

Customization – It's NOT a Four-Letter Word

Microsoft Dynamics GP is a powerful financial management software package that provides the integrated tools that businesses need to master their financial data and processes. But, what happens when the software doesn't meet the needs of your client 100%? What can be done to make Great Plains fit? Fortunately, the answer is "a lot".

Unfortunately, many resellers and partners have abandoned the idea of customizing Great Plains and no longer offer this as an option to their clients. This is due to the degree of difficulty they have in finding and retaining qualified developers and the nature of the software development lifecycle itself. To many partners and resellers, "customization" has become a four-letter word.

Overview

One of the best features about Great Plains is that it is highly customizable and suitable for integrations. Great Plains provides a variety of toolsets that allow it to be molded and shaped to fit the needs of any business and its users. One of the most powerful tools that Great Plains provides is its proprietary language and software development environment named Dexterity.

With Dexterity, a skilled developer can modify the original Great Plains windows and create new windows and modules that seamlessly integrate with Great Plains with the same look and feel as the original windows. This powerhouse tool is a simple language that packs a powerful punch, but the nuances of integrating with Great Plains is what often trips up many developers who are not familiar with the Great Plains product and Dexterity development environment.

Highly trained Dexterity developers are not easy to find and the pool of qualified resources is shrinking daily. Despite these facts, there are still Dexterity customizations and Great Plains integrations that need to be created, upgraded, supported, and maintained. Customizations, when done properly, can save clients money, increase client satisfaction with the product, and increase the reseller bottom line.

Keys to Successful Customizations

The first key to a successful customization is to find quality developers. Quality developers have many years of experience programming with Dexterity and a good technical understanding of the Great Plains environment. Functional experience and application certifications is also extremely helpful. In addition, these developers need to have a good understanding of SQL Server. Being able to read and write sql queries, stored procedures, and triggers at a basic level is necessary, but advanced skills in SQL are even more desirable. Many Dexterity developers contract by the hour and don't have to be hired on as full-time employees.

Once these resources have been found, it is important to involve them as early in the customization or integration process as possible. These resources can provide valuable insights and recommendations on the tools, methods, and timelines needed to bring a solution to life. Involving these resources and considering their input early in the planning process has been shown to significantly improve the final outcome of the project. Trained Dexterity developers can help identify and avoid pitfalls to the customization process, thus saving valuable time and money.

A final key to a successful customization project is to utilize a good software development practices. The methodology should start with a completed Functional Design Specification that thoroughly describes the functionality that will be included in the project – the scope. In addition, development should follow a common set of coding standards and documentation. Other necessary steps are system testing, remediation, and support. All of these steps work together to provide a final product that is of the highest quality possible.

Why Customize?

A successful customization project can save money for the client. Customizations can provide a way to enter and display additional data on existing Great Plains windows and store it in the database. This often eliminates the need for separate spreadsheets and double-entry to store the same information. This improves accuracy as well as efficiency thereby resulting in cost savings for the client.

Customization can also modify the flow of the user interface to allow for faster data entry and navigation also increasing efficiency. For data entry clerks who utilize the same screen a multitude of times every day to process similar data entry, customizing the user interface to fit their needs helps them do their job easier and more efficiently thereby allowing them to process more information in the same amount of time.

Integrating systems eliminates the need for redundant data entry. Creating a customized interface for bringing data into Great Plains from another system provides a streamlined retrieval point for the data, increases accuracy, and increases efficiency.

Customizing reports gives decision-makers the information they need to make decisions. Great Plains provides a multitude of reports that can be utilized. Often, however, additional data needs to be included on the report or the format needs to be changed to make it more useful. Pulling the needed data into a useable format provides a view of the data than can be more informative to the reader.

Conclusion

Customizing Microsoft Dynamics GP can be a scary proposition for many resellers and partners. With the right tools, highly qualified resources, and proven methodologies, customization projects can be successful. Successful customizations improve user satisfaction, increase client efficiency and profitability, and ultimately increase the reseller's bottom line. Therefore, 'Customization' is not a four-letter word.

DexPros is the Partner's Partner

DexPros is dedicated to providing MBS partners with professional quality software customization, integration, and support services. DexPros does not compete with Partners for sales, but rather provides Partners a way to augment their staff with highly trained development and support resources at affordable rates. Each developer on the DexPros team was trained by and worked directly for Great Plains performing core product development, customizations, integrations, upgrades, and/or support.

Our passion at DexPros is to help MBS Partners support their clients in ways that will allow them to focus their energies on managing and growing their enterprise with streamlined data processing. We do this by providing Partners with services to that will process and store needed information, eliminate redundant data entry, and provide a useable and useful format for data retrieval and presentation.

Together, the DexPros team has over 35 years of experience with Dexterity, Report Writer, eConnect, Integration Manager, VB/VBA, Modifier, SQL, C#, .Net, and other development tools associated with Microsoft Business Solutions products.

DexPros successfully supports MBS Partners and customers nationwide remotely and on-site providing many areas of expertise including core financials, inventory, sales order processing, purchase order processing, manufacturing, project accounting, report writing, and fixed assets. DexPros performs upgrades of custom features and reports and is frequently called upon to clean up code from other programming sources. We can assist you with all your custom programming needs whether it is adding additional window fields or complete modules that will handle complex processing.

For more information about how DexPros can meet your needs, visit our website www.dexpros.com or call:

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