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## Axium's "Ajera" Removes Roadblocks for Small Firms

*This article is the first in a series of reviews of several A/E specific software packages. PSMJ consultant Brad Wilson will put several packages through setup and normal monthly workflow and then report his experience. As an independent consultant, Wilson will not compare products or recommend one product over the other.*

**A**jera is a brand new product offered by Axium, the provider of the popular Protrax software. As opposed to making improvements to Protrax and giving it a new name, Axium has created Ajera from scratch. The software is targeted directly at small A/E firms, but is more than capable of handling mid-sized firms of 70 to 80 people. Since Axium has priced the basic 5-user version of Ajera under \$2,000, a small A/E firm can now get itself up and running on industry specific software and position itself for growth very inexpensively.

### Installation and setup

The instructions for installing Ajera were very straight forward and it was easy to install. Since Axium has based this product on Microsoft technology, a desktop version of SQL server and .NET 1.1 were also installed as part of the setup routine. The benefits of this are discussed later. You are required to setup one employee with administrator privileges during installation. This first user is given the security rights to setup all of the projects, accounts, clients, vendors and other employees in the system. This isn't difficult though because Axium has done its homework and included very complete templates for an architecture practice, an engineering firm, and a category called "other." If you choose "other" there are additional items you must setup yourself. I chose to be an architecture practice, and within an hour I had setup five employees, four vendors and three projects for three different clients. In that same time I also entered two weeks of timesheets and several invoices from vendors, billed the clients using three different billing formats, and produced an easy to understand financial statement. This was all possible because Axium designed the software to first take care of the most important functions A/E firms need from their software — the collection of costs and the billing of clients.

### Using the software

Ajera's intuitive graphical user interface is a big step forward for A/E software. Upon logging into the system, each user is presented with their own customized dashboard and report screen (based on security first and personal preference second). The dashboard shows icons that represent all the tasks a user can perform in the system. An employee with "administrator" rights can have up to 18 options while a regular employee can be limited to 1 (entering timesheets). There are levels of security built into Ajera, but you can create your own as well. The reports included on the entry screen are also customized to each user. As the CEO of this architecture firm, I got reports on company chargeability and receivables aging. If I logged on as a project manager, my reports were limited to just

the projects on which I worked. Ajera not only limits access to sensitive data, it keeps the average employee from digging to find the data he or she needs. This is very unique for such inexpensive software.

### **Billing and project reporting**

With one minor shortcoming, Ajera has everything a firm needs to manage its projects and bill its clients. Project reporting follows the PSMJ supported method of earned value tracking, except that schedule tracking is not possible inside the software. You can, however, pull all the information you need into Excel to track project schedules, or a custom report could fix the issue. Axium has included every contract type and billing option prevalent in the industry as part of its standard setup, but Ajera also excels at customizing invoice formats. There is almost nothing you can't rearrange on a standard Ajera invoice. You can also export the invoice into Microsoft Word in one simple step and make the modifications there.

### **Conclusions**

Before Axium created Ajera, A/E firms had to reach a critical mass in size and revenue before they could afford industry specific software. Usually, this milestone was reached long after the software used began to fall short of their needs. So, many firms faced a catch-22. Their software had become a limitation to growth, but without growth firms could not afford new software. The A/E industry can thank Axium for removing this roadblock.

If you'd like to get more information about Ajera, visit Axium's website at [www.axiumae.com](http://www.axiumae.com), contact sales at 1-800-872-1540, or email [sales@axiumae.com](mailto:sales@axiumae.com).

PSMJ thanks Brad Wilson, a PSMJ Resources consultant, for contributing this article. Brad Wilson can be reached at 614-358-7444.