2014 MSX Group Microsoft Forecaster User Group Forums

Questions Asked by Attendees

This document contains the questions we received during this year's Forecaster User Group Forum. If any of the questions below are not adequately explained, please contact us for clarification via email at Info@MSXGroup.com.

Q: Can I get a summary of shortcut options for the input screen?

A: I would suggest looking at the Forecaster online help and on the Microsoft Customer Source web site for supplemental material.

Here are some of the data input short cut options detailed in the Help files:

1000* Enters 1000 across all periods.

1000>10% Enters 1000 in the first period and increases each subsequent period by 10%.

1000<10% Enters 1000 in the first period and decreases each subsequent period by 10%.

1000>10 Enters 1000 in the first period and increases each subsequent period by 10.

1000<10 Enters 1000 in the first period and decreases each subsequent period by 10.

1000*5 Enters 1000 in the first 5 periods.

Q: Can I limit access to the Human Resources tab based on department in order to keep some salary and benefit information private?

A: Yes, in Forecaster's Security window, each user is assigned "Assignments" for which Departments they can access. Security also determines if that user can access HR data at all. Some users will not have access to HR input screens or reports.

Q: Can you add tabs similar to HR and Capital for other items that are controlled at a higher level such as Sales and Marketing?

A: The Revenue tab can be used for creating multiple templates to allow custom entry of details to drive any accounts including Sales and Marketing.

Q: It looks like I could do my loan amortization into these calculations and have them go out to the specific divisions/chart of accounts. Will the BS budget hold ending balances for this type of calculation?

A: Yes, you can post transaction balances or end balances in any period.

Q: We are converting everything to Management Reporter (MR) by EOY because we need to upgrade GP to next version. When do you think that this will tie into MR since FRx was supposed to have gone away over a year ago?

A: Microsoft has not provided any information regarding budgeting in Management Reporter. We are anxiously awaiting to hear their plans for budgeting.

Q: I keep seeing that we have to enter information. We are trying to get away from all the manual processes so that we don't have as much chance for error. Is there not a GP interface on the history? I don't see where there will be a lot of savings on steps required and reduction in errors.

A: If you are using FRx with GP, there is a connection between Forecaster and GP. Management Reporter does not currently have a direct connection between GP and Forecaster. Regardless, exports and imports are completely different than typing in balances by hand.

Q: Can you add tabs similar to HR and Capital for other items that are controlled at a higher level such as Sales and Marketing?

A: Yes, an additional tab is available for just that purpose although it could be used for breaking down the detail on any account(s). As a default, it is labeled "Revenue".

Q: Can additional "Revenue" tabs be added for different purposes or is this just a one-time calculation situation?

A: Only one Revenue tab may be added. Another option is to create multiple Input Sets for revenue budgeting.

Q: For the HR tab: Would the other department managers see that detail? Also, we allocate HR and benefits based on PC and company/division. How does that work here?

A: You can setup Security in Forecaster to limit which users can even see the HR tab. Managers are also limited to which departments they are assigned. Wages, taxes and benefits can be easily divided across departments by FTE's or hours on the HR Master screen.

Q: Currently, we have 10 GP licenses. We are trying to convert all FRx users to MR before we upgrade to GP2013. Currently, we only have a 10 GP concurrent user licenses which are not Windows authenticated. That is the primary reason that we use F9 because other users don't have to have a licenses for GP or F9. We have about 28 managers creating about 8 review points. (BTW: Is there a second level of approval for the workflow? How would this affect our licensing?)

A: Microsoft issues a separate registration key for Forecaster. Forecaster users are 'named' user id's, not concurrent users like GP.

Q: Can you allocate from the HR Master to different cost centers?

A: Yes, the HR Master screen can allocate an employee's wages, taxes and benefits across multiple centers. Double-click on the employee and allocate a percentage of the employee to another center.

Q: Can you include memos when you print? How do you print memos?

A: You can add a Memo column to reports and print the report. This new column would need to be added to the Column Set for the report. The new column will reference the Notes field from the Forecaster database.

Q: When would you use secondary calculations? Example?

A: It is not a common scenario, but you might have a total column that calculates the total and, for whatever reason, you might need to override the calculated total with something else. It may be a percentage calculation for one row, but not all rows.

Q: Can you place a dollar limit by department on a budget year that Managers cannot exceed?

A: There is no budget limit field in Forecaster but you could use IF statements in the Calculation Set.

Q: Can you use the Excel Add-In to import the "Actual" data from FRx into Forecaster once you get the data in an Excel file?

A: You can use the Excel Add-In tool to import data from Excel to Forecaster. But, I would just save the Excel data to a tab-delimited text file and import it into Forecaster which is far easier.

Q: My fiscal year starts in April. However, the tax calculation thinks April = January and hits this month with the highest taxes. Is there a way to adjust the tax calculation?

A: Fiscal years have always given Forecaster a problem with benefit calculations that involve an annual limit. Those account calculations would need to be moved to the correct months or adjusted manually.

Q: How do I include the prior year total budget for a comparison?

A: A prior year's budget may be included as a column on the input screen. It may also be used as a baseline which would be displayed on the Single Account Input Screen. Also, reports in Forecaster let you easily add columns from prior year budgets.

Q: I have set up some standard lines as default templates. Not every facility uses every account (row) in the template. Unless the rows are manually deleted in Forecaster when I use the data transfer, the zeroes come over into the GP budget. Any trick to deleting lines that are zero before the transfer?

A: There is not a setting in the Forecaster Data Transfer Wizard to suppress/delete zero balances. Another option I often use is to Export data from Forecaster to Excel and use GP Excel Budget import.

Q: On my HR detail report I continue to get employees from previous years. How do I only get the employees from the current year budget?

A: On the Report worksheet, select the Detail Filter for the Input Set that the employees should be limited to.

Q: Is it possible to get a report that has the columns as the annual budget amount with each column a different division in a rollup?

A: Yes, report columns can represent Centers instead of Periods. Report building in Forecaster is very flexible. The Online Help (F1 in Forecaster) is very good at explaining the reporting options. We're also available for reporting questions at noah.moseley@msxgroup.com.

Q: In the example showing one quarter of Actuals, can we see how the HR import works when there is an input set with actuals and budgeted months?

A: Typically, you would not be importing any HR detail data like employee names and salary amounts into any actual periods. HR Detail data would only be imported into the budget months.

Q: Can you modify the Segments after the database has been created such as delete a segment, add a segment, or change the length?

A: You cannot add more segments or delete segments after a Forecaster database is created. You can modify the length and label for the segments only.

Q: Can the HR module be used for actual periods?

A: For actuals, we would only import account balances for wages, taxes and benefits. Individual employees would not be imported for actual periods.

Q: Can you comment on the long term prospects of Forecaster?

A: While Microsoft is no longer developing Forecaster, they are supporting it and it is still included on price lists. Forecaster will be supported by Microsoft and the MSX Group for several years to come.

Q: What is the proper and complete way to delete unused input sets, periods and centers?

A: Just deleting an Input Set does not delete the data from Forecaster's database tables. The ZAP function under Tools gives many more options for actually deleting data.

Q: What if you display actuals and budgets amount in the input set. How do you suggest the HR module be used then?

A: You can have actuals columns and budget columns on the input screens and use the HR detail section. The HR detail section, however, would only be used to fill in balances for the budget columns.

Q: In some of your examples the input set seems to run calculations automatically. How is this done?

A: Under Tools > Options, there is a checkbox in the lower right to "Automatically Run Input Set Calculations". This is set by each individual user at their preference.

Q: On the HR tab, the pop-up menus don't work for me if I use the web-client. They do work for the local client application. I am assuming it is an un-fixed bug?

A: Yes, you are correct. Microsoft has not fixed this where the drop-down selections will work in the web access.

Q: Microsoft Dynamics GP customer maintenance includes a Class ID in addition to the customer number. Is it possible to include this field if you were budgeting by customer?

A: You could include this field as an account or one of the two revenue detail screen selections.

Q: Can you import the HR detail for employees more than once?

A: Yes, employee details may be imported more than once. New imports update existing details.

Q: Once you change a period setting to H, does this mean the data is copied, locked and can never be changed?

A: An administrator can always change periods back and forth from Posting to Historical.

Q: How did the Center get set up?

A: When you install Forecaster and setup a connection to database is where you define segments. After the initial setup, some changes may be made on the Setup > Segments > Definition window. New segments may not be added after the initial database setup.

Q: Is there a way to import actuals directly from GP? If we had to export every GL line to Excel, it would be a massive spreadsheet.

A: No, there is no way to import actuals directly from GP. However, it is very easy to use FRx or Management Reporter to grab data then import to Forecaster based on the segments you are, or are not, budgeting to versus what is in the GL.

If you're using FRx, ExpressLink is an option to copy account balances from GP into Forecaster.

Q: To clarify my question: Once "H" is selected, nothing you do in a future/current budget can affect Historical data?

A: Correct, Historical data can NOT be changed (via input, calcs, imports, tasks, etc.).

Q: How can you delete a spread method once you don't need it anymore?

A: Open the Spread Method, highlight every row in that Spread Method, delete all the rows, and Save the Spread Method (with no rows). Then, close the Spread Method.

Q: So, the Management Reporter Forecaster tool does not import into GP?

A: There is a Forecaster Data Transfer Tool that can copy balances from Forecaster into GP.

Q: We are currently using DirectLink to import from GP to Forecaster. Can we still use this?

A: DirectLink lets FRx pull data from Forecaster. This still works with FRx. It does not work for Management Reporter. Also, ExpressLink copies data from GP to Forecaster and works if you use FRx. ExpressLink does not work with Management Reporter.

Q: How is the Contract Grade used?

A: The Salary Grade is used for each employee imported into Forecaster to determine if they are hourly or salaried and which accounts are used for their wages, FTE's, hours and bonus money.

Q: When exporting to Excel, I need to re-format, correct?

A: Yes, exports from Forecaster to Excel do not keep formatting.

Q: With ExpressLink importing can you import one month at a time?

A: You can import one month, two months, or any number of months.

Q: What are the checkboxes used for in Allocations (i.e., All Posting, Use Source)?

A: All Posting will allocate from/to every posting-level account in a Summary-referenced Center or Account. "Use Source" allocates balances to the same accounts referenced in the 'From' section.

Q: Do you need to setup the results of a calculation as an account to allow Forecaster to store this value?

A: Yes, Forecaster has to post balances to valid posting-level accounts.

Q: When do I need to use Validate and Recovery, and, should any of these tools be used as a regular maintenance tool?

A: Validate and Recovery are used most often when a screen in Forecaster is left in a 'locked' status.

Recovery unlocks the Period worksheet, Rollups or Security screens.

Validate handles the following functions:

- **Re-Index Table:** Select the “Re-index Table” checkbox if you want Microsoft Forecaster to re-index your database tables to correct any errors. Periodic re-indexing of the database tables can improve overall system performance.
- **Zap Event Log:** Select the “Zap Event Log” checkbox if you want Microsoft Forecaster to erase the Microsoft Forecaster Event Log prior to any other Validation activities. When selected, the Event Log is zapped prior to any other selected options and so any errors that are in the Event Log after the Validate Database Utility completes can be assumed to have occurred during the validation.
- **Compress Database:** Select the “Compress Database” checkbox if you want Microsoft Forecaster to compress the size of your database. This option is only available in the version of Microsoft Forecaster for Microsoft Office Access. (Access databases automatically expand as the database needs more disk space and does not automatically shrink when data is removed. For this reason, you may be able to recover some disk space and improve overall system performance by running a Validate Database after deleting a large amount of data or running disk-intensive processes such as a Restate, large Post jobs, etc.)
- **Validate Segments:** Select the “Validate Segments” checkbox if you want Microsoft Forecaster to validate the data in each table in the database to verify that each Department and Account Code is valid. Microsoft Forecaster will confirm that no data exists for missing or invalid departments or accounts and that no summary-level departments or accounts exist in tables (that should only contain posting-level data). Invalid data will be corrected or removed.
- **Validate Periods:** Select the “Validate Periods” checkbox if you want Microsoft Forecaster to validate the data in each Period in your database. Microsoft Forecaster will check each period in the database tables to ensure that no invalid numbers exist. For example, due to rounding in mathematical operations, a database may place an extremely small number into a period instead of simply inserting a 0. This can cause confusing results in Microsoft Forecaster reports. The Validate Periods option will set any blank or missing values to 0 and will also set any number whose absolute value is less than 1.0 e-9 (that is, 0.000000001) to 0.

Note: The Validate Segments and Validate Periods options may take a substantial time to complete. The Re-Index Tables and Compress Database option times may vary based on the amount of data in the database and other environmental conditions such as network utilization, server load, etc.