

# STAR-INFO

Newsletter for Sage MAS 90 and Sage MAS 200 ERP

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## Headline News

Sage FAS Asset Accounting received a perfect 5-star rating in the **CPA Technology Advisor 2009 Review of Fixed Asset Management Programs**. "Sage's FAS Asset Accounting system is the most widely used asset management program on the market, offering automated asset depreciation management capabilities for businesses with any number of assets, providing full support for IRS, GAAP and IFRS accounting standards, and giving users advanced asset life cycle tools," noted reviewer Isaac M. O'Bannon.

## Leveraging The Economic Downturn

### Invest Now To Position Your Company For Growth As The Economy Improves

**H**ow is your organization responding to the current economic downturn? Despite the natural inclination to go quiet and spend as little as possible during the downturn, a recession may actually be a great time to use market conditions to your advantage. In this article, we will take a look at ways that an organization can leverage a downturn to position itself to reap a bigger share of the market when conditions improve.

#### Economic Cycles

It is important to keep in mind that downturns always end. Since 1854, the U.S. has experienced 32 cycles of expansion and contraction, with contractions occurring for an average of 17 months and expansions 38 months. And during any downturn, consumers continue to spend—they just look for better deals and for companies that are aggressively pursuing their business. Taking a reasoned, systematic approach will determine the state of your business for years to come. Tough economic times come and go. It is what you do during a downturn that makes all the difference.

#### Focus On Your Customers

Keep your customer relationships strong. A weak economy makes everyone nervous and that includes your customers. You can help build confidence by instituting an ongoing communication plan. You can use Business Alerts to automatically send notes to customers who have not ordered within a certain



time period. And when customers do call, Business Insights Explorer provides quick and easy access to detailed information that allows you to deliver top-notch customer service. You can look up their last invoice based on their purchase order number and drill right down to the products or services they purchased and the prices they paid.

#### Stay On Top Of Accounts Receivable

This is the time to be very clear about the gap that might occur between paying your suppliers and having your customers pay you. You will want to focus on the day-to-day flow of cash and sharpen up your cash collection policies and procedures. Find out if certain customers are taking longer to pay by comparing collection patterns year-over-year and month-over-month. Zero in on specific

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## Leveraging The Economic Downturn

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customers, and take immediate action if payment cycles are becoming protracted. Before writing off customer debts (or sending them to collections), find a creative and strategic way to settle the bill; for example, negotiate payment schedules, share talent or lead databases, or accept in-kind ownership shares.

Business Insights Explorer is the ideal tool for staying on top of outstanding balances. From your main customer view, you can filter your customers based on useful criteria such as total overdue balance greater than \$500. If desired, you could export your result set to Excel and give the report to a team member for follow up.

### Increase Your Market Presence

Resist the urge to bring your marketing efforts to a halt. Though one of the most common reactions in an economic downturn, it takes you off the radar and you are no longer top-of-mind with customers and prospects. Worse, rumors can start circulating that your business is failing. Few brands can survive without advertising and product promotion. History has shown that companies who become low-key during a downturn are in a far worse position in terms of profitability, market share, and competitive presence when an upturn becomes the new reality.

If you are using Sage CRM, you already have a tool that can help you cost effectively plan and implement marketing campaigns that give you the most bang for the buck. We also recommend you evaluate the benefits of social networking. It has enormous potential as an inexpensive marketing tool, particularly if you are in a business that sells directly to the consumer.

### Attract And Retain Talent

During a downturn, often the first thought is to save money by reducing staff. Instead, we

recommend that you carefully consider your staffing needs for the future. As other companies lay off employees, many talented people will suddenly find themselves looking for work. Capitalize on the opportunity to identify and attract talented employees. Make sure you also focus efforts on retaining key talent by communicating frequently and honestly with employees. A slowdown also can be a great time to invest in training opportunities for your employees, so they can be better prepared when the economy revs up again.

If you don't already own Sage Abra, you may want to consider investing in this human resources suite, which integrates with Sage MAS 90 Payroll. Sage Abra Suite contains many of the tools you need to cost effectively attract and retain talent, and invest in your staff. For example, Sage Abra Train automates scheduling, record keeping, and correspondence to ensure employees receive the training they need.

There is online recruiting management software available that can help you by automating and simplifying the workflows required to screen, interview, and hire new employees.

During slower sales periods, you and your staff may actually have more time available to effectively evaluate and implement new systems. There also are tax breaks available that allow you to fully depreciate or accelerate depreciation on capital purchases, making this the ideal time to invest in your infrastructure.

### Optimize Your Infrastructure

Infrastructure and technologies can be a great drain on resources if they are not being used effectively. Take stock of your systems.

Are they giving you the insight you need into your business? Are there roadblocks that can be smoothed with a custom report or better integration of Sage MAS 90 with other technologies, like credit card processing, automated payroll tax filing, or e-commerce?

ZOOM IN

Here is an example of a Business Insights Explorer View that has been customized for Accounts Receivable management. Data columns for credit limit, outstanding balance, and aging amounts are in immediate view, and you have the ability to enter a cash receipt directly from the screen if the customer agrees to pay by credit card.

Make sure your systems talk to one another and can give you a complete picture of your business. The more you know, the better decisions you can make. If you are like most companies, you can do a better job of utilizing the technology that you already have. Perhaps you need further training, improved integration, or customizations to improve your efficiency. We would be happy to help.

Here we have provided just a few ideas for capitalizing on the economic downturn. We hope they will help you generate ideas for additional possibilities. Give us a call with your questions. ✨

# The Next Generation Of Customization

Sage MAS 90 and MAS 200 ERP are highly functional business management solutions, but sometimes they are not the perfect fit right out of the box. Customizing is the obvious solution. However, there can be disadvantages to customizing your software. The good news is that customization capabilities added in Version 4.4 of Sage MAS 90 and MAS 200 can remove some of the drawbacks to customizing. Let's learn more.

## Customization Pros And Cons

When an organization has a business automation need that is not met out of the box, customization is always an option. The benefits of customization are evident—smoother internal workflow, less duplicate data entry, fewer errors due to manual processes, and all the cost savings that go with automating business processes.

However, many organizations are hesitant to customize their software. Not only is there the initial cost of the customization to consider, but also the cost of ongoing maintenance. Will there be a fee to update the customization each time a new version is released? Will upgrading to a new version be delayed until the customization is made compatible? Who will test the customization on each new version to make sure it is working properly? These issues are enough to make some organizations decide not to customize, and handle their special needs using manual workaround solutions.

## The Customizer Module

Even prior to the Version 4.4 enhancement, the Customizer module was a powerful tool. A consultant could put a button on a screen that would perform a calculation on a particular field and put the result in another field, usually a user-defined field, without needing to write program code. For example,

a calculation could take the invoice date, calculate three years into the future, and put the result into a user-defined field labeled “warranty expiration date.” Because this customization was made using built-in tools, it would continue to function just fine when the software was upgraded to a new version. The drawback? You had to remember to click the button, or the calculation would not be made and the warranty field would be left blank.

The 4.4 Customizer changes all this. Now scripts can be added that will run automatically when a certain event happens, such as tabbing out of a particular field.

## Customizer Version 4.4

The best way to illustrate the power of the new Customizer is through an example. Let's say an organization wants to reward customers who refer new customers to the business by giving them a \$50 discount on their next order over \$200. They also want to keep track of the total referral discounts taken by customer, and record the referring customer when adding new customers to the system.

Prior to Version 4.4, you could choose to keep track of this manually on a spreadsheet. You could add a user-defined field (UDF) to track the Referred-By field and a user-defined table (UDT) to collect the discount amounts. This helps because the data is inside Sage MAS 90, but you still have to remember to fill in the fields. The third option is to have a programmer write special code to automate the process; but what happens to the code when you upgrade to a new version?

With Customizer Version 4.4, the process can be completely automated with User Defined Scripts (UDS). In our example, the script could be set to automatically collect discount amounts and put them in the UDT that collects the discounts.

Scripts can be set to run based on many

different events in the software, including before and after data is entered in a field, before and after a record is written, and even after a record is read by the software.

The net result is that relatively complex capabilities can be added to your software, without changing the programs that come out of the box. This means that you will be able to upgrade to new versions and your customizations will work just fine. No waiting for the customization to be updated.

We are happy to discuss any ideas you have for taking advantage of this new feature to smooth business processes in your organization, and to assist with the implementation. Please give us a call. ✨

## (( Tips & Tricks ))

### Adding a UDF to a Business Insights Explorer View

Here we use the Sales Orders View as an example. Note: The example assumes you already have a User Defined Field (UDF) in your Sales Order Header File.

1. Expand Business Insights and Explorer.  
Double-click *Sales Orders View*.
2. Right-click the title of any column header field (for example, Order, Order Date, Type, and so on), and then click *Column Settings*.
3. Click the *Add* button.
4. Expand *SO\_SalesOrderHeader*.
5. Double-click the name of your UDF, or single click and then click the *Add* button.
6. Click *OK*, and the UDF is added as the last column. You can then drag the column across the grid to place it in the desired location.

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

## Sage Unveils New Product Delivery Strategy

Sage announced some significant changes to the way updates and new capabilities will be delivered to its customers, along with plans to retire older versions, at the Sage Summit Customer Conference held in Atlanta in November. These changes are intended to help Sage focus its resources to deliver new functionality faster, as well as give customers ongoing value for their annual subscription plans.

### Product Update Delivery

For some time now, Sage has been delivering one major enhancement release every 12–18 months. In between, monthly service packs have been available for download, to correct any program issues customers might be experiencing. Beginning March 2010, Sage will move to a Product Update release format. Product Updates will contain a combination of new features and defect corrections. Product Updates will be issued every three to six months, and will be delivered as a downloadable release. The Product Update is intended to provide customers with more value for their maintenance dollars. Sage will still fix defects for customers if they occur, and Sage will continue to deliver a major enhancement release every 12 to 18 months.

### Extended Solutions Incorporated

A major portion of the new features that customers will receive in the Product Updates

will be Extended Solutions that are folded into the software. Extended Solutions are specialized functionality that has previously been made available as a separate purchase. By incorporating the most popular Extended Solutions and retiring others, Sage hopes to simplify the product portfolio so it can focus on providing core value to customers. If you are currently using any Extended Solutions and are concerned about their continued support, please give us a call.

### Product Retirements

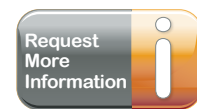
In an effort to more efficiently focus development resources, Sage will be reducing the number of versions that are supported. Currently Sage supports five versions of Sage MAS 90. Over the next two years, this will be scaled back to three versions. For example, Version 3.71 support will end on September 30, 2010. At the point of the release retirement, tax updates, product fixes, and telephone support will end.

### Good News For Sage MAS 200 SQL Server Users

During the process of updating Sage MAS 90 modules to the Business Framework, development work on the SQL Server Edition of Sage MAS 200 has been put on hold. At Summit, Sage announced that the SQL Edition will be fully updated to match all the Version 4.4 capabilities included in

Sage MAS 90 and 200. This major project is scheduled for completion in the second half of 2011.

Please give us a call if you have any questions about the new Sage release strategy for Sage MAS 90 and MAS 200. ✪



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