

## Lab Test - Access Dimensions 2.41

Date released: December 2004

Price: £3,900 (starting price for a five-user system)

Operating Systems supported: Windows 2000/XP

Database options: Microsoft SQL Server

Reviewed: March 2004

### The product

Dimensions is designed to run on Microsoft's SQL Server database. It is targeted at organisations turning over from £1m to £50m per annum, with between five and 50 users (although the largest Dimensions installation has 250 users). Dimensions Lite is an entry-level version for up to 10 users.

In addition to the core set of ledgers and cashbook, Dimensions has a set of distribution modules for Stock, Sales Order Processing and Purchase Order processing. Access recently acquired PumaSoft Software and integrated its Madisun manufacturing and distribution modules into a new companion suite for Dimensions called Access Supply Chain.

Users of Dimensions include the National Museum of Science & Industry and parts distributor Unipart, which runs a 125-user system.

### The Company

Based in Colchester, Essex, Access Accounting is one of the pioneers of Windows-based accounting packages. The company's first Windows package came out as early as 1991. Technically Access has consistently worked at keeping its products at the leading edge of Windows technology.

### What's new? Access Dimensions 2.41 innovations

- **Integration with Microsoft Office** allows everyone in the organisation to view Dimensions data via Excel or Outlook. When a user opens up their Outlook screen, they can see key numbers such as latest sales figures.
- **Executive Desktop** uses the Office integration feature to present a management dashboard containing all the key numbers. Users can take a snapshot of these any time and copy them down to their own desktop. Using Windows Smart Tags, they can drill down to see the detail. This 360-degree view takes Dimensions into the realms of customer relationship management (CRM) by giving the user a complete overview of its activities with a customer.
- **Split-screen payments module** displays a total on one side and the transactions that make up the total on the other. As you tick or untick transactions, the total amount changes. Also used in Bulk Cash Receipts, Bank Reconciliation and Batch Payments.

### Note on terminology

*In this review the terms Nominal Ledger (NL) and General Ledger (GL) mean the same thing and are used interchangeably. The former term is British, the latter American. Similarly PL means Purchase Ledger (AP in US) and SL means Sales Ledger (AR in US).*

## LAB TEST SUMMARY - Access Dimensions 2.41

### Summary

To test Dimensions, we asked the Access product manager to enter a series of test transactions into the software covering about 15 different subject areas. Out of 15 subject areas, Dimensions scored Very Good or Excellent in nine.

			POOR	FAIR	GOOD	VERY GOOD	EXCELLENT
TRANSACTION PROCESSING	1.1	OPEN PERIOD ACCOUNTING					
	1.2	PURCHASE INVOICE ENTRY					
	2.1	GL UPDATE					
	2.2	ERROR CORRECTION					
	3.1	REQUISITIONS AND ORDERS					
	3.2	NOMINAL JOURNALS					
PAYMENTS	4.1	CREDIT LEDGER ENQUIRY					
	4.2	RECEIPTS & CASH ALLOCATION					
	4.3	BATCH PAYMENTS					
	4.4	BANK RECONCILIATION					
	5.1	MULTICURRENCY					
MANAGEMENT REPORTING	6.1	EASE OF USE RATING					
	7.1	GL CODING STRUCTURE					
	7.2	GL REPORTING					
	7.3	MS OFFICE INTEGRATION					

### Access Dimensions 2.41 - Key Features

#### Highlights

- Dimensions is a very approachable system. Screens are clearly designed and easy to use.
- Microsoft Office Integration feature is outstanding, allowing everyone in the organisation with Excel or Outlook to have access to company data .
- Payments modules are of a high standard, with innovative split-screen design.

#### Issues of concern

- Uses the traditional single, multi-segment account code structure. This can give good results, but can lead to a proliferation of code combinations and can be very difficult to change after you go live.
- Once a transaction is committed to the GL, you can only make minor changes that don't affect the posted balances. Any other corrections require a manual journal entry.
- GL account was poorly laid out in previous versions; ensure on closer inspection that you can output transaction listing reports in the format that you want.

## Lab Test Feature Checklist

### 1.0 System Design - VERY GOOD

- Open period design allows you to set up periods with your own period-end dates and post to current, prior and forward periods.
- Once you've closed a period, you can't re-open it to enter new transactions and it may be fiddly if you need to set up more than 13 periods
- Each ledger has its own sequential series of numbers. Within the sales ledger a consecutive sales invoice, credit note and cash receipt might be numbered S1000097, S10000098, S10000099. A sort facility allows you to extract specific types, such as purchase invoices.

### 1.2 Purchase invoice entry - GOOD

- Would be rated VERY GOOD if you could rearrange the columns.
- You don't post directly to the GL, but intermediate Analysis Code allows detailed analysis of costs within a small chart of accounts.
- Another six User Key fields available - three for the transaction and three for each line.
- Details of any stock items purchased cannot be entered via this module. You will need to buy Purchase Order processing and use its Post Now option.

### 2.1 GL update and audit trails - VERY GOOD

- Options to update Purchase Ledger and GL immediately or in batches.
- On-screen Daybook displays a list of all uncommitted transactions, from which you can sort, select and drill down to see detail. Default listing omits narrative and GL description/codes but these can be viewed using Expand All facility.

### 2.2 Error correction - FAIR

- Once a transaction is committed to the GL, you can only make minor changes. You must enter a correcting journal to fix wrong postings.
- A third-party Corrections module is available from one of Access's resellers.

### 3.1 Requisitions and orders - GOOD

- Purchase order processing benefits from Microsoft Office integration to enable requisitions to be sent for authorisation via Outlook.
- Complexity of the module is fine for purchasing departments, but may not be suitable as a requisition tool for all users within the organisation.

### 3.2 GL journals - VERY GOOD

- Comprehensive suite of journal types.
- Minor design flaw prevents copying narrative from one side of a journal to the other.

### 4.1 Credit ledger enquiry - VERY GOOD

- Detail is accommodated by freezing the left hand columns and scrolling right to see the details. More details about the highlighted transaction are shown at the bottom of the screen.

### 4.2 Receipts and cash allocation - EXCELLENT

- Payments facilities are particularly good. Screen is split in two with a total in one part and the making up the total in the other. Total amount changes as transactions are ticked and unticked.
- Screen layout works particularly well for processing Bulk Cash Receipts.

#### **4.3 Batch payments to suppliers - VERY GOOD**

- Similar layout to Bulk Cash Receipts screen
- Payments can be emailed to a manager for authorisation via their Outlook screen.

#### **4.4 Bank reconciliation - VERY GOOD**

- Split screen layout works well, with total amount in top half, and transactions below.
- Dimensions captures the bank statement reference when the item is reconciled and uses it to print out the reconciliation report.
- Automatic reconciliation routine not included as standard, but available from a reseller.

#### **5.1 Multicurrency - GOOD**

- Values held in original currency, with two additional base currencies available. P&L reports can be printed in both base currencies.
- Currencies can be mixed currencies within an account, for example to pay a dollar invoice in yen.
- Dimensions allows you to set a new rate and revalue accounts, automatically generating an exchange rate gain/loss journal
- Minor quibble: on-screen ledger enquiry on a mixed currency account does not have a field to identify the currencies of each amount.

#### **6.1 Ease of use - VERY GOOD**

- Clear screens. Easy lookups.

#### **7.1 GL account code structure - GOOD**

- Based on a single multi-segment code up to 25 characters, with up to 8 segments.
- Sophisticated facilities for automatically creating new combinations, applying your own labels to each segment and so on.
- Traditional multi-segment code design will mean fewer mispostings to incorrect cost centres, but can lead to a proliferation of GL codes.

#### **7.2 GL reporting - GOOD**

- Expand command lets user see the GL transaction details, but makes for a messy screen.
- GL layout improved to print transaction line reports with one line per entry. This is available via one of the standard templates in the Access Crystal Reports menu.
- Nominal Transaction dump omits the name of the supplier, the narrative, and the GL account code description. Dates came over as text, and so don't sort or group properly in Excel. "Analysis-ready" file format due in summer 2005 should correct this shortcoming.

#### **7.3 Integration with Microsoft Office - EXCELLENT**

- Smart tags allow you to link Dimensions with Excel or Outlook screens - in effect to pull together data held on different systems into one place. An outstanding feature.

**David Carter**

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May 2005

### **Software Author's Response**

We are pleased David Carter has acknowledged the technology benefits that Dimensions is delivering to our users. Access has been working closely with Microsoft for the past two years to deliver an enviable level of integration with MS Office that is unique to Access.

Some of the key elements which are not covered within the scope of the Lab Test are the comprehensive suite of integration tools. These have allowed many of our customers to use the Dimensions SQL Server system at the heart of their business, and integrate it with their "best of breed" operational software applications. This technology has also enabled Access users to take advantage of the integrity and stability of Dimensions in many different vertical market sectors.

Integrating business systems together is the key area where companies can gain their greatest return on investment. Dimensions offers a range of tools that provides a cost-effective mechanism for delivering these benefits to all levels of business.

In addition to the above, we would also like to set out three key elements of our product development roadmap below.

#### **What's next? Future developments planned for Dimensions**

- Works order processing module to integrate production control with stock, sales order processing and purchase order processing.
- "Analysis-ready" feature to import GL and sales information from Dimensions to Excel for analysis using pivot tables. This will boost GL reporting rating from Good to Excellent.
- Expanded customer relationship management (CRM) facilities, both within core prospect management functions and by allowing contact and information synchronisation with Outlook.

**Stuart Allsopp**

Innovations director, Access Accounting  
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