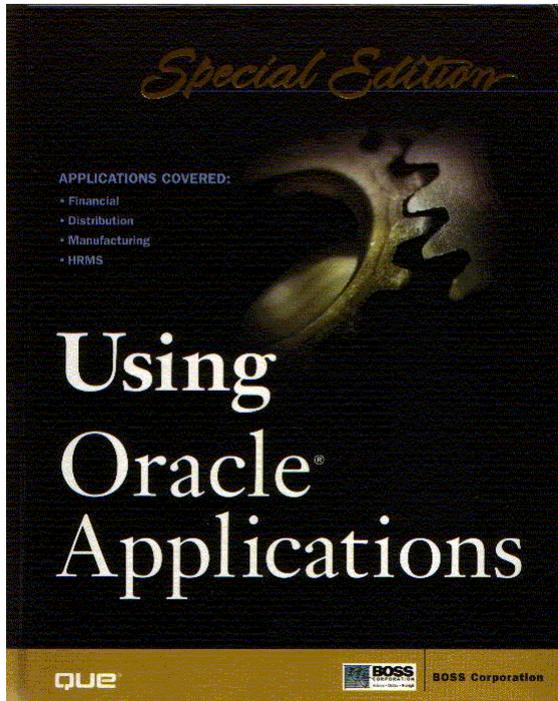


Book Review

Jim Crum et al., *Using Oracle Applications*, Special Edition, April 20, 2000, QUE, A Division of Macmillan Publishing USA, Indianapolis, Indiana 46290, ISBN: 0-7897-1280-6, available from <http://www.amazon.com>, price US-\$ 75.00

by

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The accompanying illustration displays the appealing outward appearance of the introductory and reference book about Oracle Applications comprising 912 pages. Dimensions are 5,2 x 28,9 x 19,5 cm and weight equals 1,7 kg. The table of contents stretches over 18 pages and testifies to a very fine subdivision of the book. It is divided into 30 chapters and 3 appendixes. The publication comprises 18 figures and 64 tables. 156 notes, 222 tips and 8 warnings call special attention to text sections contained in boxes having a grey background colour. The comprehensive index is easy to take in at a glance and covers 38 pages.

The book was written by 12 authors. Nearly half of them belong to the staff of BOSS Corporation. BOSS is a four letter acronym for *Better Organisation Service Solutions*. This US-American consulting company specialises in implementation, customisation, and operation of the Oracle Applications. Further information can be retrieved from the internet using the following URL:
<http://www.bosscorporation.com>.

The introduction already reveals, that the authors intend to use the publications as a means to document the professional skills and with that the efficiency of the BOSS Corporation. The idea to apply a specialised book as a marketing instrument is not at all new in the consultation business.

The book comprises 30 chapters and 3 appendixes.

- The first two chapters contain an introduction into the Oracle Applications.
- In substance the next 8 chapters treat diverse topics about planning and project management comprising methods for first time implementation and upgrades.

The following 17 chapters are arranged by modules:

- *Financials*: general ledger (GL), payables (AP), receivables (AR) and fixed assets (FA)
- *Logistics*: purchasing (PO), inventory (INV) and order entry (OE)
- *Manufacturing*: engineering (ENG) and bills of material (BOM), cost management (CST), master production scheduling (MPS), material requirements planning (MRP) and capacity planning (CPP), work in process (WIP)
- *Personnel*: human resources (HR) and payroll (PAY)
- *Other applications*: workflow, system administration and multiple organisations. Multi-Org is certainly not a module but a feature of the integrated business software suite. In this respect the reader could be confused by the incorporation of Multi-Org into this set of chapters.

The last 3 chapters are dealing with the support of the Oracle Applications by:

- Oracle Support
- outside consultants
- software vendors (Oracle Alliance Partners)

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Complementary software products of 64 partner companies are described in sufficient detail. Contact name, phone, e-mail and web-page are specified in each case. For US-American readers this chapter (comprising 65 pages) is probably of particular interest.

The first two appendixes describe the Oracle employment market and the Oracle consulting market in the USA. On 6 pages the last appendix presents a checklist for Oracle Applications implementation showing more than 100 bullet point entries. If a company's decision-maker or a consultation client complains about too high implementation cost and/or too long implementation duration, this check-list could be searched in order to find realistic opportunities for cost-cutting and to discuss corresponding consequences.

For the description of the modules in the middle part of the book 31 pages are required per chapter on average. This seems to be sufficient to gain a general functional view, but presupposes some previous knowledge. A uniform description scheme is not applied to the modules as a rule. But the following headings are used in most of the chapters:

- Introduction
- Relationship to other applications
- Discovering new features in release 11
- Critical implementation factors
- Configuring the application
- Processing transactions
- Understanding key reports
- Summary and/or troubleshooting

Surprisingly a functional description of the rather complex Project Accounting (PA) module is not included in the book. Just this complexity would have necessitated its consideration. Thus the presentation of the subsidiary ledgers within the Financials domain is incomplete.

20 notes and 29 tips are allotted to the AR module. This is more than in all other descriptions of the modules, although the relative difficulty index of AR is only 90 (see table 4.2, p. 50). The relative difficulty index of the OE module is stated to amount to 170. Thus more notes and tips could be expected in corresponding chapter. But that doesn't happen. In spite of this disproportion the full understanding of the notes, tips and warnings is not always easy for beginners.

For 12 modules (GL, AP, AR, PO, INV, OE, ENG, BOM, CST, MPS/MRP, CPP and WIP) the interfaces are explained by figures showing input-output-relationships. For unknown reasons such a figure is not included for the FA module. 5 figures are utilised for illustration of the multiple organisations feature of the software package. 1 figure exhibits the business process for overdue customer invoices. The set-up steps, the profile options and sometimes the key reports are presented in tabular form. An index of figures and tables is not included. An index of bibliographical data and a glossary of technical terms are also missing.

The explanation (107 pages) of the HR and PAY module accounts for 12 percent of all pages. In this context the authors of the book are writing the following (see p. 50): *„The HR/PAY applications are very complex and often use a different method for implementation. A complex payroll implementation can take more than five times the effort of a General Ledger. Your situation might vary.“* In spite of this complexity European users will have only limited interest in the PAY module, because labour and social security regulations as well as labour contracts between employees and management will usually prevent a good fit. In general European business requirements (Value Added Tax for example), which can be covered by the standard product to a certain extent, are not treated in detail.

The book is less suitable for readers performing a functional and/or technical support task or working as an Oracle Applications functional expert, because useful in-depth information is not available.

Disregarding the desire of BOSS to become public knowledge the contents of the book is aiming at middle management within the functional departments, which wants to gain a general knowledge of the scope and profundity of functions making up the Oracle Applications. For this purpose it is certainly appropriate, provided that the reader is acquainted with English technical terms and the so-called Oracle jargon, for example *AutoAccounting*, *FlexField* or *QuickCode*. Accordingly the reverse side of the hardcover correctly recommends: *„User Level: Intermediate – Advanced“*. Compared to the *„Functional Overviews“* published on CD-ROM by Oracle the book has the advantage, that critical opinions

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can be read here and there. In the introductory chapters for example misdirected developments and quality issues are stated frankly (see "Admitting Mistakes", p. 13). In addition, under headings like "*Proposed Enhancements*", important enhancement requests of the user community are quoted (for example on pp. 168, 520, 530).

Without regard to described limitations the acquisition of the book can be recommended. If the reading enables a more reliable judgement about the suitability of the modules for specific business requirements and/or if only 1 fundamental set-up mistake can be avoided, the acquisition price (US-\$ 75,00) will be regained many times.

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