

Computerwoche

News Analyses Trends

Microsoft Navision wins out in direct product comparison with Business One

Showdown between SAP and Microsoft

DORNBIRN – In a direct comparison between SAP’s SME business software “Business One” and “Navision” from Microsoft Business Solutions, the SME solution from the Walldorf, Germany-based company was clearly the loser. Two specialist teams had to perform the same tasks using both solutions in front of an audience. A panel of experts and the audience rated the approaches.

CW Report, Frank Niemann

The winner of the duel at the end of the daylong showdown was Microsoft Business Solutions: the Navision software turned out to be the more mature alternative. The comparison did have its weaknesses, however, because the standard version of Business One does not include certain functions like production control, capacity planning and the Web shop as well as the synchronization of the calendar software. Nevertheless, in all the categories in which a comparison was possible, the jury consistently awarded Navision better marks. The audience, made up mostly of users or independent IT specialists, also cast their ballots for Microsoft. The company representatives in attendance were not allowed to vote.

Werner Schmid, an IT expert who is specialized in software tests and is managing director of the Association for Software Testing (GPS - Gesellschaft zur Prüfung von Software) in Ulm, Germany, had organized the showdown. The members of the jury included Peter Kaufmann, from the Vorarlberg Chamber of Commerce, Thomas Bader from the GBU Unternehmensinformatik (Corporate Informatics) from Dornbirn, Walter Merkt, Piscator GmbH from Niederweningen in Switzerland, Johannes Bergsmann, Software Quality Lab from Langenstein (Austria), and ERP specialist Michael Amann from Altsch in Austria.

Two partner companies of the manufacturers who have already gathered extensive experience with the respective software showed up for the duel: SAP partner Protask from Dornbirn, where the event took place, and Kumavision, a company specializing in Microsoft Navision from Lustenau in Austria.

The tasks included handling the sequence of processes required from order placement, order acknowledgement and assembly to the delivery of a product. Prior to the actual competition, the business systems had both been fed with data on company employees, basic products and impersonal accounts.

Only the functions in the standard version were evaluated, which made the comparison of the two products more difficult for the task of “order entry via the Web shop”. Business One is currently available without the Web shop function, while Navision is equipped with such a module. As a

result, the SAP partner made do with a shop software they had developed themselves, which, however, was not able to assign a customer order to the responsible salesperson.

Sales Management

The Microsoft product was also ahead as far as sales management was concerned. Business One has only one text field for a report on a customer visit. In contrast, Navision offers a comprehensive template to collect information on customer visits, which are also displayed in the activities protocol of the sales employee. In addition, it is also possible to indicate the costs incurred for the visit, making it easier for the sales manager to determine the total costs involved in customer acquisition.

What spoke in favor of Business One was the modern interface, which, however, could not be demonstrated adequately because of the limited range of tasks set in the competition. The “Drag and Relate” function in the SAP system, for example, gives the user a convenient method of putting objects in relation to one another. When an article from the master data is dragged onto the order screen, an overview will appear, indicating the orders for which the part has been reserved. The analysis and prognosis of business opportunities was also convincing. A graph shows the customer contacts that can be expected to place orders in the future.

The two systems do not differ significantly in the core functions of financial accounting, such as invoicing or profit and loss statement; only the user prompting is designed differently. The jury was also of the same opinion, which was why the difference in points between the two ERP products was minimal in this department. Business One, however, also showed weakness here, since overviews (“Journals”), such as “Sales per Article”, have to be exported in Excel, while Navision makes it possible to already process them within a corresponding module.

A comparison of the functions for production control was deliberately left out of the test because Business One does not have the required module, which caused some people in the audience to wrinkle their brows. “How do you want to go about capacity planning?” one surprised visitor asked the Protask team. All they could say was that other SAP partners are currently working on corresponding developments. That was why the event organizer purposely limited the task to material planning with subsequent assembly. Both products put on a good showing here: they both reliably indicated when parts required to complete the assembly order were missing. The resulting screen could also be used to place orders. But of course it’s always the little things that cause problems: after the orders are placed, Business One does not automatically make sure that the minimum stocks indicated are actually on hand. The user has to use a query to do this. Navision, on the other hand, already has this convenient feature: if 20 units of an article are required, the minimum stock is 30 and there are no parts in stock, the ERP system automatically orders a total of 50 parts.

The differences between the two products became most obvious in generating reports. The teams were instructed to use the onboard tools of the ERP systems to prepare a report on the commission payments to be made to the sales representatives. The Microsoft ERP is equipped with a wizard to generate reports: it is integrated into the “Object Designer” included with the system. The tool makes it possible to conveniently select fields from tables, to determine the sorting and to define totals fields.

The user then uses a layout template to design the report, which can then be either printed out or exported to the spreadsheet program. In contrast, the “Query Assistant” (Abfrageassistent) in Business One offers far fewer functions. The reports appear in a screen template that is not very

convenient and have to be exported to Excel to put them in their proper form or to be able to print them. And that is quite surprising insofar as the SAP software does have a tool to layout forms, making it possible to prepare invoices on the screen and print them out. On the other hand, Business One was able to collect brownie points with its interface. The report view also makes it possible to show the SQL syntax of the query it is based on. The advantage: experts can easily change the query and start again.

Things really came to the crunch when the two teams of specialists were instructed to enter a new data field in the table structures. Both products support the user in doing so, whereby the Navision team came up with a more elegant solution to the problem by using the Object Designer. And the Microsoft product also has more to offer in terms of multiple languages. It was, however, necessary to change the source code before the new field would appear in these views as well. Navision is based on a proprietary programming environment. In Business One this adjustment took place on the database level, which could prove to be positive for new release updates.

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Navision dominates on all levels

Figure

Only the **functions available in the standard versions** were evaluated.

Meet requirements in ...	SAP Business One	Microsoft Navision
... sales	0,66	1,70
... material management	0,65	1,40
... assembly	0,00	1,00
... supply	1,00	1,40
...accountancy	1,05	1,40
...customizing	1,40	1,47

(Scale from +2 (the best result) to -2 (not fulfilled), 0 = task fulfilled)

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Different approaches – a mismatched duel

While Microsoft has positioned the Navision solution as a complete ERP product, SAP is marketing its software for retail companies, service providers and companies with simple production. As a result, the Walldorf, Germany, product does not currently include any production planning and control system, but SAP expects to be able to offer one soon via a software partner.

In addition, the Navision solution has already been on the market for a long time – the first users still used MS-DOS clients to operate the ERP software. Business One, on the other hand, which was originally developed in Israel, has only been actively on offer for about one year. A development environment was launched onto the market just a few days prior to the duel.

Note: This translation is based on the “Computerwoche” article, “Showdown zwischen Navision und Microsoft”, edition no. 42 as of October 17, 2003



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