

Which Project Management Software Is Best for Your Organization? by Project Assistants, Inc.



The fact that flaws exist in project software solution often tempts organizations to give up on all of the options altogether, but this would be a mistake. Way back in 1986, Harvey Levine wrote, “The project manager who is waiting for the perfect project management solution will still be waiting 10 years from now.” 26 years later, this quote still rings true. Organizations should not be scared away from viable project management solutions because of a few imperfections. The focus should be implementing the technology that best fits your organization’s processes, while minimizing the investment of the implementation process.

Now, for the comparisons. When discussing capabilities in PPM software solutions, the following functions are key:

- Project Management
- Schedules
- Collaboration, Risks and Issues
- Documents
- Reporting

- Portfolio Management
- Resource Management
- Workflow

There are different tiers of product quality and cost, and the level of complexity in your project processes will determine which investment will have the best return for your organization.

Low-Level Usage: 1-20 Users

If the project processes of your organization aren’t large and complex enough to justify a big software and consulting investment, then these tools may be your best fit. They range anywhere from free to a few thousand dollars. The downside is that each product will only be truly competent at one or two of the above functions, making them more niche products. Projity, a Software as a Service (SaaS) solution, for example, does Scheduling adequately and a little bit of Portfolio Management, but it has no other functions.

Mid-Level Usage: 20-100 Users

This level of usage justifies investment in more complex tools, including Microsoft Project Server, Daptiv and @Task. The prices for these products are in the tens of thousands. Project

Server is head-and-shoulders above the field in terms of Scheduling, surpassing even the Top-Level products like Primavera. It also—by far—has the best integration with Microsoft Project.

The biggest advantage of Project, though, is that Microsoft has a head start in the vast majority of organizations due to the vast array of easily integrable office productivity tools, like Outlook and SharePoint. There are a plethora of advantages to this: Microsoft’s visual reports feature allows you to create reports that are rendered in native Excel pivot tables; you can make screen captures that render into PowerPoint; there are specific integrations with Outlook; it uses the SQL database; etc. Also, people in all departments are generally already comfortable with using MS tools, which gets rid of much of the learning curve during implementation.

With all of these inherent advantages for Microsoft, though, you might imagine that there are reasons why competitors are able to steal business away. MS Project is the industry standard, so going with a non-MS PPM-integrated solution is rogue, but here are some reasons why companies may take the



unbeaten path:

1. Though on the surface, Microsoft's price tag is smaller (\$20k or less), Project Server 2010 requires SharePoint, which is an additional \$50,000.
2. Microsoft's main competitors, Daptiv and @Task, are SaaS products. Microsoft will close this gap at the end of this year with the release of the cloud-enabled Microsoft Project 2013 suite.
3. Though the Scheduling and integration functions are top-of-the-line, they don't have extended out-of-the-box usability in the other areas. Implementation requires using a Microsoft partner to get the full benefit of the product. In the same vein, Microsoft doesn't offer its own implementation services, so finding a partner that treats the implementation as an improvement initiative is often difficult to find. And since you're getting outside service, you have very little leverage with Microsoft when the service is undesirable. This can also be an advantage, though, if you use one of the many great partners out there.
4. The usability of the product itself is well below other mid-level products, like Daptiv and @Task, and there are a few areas where functionality isn't as good either.

In spite of these shortcomings, once Project

Server 2013 establishes itself as a SaaS product, it is likely to overtake the competitors, especially among organizations that have already absorbed the cost of SharePoint.

Enterprise Usage: 100+ Users

Project Server continues to be a big player in this range along with some very powerful tools, such as Clarity, Planview, HP and Primavera. As mentioned earlier, Project Server has been the de facto Scheduling standard for the last 20+ years, and it continues to have the advantage of being easily integrated with Microsoft's productivity tools. Scalability used to be a concern for dealing with organizations on the enterprise scale, but the 2007 release allowed for capability on this level, and Project Server 2010 improved upon that.

The competitors in this echelon are very comprehensive, covering all of the functions mentioned earlier, many of which are ready out-of-the-box. Since these solutions are so powerful, though, they often don't provide the value that was intended because of the all-encompassing scope of the rollout, and the lack of attention to the needs of the individual project organizations often are unmet. These products will cost you at least \$300,000 (often as much as a few million dollars) once you consider licensing, use of their consultants to implement the products and ongoing maintenance costs. Because of this, we

find that only a select few organizations will optimally benefit from this investment, such as large federal acquisitions, air and defense projects, etc.

Summary

For those working with such large and complex project processes that the \$300,000+ price tag is far-outweighed by the assurance of projects running effectively, then Planview is the most comprehensive tool out there. For those with a tight budget who already have SharePoint, Project Server is the best option. If you have a reasonable budget and have 20-100 users, then Daptiv and @Task are better products for the time being, but they may be overtaken by SaaS-enabled Project Server 2013. At that point, it may just be a straight price comparison between the mid-level products, since SharePoint will no longer be necessary.

If you have a tight budget and don't have SharePoint, then you can combine the desktop version of MS Project with one or two low-level products. If your organization works within a small geographic scope, runs less than ten projects at a time and doesn't measure its budget in the millions, then your best bet is to go with low investments, free tools or nothing at all.