

# Say goodbye to Excel

What are the tools that keep a project afloat and on track? This month Malcolm Raymond from the Enex TestLab looks at project management software.



Regardless of the amount of programs available to assist in project management, many people are still taking a very informal, unstructured approach to managing projects.

Sure, a very simple project could be represented by a basic timeline on the back of an envelope or on a whiteboard, but what happens when times/dates change and a staff member (ie resource) that you've selected for a task is not available on a particular day?

When tasks get more complex it seems managers make a move into software tools such as an Excel spreadsheet to help with some of the planning and scheduling. However, for even quite simple projects there are now a number of project management software solutions available that will greatly assist in the planning and tracking of the project so that the manager is aware of the project status at all times and can make adjustments when issues arise.

When you start to consider large projects that require a significant amount of investment, the use of software project management tools are necessary to help maximise the project return on investment and lower the project risk.

Additionally, many large corporations undertake projects with geographically dispersed team members: with the move to outsourcing in many industries, the team members may even be in different countries. In these situations additional features need to be provided by the project management tool, and several products also have a range of work collaboration features.

#### WHAT IS PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

Project management can be defined as a methodical approach to planning and guiding project processes from start to finish. Normally the processes go through five stages: initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and closing.

Project management can be applied to almost any type of project and, in particular, it is widely used to control the complex processes of software development projects. The planning stage is critical in order to complete a project within a certain timeframe, usually with defined stages and with designated resources. Normally project planning divides the activity into stages such as setting objectives (that should be measurable), identifying deliverables, planning the schedule and making supporting plans. These supporting plans may be related to: human resources, communication methods and risk management.

For this review we have looked at projects from @Task, Computer Associates, eProject, Microsoft, Primavera and TASKey. We have examined these products based on their abilities to manage such things as project tasks, costs and resources, as well as aid communication and collaboration between all parties.



**@TASK**

We were one of the first users to get a glimpse of the latest version of the @Task Enterprise Project Management software package. Version 4.0 is due for release this month and includes a number of new features over its predecessor v3.5.

Of note are the improvements to the user interface, which contributed to the product's ease of use. One of these new features is the tabbed navigation interface, where tabs can be customised to display only the required data—the interface provides breadcrumb or trail navigation


in which each level in the context is hyper-linked enabling the user to return to previous application screens.

Also worth noting is @Task's ability to sort lists in ascending or descending order and improved information architecture.

@Task is offered as both a hosted solution or it can be installed on the user's system. We had access to the hosted system so installation wasn't required, but as described in the documentation it is database and server platform independent.

As the product has been built to open standards data can be used with other processes and applications and its modular build also allows for extensibility and development. We ran @Task on both the Firefox and Internet Explorer 6 browsers with no compatibility problems.


The opening or "Home" screen design is




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 Enex TestLab is an independent testing institution based in Melbourne, Victoria, performing IT product testing for clients such as IBM, Coles-Myer, and a wide variety of government bodies. In the Labs' testing for T&B, they are in direct contact with the clients supplying products and the magazine is responsible for the full cost of the testing. The findings are the Labs' own—only the specifications of the products to be tested are provided by the magazine.




|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Product</b> | @Task v4  |
| <b>Vendor</b>  | @Task   |
| <b>Phone</b>   | +1 801 373 3266   |
| <b>Web</b>     | www.attask.com  |
| <b>Price</b>   | Install option: US\$350 per user<br>Hosted option: US\$250 per user—per year plus 20 percent support, discounts for over 500 users. |

**Interoperability**  ½  
Good feature set, excellent user interface, runs on most servers and supports the major databases. Client works with major browsers. A rich set of APIs provides integration with any application on any OS platform.

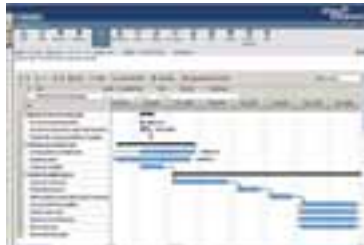
**Futureproofing**   
Very scalable and can be run in a clustered environment. Hosted version automatically upgraded.

**ROI**   
Relatively low cost with the option to pay as you use through the hosted system, which also reduces infrastructure costs.


**Service**   
No local support but forum/FAQ support access, phone support, and on-site training/consulting available for additional cost.

**Rating** ★★★★★


clean and uncluttered and includes four quick link drop downs that provide very quick access to key information of: "My"—Documents, Issues, Projects etc; "Find"—Companies, Documents, Issues etc; "Create"—Access level, Company, Project, User etc; and "Recent" which contains a list of recent Projects, Tasks,




|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Product</b> | eProject   |
| <b>Vendor</b>  | eProject<br>Aust dist. Bluenova  |
| <b>Phone</b>   | +1 206 341 9117<br>08 9474 2990  |
| <b>Web</b>     | www.eproject.com<br>www.bluenova.com.au                                    |
| <b>Price</b>   | Install option US\$395 per user<br>Hosted option US\$39.50 per user/month. |

**Interoperability**   
Good feature set, good user interface, runs on Windows servers and MS SQL database. Client works with major browsers. Web Services APIs for further integration.

**Futureproofing**   
Very scalable from 10 to 10,000 users. Hosted version automatically upgraded.

**ROI**   
Slightly more expensive than @Task but still good value hosted version reduces infrastructure costs.

**Service**   
Local training/consultancy support all other support from US.


**Rating** ★★★★★


Issues, Timesheets, Users and Documents. A main navigational menu is provided on the left-hand side of the screen and enables selection of Application Home, My Profile, Project Management, Resource Management, Help Desk and Setup. The Application Home has a set of quick links to My Profile,



|                |                             |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Product</b> | MS Project                  |
| <b>Vendor</b>  | Microsoft                   |
| <b>Phone</b>   | 13 20 58                    |
| <b>Web</b>     | www.microsoft.com/australia |
| <b>Price</b>   | Single user \$1033          |

**Interoperability**  ½  
Runs on Windows 2000 or XP, good user interface.

**Futureproofing**   
Project Professional is a standalone product but can be upgraded by using Project Server.

**ROI**   
Relatively expensive compared with the other systems especially when upgrading to enterprise capability.

**Service**   
Local support from Microsoft.

**Rating** ★★★

My Tasks and My Projects. Under the Project Management section, selected from the main left hand menu, we found that setting up project team members and assigning project permission and tasks was quite straightforward. Other controls include a Timeline button that enables the selection of a



|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Product</b> | Open Workbench/Clarity   |
| <b>Vendor</b>  | Computer Associates  |
| <b>Phone</b>   | 02 9937 0500   |
| <b>Web</b>     | www.ca.com   |
| <b>Price</b>   | Open Workbench: free.<br>Clarity: 10 users \$85,000<br>500 users \$500,000 |

**Interoperability** Runs on Windows and Unix servers and Oracle or MS SQL databases. Client works on Windows or Mac. Good user interface.

**Futureproofing** Standalone product with good feature set. Can only be upgraded using Clarity.

**ROI** Open Workbench is free but investment required to upgrade to Clarity is quite high.

**Service** No local support for Open Workbench but active user and developer forum. Clarity support from CA at 20 percent of price.

**Rating** ★★★½



|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Product</b> | Primavera   |
| <b>Vendor</b>  | Primavera Australia   |
| <b>Phone</b>   | 03 9826 9292  |
| <b>Web</b>     | www.primavera-aus.com   |
| <b>Price</b>   | Average per-user cost for 100+ users, assuming typical mix of modules, \$1000 |

**Interoperability** Runs on Unix and Windows servers and MDE, Oracle and MS SQL databases. Client Windows, or major browsers for MyPrimavera. Very good user interface.

**Futureproofing** Very good scalability up to 10,000—plus users

**ROI** Slightly more expensive but has very good feature set, very robust and proven performance.

**Service** Local support includes 24x7 “follow-the-sun” support, access to free upgrades for 20 percent.

**Rating** ★★★★★



|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Product</b> | TASKey Team  |
| <b>Vendor</b>  | TASKey   |
| <b>Phone</b>   | 02 6296 1150   |
| <b>Web</b>     | www.taskey.com   |
| <b>Price</b>   | Enterprise: based on 50/50 split—supervisors to workers and includes MS Exchange Integration:<br>10 users \$13,431,<br>500 users \$186,868<br>ASP version \$25 setup fee per-user then \$25 per-user per-month |

**Interoperability** Runs on Windows 2000/2003 Server and MS SQL, Oracle or Firebird databases. Client works with major browsers. Very good user interface.

**Futureproofing** Very scalable through support load balanced Web servers, clustered database servers, clustered Exchange servers.

**ROI** Good value offered through hosted version. Installed version is about the same as the other products.

**Service** Free support for the first year then a support charge of 25 percent. Local support

**Rating** ★★★½

Gantt chart, a calendar and resource grid. You can also recalculate timelines and replan the project from this section.

The Team button enables the project manager to view the Team, search for and add team members and to search and add roles. The Attachments button provides a number of features

that assist in the project documentation. These include the ability to prepare, search and view notes, prepare and view documents as well as set up new directories and documents.

Documents can be shared between users and document version control lets users checkout, review and modify (based on permission)

documents with the old version still being maintained. The Import/Export button gives the project manager control to attach a template, save a project as a template, copy a project and export in MS Project format.

A number of resource management features are provided and include functions to manage

user schedules, job functions, skills and work.

In addition the user/manager can create, approve and manage time sheets. Other resource management functions include job roles for users, capacity planning—giving resource utilisation reports identifying resource conflicts—and capacity requirements.

Setting up a new project was quite simple, this could be user defined or built from an existing template. This section also provides a button to Import a MS Project which displays a seven-step Import Wizard. The Wizard is well designed, clearly indicating what each step was and where you are in the process. We imported a couple of very simple Microsoft Project worksheets, and while they were imported easily they did seem to lose some date information, but this was easy to change, and you need to do this for a new project anyway.

Overall @Task is a fully featured project management package that covers the gamut of requirements for enterprise-level work. We were particularly impressed with the effort @Task has made in developing a standards-based, versatile architecture.

## EPROJECT

eProject is available as both a hosted and licensed solution—we chose the hosted option and were up and running without installation.

Rather than being a straight project management tool, eProject has gone one step further and prepared a number of “bundled” products that include templates tailored to suit key business requirements. These “in-a-box” solutions include Project Management Office, IT Governance, Project Portfolio Management, Sarbanes-Oxley, Six Sigma and Advanced Reporting. Some of these products may be of use to organisations that want to apply more methodology and process to their business practices and also assist in moving towards achieving better governance and compliance.

When first starting eProject, a Dashboard page provides a summary of key sections of information that can be tailored to suit the individual user requirements, such as providing key summary points for executive review.

We found the interface to be clean and quite intuitive—the left hand side panel or quick dashboard includes links to the user start page, a search capability to items, workspace names and users, a Navigator or tree representation of projects/task, workspace

creation for users with administrator rights and the user’s personal calendar.

A project workspace can either be established from scratch or created using templates available from the main horizontal tool bar. For our review we used a New Product Development template supplied with eProject. The original template is customised and when saved it appears in the Navigator.

Assigning resources is a breeze—the Members button on the toolbar enables you to search for and select people to be involved in the project as well as assign their roles. Once assigned, the team members are sent an e-mail notifying them of the project and their role—a very handy feature.

By selecting Resources on the toolbar a team resources bar graph can be displayed that shows



the availability for each person selected with their availability colour coded to show if the person is allocated (blue), has additional availability (white) or is over allocated (red).

Finally, specific tasks can be assigned to the team members and they will be sent another e-mail asking them to login to eProject to view their task and their resource status is updated.

Alternatively, by viewing the project Gantt chart, team members can be assigned to tasks using a drag-and-drop process. Task dependencies can also be set this way. In addition, a baseline view can be created from the Gantt chart that enables the project manager to track and compare the project progress against the original schedule.

All projects have a range of documents associated with them and eProject provides a document-management feature that allows project documents to be uploaded for

viewing, version tracking and also approval. Team members can also modify documents to provide some collaboration.

Once a project has commenced, eProject has a number of features that help to manage the project. Overall eProject has a great user interface and feature set, and a good price although it does not display quite as much interoperability as some of the other products here.

## MICROSOFT PROJECT

Project has been around for a long time and is used by many project managers. All of the other products tested in this review have some form of import/export capability to Project.

We are reviewing the standalone Project Professional but Microsoft also has an enterprise version that contains collaboration features for working with remote workers, timesheets and so on. To take advantage of these features Project Professional has to be used with Server 2003, Web Access Point and Sharepoint. The enterprise solution has been put together from a number of other existing products which means that the interface does appear to be somewhat inconsistent as you move through the various components.

The standalone version of Project has seen many changes over the years, many of which have been introduced to increase ease of use. The Project screen has a Microsoft Office look and feel with the added buttons that are project-management specific. In particular, buttons are provided to select a number of functions under the headings: Tasks, Resources, Track and Report. Each of these buttons has a drop-down list offering a wide range of alternatives.

A Project Guide pane is included on the left-hand side of the screen and includes instructions or tools to assist the user with many of the common tasks that a project manager might want to undertake. As an example, clicking on the “Define the project” link invokes a short three-step wizard to set up the project.

Because Project was only provided in a standalone version it doesn’t actually meet the scenario criteria, however, Project has been a market leader for a long time and should not be disregarded.

## OPEN WORKBENCH

Originally developed as an open-source product, Open Workbench has been taken over by Computer Associates (CA) as part of its purchase of

Niku, an IT management and governance software vendor. Although Open Workbench doesn't provide some of the more advanced collaborative and other features required under our test scenario it was included in our review as it can be used with the CA Clarity product to provide an Enterprise solution.

T&B invited CA to submit Clarity for review, however, CA declined stating: "Because of the breadth and depth of the solution and the myriad of configuration options, CA does not provide evaluation copies of this software." CA did, however, provide a demonstration of the product.

Being an open-source product, Open Workbench has gained a lot of support and its site reports there have been nearly 65,000 downloads of the product. While there are similarities between Microsoft Project and Open Workbench, the fundamental difference between the products is that Project is task driven, and Open Workbench is resource driven.

Open Workbench, in common with many other open-source packages, has no formal support—you need to purchase it separately. However, there is an active forum group that goes a long way to resolving problems that novice (and some experienced users) might have, and good documentation provides product description and usage information.

In common with many of the other packages reviewed here, Open Workbench is able to import Microsoft Project files. The interface is clean with major selection groups down the left hand side including Favourites, Planning, Executing, Controlling and Filters & Sorts. The Favourites provides the selection of project views and includes Gantt Chart, Critical Path Method (CPM) Network and the Phase Level Gantt, which is similar to the standard Gantt except that it displays only the phases in a project, and not all tasks in the project's Work Breakdown Structure (WBS).

Open Workbench has an Auto Schedule

feature that calculates the work on a task to fit the availability of the person to undertake the task, even if the person is allocated to multiple projects. This is a major difference to Microsoft Project where the task is shifted to the next available time that the resource can complete the entire task.

In order to meet the scenario for this review it would be necessary to use CA's Clarity product, which provides enterprise collaboration features through a central database. Although we were unable to physically review Clarity, through the demonstration we were very impressed with the wide-ranging features that it offers. Clarity is a Project Portfolio Management Solution that enables organisations to effectively manage project portfolios.

Overall, Open Workbench is a great choice for readers who are just putting a toe into the project management water as it has good features, is free and has a great growth path due to the Clarity enterprise system.

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| Product   | @Task Project Management Software   | Computer Associates (CA)  | eProject, Project Management Software  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Distributor</b>                              | @Task   | CA  | Bluenova   |
| <b>Accessibility</b>                            | Runs on any operating system that supports Java.  | Browser based   | 100% Browser Based   |
| <b>Calendar support</b>                         | Collaborative and Multiple work calendars   | Yes at a project and resource level   | Native project calendar supports I-Calendar format and Outlook synchronization   |
| <b>Client OS supported</b>                      | All OS/hosted   | Windows and Macintosh   | Browser based  |
| <b>Collaboration</b>                            | Web based, with features such as automated, manual notifications, audit trails, approval process.                                   | Through browser based project and resource modules and Clarity core module  | Document management with version control, threaded discussions, polling, news boards, workflow                                     |
| <b>Database support</b>                         | Oracle, Microsoft SQL, MySQL  | Oracle, Microsoft SQL   | Microsoft SQL  |
| <b>Deployment options</b>                       | Installed enterprise version hosted by client. Hosted enterprise version hosted by @Task  | Use CA resources, train internal resources or a mixture of internal and external  | On demand (hosted software as a service or customer site installed)  |
| <b>Document management features</b>             | All docs version control, document preview, check in/check out, security controlled.  | Integrated document management at a project and system level  | Version control, check in/check out, version retention, approval routing, zip file upload, thumbnail preview, item level security. |
| <b>File types handled</b>                       | All   | All   | All  |
| <b>Import/export capability</b>                 | Import/Export of MS Project .xml and .mpp. TSV and CSV exports of any lists in the application.                                     | Via Clarity XML gateway   | Zip file import/export for documents, .csv for most other data elements. MSFT Project sync option.                                 |
| <b>Integration with enterprise applications</b> | All functionality in the UI is available on any platform, any language, from local or remote host.                                  | Most Clarity implementations integrate to Financial and HR systems via out XML Open Gateway                                   | Active Directory, MSFT Outlook Sync, MSFT Project Sync. Web Services API's for other integration.                                  |
| <b>Issue management features</b>                | Help Desk feature enables each project to be activated to track issues and customised to capture information.                       | Yes, using PMBOK rules  | Native issue tracking with assignments, status, and user definable fields.   |
| <b>Mobility solutions</b>                       | Hosted. WAP enabled for cell phone accessibility  | Clarity client is native Web  | Outlook sync for tasks and calendar  |
| <b>Portfolio management features</b>            | Projects, tasks, issues and financials in exec views. Milestone report, cost, budget roll ups, progress status across all projects. | Portfolio Manager module able to customise portfolio analysis portlets  | Portfolio dashboards and scorecard for aggregation   |
| <b>Reporting formats/options</b>                | html, flash, .tsv, .csv, MS Projects, saved searches, any external reporting system like Crystal Reports through Web Services APIs  | Clarity comes with native reports that can be modified or new reports built.  | Canned Reports. Ad Hoc Reports, Crystal Reports. Excel, .pdf, .csv output put options.   |
| <b>Resource management</b>                      | Detailed resource allocation reports for projects, tasks, and issues.   | Resource planner module includes resource finder, capacity planning, resource requisitioning and skills management components | Full resource demand and capacity planning by resource type and name. Tracks actual versus estimates.                              |
| <b>Scalability</b>                              | Horizontally scalable and can be run in a clustered environment.  | From 15 to over 20,000 end users  | From 10 to 10,000 users  |
| <b>Security</b>                                 | User access level gives rights to all functional areas. Custom scopes can also be defined further                                   | Security is role based  | Item level security. Role based permissions. Fully customisable roles and security parameters                                      |
| <b>Server OS supported</b>                      | Windows, Unix, Linux, OS X- Non-Platform Specific.  | Windows, AIX, HP-UX   | Windows 2000 and 2003  |
| <b>Timesheet</b>                                | Timesheets supported and are customisable   | Yes   | Native integrated timesheets with automatic project and task data display. Real time updates to schedule.                          |
| <b>Web client</b>                               | All   | Yes   | Browser based.   |
| <b>Workflow support</b>                         | Flexible workflow. Automated notifications, advanced dependency structures for projects and tasks.                                  | Yes   | Integrated workflow—customisable by module.  |



| Primavera   | MS Project  | TASKey TEAM Technology   |
|---|---|--|
| Primavera Australia   | Microsoft Australia   | TASKey   |
| Flexible, configurable user interface   | Fully supports Windows accessibility features   | Not fully compliant  |
| Project, company, role, user based, shift support, etc.   | Extensible calendar support through defined working hours, can be associated with individual resources or groups                                    | Users maintain their own calendar based on their ability to contribute   |
| Windows 2000, 2003 and XP   | Windows 2000 or later   | IE browser based   |
| Primavera Web browser based project workspaces become a hub for the entire team, discussions, news and e-mail integration | Shared workspaces allow users to store files centrally with others. Based on Windows SharePoint services  | Matrix management capability with full task and team coordination from portfolio to action/ToDo level                    |
| MSDE, Oracle, Microsoft SQL   | Microsoft SQL, Oracle   | MS SQL, Oracle, Firebird   |
| Configurable to meet technical, process, maturity needs   | Standalone, or installed enterprise version using Project Server  | Enterprise (internally hosted) or ASP (On-demand) hosted by TASKey   |
| Manage work products & documents, upload/download, checkin/check out, version control, view history                       | Shared workspaces allow users to store files and other documents centrally with others.   | URL hyperlinks to documents in task context. Can be linked to popular document management systems                        |
| Primavera native file formats, MPX, MPP   | Project, CSV, Text, Excel, WebPage, XML   | All IE MIME supported file types   |
| Various: eg. MS Project (MPP,MPX,XML,XLS, XER,P3), MS Excel   | Import tasks from Outlook and Excel   | XML, MS Project (import), CSV Files (financial and resource information)   |
| API supplied on request.  | Microsoft Office Project Server 2003 required for enterprise intergration, connectors available to LOB systems                                      | Integrated with Microsoft Outlook via Exchange   |
| Create/View Project Issues, Configurable Issues Portlet, Issues Graphics, Email notification                              | Shared workspaces allow users to store files and other documents centrally with others.   | Issues are handled in the same context as the work being done. Issues are fully integrated into task and team management |
| 3rd party app. enables read/write access on any mobile device   | Microsoft Project solution providers offer a range of add ons   | Operates on mobile devices with Microsoft CE Outlook   |
| Automatic Project & Resources Portfolios, Side-by-Side Portfolio Comparisons, range of graphs, View ROI data              | Microsoft Office Project Server 2003 required for Portfolio management features   | Concurrently controls multiple strategies, project, tasks and teams. Automatic real-time progress reporting              |
| Native report writer/editor, 100+ template reports, WYSIWYG graphic reports   | Predefined reports for task, resource, assignment, or cost information you want to share. Or wizard generates XML file                              | HTML, XML, PDF, MS Word, MS Excel, JPEG, text  |
| Resource and skills management, capacity planning   | Assign and adjust resources. Add from the Resource Pool, Active Directory service or Exchange address book. Project Pro includes resource levelling | Available at both Task and Action/ToDo level, user definable resource types and codes, people and resources separated    |
| From 1 to 10,000 plus users   | Stand alone, Server 2003 required for multi users   | Supports load balanced Web servers, clustered database servers, clustered Exchange Servers.                              |
| User, role, project, function based, LDAP support   | Project integrates security with Microsoft Active Directory   | Security based on task team membership.  |
| Unix/Windows 2000 and 2003  | Stand alone, Server 2003 required for multi users   | Windows 2000 Server, Windows 2003 Server   |
| Formal timesheets and/or progress status, plus collaboration features   | Microsoft Office Project Server 2003 required for enterprise timesheet capabilities.  | Individual timesheeting, flexible costing and approval process   |
| Yes   | Microsoft Office Project Server 2003  | IE 5 and above   |
| Project process templates, administer workflow recipients, initiate project process                                       | Shared workspaces allow users to store files and other documents centrally with others.   | Dynamic structured and unstructured (ad hoc) workflow support  |

## What to look out for

- **Scalability:** Don't invest in a project management tool that can't grow with your organisation and cope with changes in technologies over time. System upgrades should be able to be conducted transparently and with minimum disturbance to existing and on going projects, templates etc.
- **Compatibility:** The system you select must be capable of operating across your organisation. It should work with all major servers, databases and client operating systems. The use of a browser-based interface for client machines greatly simplifies compatibility issues.
- **Product features:** Consider if the product has the all of the features that you need, including the ability to integrate with your existing systems such as financial and enterprise resource planning systems. Also check that systems publicised as being fully featured have sufficient capability in each area eg document management, financial and so on, to fully meet your organisational needs.
- **Collaboration:** Organisations with a geographically dispersed

workforce have particular need for the remote workers to be readily involved in the planning, scheduling and tracking of projects. Consider the use of tools with collaboration features that include options such as forums, issue handling, calendars and e-mail.

- **Security:** Ensure it has adequate levels of security available—you are protecting all of your company's project information. The system should provide multiple levels of security including authentication, authorisation and provide audit trails. Apart from the normal security requirements for network or operating system and Web-server security the system must provide control over access rights of all user groups accessing the system including readers, administrators and so on.

- **Workflow:** Look to using a Workflow system to automate project handling through critical business processes. The workflow system should preferably be easy to use providing a user-friendly graphical user interface. A full audit trail should also be available.

### PRIMAVERA

The Primavera solution is an integrated project management tool providing a number of modules that meet the needs of different team members. Primavera uses client-server architecture, is Web enabled and uses either standalone or networked databases. It works identically in single or multi-project modes, is very scalable and runs Oracle, SQL Server and MSDE databases.

The modules available include Project Management, Methodology Management, Portfolio Analysis, Timesheets, and Primavera Web to provide access via the Internet as well as a software development kit for integration with external applications. Other modules provide links to Microsoft Project as well as a project plan comparison tool.

The methodology management module enables users to create, capture and organise reusable components for use in future projects. It provides companies with a method to capture best practice using templates that can be customised. Project summaries and tracking information can be presented format using

graphics, spreadsheets and reports.

The timesheets module works through the Web allowing team members to communicate with a centralised database.

The Primavera product features a lot of functionality which is easily accessed through a very simple Home or Navigation Window. A number of different projects can be viewed at the same time and multiple projects can exist under nodes. Also, an Enterprise Project Structure (EPS) is used to organise projects into a hierarchy and each project must fit under a node within this.

When you first start working on a project the user interface seems a bit daunting, however, you are guided by very good documentation and it doesn't take long to master setting up your own projects, entering tasks and users and producing the inevitable Gantt chart.

New projects can be created in a number of ways including a New Project Wizard, from a template or through importing a file from other packages including Microsoft Project. Setting up a new project is made simple by the use of a wizard and simply consists of selecting a lo-

cation for the project in the EPS, entering the project name, defining start and finish dates, entering the project manager and selecting a resource rate type.

Once the project has been entered and is open, the Projects window is displayed showing where the project sits in a project table, a Gantt Chart view and a number of project detail tabs at the bottom of the layout of the window that provides access to a number of features including Notes, Dates, Default settings, setting project codes and how to calculate costs.

Once the new project has been created you can define where it sits in the WBS and then define activities (often called tasks in other packages) that are the lowest level in the WBS and are the most detailed unit of work that is tracked. Activities can be set up through a Wizard or entered it directly into the Activity Type Column in the Activities Table. It can also be done through a wizard which sets up the name, WBS element and activity type, enabling the selection of how the activities dates are calculated ie Start or Finish Milestone, Task or Resource Dependant.



Project Scheduling is conducted using a Critical Path Method (CPM) which uses activity duration and relationships between activities to calculate the schedule dates. Once activities have been set up, roles can be set up between resources and the activities. The role will act as a place holder indicating the type of resource to be assigned later (for example software engineer, draftsman). Resource usage can be displayed with a Bar Graph giving an indication of a particular resource's activity allocation and will indicate over allocation through a different colour in that section of the bar.

The Primavera Web module, which provides Web access through a browser, had a very clean and intuitive interface and enables many remote, workflow and collaboration features. As with many of the other products reviewed, Primavera provides a dashboard view which can be configured to provide access to projects, activities and events, display key information such as financial trend analysis, summaries of resource allocation and status as well as the ability to set up discussions or e-mails for collaboration.

Overall, this product provides a comprehensive and robust solution for project managers at an enterprise level. It has good collaboration features to assist distributed team members and a range of tools that facilitate planning scheduling and tracking large projects.

## TASKEY

Taskey takes a different view to most other project management tools in that it inherently employs a distributed management method that integrates general management and project management techniques.

Taskey identifies three activity levels in its method: Actions as the lowest unit of work, that is, it can't be broken down any further, such as an appointment or a to-do; Tasks, which are a logical grouping of actions and as such need management of information, resources and people; and Projects, which in turn is a grouping of tasks to achieve the overall, longer team goal.

The key steps in the Taskey method are: a goal and work breakdown of tasks using a bar chart to indicate planned and actual timings plus progress. For each Task an information template is used to ensure capture of key information such as team composition, responsibilities and actions to be done. Then a consolidated to-do list is created for all the actions required for all projects and tasks. Finally, when

a to-do list is complete, key information for the task and the bar chart progress are updated.

Taskey Team is good for all levels of users within an organisation—managers would use it for strategic plans, large projects and coordinating work between groups within the organisation, as well as their own Tasks and Actions; middle managers for smaller, more specific projects; and users who check off their to-do list that has been assigned by others.

TASKey TEAM, which uses a Web-based client interface, can be purchased as a client/server system for installation on the company infrastructure or as a hosted system. The client/server system can be used with Windows 2003 Server, Linux and Unix. A number of database systems can be used such as SQL Server 2000, Oracle 9i or Firebird (open source). The system is very scalable to cover use across large organisation and a mobile solution is available using Outlook and Exchange server.

The browser-based interface is very clean and uses a main header containing selection for the main views that cover Today, To-Do, Tasks, Task List, Progress, Options and Search. The Tasks button selects the main workspace which consists of a Task tree in a left-hand panel and in-

put areas on the right a number of Tabs enable the required Task related activities to be selected allow the user to add, edit or view Tasks, Actions, Resources Times or Documents.

Navigation through the various steps of a project is intuitive and even novice users will adapt to the system with little training. However, the Administrator functions aren't quite so intuitive but this is soon overcome.

Overall, the products mentioned in this review so far have all been designed for traditional projects and their management; TASKey Team on the other hand provides an innovative solution to distributed management and is definitely worth a look.

## FINAL WORDS

For enterprises that are serious about running projects in an efficient and cost-effective manner, the products reviewed offer a wide range of features. They have been designed for all users in an organisation from senior management to the project managers and staff undertaking the tasks. The product designers have also taken noticed how modern corporations are moving to distributed workforces and have implemented collaborative work features. ■

## SCENARIO

This large company is struggling to maintain control of a growing number of projects. It is seeking a project management tool that will be able to help

manage such things as project tasks, costs and resources, as well as aid communication and collaboration between all parties.

## (((EDITOR'S CHOICE)))

### Primavera



With the number of products available and competition for a growing market space, the developers of these products are packing a lot of features into their solutions which makes picking a clear winner in this review difficult.

Based on its feature set, position in the marketplace and local support, the Editor's Choice award goes to Primavera.

We were impressed with the compre-

hensiveness of the Primavera product, which takes the disparate people and groups within a large enterprise and brings it all together under an easy-to-use tool.

The product appears robust and the level and presentation of documentation inspires confidence that the product will get the job done.

As a close second we must recommend @Task for a very rich feature set, great user interface and interoperability at a great price.