



What's New

Happy New Year! This is a time to reflect on the successes in 2024 and the goals/plans for 2025. We continue to look for opportunities to Streamline, Standardize, and make our systems Bullet Proof as we serve our clients.

We're happy to announce that our hourly rates will not change in 2025! In the Azure hosting, only the per user rate has changed. A few other services have increases. We sent a letter to each of you, so call with questions.

Thank you to those who were praying for Larry's hip replacement; he's doing great and plans to be back on the bike January 1st!

- Catherine Wendt

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January 2025



Construction – Considerations for 2025

In the Phoenix Business Journal December 20-26, 2024 issue, there was an article summarizing a panel discussion with several companies deeply involved in Construction. In this case, it was specific to the Arizona market, but many of these comments and considerations are appropriate for all those in construction across the country.

There was an interesting comment about the 'fourth Industrial Revolution' and how it is transforming construction through the integration of more advanced technology and the adoption of sustainability practices.

With continued tight labor markets, companies have been very focused on developing and training their work force. This includes field training, but also helping assess staff interest in future growth with the company. The goal is to bring the younger generation to the construction workforce, but also to help them grow and stay in the industry. Having and sharing a growth plan, communicating what that looks

like, and setting reasonable timelines has been very important. When this has been communicated, coaching and regular check-ins are important. No one wants to over-state expectations then find that the employee is not ready for the new role and may fail.

As for the office, several of the firms said they have some amount of flexible work opportunities from home. More often, they're being flexible with start and stop times to accommodate traffic, kids' school drop offs, and other work-life balance issues. In-person collaboration remains very important, keeping the projects productive. Having some remote options seems to have been well received by the companies represented in this panel.

Back to the technology comments: there were references to technology tools like BIM modeling (we held a webinar on this several months ago) to address efficiency and collaboration. Taking advantage of integrated accounting software for project

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management, banking, fleet management, and credit cards for expenses, are all tools to bring efficiency and accuracy, saving time at several levels. This includes the field as well as data collection and reconciliation for the office and management.

There were some interesting comments about AI (Artificial Intelligence), as well. The Visual Designers have been using AI for quite a while, but as an industry, construction has been a slow adopter of AI. Simple tools such as Copilot to review long contracts, record and summarize meetings, and draft communication updates are some easy ways to get others engaged with these tools. It's not only about encouraging their use; your clients will have higher expectations regarding what is provided, in what detail, and how quickly. To meet these expectations, we'll have to use these tools!

There was a section about the R&D tax changes in the last few years. The tax treatment changes have been very unfortunate, greatly impacting when expenses can be realized and what

taxes are due on income in the meantime. Many professionals really thought this would have been resolved by now. Add in the bonus depreciation that's going away while interest rates are high, and it's had a huge impact to growth and planning.

Another hot topic for this panel was succession planning, and they had a few nuances I hadn't heard before. There's the typical succession planning, who will step into which roles, but also what was termed 'emergency succession planning.' If a key person won the lottery or retired tomorrow, what would the ripple effect be in the company? Who would step in and where? What gaps would appear and how would they be addressed? Even in the succession conversation, systems, software, and technology are big components as we consider new ways to work and get things done.

Nurturing younger generation workers within the construction industry, now and for their career; leveraging technology for efficiency and accuracy; incorporating software solutions that integrate for the field and office

functions; planning for succession in the short and long term; all of these are part of the strategic growth ingredients for the construction industry and your company's growth.

Nothing here is a 'one and done' item. These take time, planning, discussion, discovery, and an investment of time and money. We would welcome the chance to walk with you on this journey! - CMW

"Dance like no one is watching. Sing like no one is listening. Love like you've never been hurt and live like it's heaven on Earth."

— Mark Twain

Nudge: The Final Edition by Richard Thaler, Cass Sunstein

In general, a nudge is something that gently moves you in a specific direction. We have them all around us. These can be used for good or for bad. In this book, the authors tackle the general idea of a nudge (good things), or its opposite, sludge (dark things). The chapters have some specific topics where the idea of a 'nudge' has been used to move people's choices in a specific direction.

I found this book challenging. On the one hand, it is fascinating to look at the idea of nudging people in specific directions. It's also sobering since someone is deciding which



direction is best, or most preferred, and the morality of that is a factor. Also, I was distracted when thinking of how we might be nudging people to

Book Nook

specific solutions; where we are being nudged as a business or individuals; and how we might use some of these tools to help others; did we send them in the right direction?

One topic tackled was school cafeterias. Who doesn't want good nutrition for our students? Where the foods are placed, how they're presented, and what is offered can greatly impact selection. For those responsible for our children's nutrition, what about the potential to be influenced by discounts on specific items, personal preferences imposed on the students, and so on. Another big topic in the book is the selection of retirement programs, opting in or out, default choices, and even the risk that what were good options may become corrupt over time. Much to think about from the consumer perspective as well as the business one. Recommended! - CMW



Important Updates

- Are you traveling out of the country? Let us know so we can open up access while you're there, then lock it back down when you return.
- If you purchase hardware through us, we have sales tax relationships with quite a few states, but not all. A reminder that if we do not collect sales tax, you are responsible to pay the Use Tax to your state.

Microsoft Licenses—More Changes

Back in February 2023, Microsoft made some significant changes in its licensing. We held a webinar for all of our clients to talk through the changes and their impact. We also sent each of you a list of the licenses you had at that time for you to review. Looks like we might be doing this again; here's what we know.

Microsoft has announced that beginning April 1st, any renewing or new licenses will change from the annual commitment with monthly payments, to an annual commitment with annual payments. Or, you can choose an annual commitment with monthly payments tacking on a 5% increase!

We're not excited about this structure change for quite a few reasons. Some of you may choose to pay monthly and receive the 5% increase; others may choose to pay the year upfront and lock in the existing price.

The good news is that many of you have licenses that renew in February and March, ahead of this change. In the

meantime, we're gathering more details and we'll share updates in our newsletter and through email to our primary contact(s). — CMW

MFA Everywhere, Please!

One of our clients was signed into Microsoft Edge with their personal gmail account, which did not have MFA. From this browser, the gmail account had access to the business accounts and log in information.

If you sign into your browser with a personal account, then save work credentials like bank passwords, vendor passwords, and similar, then they break the personal account, guess what? They now have access to all the business credentials!

Two easy steps here: When you're working, sign in with your work credentials and be sure they have MFA in place; if you choose to or have to sign in with personal credentials, be sure to setup MFA on that personal account. Not sure how to do this? We can help!! - CMW

ROI on Cyber Security? Yes!

At last year's TUG (The User Group) event, one of the breakout sessions was about cyber security for construction companies. Rather than attend the software-specific breakout for that slot, I decided to attend this one.

I was very surprised at how many around the table had experienced a breach and even paid a ransom! Many were willing to share the details of the events, and very much wanted to share how they added tools to avoid something like this happening again! These were mostly Controllers and financial managers, so it was surprising to hear them say that every dollar they invest in Cyber Security is considered a return on investment (ROI). What if you experienced a phishing attack and all your data was encrypted? Investing in cyber security is a sound investment! - CMW



Shiny New Gadget Of The Month:



Typhur Wireless Meat Thermometer

Thinking you already have quite a few gadgets in the kitchen? You may want to add this one; a wireless meat thermometer. It is recommended by USA Today, Bon Appetit, America's Test Kitchen, and more.

The Typhur digital thermometer can measure doneness and even predict when your cook will be done with its intelligent algorithm. Each probe undergoes three rounds of testing and calibration during production to ensure perfect accuracy.

The Typhur Sync Series comes with one or two probes, and the Gold Series is available in dual or quad. This includes the Smart Base, LCD Display, improved stability, NIST-Certified Accuracy. It can even connect to your wifi with Bluetooth 5.4. It's waterproof, dishwasher-friendly, is easy to grip with T-shaped handles, 50 hours of battery life, 2-minute charge of probes that provides two hours of battery life. The box includes the Device Base, the Probe(s), a USB-C Cable, and the User Manual. It's 5.08" (L) x 0.22" (dia).

There are some great videos on their website and even a wireless coverage map! They were running some specials so you'll have to check their website for pricing, Typhur.com.



CONSTRUCTION CORNER



Overhead Payroll – Streamlining Entry

Many of our clients use our Field Integrated Time (FIT) System to collect time from the job sites, the shop, the service technicians. For many of these clients, the office also turns in their time through FIT, but not all. And the most common exclusion seems to be the owners and senior management.

With the field time automated, we wanted to share some options to speed up entering non-field time. There are two good options depending on how many team members are not participating in the FIT process. Both involve using templates.

If you only have a few people to hand enter, you could setup a template for each person in the 5-2-2 screen. Setup the record without dates (since those will always change), then choose File, Save as Template, and name it after the person. Each pay period, choose File, Load Template, and choose the person. Update the date fields and Save.

If you have quite a few people, it would be faster to use the template feature in the 5-5-1 screen. Setup the screen with the list of employees, the standard 8 hours, their hourly rate if they're not salary, and fill in the rest of the fields. With the grid completed, choose File, Save as template, and give

LOTS of changes in various states. Things to look for include new rules for vacation and sick time; new requirements for retirement plan offerings; update rates for Paid Family Leave, Disability, and State Unemployment; and more!

it a name. To enter time, choose the day of the week, File, Load Template, and the grid will fill in with everyone's name. Update as needed for vacation and holiday time and save. Repeat for the other days of the week. When you create the Timecards from this screen, all of these people will be part of it.

'With the field time automated, we wanted to share some options to speed up entering non-field time.'

If you can encourage everyone to use FIT, these templates aren't necessary. But if the office using FIT would be new, let's get on a short call and talk about the work flow. FIT requires a job and we have a great workflow in place that strips the job upon import. There's more to this, so please call if you're interested! -CMW

Departmental Financials: We Have a Special Tool

Many of our clients use Departments in Sage 100 Contractor, as do we. This is a great way to pull financials for specific departments to track profitability on those jobs or service work. Sometimes different departments have different gross margin goals, or one type of work might be a feeder for other types of jobs.

The Departmental Income Statements in the 2-3 screen are great. When you choose the one that displays the selected period on the left and year-to-date on the right, it also includes the percentage

calculations.

We often get the question, 'Is there a report that would let me combine some but not all of the departments?' Several clients have a couple of departments in one geographic locations, and in another location, similar departments. They'd like to look at the whole location, as well as the individual departments. Well, not in S100C, but we have a custom report that pulls the data right from S100C and lets you select which departments to combine. It's a separate icon on the desktop. Choose the departments to include and the reports are presented in Excel, ready for review and sharing. Interested? Let the office know and we'll provide some additional details. -CMW

FIT System Add-On's

Our Field Integrated Time (FIT) System is designed specifically for contractors using Sage 100 Contractor. This fully-integrated time collection program is a huge time-saver!

Many of our clients are using the Core FIT System for capturing hours, expenses, and time punches, and that's all they need. Others are looking for a bit more, and we have it!

Our latest add-on is the Daily Field Report module. We also have a Job Scheduling module, Employee Timecard Sign-off add-on, and more.

We've done some pretty interesting customizations to meet specific needs. We've created a custom job startup form, custom employee evaluation forms, and many more. How can we help You!?
- CMW



M365 Education Station

Do you have really expensive M365 licenses, or really Cheap everything else?

Most of us LOVE when things are fully integrated. Get in your car and your cell phone automatically connects so you can continue your call. From anywhere, check on the garage door, the temperature in the house, the home alarm system, and so on. Now apartment key cards are used to get into an apartment building, the garage, the actual apartment, and the connecting tunnels? Larry just installed some software that allows him to see and respond to text messages right from his computer!

So we're pretty surprised when clients are using disconnected services with work arounds. We'll find companies with Microsoft email licenses, but using (and paying for) Zoom for meetings. Sometimes it's Drop Box (hopefully a company license) to share documents instead of SharePoint which is already included in even the Basic license level.

Back to Basics: Doing More with the Tools You Have

One focus for Microsoft has been to create a very seamless platform of tools that work together, talk together, and are easy to navigate. The other big focus has been security!

By leveraging the Microsoft 365 licenses you already own, you can save money, but more than that, you can truly keep your teams connected with the tools they need.

Starting with **M365 Basic**, you have email but this license includes Teams for meeting and chat; and SharePoint for access to shared documents and files.

Step it up to **M365 Standard** and you have Word, Excel, and the Office Suite available on up to five (5) devices! That's your cell, laptop, desktop, and maybe a tablet with one to spare. Share these Office documents over Teams. Collaborate in these documents 'live' on a call.

SharePoint versus Network Drives

One of THE biggest wins is moving shared drives on the server to SharePoint. No need to fire up a VPN and deal with security on the server. With some care and planning, the shared folders can be moved to SharePoint, available to your team members from anywhere with an internet connection!

With the same backup license you have on your email, the SharePoint and OneDrive files are backed up. This can reduce backup expenses for the server, or maybe even the server itself! We do a LOT of these and know the tricks!

Our Favorite: M365 Premium

At this level, Terminal Service/Remote Access licenses are included so you can log into the Azure environment for Sage 100 Contractor, Sage Estimating, Sage Paperless, and more. When you're in the Azure environment, Email, Teams, SharePoint, and OneDrive, all seamlessly integrate. They're all Microsoft products and they are optimized to work together.

The M365 Premium license has additional security available including advanced Multi-Factor Authorization (MFA). There are a host of security tools to help manage the users in your tenant. This includes standardizing new equipment configurations, security configurations, and more.

Add Intune for Mobile Device Management. There's even encrypted email, too.

The Latest Craze!

If you're ready, check out Teams Voice! From the business perspective, calls can be answered from remote locations (like during a snow storm). When calling out from your cell phone, Teams, or a desk phone designed to work with Teams, the caller will see the company's number as the caller. BTW, this works great when calling the credit card company since they are looking at the caller ID to help verify who is calling!

We held a great webinar about this Voice over IP (VoIP) service, Teams Phones. We use it ourselves, so we knew quite a few of the questions that would come up, and we covered the rest at the end of the webinar. If you'd like a link to the webinar, just call the office or email CustomerSupport@syscon-inc.com with your request and we'll get it to you.



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How Did They Do It? Gaspar's Construction

Back in 1973, Rich Gaspar set aside his career teaching math and jumped into the handyman service business. His wife Cathy went back to school focused on her Design degree. Together, they grew into providing residential remodeling services. Like many family businesses, the children all helped with the business, too. After receiving her degree in Human Resources, their daughter Sarah joined the company in 2002, becoming an owner in 2008.

In that same year 2008, Gaspar's signed up for Sandler Training, which has helped them with their steady growth. Sarah credits the company-wide training with its focus on community, building trust with homeowners, and great relationships with each other. It's stressful to tear people's houses apart during a remodeling project! Communication and great team members make all the difference.

Hiring Project Leads has been a challenge over the last year. Sarah highlighted that it's super important to hire the right person, and that takes time.

Last year had some technology challenges, as well. The Gaspar's team has been

working with Syscon to address these, starting with the stabilization of SharePoint, moving S100C to Azure hosting, and exploring Power BI for report automation.



Sarah Henry,
Owner

Although the ease of remote access has been a winner across her team, Sarah is especially happy with how quickly she can have technology requests addressed and answered. When things aren't working as desired, knowing she can call, talk with someone, and receive a quick turnaround has been amazing.

Sarah and her team are looking forward to 2025, hoping the remodeling industry continues to be busy, and all signs are that it will be. - CMIV

Fast Facts

Location: Greater Seattle, WA

Specialty: Design, Remodel, Handyman

Founded: 1973

Professional Affiliations: Master Builders Association; Women's Presidents Org



Read more at www.syscon-inc.com/how-did-they-do-it

Are you interested in having your story featured? Let's talk!

Upcoming Events

Event: How to Prepare for 1099's at Yearend, webinar

Date: Wednesday, January 8

Time: 11:30 a.m. CST

Register: www.syscon-inc.com/events

Event: Ditch Paper Timecards!, webinar

Date: Thursday, January 16

Time: 1 p.m. CST

Register: www.syscon-inc.com/events

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We love this stuff!

We are committed to helping businesses use technology to run their organization successfully and profitably.

This monthly publication provided courtesy of Catherine Wendt, President of Syscon Inc.

