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WHAT IS ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING (ERP) FOR CONSTRUCTION SOFTWARE?

ERP software for construction industries brings all the features and functions needed to run a construction business into one unified software solution. By definition, an ERP solution combines all the capabilities needed by internal and external stakeholders to run the business under one roof. Construction software supports bids and estimates; building information management (BIM); project planning, scheduling, and risk controls; employee and contractor management; procurement; inventory management; and financials. The ERP system allows for the management of all these enterprise functions in a single enterprise software package.

There are many participants in the construction industry. Architects and engineers develop building plans. These plans are the basis for project bids and estimates. These bids and estimates turn into contracts agreed upon by contractors and subcontractors. The building projects themselves can take months or even years to complete, while every nail and screw purchased impacts the project's bottom line. The scheduling and staffing of construction projects are subject to the effects of a wide range of factors, some of which (such as the weather, for example) are out of the control of the project participants. After completing a construction project, the asset becomes the responsibility of another party for future maintenance and support services.

The entire construction industry landscape comprises residential and commercial construction firms; general contractors and specialty contractors such as electricians and plumbers; design and engineering firms; property and facilities management companies; and off-site and modular construction companies. Larger companies will often offer products and services from one or more of these segments of the overall industry landscape. Regardless of the products or services offered, a construction company needs enterprise applications to support the unique needs of their business now and into the future.

Historically, the construction industry has been underserved by ERP software providers. The solutions that have been available each support a specific aspect or stage of the construction process. For example, some solutions on the market target architects and engineers and only adequately support these professional services providers. Other solutions address the specialized requirements of contractors and subcontractors, including their complex payroll processing requirements. And some other solutions are better suited to the building managers who take over with the management of tenants and the facility. Completely different solutions often support these different phases of the construction process.

Recent significant technological strides have played out on all ends of the construction software spectrum. The tools for developing BIM models and the adoption of BIM standards enable building plans to support 4 to 6 dimensions. (These additional plan dimensions house schedule information, materials specs, or other supporting information.) In the field, mobile phones, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, drones, and wireless networks make real-time monitoring and updates a reality. These deep vertical software capabilities are now being combined within the backbone of ERP systems to create a solution that can meet the complex needs encompassing the entire lifecycle of a large construction organization.



This guide helps unlock essential considerations to understand when evaluating ERP solutions for construction industries. The guide breaks down the business benefits, functional areas, and market trends of ERP for construction enterprise applications. Finally, the guide provides the necessary info your organization needs to know to select the best-fit software for your construction business and presents the top ERP solutions for construction on the market that may be worth your consideration.





BENEFITS OF ERP FOR CONSTRUCTION ORGANIZATIONS

Improved Project Controls

Construction projects can quickly spin out of control. Putting up a building requires rigid planning and strict project controls. The simplest scheduling mix-up can cause an entire project to be delayed. These delays lead to headaches at best. In most cases, the delay will lead to additional project costs. For example, poor planning with a single plumbing contractor pushes back the dates for the sheetrock crews to start closing the walls. A construction ERP system supports detailed task and resource tracking to ensure the project stays on track.

Resource Management

People are the most important resources in a construction organization. Equipment and materials are additional resources to manage. Managing the entire organization's resources in terms of skills, assignments, capacity, and availability go hand in hand with extensive project controls. Quickly assigning additional resources or shifting them between projects can make the difference between meeting a timeline or falling behind and into red ink. Expensive equipment need not sit idle on one job site when needed at another site. An ERP solution provides a full view of all resources that are available to apply to a given project.

Document Control

ERP systems are built on sophisticated software platforms, which include important business tools. These business platform tools provide capabilities for reporting and analytics, business process automation, and document management. There are many documents needed to execute construction efforts. The list includes, but is not limited to, contracts and agreements to do the work, plans for the work to be performed, and specific documentation for government work. These documents undergo revisions and updates regularly throughout a project. The majority of ERP solutions for construction have fully integrated document management systems built into their software platform.

Improved Collaboration

A central ERP database, in conjunction with collaboration tools, promotes improved collaboration across all departments. Data and processes from each business group flow through the ERP, connecting the effort of separate departments into a streamlined system. Collaboration tools let people follow important tasks. Without an ERP system, the work performed by different workgroups remains separate from one another, requiring more effort to collaborate, prevent information silos, and avoid process inefficiencies.

Employee Satisfaction

Running a construction operation requires trained and dedicated personnel. Engineers, project managers, and skilled and unskilled labor are all vital for the success of the organization. Today's ERP systems give employees the training and tools needed to perform their job in real time using the latest in mobile technology. ERP for construction software automates many mundane tasks, freeing the employees to do the skilled and meaningful work they signed up to do. Employees are more satisfied when they don't spend days in an endless cycle of frustrating tools that do nothing to help them perform their jobs.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CONSTRUCTION ERP SOLUTION

Construction companies require software that supports a complex and dynamic business. This entails a complete set of thousands of business requirements to fully support the needs of construction organizations. An ERP solution for the construction industry is a set of functional modules. Each functional module links to the other functional modules via the electronic ERP backbone. The backbone allows any module to work with any other module when needed. For example, in construction projects, a task in the project plan that calls for a pallet of roofing material would be automatically passed to the purchasing group for order and delivery to the module manufacturing facility. All updates to the task would be shown in real time to all affected parties using the ERP system. Major functional modules in an ERP for construction solution include customer experience applications, bid and contract management, asset and facilities management, back-office applications, modular and off-site manufacturing, and project execution, as shown in figure 1.

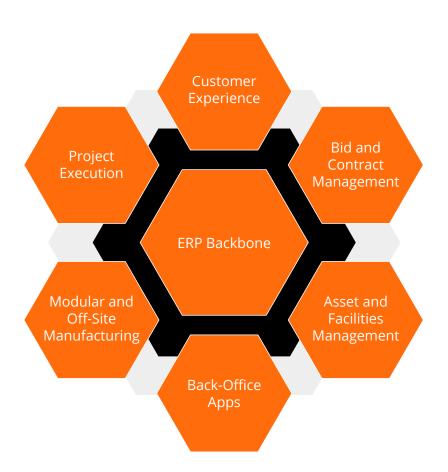


Figure 1. ERP for construction solution modules



Bid and Contract Management—Developing bids and contracts in construction industries is an extremely important and complicated process. Construction efforts begin with the bid and contracting stages. Architects and engineers first design the asset to be built (a house, an apartment building, or a naval destroyer). That design forms the basis for bids gathered from internal and external contractors. The bids eventually turn into contracts and associated subcontracts. The contracts have many special provisions and special handling, such as retention and holdbacks on payments. The contracts can undergo significant small- and large-scale changes over their lifetime. All the contract complexities in the construction industry require special handling by the ERP system's built-in bid and contract management system.

Project Management and Execution—The heart of a construction ERP solution is support for the execution of projects. Construction companies manage both large and small projects. The estimated, planned, committed, and actual costs for projects are tracked in real time. All project participants enter time and expenses against the project from any device and any location. Construction projects require the execution of linked purchase orders to acquire new materials, equipment, and staff. Cost and work breakdown structures run side by side against a project providing additional control and visibility. Embedded resource management makes it possible to find the right resources at the right time. Projects tasks and statuses may be automated or require manual intervention depending on project requirements. The successful completion of complex construction projects requires an ERP system that is up to the task.

Customer Experience Applications—Today, every company needs applications that oversee customer interactions. The construction company needs to keep up to date on its best customers and all interactions with those customers. Construction companies need to handle any service calls or complaints that come in from these customers. Many construction companies also offer other products, warranties, or management services to their customers. Customer relationship management (CRM) and customer service tools provide the needed customer-facing applications to ensure a satisfying customer experience throughout the project's lifecycle.

Back-Office Applications—The back office of an ERP solution houses all the sometimes dull but still critical applications to run the business—human capital management (HCM), financials, payroll, and inventory management. HCM systems manage the personnel-related tasks for corporate managers and individual employees, including personnel management, benefits management, payroll management, employee self-service, and health and safety. The financials system contains the corporate general ledger, along with managing the company's receivables and payables. A construction ERP system deserving respect can manage the burdensome payroll processing requirements that govern the industry. The valuable building materials used in construction efforts are managed by the ERP system's inventory management application.

Modular and Off-Site Manufacturing—The industry is increasingly leveraging modular and off-site construction. This type of construction helps bring down costs and produce repeatable results in a more controlled environment. The manufacturing capabilities of ERP systems are ideally suited to supporting requirements in the construction for modular and off-site manufacturing. Increased housing costs are forcing construction companies to come up with creative ways to cut the cost of building, with modular and off-site manufacturing offering some help. Even companies that offer cookie-cutter housing units benefit from the application of mass production manufacturing techniques.



Asset and Facilities—Large assets and facilities add another wrinkle in running construction businesses. Cranes, trucks, and trailers are valuable assets. These assets should not be left idle and require regular maintenance and repairs. Some construction companies maintain the asset or facility after construction. Asset and facilities management software, known as enterprise asset management (EAM) software, manages the lifecycle of large and complex assets. EAM software houses the structures and supporting business processing tools to manage assets such as manufacturing production equipment, offshore oil rigs, highways, facilities, municipal transportation systems, and fleets of vehicles.

ERP Backbone—ERP systems are built on top of software backbones. The backbone (or platform) is the underlying foundation and plumbing of the ERP system. Modern ERP application platforms run on cloud infrastructure services such as Microsoft Azure, Amazon Web Services, or Oracle's platform services. Other services provided by the underlying software platforms include:

- Business intelligence (BI)
- Document management
- Internet of Things (IoT) processing
- E-signature
- Open application programming interfaces (APIs)



TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CONSTRUCTION ERP

Players Across the Industry Are More Broadly Adopting Modular and Off-Site Construction—The trend has gained steam in Europe, with interesting new players such as home-furnishing giant Ikea entering the marketplace. Modular construction enables construction to take place in controlled environments away from the effects of different weather conditions. The schedules of all tradespeople (electricians, drywall installers, plumbers, framers, etc.) are easier to manage and control. Repeatable processes lead to more reproducible results. The net result is consistently better quality and lower costs. This trend will continue as countries look for ways to build more affordable housing.

Building Information Modeling (BIM) Software—BIM products move construction designs and drawings beyond 3D. The BIM tools serve as the foundation for digital transformation in the construction industry. The additional dimensions hold costs, schedules, materials, and additional properties of the material. Housing this additional information in the model adds the critical missing link to the better management of construction projects. This digital twin models an asset throughout its lifetime from design to build and through to ongoing maintenance. The ERP solutions serving the industry have seamless bidirectional integrations with BIM products.

Mobile and 5G Wireless—The availability and costs of smartphones (and other mobile devices) are critical to construction companies. The expanding global 5G network infrastructure brings additional bandwidth and precision to mobile work. 5G networks can pinpoint a device's location within a few centimeters, with transmission rates rivaling wireless networks. The spread of 5G networks enables construction workers to share a real-time video of site conditions and free workers for more meaningful work. Mobile device capabilities, combined with the increased global 5G coverage, opens the door to new opportunities across the entire construction industry.

3D (Additive) Printing—3D printing is seeing more mainstream adoption in the construction industry. Projects are currently being completed and planned where a 3D printer prints the structure of the house, for example. Additional applications abound in the construction industry. With a 3D printer, an electrician could print the custom conduit and junction boxes needed for a job. A job site could have a printer dedicated to printing standard and custom parts needed for a project, thus eliminating the many steps involved in purchasing, acquiring, and transporting a part to a job site. Using 3D printers also frees a company from managing parts inventory or enables a company to create a replacement for a minor broken piece of equipment. The construction industry's adoption of this technology can replace and eliminate a range of project bottlenecks.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)—AI is all about making machines smarter and undertaking more intelligent tasks. AI technologies form the basis of tools such as converting a sentence from a worker in the field into text and translating it so that an engineer in say Düsseldorf, Germany, can work diagnose the problem over a chat. AI technologies are being applied across ERP solutions. AI software and hardware range from chatbots, digital assistants, image recognition, natural language processing (NLP), robotics, and machine learning (ML) tools. AI applications are freeing the hands of workers at the job site for more productive work. Other AI tools constantly learn from project data to build better buildings and apply learnings to other projects. Because of their enormous potential, AI applications rolling out today will impact all areas of ERP and other construction solutions.



ERP FOR CONSTRUCTION SOFTWARE SELECTION

Construction ERP solutions are gaining popularity in the broader ERP marketplace. In the past, some ERP vendors shied away from delivering solutions for the construction industry. This aversion to the industry was due to several factors. Such major hurdles included the paucity of software and devices that were available to the average construction worker in the field to do their job. Mobile devices and the latest generation of software have removed that hurdle. Other problems relate to the subtle complexities in the marketplace that the major ERP vendors do not wholly understand or know how to address. For example, the contracting cycle and payroll management requirements in the construction industry are very different from those in other industries.

TEC comprehends the difficulties in choosing an ERP solution for the construction industry. The overall process of selecting an ERP solution can be complicated and arduous. The decision to buy an enterprise-grade solution is a long-term investment that a company lives with for many years to come. TEC's experts use a time-tested, data-driven, and structured approach to software selection. This approach begins with understanding your current business operations and application landscape. The process then identifies the top vendors that can meet those needs and narrows it down to a shortlist for the final phase of the selection. TEC can deliver results in weeks, where other selection providers take months.

TEC's resources can help with the entire software evaluation and selection process or assist in different phases in an à la carte fashion. TEC's experts have decades of experience solving problems for companies across the globe. The broad list of free resources includes RFP templates, software modules, and features lists, and comparison charts. Our experts use TEC's proprietary tool, TEC Advisor, to enable your organization to select the best construction ERP solution for your business needs.



TOP CONSTRUCTION ERP SOFTWARE VENDORS

Many vendors provide solutions for construction organizations. Some solutions may target companies in a specific region or country. Other ERP solutions are designed and built for a particular service vertical such as general contractors, modular builders, or architecture and engineering businesses. Here is a list of leading providers of construction ERP software:

- Acumatica
- Adeaca Corp
- BuilderTrend
- CMiC
- Epicor
- IFS
- Microsoft
- Oracle
- Oracle NetSuite
- Penta Technologies
- Procore
- Sage (Sage X3)
- SAF

CONCLUSION

Great progress is being made by construction ERP software solutions in recent years. Advances in underlying technologies such as cloud computing, mobile devices, and mobile networks have made these solutions more accessible to organizations across all verticals of the construction industry. ERP providers have spent years honing ERP software for the complicated and fluid nature of the construction business. It is important for construction industries to look at the extremely powerful and sophisticated ERP tools on the market today to help them optimally run all aspects of their business. For those organizations needing additional info or help with evaluating or selecting an ERP solution for their organization, check out our services or contact TEC today.









Customer Success

American Asphalt Paves Way to Rapid Growth Leveraging Acumatica Cloud ERP

OVERVIEW

American Asphalt is well known in the state of California for its ability to do more high-quality work faster than its competitors. After operating for 20 years on American Contractor, other siloed software, and storing information on paper, the company needed an integrated cloud-based solution. They implemented Acumatica Construction Edition, gaining real-time data access in the field, flexible reporting, and a financial platform that easily integrates with third party applications.

KEY RESULTS

- · Acquired an integrated, cloud-based solution, gaining real-time mobile data access
- · Obtained a single source of truth that's actionable, eliminating errors and confusion while boosting profits
- · Gained field access to critical data, allowing project managers to make better and faster decisions
- · Eliminated the need for 50 banker boxes of paper annually, saving time locating older projects
- · Deployed an easy-to-use business solution tailored to the construction industry, speeding user adoption
- · Accessed a flexible business solution that easily scales, paving the way for additional growth

CHALLENGES

American Asphalt operates border to border in California pouring concrete and asphalt for Residential Communities, Commercial Properties, Shopping Centers, and Public Works. The company uses state-of-the-art equipment and incorporates the latest in asphalt pavement, Caltrans slurry surfacing, sealcoating, striping and concrete technology.

Headquartered in Hayward, CA, American Asphalt employs 250 and generates nearly \$100 million in annual revenue. Rather than working on a few large projects that take six months or more, American Asphalt completes about 1,400 jobs a year, with most taking 10 days or less to complete.

The construction firm is self-performing and has a high percentage of repeat customers including HOAs, commercial business parks, stadiums and large commercial companies and cities. It has two operating units, one covering Northern California and the other, Southern California.

"We are well-known for our quality and speed," says Shel Waggener, President. "We do more work at a higher quality, faster pace than our competitors. Our strategic advantage isn't doing accounting better but being able to support our field teams in delivering to our customers better."

Legacy Construction Software for 20 years

For more than 20 years, the company used American Contractor, a legacy construction ERP package that later was subsequently acquired multiple times, merged with other software, and was built on older technology.

"It was a client-server package built on FoxPro that wasn't able to easily integrate to any other solution. We couldn't easily get anything out of it, and the reporting wasn't flexible," says Waggener. "As we grew, it became more and more challenging to live in one software package."

American Asphalt stored critical information in paper-based project folders, operating like many other construction firms. This solution was less than ideal when 10 people working at many different locations all wanted to view the paper job file. In addition, project managers at construction sites did not have instant access to vital information.

Instead, they called the office, and asked someone to locate a file and verbally relay the necessary project data. Without immediate access to real-time financial details while on the job site, making decisions took much longer, a detriment in an industry where time is money and construction projects are short.

Needing a much more modern business solution, American Asphalt executives wanted to implement cloud-based software. They began a digital transformation journey with Salesforce's CRM, and then added resource planning software Assignar. They chose a payroll application they later learned couldn't handle certified payroll in California.

Executives wanted a robust centralized financial system built for the future, one that could grow with them as American Asphalt evolved. They wanted an open system—not a walled garden—that could easily connect to Salesforce, Assignar, and additional applications that could make them more efficient.



Company

American Asphalt Repair & Resurfacing Company, Inc. www.americanasphalt.com

Industry

Construction: Paving Contractor

Location

Headquarters: Hayward, CA for Northern California and Fontana, CA for Southern California

Number of Employees

Approx. 250 full time employees

Products

Acumatica Construction Edition with:

- · Advanced Financial Management
- Fixed Assets
- CRM
- Salesforce Sync
- Assignar
- Smartsheet

Customer Social Sharing Details



www.linkedin.com/company/ american-asphalt-repair-&resurfacing-co.-inc.



www.facebook.com/ AmericanAsphalt

Partner Details



Alliance Solutions Group aka ASG https://alliancesg.com



Customer Success

Limited Feature Set, Siloed Applications Eliminated

American Asphalt executives evaluated CMAC, Viewpoint and other legacy applications like Sage, which they eliminated from contention because each offered single modules with limited feature sets that did not allow for ease of integration with other applications, Waggener says.

They wanted something that was easy-to-use and could handle blueprints, photos, video and other unstructured data typical to the construction industry, which would make processes more efficient. The new system also needed to have the flexibility to easily add new lines of business and accommodate future acquisitions.

"What if we added another trade, or another jurisdiction or another tax ID? We wanted to be in a position to take advantage of future innovations without having to overhaul and be in a different environment," Waggener says.

SOLUTION

While no software fulfills 100 percent of a company's needs, Acumatica Cloud ERP "had an open API and a construction module with project accounting, allowing us to begin the process of unbundling American Contractor," he says.

Most importantly, Acumatica Construction Edition offered "a financial platform that provides information to the field."

"Acumatica had the best roadmap, the best understanding of the construction industry, and the best user experience on the web," Waggener continues. "I felt confident Ajoy (Krishnamoorthy, EVP Product Management, Acumatica) and his development team were headed in the right direction with the overall product."

He was impressed with Acumatica's strategy to create a core financial platform while also creating standalone industry-specific editions like Acumatica Construction Edition, and invested heavily in R&D. He also liked that Acumatica's development roadmap included construction payroll, but that American Asphalt wasn't locked into that option if it preferred a different payroll provider.

American Asphalt implemented Acumatica with help from Acumatica Partner Alliance Solutions Group, aka ASG. The pandemic slowed the process somewhat but decisions, including not to import past data and instead use its legacy software as an archive, allowed them to focus on the new solution's functions rather than cleaning up old data.

"There were no technical problems that weren't solved quickly by our technology partner," says Waggener. "You always need a good integration partner, and we had that with ASG."

BENEFITS

Real-Time Access to Critical Data from Construction Sites

Acumatica Construction Edition gave American Asphalt project managers and others instant access to critical information while in the field, helping them boost profitability.

In construction, Waggener explains, decisions made in the field make or break a project. A firm can have good plans, suppliers lined up, and begin a project only to learn that site conditions are different. They may uncover soft ground, or an underground stream, or legacy telephone conduits, for example.

"So you have to do what we call 'Stick and Move,'" he says. "It's like being light on your feet. You have to know exactly what you have to do. You have to move guickly and adapt."

His experienced and skilled field team excels at adapting but they needed a system and real-time data, which they now have with Acumatica Construction Edition.

"With Acumatica's mobile application, now they can pull up all the information and make a real-time decision not just based on what makes sense for production but also what makes sense financially, based on availability for speed," Waggener says. "We've empowered the superintendent and the foreman to make better decisions, and if you can't do that, you're going to lose money in construction."

Integrated Software Reduces Errors

Acumatica's ability to integrate with third party software such as Salesforce and Assignar reduces errors, confusion and saves American Asphalt a lot of time. It automates and streamlines many previously manual processes.

"Now, when a new job is confirmed in Assignar, it notifies Acumatica that it is now an active project. In Assignar, when milestones are hit in the production process, it sends a call to Acumatica and the financial team can see the information and invoice," Waggener says. "We don't have to wait for paper or emails to move around the office."

"With Acumatica we have a single source of truth that's actionable, which cuts down on errors, cuts down on confusion, and ultimately makes us more profitable."



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—Shel Waggener, President, American Asphalt



Customer Success

Slice and Dice Data for Reporting, Every Day Views

Acumatica doesn't just provide a single source of truth, but was flexibly designed to provide reporting functionality that draws data from third party applications and allows individuals to gather, filter, and manipulate data based on permissions.

"We want project managers to be able to see quantities and granular views of the data and if they are updating a project, they can do that," Waggener says. Accounting and estimators have access to the same data but can filter and apply it to views more appropriate to their roles, he says.

"Acumatica also provides customizations of the amount of information that you see," Waggener continues. "Any robust accounting package has hundreds of functions, but everyone isn't an accountant. In Acumatica, you can filter but also hide all the information that you don't use every day. You can favorite items and build a favorites view for every day and that's been very, very helpful."

Within Acumatica, employees can easily create customized reports and push them out to others without needing to call upon an IT department and wait days for the information. "They don't need additional training and there's no additional complexity," Waggener says. "They are able to see it simply by changing a view. Acumatica is more flexible with less work than any other package out there."

There's also no need to print and distribute reports. "I don't have to wait for printed reports anymore," Waggener says. "Everyone can get what they need, when they need it from their computer, their phone; anywhere."

Eliminated Manual Processes

Prior to implementing Acumatica, American Asphalt archived its paper project folders, which grew to over 50 banker boxes in an average year. That information is now easily retrievable. "We can search by client, date or project. I'm not sure what the time savings is when you have to look through bankers' boxes versus searching from your phone in real time but it's an enormous help," Waggener says.

And it's not just access to older information but immediate access to information that also changes in real time. "If a project manager needs an extra 200 tons of asphalt, he can make those changes in the system from the field, and everyone can see it," says Waggener. "And when a client makes a change, we all need to be on the same page, and everyone needs to know about that change instantly."

Strong Foundation for Growth

Acumatica Construction Edition not only gave American Asphalt a tool to make its field work more efficient, it also gave the construction firm a good foundation upon which to build its future.

"We can run multiple companies with one platform, have different tax IDs, and Acumatica gives us the flexibility to set up new tax IDs with a click of a button versus making a major investment in IT," Waggener says. Several customers have asked them to expand to other states where they have additional properties, and continued growth is part of the company's strategy, he says.

"We continue to grow between 7 and 10 percent a year, and we managed to do well during the pandemic, keeping all employees on board. Acumatica made it easier to do that," he says.

"Any company looking to grow into the future needs an IT strategy that advances its business", Waggener says. "If you need to integrate data and you want to move faster with your business, then Acumatica is the perfect solution."



Acumatica had the best roadmap, the best understanding of the construction industry, and the best user experience.

—Shel Waggener, President, American Asphalt

ABOUT ACUMATICA

Acumatica Cloud ERP provides the best business management solution for transforming your company to thrive in the new digital economy. Built on a future-proof platform with open architecture for rapid integrations, scalability, and ease of use, Acumatica delivers unparalleled value to small and midmarket organizations. Connected Business. Delivered.

Acumatica Construction Edition is a complete cloud ERP with superior mobile technology that enables a 360° view of your business anytime, anywhere, from any device. The streamlined platform includes robust financials, job cost accounting, project management, payroll, CRM, inventory, and service management.



About The Answer Company

For the past 30 years, The Answer Company ERP consulting group has been transforming businesses with technology.

Team members across the country have worked with over 800 construction and real estate companies seeking to digitize and streamline their operations, gain tighter project controls, and access intelligent, real-time insights across every department.

We work with clients to design business management software to align with business objectives, giving them the power to make informed decisions, enhance productivity and employee satisfaction, and achieve sustainable growth.

With us by their side, clients can build better and stay competitive.

For more info, visit: www.theanswerco.com
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