

# Master Builder Solo

by Joe Stoddard

**I**ntegrated construction software can make a lot of sense for understaffed small-office contractors — one place to enter data, one interface to learn, and a single set of office procedures to follow. Omware's *The Master Builder* (825 Gravenstein Hwy. North, Suite 5, Sebastopol, CA 95472; 800/726-6278; [www.themasterbuilder.com](http://www.themasterbuilder.com)) has been a very good integrated solution for large and mid-size contractors since the mid-'80s, but has been priced beyond the range of the typical small-volume builder or remodeler.

That recently changed with the release of Master Builder 7, Solo Edition. As the name implies, MB7 Solo is a single-user version of Omware's Network Edition, but it isn't "Lite" by any means. Solo has the same interface, same core program, same basic modules, and the same tight integration as its big brother. Growing contractors can put MB7 Solo to work with no fear they will outgrow it, lose data, or waste their training investment. Master Builder 7 will now import employee, job, and vendor lists from Intuit's QuickBooks and QuickBooks Pro — making a move to an integrated program a little easier.

## What's Under the Hood?

The core of Master Builder (Solo or Network version) is an accounting package that includes General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Budgets, Proposals, Job Cost, plus form design and text editor utilities. The end user, normally with the help of a certified Omware consultant, builds a customized package from several add-on modules (see Figure 1). These vary for the Solo and the Network versions, but the key functionality of the Estimating, Scheduling, Purchase Orders, Change Orders, and

Equipment Management modules is identical for both. You could argue that these add-on modules are not as powerful as single-purpose software, but because they're so tightly integrated with the accounting and job-costing core modules, they are actually much more helpful for the typical contractor.

**Integrated estimating.** Master Builder's Estimating module is surprisingly good. It's a true assembly-driven system that allows the user to program combinations

of materials into a single take-off unit — for example, a wall or floor system (Figure 2, next page). Estimate quantities integrate into other modules, such as Purchase Orders and Job Cost, potentially saving hours of data input and reducing mistakes in later project stages.

**Scheduling.** At first glance, the scheduling module is plain vanilla, but it will generate a decent linked Gantt chart and critical project path (Figure 3, next page). One shortcoming is that resource sched-

## Pricing

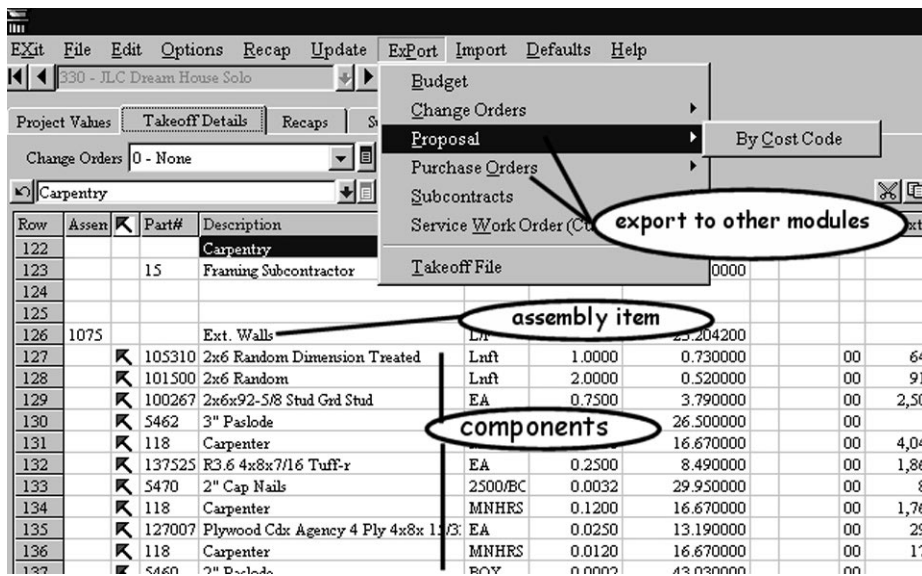
| Module Name              | MB7 Network                | MB7 Solo     |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Core</b>              | <b>\$3,000 (two seats)</b> | <b>\$995</b> |
| Each Additional Seat     | \$800                      | N/A          |
| Standard Payroll         | \$550                      | \$300        |
| Advance Payroll          | \$440                      | N/A          |
| Progress Billing         | \$450                      | \$250        |
| Unitary Billing          | \$450                      | \$250        |
| Loan Draw Request        | \$450                      | \$250        |
| Time & Materials Billing | \$450                      | \$250        |
| Change Orders            | \$550                      | \$250        |
| Purchase Orders          | \$550                      | \$250        |
| Subcontracts             | \$550                      | \$250        |
| Financial Review         | \$550                      | N/A          |
| Scheduling               | \$550                      | \$250        |
| Equipment Management     | \$990                      | \$500        |
| Service Receivables      | \$990                      | \$500        |
| Inventory                | \$990                      | N/A          |
| Estimating (PTO)         | \$990                      | \$500        |
| Project Document Control | \$690                      | N/A          |
| Digitizer Support        | \$690                      | \$250        |
| Direct Deposit           | \$690                      | \$250        |

**Figure 1.** Both the Solo Edition and the Network Edition of Master Builder 7 offer a wide range of add-on modules that integrate with the core product.

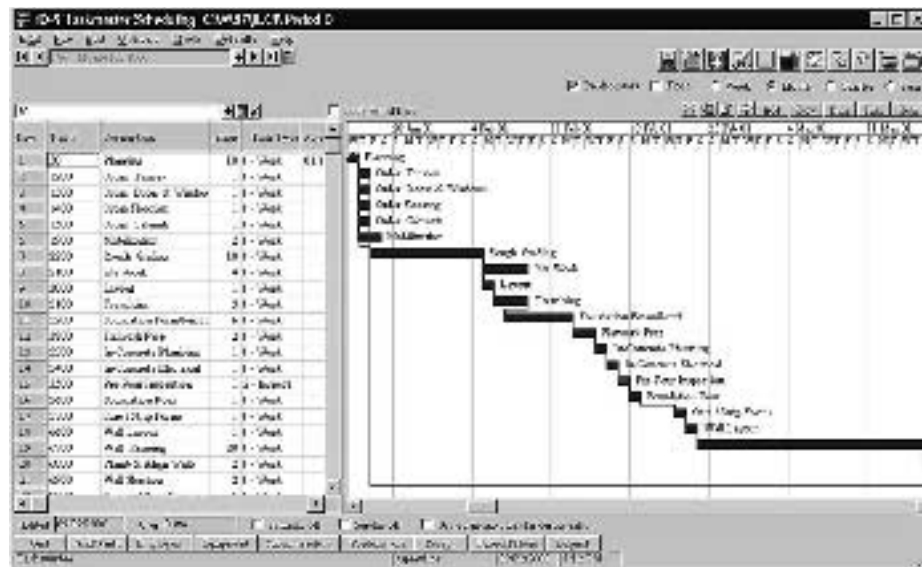
uling is limited to full days only — a major problem for subcontractors or service contractors who might need to spread workers or equipment between two or three jobs on a given day. We were told that Omware is addressing fractional-day scheduling for future releases.

**Schedule/cash requirements report.** Even though it's not Primavera P3 or even Microsoft Project, the scheduling module plays an important role in gen-

erating one critical report you won't find anywhere else: The Schedule/Cash Requirements Report. This module reads both the estimate and the schedule to produce an incredibly useful report of how much cash you need at any given point in the job to meet your obligations, and whether you're currently under or over your contract numbers (Figure 4, next page).



**Figure 2.** The Estimating module produces true assembly-driven estimates. The data can then be re-used in Purchase Orders, Request for Quotes, and many other reports.



**Figure 3.** The Scheduling module can generate a useful Gantt chart and critical path, but it can only distribute resources in full day increments.

## What's the Catch?

Unlike the Network Edition, which can support as many simultaneous users as you can afford seats for, Solo can be installed on a single computer or on a network, but is limited to one active user at a time. In addition to no multi-user functionality, Solo doesn't have the custom report writing capability of Network. Omware's Robert Intersimone told *JLC* that Master Builder consultants would be able to help Solo users in that regard by using an external report writer, such as Crystal.

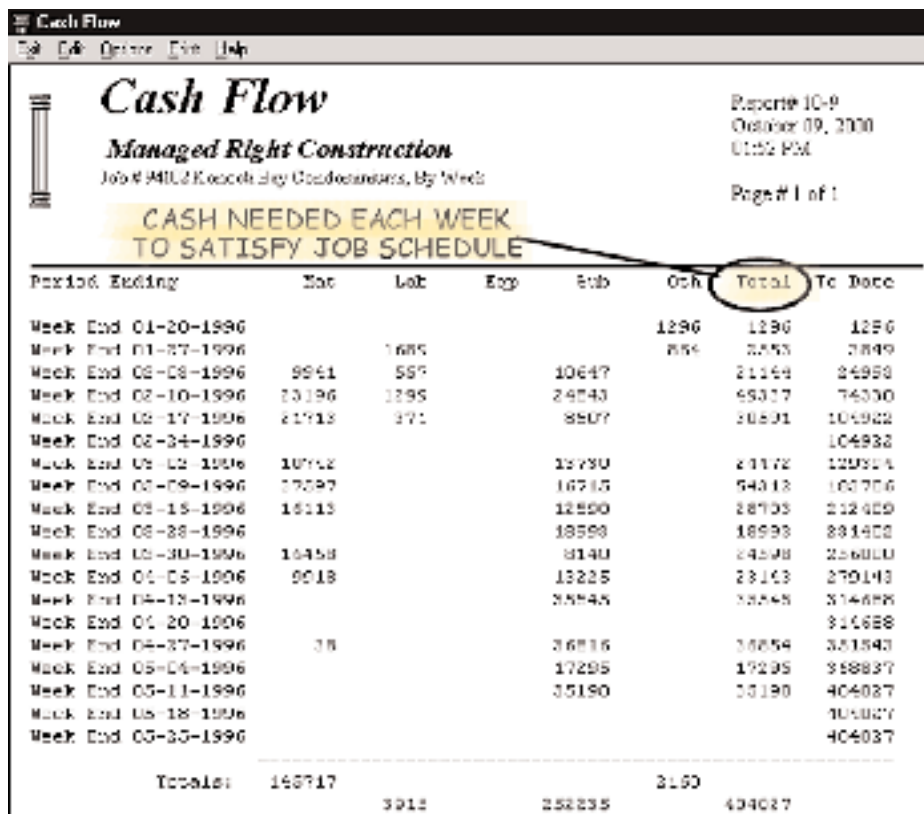
There are also fewer plug-in modules for Solo. For example, the New Project Document Control module, designed to go head-to-head with Primavera Expedition or other similar enterprise project-management products, is only available for the networked version.

## Training Built In

Time-challenged small-office contractors often require the most training but wind up getting the least. Omware has addressed that problem by including eight 90-minute Internet-based training sessions with MB7 Solo. The training sessions can be viewed as often as necessary by whoever needs them. Omware is also one of the first software publishers to offer high-quality remote training, both with Internet-based lessons and "Mentorpoint" — a system that allows their network of 120-plus trainers and consultants to work directly with clients using the Internet.

## Recommendations

Omware has definitely hit a home run with Solo. For the official launch, they've bundled the Master Builder core construction-accounting program with the most common add-on modules into "Power Packs" for added savings for general contractors and subcontractors. At \$1,995 for the GC package and \$1,395 for the Sub package, Solo is a fraction of the price of the Network Edition, which can cost more than \$8,000 for two seats, and



**Figure 4.** The Schedule/Cash Requirements Report reads both the estimate and the schedule to produce a very useful report of what your cash position should be at any given point in the job.

| MB7 Solo Edition "Power Pack" Pricing |                |                            |                |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| General Contractor's Power Pack       |                | Subcontractor's Power Pack |                |
| Core                                  | \$995          | Core                       | \$995          |
| Payroll                               | \$250          | Payroll                    | \$250          |
| Change orders                         | \$250          | Purchase orders            | \$250          |
| Purchase orders                       | \$250          | Estimating                 | \$500          |
| Subcontracts                          | \$250          | Total:                     | \$1,995 SRP    |
| Scheduling                            | \$250          | <b>Power Pack:</b>         | <b>\$1,395</b> |
| Estimating                            | \$500          | <b>Savings:</b>            | <b>\$600</b>   |
| Total:                                | \$2,745 SRP    |                            |                |
| <b>Power Pack:</b>                    | <b>\$1,995</b> |                            |                |
| <b>Savings:</b>                       | <b>\$750</b>   |                            |                |

**Figure 5.** Instead of buying each separately, at a higher cost, the Power Packs bundle the core product with the most common add-in modules for substantial savings.

it's well within the reach of the smaller contractor (Figure 5). Solo will provide a good platform on which to grow a business. In addition to the bundled module, I recommend that any contractor who owns equipment add the Equipment Management module, as well as any specialized billing modules (for example, Time & Materials) appli-

cable to whatever type of work he or she normally does.



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