# of Items	Expense Code	Budget Code	Balance Due	Actual Amount	Bud Amo
1	100	1100	$400.00	$500.00	$
1	110	1110	$100.00	$325.00	$
1	130	1130	$110.00	$110.00	$
1	140	1140	$180.00	$180.00	$
1	200	2500	$214.00	$214.00	$
1	220	2500	$4,500.00	$10,500.00	$10
4	500	1500	$139.00	$139.00	$
1	600	1600	$731.00	$731.00	$
1	650	1650	$70.00	$70.00	$
	800	1800	$525.00	$525.00	$
		1900	$3,100.00	$3,100.00	$
			$0.00	$0.00	

HIGH-TECH TOOLS

SOFTWARE • WEBCASTS • KIOSKS • TRAFFIC BUILDERS • SCREENS • FUTURISMO

FOR TRADE SHOW AND EVENT MANAGERS

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KEEPING TRACK

Project management software can turn your logistics nightmares into a smooth-running system

Only a few years back, "project management" was a code phrase for "my Day-Timer stuffed with Post-Its" and "those leaning stacks of three-ring binders." More recently, exhibit managers cobbled standard business applications together to track the budgeting, scheduling, logistical, and to-do list details of their biggest projects. But that cut-and-paste approach was usually more of a hassle than it was worth, since one needed to double- and triple-enter much of the data.

Today, new project management software programs are helping exhibit and event managers raise their programs to new levels of efficiency, productivity, and success. These powerful programs track thousands of details, generate reminders as needed, and automatically send queries, orders, and other notes and forms to your suppliers and team members. They also seamlessly handle budgeting, inventory, booth-staff scheduling, data display, return-on-investment, trip reports, and more. Still other programs, tailored more for corporate events than trade shows, help with duties such as site selection, seminar-room booking, vendor-service scheduling, and attendee registration. And just in the nick of time.

Log expenses by accounting codes to make sure the right department gets charged

Track which payments are outstanding to make sure no late charges are accrued

View line-by-line budget variances to help improve your budget forecasting
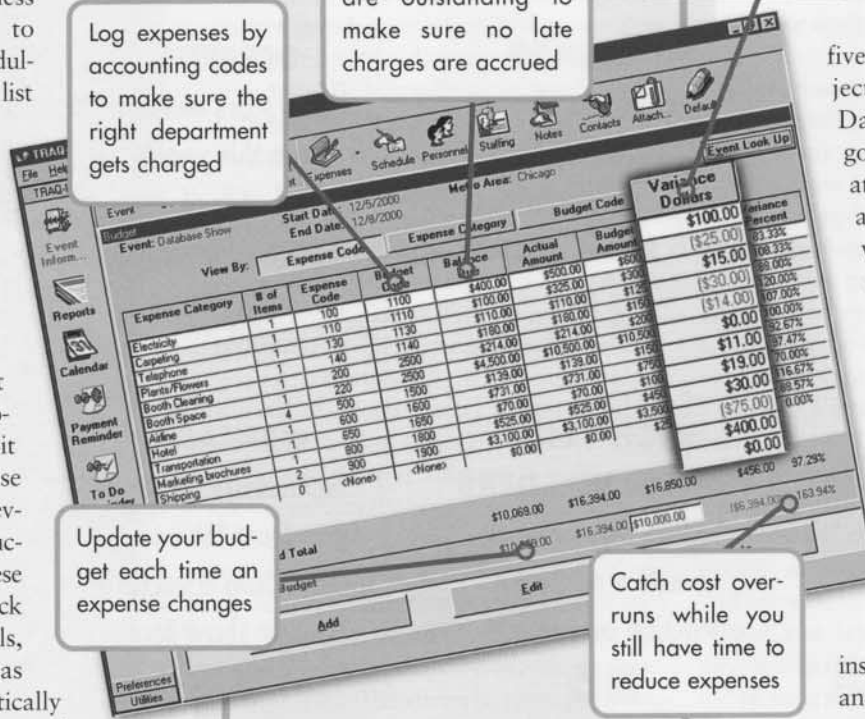
Update your budget each time an expense changes

Catch cost overruns while you still have time to reduce expenses

Snapshot: Better control over your budget is one key benefit to using project management software.

Karen Dalton, a Texas Instruments exhibits manager, recently put her four-person staff on a project management system called Show Event Tracking (SET). With more shows getting assigned to her team every year, they would have burned out if they hadn't taken that simple step, she said.

With her four-person trade show staff, 220 TI employees, and five vendors now on the project management system, Dalton's department has gone from managing exhibits at 50+ shows a year to managing 350 shows a year — while avoiding burning out and without needing extra hires.

"It's been a lifesaver," Dalton said. "I'm able to do more, and I'm able to work a lot smarter."

The software has improved her budget forecasting as well. Given the hundreds of variables that can affect costs for shipping, install and dismantle, drayage, and other costs and fees, Dalton says it was easy in previous years to be as much as 20 percent off her initial budget estimates. After switching to the SET system, her budgeting was off by only 4 percent and 1 percent in the first and second quarters of this year, respectively, Dalton says.

DATA SHARING: CALENDAR SCHEDULES, TASK REMINDERS AND MORE

One key to project management software's

enormous efficiency gains is its ability to "remember" and correctly use every piece of information that gets entered. For instance, when you enter the basic dimensions of your booth properties, the computer will place those figures where they're needed when logging and tracking booth space reservations, installation instructions, shipping requests, etc.

Still more efficiency is gained because data that is entered into one part of the system can be accessed by all other relevant parts of the system — no need to enter the data multiple times.

Let's say you're planning the shipping details for your next show. You might begin by logging the storage location, shipping weight, and dimensions for each product you plan to display in the booth. The software will retrieve those data each time you need those products for the present show, and for all future shows using the same items.

This "data sharing" feature of the program can also be used to automatically generate due-date reminders, purchase-order requests, budget-forecasting reports, and so forth. You might, for example, specify that your booth space must be reserved nine months out, your staff's travel itineraries must be set six months out, and so forth. For each new show, you'll tell the computer who's responsible for each task, and it does the rest. In addition, it can automatically send shipping requests to your van line, place requests for materials-handling with show contractors, produce the budget-tracking reports for your accounting department, and carry out any of dozens of other tasks you assign to it.

"As an exhibit manager, you don't have to think about what you have to remind others to do today," says Shane Eckel, president of Seattle Software Inc., which makes Show-Go project management software. "You just view the list of reminders that come up, approve them and off they go."

If you have your entire trade show staff using the same system, you can gain still more efficiency. Texas Instruments' Dalton says she appreciates that her system allows any user to attach related pictures and documents, so she can approve or decline them with no phone calls or faxes.

DATA REPORTING: BUDGETS, TO-DO LISTS, AND MORE

Another critical benefit is that with a click of the mouse you can automatically generate hundreds of different reports, such as pre-show to-do lists, at-show work schedules, and post-show budget reports. You can also ask for the data to be displayed in any combination or relation that you want, such as to-do lists sorted by date, missed deadlines sorted by staff member, graphic orders sorted by show, or dollars spent sorted by accounting category.

Since these reports are built through the same central database of show information, every time you revise a date or a cost, any report that contains that information will be automatically revised.

EXHIBIT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

KEY FEATURES	SHOW EVENT TRACKING	SHOWGO	TRAQ-IT
PROGRAM PRE-STOCKED WITH BASIC CONTACT INFO FOR MAJOR CONVENTION HALLS, SHIPPING FIRMS, ETC.	X	X	X
OFFERS REAL-TIME BUDGET TRACKING	X	X	X
SECURITY FEATURES CAN BE CUSTOMIZED FOR MULTIPLE USERS	X	X	X
GENERATES/SENDS REMINDER NOTES REGARDING TASK DUE DATES	X	X	X
STORES IMAGE AND DOCUMENT FILES TO FACILITATE APPROVAL PROCESS	X	X	X
OFFERS DATA STORAGE AND ACCESSIBILITY VIA THE INTERNET	X		

EVENT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

KEY FEATURES	CON-TRAC	EVENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS	EMSYSTEM	EVENT PLANNER PLUS	EVENT PRO 2002	PEOPLEWARE PRO	SCHEDULER PLUS
ALLOWS/TRACKS SCHEDULING OF MULTIPLE ROOMS AND RESOURCES	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TRACKS SCHEDULING/SELECTION OF OUTSIDE VENDOR SERVICES	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
GENERATES/SENDS REMINDER NOTES REGARDING TASK DUE DATES	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ALLOWS/TRACKS REGISTRATION OF MULTIPLE ATTENDEE GROUPS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SECURITY FEATURES CAN BE CUSTOMIZED FOR MULTIPLE USERS	X	X	X		X	X	X
OFFERS DATA STORAGE AND ACCESSIBILITY VIA THE INTERNET		X	X		X	X	X

Comparison Shopping We've selected a few key features from among the hundreds available to show what these programs can do.

EXHIBIT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

SOFTWARE: ShowGo
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98/2000/NT, 20 MB disk space, 32 MB RAM
PRICE: $1,789 for one user license; $1,389/license for 2-5 users; $1,189/license for 6+ licenses
CONTACT: Seattle Software Inc., 206-286-7677; www.seattlesoftware.com.

SOFTWARE: Show Event Tracking
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows or Mac, 75 MB disk space, 64 MB RAM
PRICE: $1,200 per user license
CONTACT: TRI Software Inc., 800-794-1723; www.trisoftware.com

SOFTWARE: Traq-It
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98/2000/NT, pentium processor,166MHZ or higher; 25 MB disk space, 32 MB RAM
PRICE: $1,595 for one user license; $1,195/license for 2nd-4th users; $1,095 for 5th-9th users; $995 for each additional user
CONTACT: Traq-It Software Inc., 888-869-4677, www.traq-it.com

EVENT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

SOFTWARE: Con-Trac
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98/2000/NT; 20+ MB disk space, 16 MB RAM
PRICE: $1,995 for single-user version; network versions starting at $6,995
CONTACT: Chambrés & Associates Inc., 215-635-7283, www.con-trac.com

SOFTWARE: Event Management Systems (EMS)
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98/2000/NT; following stats represent requirements for EMS Lite/EMS Professional/EMS Enterprise: Pentium processor: 133/200 MHZ/400 MHZ; disk space: 100 MB/100 MB/2 drives of 6 GB each; RAM: 32 MB/128 MB/256 MB
PRICE: $295-$1,000 per user license — call for details.
CONTACT: Dean Evans & Associates Inc., 800-440-3994, www.dea.com

SOFTWARE: Emsystem
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows or Mac platform with Internet access
PRICE: $8,000-$10,000, depending on features selected
CONTACT: Kallman Associates Inc., 201-652-7070, www.emsystem-green.com

SOFTWARE: Event Planner Plus
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98/2000/NT; 25 MB disk space; 8 MB RAM
PRICE: $495 per user
CONTACT: Certain Software Inc., 888-237-8246; www.certain.com

SOFTWARE: EventPro 2002
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98/2000/NT; 50 MB disk space; 64 MB RAM
PRICE: $1,500+, depending on number of users
CONTACT: EventPro Software Inc., 306-975-3737, www.eventpro.net

SOFTWARE: Peopleware Pro
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98/2000/NT/XP, pentium processor,233MHZ or higher; 40 MB disk space, 32 MB RAM
PRICE: $4,995+, depending on number of users
CONTACT: Peopleware Inc., 800-869-7166, www.peopleware.com

SOFTWARE: Scheduler Plus
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95/98, pentium processor,200MHZ or higher; 50 MB disk space, 64 MB RAM
PRICE: $3,000+, depending on number of users
CONTACT: CEO Software Inc., 800-441-2581, www.ceosoft.com

The same feature allows you to compare your original budget forecasts with your actual expenses as you incur them. "If you're starting to go over budget, you can do some cost containment while it's still practical to do," explains Michael Benson, head of sales and marketing for Traq-It Exhibit Management Software.

The same reporting options can help you to isolate cost per lead by show, by products displayed, and by marketing theme, to name a few.

DATA SECURITY: PASSWORDS, FIREWALLS, AND MORE

Because project management software is normally used by many people sharing data, if you start to use such a program you will need to think about data security.

Most programs allow access to be controlled at different security levels. You probably won't want everyone, including outside vendors or service providers, to see all data categories, especially if you've collected Social Security and credit-card numbers. You'll also want to check with your IT staff to be sure that the existing security features on your internal network can ensure the safety of data stored on the project management system.

Newer project management programs allow access via the Internet, which further increases security concerns. A business-to-business application is best safeguarded by having an independent third-party company host the data.

Proper security means a lot more than requiring a user name and a password to access the data, says Enola Gaye Hammers, president of TRI Software, which makes Show Event Tracking (SET). Be sure to ask for the entire list of security measures your potential provider can offer.

A few of the larger exhibit houses now offer clients some form of project planning software. These programs may be as powerful as the ones we review here, but they have one major drawback: they are available *only* to the exhibit house's customers.

Using this type of software may be convenient in the short run, especially if it allows you to automatically schedule upgrades to, and shipment of, the booth properties stored by your vendor. But in the long run, you need to consider whether it will give you the flexibility you need as an exhibit manager. For example, would a vendor-supplied program allow you to enter data about properties built by another vendor? And what will happen to your data if you sever your business relationship with the exhibit house?

CHOOSING A PROGRAM

Once you start looking for the project management system that's best for you, narrow the field by

deciding whether you mainly handle trade show programs or event programs.

The first three software titles listed are designed for exhibit managers, whose duties focus on the arrangement of trade show exhibits. The remaining seven are primarily for corporate event managers, whose duties involve multi-location events to which attendees must be invited. Some programs, such as Show Event Tracking and Emsystem, include some of both types of features.

Though not covered in our listings, Flex Design A/S, a Danish software developer, makes a program called FlexExpo (see www.flexexpo.com), which offers supplier information and convention hall data tailored to European exhibit managers' needs. It could be an effective tool for international exhibitors; however, it is not yet available in the United States. ▣

By Nancy L. Gordon: nlgordon@exhibitormagazine.com

SCREEN TEST

Three stars emerge from this year's batch of video contenders

Banners, signs, and other static graphics will always have a place in trade show exhibits. But let's face it — they can only take your message just so far.

Enter video and other electronic screens. Pulsing with sound and music and motion, they're as familiar as your home TV but capable of packing a strong corporate punch. Screen technologies have been getting cheaper, better, and much more diverse.

Here are three versions to consider:

OUT OF THE MYST

Need a video messenger as unique as your firm's services? Consider Image-Myst, from the L.A. corporate communication specialists CMS Inc. They have developed a process for making still and moving images float in thin air on a sheer curtain of mist.

That's right: video mist. Pictures and movies reflect off a screen made of water vapor. The thin, shimmering wall of mist shoots up from a box on the floor, rising up to six feet high. The screen can be turned on and off at will, and because the mist is extremely fine, it leaves no water residue. Presenters can stand next to the device and interact with the images projected onto the screen. It can work with PowerPoint presentations, corporate videos, or more creative applications. Some performances call for people to emerge from the mist.

Cost: $15,000 per week for equipment rental; creative services and image prep work are additional.

LED VIDEO WALLS

If you're looking to draw a crowd with a giant, super-bright, high-resolution image, forget the video walls of old. Those massive cathode ray tube (CRT) cubes stacked into a wall of screens may offer a big impact, but they're almost more trouble than they're worth. The newer, light-emitting diode (LED) video walls are thinner and lighter weight, and they offer an image that's brighter and packs a bigger punch. The display appears seamless, since individual panels aren't framed by outer casings.

LED panels are also more versatile than the old cathode ray tube cubes. They can be stacked or even flown from a truss (they average two feet thick, compared to four feet for the CRTs, and are about half their weight). If you saw this year's Grammy Awards or MTV Awards, then you've seen what these video walls can do for creating major presence.

They are also now an effective choice for the trade show floor. When LED video walls first came on the scene, their resolution was so poor they could only be used outdoors. But with improved resolution, the panels can be made smaller. In the past two years, LED video walls have appeared at the big auto shows and video-gaming

Dynamic Digital Depth's 3-D videos require a special display monitor for viewing, but no goofy glasses need to be worn.

SCREENS