and focus. Here are our top suggestions:

1. Invoice More Frequently

If you sell products, mail the invoice the same day the product ships. If you are a service-based business, bill your clients twice a month or even once a week instead of at the end of the month. This will keep the cash coming in more evenly.

2. Request Deposits or Multiple Stage Payments

For large orders or engagements, it is reasonable to request an up-front deposit of up to 50%. Cover your costs before fulfilling the order.

3. Offer Payment Discounts for Timely Payments

Encourage customers to pay early or on time by offering a discount for prompt payment. Even a 2% discount will motivate your customers to pay on time.

4. Check Credit References

Check credit references before giving payment terms. Set procedures with your staff regarding credit checking and make sure they are adhered to. Ask for e-mail addresses with credit references. The credit checking process can be greatly simplified by sending the references a template e-mail with the credit questions you need answered.

5. Understand Your Cash Flow Trends

Generate regular reports on receivable ratios and aging. Plot both the total amount of your receivables and past due amounts over time, so you understand your cash flow trends and can identify potential shortfalls and take action.

6. Add Late Payment Charges

Just like early payment discounts, late payment charges are a good motivator for customers to pay on time. Send account statements at least once a month if your terms are net 30, more frequently if you offer a shorter period for pay-

ment, and include the late charge information prominently on your invoices and statements.

7. Generate Mid-Month Payment Reminders

Generate mid-month payment reminders. Use the mail merge feature to generate your list of payments due based on criteria within your Sage MAS 500 database.

8. Accept Credit Card Payments and Deposits

Customers may be having cash flow problems. Accepting credit card payments gives them relief from their cash flow problem while allowing you to collect your money on time. Encourage credit card payments for deposits as well. You'll have the cash to begin working on the order, moving the entire transaction forward more quickly.

9. Adjust Your Prices

When was the last time you raised your prices? As the overall cost of doing business increases through rising fuel, labor, and insurance costs, your prices need to increase to keep pace. Smaller, more frequent increases will be easier for your customers to accept than one big one.

10. Charge For Items That You Now Give Away

Do you go out of your way to process rush orders, but fail to charge extra for the service? What about local delivery services? Does your service-based company too often “not bother” to bill for that five-minute phone call? Think about what types of services you might be giving away for which you can add fees.

11. Add Handling Charges

The cost of packing supplies and labor is significant. If you are not already adding a handling charge to actual freight, it's time to start. If you already have a handling charge, it may be time to increase it.

12. Reduce Inventory/Streamline Product Lines

Excess or obsolete inventory adds a heavy burden to your costs, including taxes paid on inventory assets and the cost of leasing the space it occupies. Can any of your excess inventory be returned to the vendor? Can you streamline your product line, reducing the total # of SKUs by eliminating low volume or similar items?

13. Negotiate Discount/Extended Terms

Suppliers who value your business will often be willing to offer special terms, especially for larger orders, giving you time to collect balances from your customers before paying your suppliers.

14. Renegotiate Bank Service Charges

Do you do all your banking with one institution? When you hold assets such as certificates of deposit with your bank, they should be willing to waive checking account and other service fees.

15. Consolidate Debt

If you have several loans related to your business, such as a car loan, an equipment loan, and a business line of credit, review the rates and terms on each one. You may be able to consolidate them into a single lower-interest account.

Which of these suggestions has potential to improve cash flow in your business? We suggest you prioritize the list according to the importance in your business and start working your way down. Your Sage MAS 500 software has the tools and features to implement many of these improvements. Call us to discuss. ☆

Tips & Tricks

Here's how to create magnetic Media for 1099 Forms in Sage MAS 500 ERP.

- 1 In Accounts Payable, from Reports, 1099 Reports, select *1099 Forms*.
- 2 From the Options tab, select *Magnetic Media*.
- 3 Enter the 1099 Form and Calendar Year.
- 4 Verify the Federal and State Tax ID Number are entered on the Company tab.
- 5 Review the Magnetic Filing Information on the Company tab.
- 6 Click on the Proceed button.
- 7 When prompted, select a Drive.

The system will create a file named IRSTAX and save it under the root directory of the drive you selected. The file can be reviewed or edited using any text editor such as Microsoft Word or Notepad. ☆



Spotlight On Sage MAS 500 Product Extensions

In addition to the broad suite of modules available for Sage MAS 500 ERP, Sage Software also offers a series of **Product Extensions**, specialized features and capabilities developed by the Sage MAS 500 Professional Services Group (PSG).

The PSG has been working with customers and business partners of Sage MAS 500 for many years to develop site-specific customizations that meet the unique requirements of an organization. Over time, they realized that many of these customizations have a broader application beyond the original customer for whom they were developed. These customizations have been dubbed Product Extensions to differentiate them from the core suite of modules and custom modifications.

Taking advantage of Product Extensions can be a very cost-effective way to customize your Sage MAS 500 system and gain power, flexibility, and that competitive edge you need in today's crowded marketplace. The PSG group provides full support for the Product Extensions through your Sage Software business partner. Sage Software also provides upgrades for the Product Extensions as they become available for future releases of Sage MAS 500, so owning and maintaining Product Extensions is as straightforward as the modules they enhance.

Credit Card Processing Product Extension

There are dozens of Product Extensions available. Here we will take a look at one of the most powerful—Credit Card Processing for the Sales Order Module. The Credit Card Processing Product Extension is available for Sage MAS 500 Small Business, Standard, and Enterprise editions. The module provides for the authorization of credit card transactions through Sales Order Entry.

Credit Card Processing supports a broad variety of processors through the use of PC Charge Payment Server transaction processing. For each tender type, such as Visa or MasterCard, you can set a broad range of parameters, including the general ledger accrual account, card number mask, minimum and maximum amounts allowed, the discount percentage and per-transaction fee, and whether the security code or address verification is required for this tender type.

Once setup is complete, customer card numbers are entered through Accounts Receivable Customer Maintenance. You can maintain a separate cardholder name and billing address for each card. In order to protect customer privacy, a security setting allows you to designate which users have the right to view and edit credit card numbers and expiration dates.

A button within the Sales Order Entry screen gives you quick access to Credit Card Processing to pre-authorize transactions. You can see the status of the transaction at a glance, whether it is pre-authorized, authorized, settled, or voided. When the orders are ready to be shipped, the authorizations are processed through a flexible batch process that allows you to choose which orders to process using a variety of parameters, including ship date, customer number, and tender type.



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Reconciling your credit card transactions is easy using the **Settlement Report**. You can run it by settlement date or for a specified period, and choose to print by Merchant in Detail, by Tender Type, or by Date. The report is subtotaled by merchant and includes transaction fees and discount percentages. The Settlement Report facilitates the creation of a General Ledger Journal to post your credit card expenses.

Credit card payments processed through Credit Card processing appear in Accounts Receivable customer payment history, and may be accessed through Business Insights Explorer.

Broadly-Applicable Product Extensions

Other broadly-applicable Product Extensions available include **ACH Processing** for Accounts Payable (U.S. and Canadian versions) and a variety of import programs that can create tight integrations between Sage MAS 500 and your other business applications.

Call us for a complete list of product extensions available or to discuss how Product Extensions can expand the power of your Sage MAS 500 solution. ☆