



ALERE Accounting

Key Features and Their Benefits



Introduction

ALERE has a number of features not normally found in accounting packages. The purpose of this document is to discuss those features and the benefits they provide in sufficient depth so that you may understand their implications.

General Program Features

Document Management

Discussion – Integrated document management uses hyperlinks to integrate digital documents, email, web sites and internal files into the ALERE system without cumbersome indexing. The benefits are instant access to

- Digital documents such as correspondence, invoices, quotes, etc.
- Emails can be started and sent based on a link embedded in a customer or supplier record.
- Supplier, customer or any other web sites can be tied into internal records.
- Links to internal files such as CAD drawings, material safety sheets, contracts, etc. can be accessed from within ALERE.
- The graphical chart of accounts can be used to drill down to digital documents attached to general ledger accounts. As an example, only three screens are necessary to find and display an invoice from a supplier.

Fetch Search Engine

Discussion – Most people in a company spend a considerable part of their day simply looking for information. Often it is for simple things like a sales order or purchase order and often the need to look up the information comes while they are in the middle of doing something else in an unrelated part of the program. That is the reason Fetch was created. The benefits are

- Fetch can sit on the screen all the time no matter what you are doing or where you are in the program. It is always available and does not require you to exit a screen or module.
- Fetch is easy to use. Simply enter what you are looking for and click the related link. For example, a customer calls with his PO number and wants to find out what has shipped so far on his order. Enter his PO and click on the “Order by Customer PO” link. His sales order is quickly found and displayed. The *Status* tab will provide a summary of the items shipped.
- Fetch will search text. For example, items in inventory can be found by their description.
- Fetch remembers past searches and will display them as you enter keystrokes.
- Fetch does not require you to know where to go in the software to find information.

Data Browser

Discussion – A browser provides a convenient method of searching for something, for example, helping you find a specific item in inventory. Better browsers include features like advancing to the closest matching record as you type in a word or number. The data browser in ALERE has taken the concept to a whole new level by not only helping you find a record but by giving you access to all related information. The benefits are

- Having the browser remember typed in search items and being able to select them from a pull down window.

- Having a feature called *Persistence*, which keeps the browser displayed on the screen while you drag and drop records. For example, you can create a filter to list purchase orders for a specific item. Then display each purchase order without leaving the browser.
- Being able to right click on an item in the browser and have access to all related information on that item no matter where it is located in ALERE. For example, right clicking on a sales order from a list will permit you to see company information about that sales order, customer information, and the order itself.
- Having advanced searches using any combination of multiple criteria, which includes searching within strings of text.
- Being able to right click on a column title to search on that column.
- Using a mouse to drag and drop information from any field to enterable fields on the screen.
- Customizing column order by user, initial search field, number of lines in the grid, column widths, and more.

Diskless Workstation Installation

Discussion – During the process of installing the software on a server, a workstation installation program can be optionally included. When this program is run from a workstation, it configures the workstation to run ALERE without the need to use a CD for the set up process.

- Faster workstation setup.
- Allows workstations without a CD drive to be linked to ALERE.
- Add additional workstations at a later date without the need to find the program CD.
- Becomes easy to reconfigure networks.

Dynamic Screen Sizing

Discussion – Dynamic Screen Sizing allows you to resize screens on demand. Any lists, notes fields or pictures on the screen are automatically sized with the screen. This approach is particularly useful on screen resolutions greater than 800 x 600. The key uses are as follows:

- Long lists can be more easily viewed and searched.
- More than one screen can be opened at a time and resized, which allows easy side-by-side data comparisons to be made.
- Screen sizes can be preset for each user with a simple modification requiring no code changes.

MDI (Multiple Document Interface)

Discussion – MDI permits you to have multiple screens and reports open at the same time. This includes screens of the same type, for instance, having several different sales orders open. To work on any one screen or report, simply click on it. MDI also means that all the modules are always open. You can leave a screen open and go to another in a different module by clicking the menu and opening the screen. MDI greatly helps work flow by

- Allowing you to work on multiple, different documents at the same time in a manner similar to the way you work at your desk.
- Making it easy to work on a screen, be interrupted, and return to the screen to pick up where you left off.
- Running side-by-side comparisons of multiple reports.
- Making data entry easier by permitting you to open screens with supporting information.
- Eliminating the need to open and close modules constantly.

Language Sets

Discussion – Language sets allow you to customize menus, screens and even different languages on a user-by-user basis. This feature will literally enable you to have one user working in English, another user working in Spanish, and yet a third user working with menus designed to support only the area he or she works in. The benefits are obvious. When a user logs in, they can have

- Menus designed for only them.
- Screens and field names unique to their business.
- Different languages.
- Preset defaults.
- Screen sizes to fit their hardware.

Activity Tabs

Discussion – The *Activity* tab is a convenient way of seeing information that is related to the work you are doing. For example: On the inventory screen the tab displays all the activity that will affect the ins and outs of the item, by location, along with the order that was the cause of the movement.

Filters can be used to narrow the information to certain types. Using the example above, you might like to see all the shipping activity at one warehouse location.

All the major processes in ALERE have an *Activity* tab only a click away. Here are some of the major advantages:

- The tab is instantly available for your use.
- Filters control the amount and type of activity displayed.
- The tab provides a way to trace the source of orders. For instance, finding out the sales order number that generated a specific invoice.
- The status of the orders is shown.
- You can use it to look up payments that have been made.

GL Posting Tab

Discussion – The *GL Posting* tab is a convenient way of seeing the journal entries that are related to the work you are doing. Imagine being able to see the journal entries generated by an invoice you have entered the moment you release the invoice. All the major processes that affect your general ledger have a *GL Posting* tab. Some of the ways this tab can be used are

- Immediate verification that the correct GL account was used.
- Auditing in real time instead of the end of the period when the specifics of what was done are not easily remembered.
- Journal entries remain associated with the order/inventory/other processes so that you may use them as a reference in case questions arise at a later date.

Hyperlinks

Discussion – A Hyperlink is a relationship between two screens based on common information. In ALERE, Hyperlinks have been predefined throughout the system. An example of their use would be accessing inventory information on the item for which you are taking an order by simply clicking on *Inventory* on the menu bar and selecting *Item Definition* from the list. In this case the hyperlink looks at the item number being entered on the sales order line and automatically gets the matching inventory record. The benefits are as follows:

- Supporting information for many processes is only one or two mouse clicks away.
- Little or no training is required to use this intuitive feature.
- The way in which work flows is smoother.

Email Automation

Discussion – At key points in the ALERE processes, emails can be auto-generated and a PDF of the accompanying document attached and sent. Numerous sets of email rules can be defined and assigned to individual companies to control how they are handled. For example, one rule set could contain individual rules that send emails when an order is accepted, when it is shipped, and when it is invoiced. That particular set of rules could then be assigned to a specific company. The benefits are

- A default rule set applies to your company with other rule sets that can be used for specific companies you deal with.
- Use for both internal and external notifications and alerts.
- Automatically acknowledge orders received from customers.
- Electronically send invoices when orders are shipped.
- Released purchase orders automatically sent to suppliers.

Report Previewing Capabilities

Discussion – Extensive report previewing options are available on a toolbar when a report is sent to a monitor. The benefits are numerous.

- The previewed report can be sent by email.
- It can include pictures, hyperlinks and files.
- The email can be marked with different priorities and return receipts requested.
- The report can be saved as an image, PDF, MS-Word or Excel document.
- The report can be formatted with HTML or Plain Text and generate HTML outputs.

Excel Export for Reports

Discussion – Reports can be optionally exported to Excel spreadsheets. Each spreadsheet column represents one field and each row represents one record. The benefits are

- Virtually unlimited formatting, graphing and analysis are possible.
- Data from different reports can be merged.

PDF Export for Reports

Discussion – Every report can be turned into a PDF file. The benefits are

- Reports are easily shared and attached emails.
- A range of separate documents can produce a matching range of PDF's.

Manager Module Features

Single Point Information for Companies

Discussion – All information concerning your company, your customers and your suppliers, is grouped into one location. This design permits a company to be both a customer and a supplier with different rules for each type of relationship. Using this approach allows the following:

- One ID is maintained for a company that is both a customer and a supplier.
- A refund is simplified because company information between accounts receivable and accounts payable is shared.
- One location maintains the information for all the companies with which you do business.

- Costs and errors that occur when maintaining duplicate information in separate files are reduced.

Global Definitions

Discussion – Accounting software, by its nature, has many codes that need to be created and maintained. Some examples are salesperson codes, unit of measures codes, and price group codes. Frequently these codes are scattered throughout a product resulting in more work than is necessary to locate and maintain them. In ALERE, all of the codes are grouped into one screen. The benefits are

- Shortened product setup time.
- Easier maintenance.
- Reduced training requirements.
- Reduced costs of maintaining the many different definitions that are integral to the operation of modern accounting systems.

Order Approval Rules

Discussion - Order Approval Rules are designed to provide a structured approach to the approval process. This process includes choosing which types of orders (both sales and purchases) require approval, assigning the threshold levels that trigger the approval process, defining who is authorized to "sign-off" and how many (up to four) levels in an organization require this review and approval, and finally an automatic notification system to push the approvals through to completion. The benefits are

- Having the full range of order documents available for approval permits far reaching control over the purchasing and selling processes.
- Simply creating and accepting an order initiates the approval process which automatically notifies the people authorized to "sign off".
- Orders are formally accepted when they meet the approval requirements and become subject to further processing automatically.
- Approval groups of up to four people spread the workload and speeds the approval path by minimizing bottlenecks.

Expanded Payment Terms

Discussion – ALERE supports three types of payment terms. The "Net Terms" method sets the due date of an invoice based on the number of days after the invoice date. "Calendar Terms" set specific due dates based on the calendar and are especially useful when there are multiple due dates required on an invoice. "Prox Terms" set the due date by establishing one day of the month as a closing day and one day as the due day. The benefits are

- A wide range of payment term definitions can be supported.
- Variations of terms can be created and saved and then assigned as defaults to companies or individual invoices.
- Terms can be segregated based on customer or supplier use.

Bank Transactions

Discussion – There are many banking activities that occur in a company besides AR/Cash receipts. The *Bank Transactions* option in ALERE is designed to handle deposits, withdrawals, transfers between bank accounts, posting of interest/credit transactions, accounting for bank fees, handling returned checks and voiding checks. The benefits are

- All these activities are centralized on one screen.
- Each activity is easily and quickly handled.
- Almost no operator training is required.
- Processing errors are reduced by not requiring any reentry of information.
- Non-intuitive steps normally associated with these activities are eliminated.

Returned and Voided Check Recreation

Discussion – Here are two more everyday functions that, like converting a credit memo to a payable, are so important to the smooth flow of work in your company. They are accepting a returned check and recreating the invoice or invoices it was used to pay; and voiding a check you have written and recreating the payable or payables it was used to pay. The *Bank Transactions* screen handles both of these activities with the following benefits:

- Speeds the processing of the returned and voided checks.
- The returned check process voids the payment, recreates the invoice, and handles the GL entries in one step. This preserves the integrity of the aged receivables.
- Payments that are applied to multiple invoices and unapplied credits are handled.
- The void check process voids the payment, recreates the payable, and handles the GL entries in one step. This preserves the integrity of the aged payables.
- Neither process is accounting period sensitive, which considerably extends its usefulness.
- Almost no operator training required.
- Reduces processing errors by not requiring any reentry of information.
- Eliminates complex steps normally associated with this process thereby significantly cutting the costs of handling these types of transactions.

Sales Module Features

Geographic Hot Spots

Discussion – This is a tool designed for companies that conduct national or international business and want to understand how their sales are spread among geographic areas. By giving a radius in miles and a range of dates, this report will calculate and rank areas based on their sales volume. This allows you to

- Accurately see which areas contribute the most/least to your company's sales.
- Rank the customers that make up the sales volume in each area.
- Enter a zip code and a radius and get the sales volume for an area.

Pending Orders in Sales

Discussion – All orders (quotes, sales orders, invoices, returns, credits, blanket orders, and recurring orders) in the Sales Module are created as pending orders until they are released. This means

- Orders can be started and saved in a partially completed state without releasing them for processing, thus eliminating the requirement to “throw away” and start over any orders that are not completely finished.
- Orders can be queued up in advance and released as needed.
- Customers can get back to you to complete or change an order at a later time.
- Supervisors, engineers, etc. can review orders before they are released.
- The problems with work interruptions are eliminated.
- Orders can be placed into the software from outside sources without making them active.

Sale, Return and Credit Line Types

Discussion – A line item on an order may be set as a Sale, Return or Credit. The benefits are

- The number of steps required to handle a customer are minimized because on one order you can mix items that are being ordered with items that are being returned and/or credited.
- The total of the line items is netted out.
- Net negative orders are easily converted into credit memos.
- Just as items that are sold are allocated in inventory, items that are being returned are considered to be on order in inventory. Thus you can track and receive returns.
- Eliminates the costs of processing separate orders to achieve the same results.

Customer Item Numbers

Discussion – Items on a sales order can be entered using either your internal item number or the customer's item number. The benefits are

- Customers can place orders using their own item numbers.
- Your internal item number is automatically backfilled when a customer number is used.

Drop Shipments

Discussion – While the capability to handle drop shipments has become available in the better accounting packages, the actual use tends to be clumsy and usually requires that a dedicated order be used. ALERE has integrated drop shipments into the normal order entry process. The benefits are

- Drop shipping items to a customer is as easy as entering the item on a sales order and either accepting the default drop ship supplier or selecting another.
- No separate order form or process is required.
- Inventory items, credit memos and returns can be handled on the same order.
- Items can be dropped shipped or shipped from inventory.
- You can choose to mark drop ship items as shipped and create a purchase order for them all in one step or select among several other options.
- Multiple drop ship items on one order for one vendor are consolidated on one purchase order.

Consignment Orders

A sales order type, the *Consignment Order* is designed to transfer and replenish inventory at a consignment location being maintained for a customer's use. This allows you to

- Enter a Consignment Order, which is similar to entering a Sales Order, but instead of listing the items being sold, listing the items and quantities being moved to the consignment location.
- Create an order that employs the standard processes of issuing and receiving inventory using the sales, picking, and packing documents and lists to move the inventory to the consignment location.
- Create a manual Sales Invoice as inventory is consumed by the customer or invoice from a Quote, Blanket Order, or Recurring Order. In each case, the "Ship From" consignment location is used to issue the inventory.
- Manage inventory at consignment locations by being able to do physical counts.

Price Contracts

Discussion - The *Price Contract* is a standard sales order type that acts as an extension to pricing rules. It is a contract between you and a customer that consists of a negotiated price list that has an expiration date, at which time it may be renegotiated or cancelled. The benefits are

- It extends pricing rules by applying to a specific list of items with some, or all, at different tier levels.
- It is a formal sales document that can act as a contract between you and your client.
- Pricing contracts and pricing rules are both checked for the current best price which is then used.
- Orders can be created directly from pricing contracts and released as sales orders, invoices, consignments, blanket orders, or recurring orders.

User Defined Order Entry Screen

Discussion – General purpose sales order entry screens are designed to handle a wide variety of order entry tasks such as lot and serial number control, selecting shipping locations, etc. This broad capability, while often necessary, forces the user to move through many fields and screens that may not be pertinent to the type of orders being taken. Consequently, the grid on the order entry screen can be modified to match how individual companies take their orders. The benefits are

- Each company can design their own order entry screens and have control over both the content and sequence of the information that is required to enter an order.
- Maximum heads down order entry speed.
- Multiple different entry screens can be designed and saved as templates. This permits the order entry screen to be customized by product and user.
- Only one screen is required to enter and accept the order.

Sales Pricing Inquiry Tab

Discussion – The *Pricing* screen in the Sales Module provides a way to create different pricing schemes for sales, customers, items, etc. The *Inquiry* tab on that screen allows you to test the individual schemes under a variety of different conditions. The benefits of this approach are

- The pricing scheme can be tested before it is released for use.
- Several different pricing schemes may apply to any given order. All applicable schemes are displayed and sorted in descending order, starting with the best price.
- While the best price is always used when entering an order, sales people can use the function to find the best price breaks for customers based on quantity, thus adding value to the order.

Whole Order Discounting

Discussion – Whole order discounting is over and above pricing schemes that are used for individual line items on a sales order. It allows you to apply discounts on the total value of an order when it is released as an invoice. This provides the following advantages:

- It permits two-level order pricing – one at the line level and one at the total order level. This combination greatly extends your control over how orders are priced.
- Better pricing control permits your company more options for developing customer incentive programs.
- When the discount is taken, the amount is applied to the individual line items. This method allows the correct department, product line, etc. to be charged a portion of the whole order discount.
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Real Time Acceptance of Payments for Orders

Discussion – Over the counter sales and payment upon acceptance of an order are two common sales processes for many companies. Consequently, a *Payment* button permits monies to be received in the form of cash, checks and credit cards during the process of taking an order. Open credits that a company has may also be used as part of the payment process. The benefits are

- Point of sale support for orders is available.
- Payments for sales orders, which will ship in the future, can be accepted during order entry.
- Invoices can be paid as they are created.
- Immediate availability of any open credit a customer may have.

Credit Cards

Discussion – Credit cards are an acceptable form of payment in ALERE. Check sum logic is used to validate the credit card number upon entry. The benefits are

- Credit cards are commonly used for payment, making their acceptance a critical part of the AR/Cash receipts process for most companies.
- Card number encryption compliance to identity theft laws.
- Support for credit cards is built into the receipts process instead of making it an exception.

Reopen Completed Orders

Discussion – It is not uncommon for a customer to want to add additional items on an existing order or increase the quantity on other items. The problem occurs when the order has already been shipped and marked completed. With a “Reopen” button on sales orders and purchases orders you can

- Reopen complete orders.
- Add new line items.
- Ship or order more quantity from existing line items.

Recurring Orders

Discussion – A recurring order is an order that can be set up once and then released many times. In ALERE this common function has been expanded to provide a number of other capabilities.

- Recurring orders can be released as either sales orders or as sales invoices.
- You can select which line items to release and the quantities of the items.
- Recurring orders can be released “on demand” and as often as required.
- The sales orders or sales invoices are created as Pending orders which allows you to make modifications before accepting them.

Mass Recurring Orders

Discussion – The purpose of this function is to provide a batch method of releasing large numbers of recurring orders at one time. A typical use by a company would be to fill weekly standing orders for stock replenishment for a number of customers. The benefits of this approach are

- The time it takes to release recurring orders is significantly reduced.
- One screen can provide a complete list of all recurring orders that have been set up. This list can then be filtered to show a subset of those orders from which those that are to be released can be selected.
- Groups of orders can be assigned a Release Group ID so that they can be quickly and efficiently marked for release.

- Orders can be released as either Sales Orders or Invoices.

Mass Invoicing

Discussion – The Mass Invoicing process allows you, on one screen, to choose and release multiple sales orders for shipping and invoicing. The benefits of this approach are

- It significantly speeds up invoicing and shipping.
- It allows orders to be filtered and sorted so that the releases can be done on a priority basis.

Credit Memos & Return Orders from Invoices

Discussion – A credit memo or return order can be created directly from the lines on an invoice. This allows

- Superior control by providing a complete audit trail that is visible on the Activity tabs of Invoices, credit memos and return orders.
- You to accurately identify items being returned and their lot/serial number/traits if applicable.
- The correct amounts to be credited.
- Lot/serial numbered/trait items to be placed back into inventory.

Credit Memo Conversion to Payable

Discussion – One of the traditionally difficult tasks in an accounting package occurs when you owe a customer a refund and need to produce a check. In ALERE, one of the options when a credit memo is entered is to convert it directly to a payable from which a check may be issued. This option is also extended to existing credit memos where you are only two mouse clicks away from turning it into a payable. The benefits of this approach are as follows:

- Speeds processing of refund checks.
- The process voids the credit memo and creates the payable in one step.
- All GL entries are automatically made.
- Almost no operator training is required.
- Reduces processing errors by not requiring any reentry of information.
- Eliminates complex steps normally associated with this process.

AR and AP Balances Offset

Discussion – It is not unusual to both sell to and purchase from the same company. On occasion this may lead to situations where it is desirable to offset a receivable or a debit memo against a payable or a credit memo. In ALERE this can be done on the *AR/Cash Receipts* screen with a function that allows payables and debit memos to be listed on the same screen as receivables and credit memos. There you may choose the items and the amounts to use to offset the respective balances. The benefits of this approach are as follows:

- A straightforward visual method makes this usually complex and time-consuming task easy.
- All general ledger transactions are automatically made.
- A complete audit trail is kept.
- The process reduces the costs of separate processes to achieve the same results.

Payment Review and Correction

Discussion – A common problem when applying cash receipts to customer invoices is the accidental misapplication involving the wrong customer, the wrong invoice or the wrong amount. In ALERE a screen is available to review how receipts were applied. This screen also provides the ability to make corrections to these receipts. The benefits are

- Easy access is provided to all receipts information.
- Corrections can be made quickly on the same screen.
- All general ledger entries are done automatically.
- This provides a method that allows payments to be received against a customer's account and then distributed at a later time to the invoices they paid.
- This reduces the costs of separate processes to achieve the same results.

Multiple Location Payments

Discussion – A payment can be distributed to receivables originating from a single customer's multiple locations. The benefits are

- You can easily accept and apply payments from a customer with centralized invoice payments for their multiple locations.
- It facilitates applying customer prepayments to multiple location receivables.
- It is accomplished on a single screen.

Lock Box Cash Receipts Support

Discussion - When a lock box is used, the bank receives A/R payments and deposits the monies in the company checking account. The company is notified of the amount deposited and makes a bank transaction to enter the amount into their internal checking account which, lacking the detailed customer information, is offset against a lock box account. Upon receiving from the bank the detailed receipts information, the lock box account is used to distribute the payments to the appropriate customer accounts. The benefits are

- A simple, clean procedure that supports companies using lock boxes is available.
- Monies received via the lock box can be immediately recognized internally without having to have the detailed receipts information available at the same time.
- The addition of the accounts receivable account and the lock box account provides the current A/R balance.
- The process reduces the costs of managing lock boxes manually.

History of Payments

Discussion – Managing accounts receivable is critical to just about any business. Part of that process is evaluating how well your customers adhere to your payment terms. The *History of Payments* report is designed to provide that information. The benefits are

- Customers that take the longest time to pay can be easily identified as well as those customers that take the shortest time to pay.
- A weighted average option, that calculates based on the value of invoices, will allow you to see trends. For example, those customers that quickly pay small amounts but are always overdue on large amounts.
- The analysis can be done by the different payment terms and date ranges to better pinpoint problem areas.

Refund Overpayments

Discussion – Overpayments (or prepayments) occur when a customer payment is more than the invoice amount and the difference is applied to the customer's open account. The *Approve to Pay* screen in the Purchases Module has an option to include these open amounts so that they may be released for payment. The benefits are

- A straightforward method of refunding open balances on customer accounts that significantly reduces the cost of managing this issue.

- Almost no operator training required.
- Processing errors are reduced by not requiring any reentry of information.
- Complex steps normally associated with this process are eliminated.

Purchases Module Features

Pending Orders in Purchases

Discussion – All orders (quotes, purchase orders, returns, and recurring orders) in the Purchases Module are created as pending orders until they are released. This means

- Orders can be started and saved in a partially completed state without releasing them for processing, thus eliminating the requirement to “throw away” and start over any orders that are not completely finished.
- Orders can be queued up in advance, which does away with the need to save blocks of order numbers for use by suppliers.
- Suppliers can get back to you to complete or change an order at a later time.
- Supervisors, engineers, etc. can review orders before they are released.
- The problems with work interruptions are eliminated.
- Orders can be placed into the software from outside sources without making them active.

Pending Payables

Discussion – A newly created payable may be either immediately processed or saved as a *Pending* payable. The three primary reasons for this option are as follows:

- Payables can be entered as they are received and then released for GL posting when they are paid. This allows ALERE to operate on either an accrual basis or a cash basis.
- Payables that are being contested can be entered and held in a pending state while a log of events is kept in the notes field. When the issues are resolved, the payable can be released, edited and released, or voided. In any case, a permanent record is maintained.
- Payables with incomplete information can be held until complete and then released.

Purchase, Return and Credit Line Types

Discussion – A line item on an order may be set as a **Purchase**, **Return** or **Credit**. The benefits are

- It minimizes the number of steps required to handle a supplier because on one order you can mix items that are being ordered with items that are being returned and/or credited.
- The total of the line items is netted out.
- Net negative orders are easily converted into Debit memos.
- Items that are purchased are placed “on order” in inventory, items that are returned are “allocated” in inventory. This permits you to track and ship returns.
- The costs of processing separate orders to achieve the same results are eliminated.

Multiple PO Invoice

Discussion – Combining multiple purchase orders that have been completely or partially received into one invoice is becoming a more common business process. In a large part this is due to the expansion of world trade and the relocation of many manufacturing and distribution facilities outside their domestic headquarters location. Frequently, containerized shipping is used to fill orders. Since the purpose of a container is to fill it completely, many orders are combined. That results in a single invoice. ALERE is not unique in offering a method of combining multiple orders

into one invoice. What does set it apart is that the function is cleanly and purposefully integrated into the software. The benefits are

- Handling multiple PO invoices is a normal process instead of being treated as an exception with difficult to understand logic.
- The process reduces errors and is considerably faster.
- The learning curve is shortened.

Requisitions

Discussion – Employees can start a requisition with a list of items that they would like to have purchased and send that request to the purchasing department. Since it is common for the employees not to know the item number of the items they want, the order can be filled out using only a description, a quantity and a date when it is needed. The benefits are

- No item number is needed to start the requisition.
- One order can handle items purchased from any number of different suppliers.
- Multiple people can enter requests on the same order.
- Purchasing can review and control the order.

Recurring Orders

Discussion – A recurring order is an order that can be set up once and then released many times. In ALERE this common function has been expanded to provide a number of other capabilities.

- Recurring orders can be released as either purchase orders or as payables.
- You can select which line items to release and the quantities of the items.
- Items are automatically received in inventory when a payable is created.
- Recurring orders can be released “on demand” and as often as required.
- You can “push” or “pull” a recurring order to create a payable. You “push” an order when it is released from a recurring order. You “pull” by starting a payable and then selecting the recurring payable from which to create the payable.

Matching Receivables to Payables

Discussion – Since ALERE makes it easy to sell and purchase from the same company, it is quite possible that there will be both payables and receivables open at the same time. Therefore, an option on the *Aged Payables* report permits open receivables to be included for those companies with open payables. The benefits are

- Being able to readily match open payables and receivables preserves cash flow by allowing the amounts to be offset before approving or making a payment.
- Having AR and AP information condensed on one report.
- Eliminating the costs of finding and combining this information manually.

Check Attachment

Discussion – For many companies that do a high volume of business with their suppliers, it is easy to overflow the space on a check stub when listing the invoices that are being paid. In ALERE up to 12 lines can be printed on a check stub. Should that number be exceeded, a message informs you that the overflow can be printed as a separate attachment when the check printing process is complete. Then a note is added to the check stub indicating that an attachment should be printed for this check. The benefits of this approach are

- Company checks are frequently preprinted and have sequential check numbers. A separate check attachment makes it unnecessary to void one or more of the next check numbers and print on their stubs when there is an overflow.
- A separate check attachment is more easily understood by the company receiving payment than a number of checks, some of which are marked "VOID".
- It is easier to do bank reconciliations when the check number sequence is unbroken.
- Large numbers of voided checks are considered a warning flag by outside auditors.

Inventory Module Features

Inventory Images

Discussion – Each item in inventory may have up to two images and two notes associated with it. The format for the images may be ICO, BMP, GIF, or JPG. The images are readily added by just providing the file name and path. Images permit you to

- Have a visual record of a part and special notes to go with it.
- Add simple CAD drawings to the inventory file.
- Build an image file to support sales presentation.

Inventory Item Traits

Discussion – In addition to handling lots and serial numbers, each item in inventory may have up to three traits associated with it. A trait is a distinguishing characteristic of an item or group of items. Traits work in the same manner as lots and, in fact, they can be used together to describe an item. For example, a Tee Shirt manufacturer might use traits to identify different styles, to track colors, and to select sizes. The use of Traits offers enormous advantages:

- Traits allow you to build a matrix of choices using only **ONE** item number.
- Each inventory item can have up to three unique traits defined and assigned to them. So T-shirts may have *Style*, *Color*, and *Size* traits while pipes may have *Finish* and *Thread* traits.
- You define the list of valid choices for each trait and then assign them to items in inventory.
- Available traits can be displayed and allocated during the sales order process.
- Items in inventory may be replenished based on traits.

Lot and Serial Number Support

Discussion – For companies managing perishable inventories or inventories requiring traceability, ALERE has extensive lot and serial number support. The benefits of these functions are

- Lot and serial number tracking includes serial numbers within lots.
- Two lot expiration types: "Expired", meaning that items cannot be used, and "Degraded", meaning that the items are still available for use but you will be given a warning.
- Lot inspection can assign a status of "uninspected", "passed", or "failed".
- Existing lots allow additional quantities to be received when the cost is the same, or use an option to average the cost across all inventory locations, or post the difference to a variance account.

Physical Inventory

Discussion – Physical inventory is an integrated process that combines data acquisition, manual input, and managerial review and adjustment into one smooth operation. It encompasses

- Direct scanner entry, manual entry and the importation of Excel files to record counts
- Lot, serial numbers and traits
- Location, store and bin
- Side-by-side comparison of system inventory quantities with actual counts for adjustment decisions
- Real-time refreshment of system inventory quantities
- Filtering options to hide empty stock, matching quantities and items not counted
- Selectable inventory counts based on location, store and bin or range of item numbers

Mass Shipping

Discussion – This function is designed to support companies that have a high volume of shipping activity by allowing mass shipments to be done from one screen location. While individual orders can still be shipped directly from a sales order process, the mass shipping approach permits large groups of orders to be batched together and shipped at one time. This shipping process is not limited to sales orders. It also applies to transfer orders and return orders. The benefits of this function are

- A tremendous reduction in the time it takes to record and process the shipment of orders in ALERE versus other systems.
- Support for companies that have dedicated shipping docks by having a screen designed to support high volumes of shipping activity.
- The ability of the system to perform a “ship only” function which allows the shipment to occur without generating an invoice. Thus, the order can be reviewed and released for invoicing at a later point or the order can have multiple shipments made against it, then have the shipments consolidated into one invoice.
- It provides an option to enter shipping charges as the orders are being processed. This includes applying the multiple types of charges that are common when more than one carrier is involved in the delivery of the order, such as overseas or international shipments.
- Consolidating all orders from a single company and shipping them at one time.
- Consolidation of all orders from one location and shipping them at one time.

Mass Receiving

Discussion – This function is designed to support companies that have a high volume of receiving activity by allowing mass receipts to be done from one screen location. While individual orders can still be received directly in the purchase order process, the mass receiving approach permits large groups of orders to be batched together and received at one time. This receiving process is not limited to purchase orders. It also applies to transfer orders and sales return orders. The benefits of this function are

- A tremendous reduction in the time it takes to record and process the receipt of orders in ALERE versus other systems.
- Support for companies that have dedicated receiving docks by having a screen designed to support high volumes of receiving activity.
- The ability of the system to perform a “receive only” function which allows the receipt to occur without generating a payable. Thus, the order can be reviewed and released as a payable at a later point or the order may have multiple receipts made against it, then have the receipts consolidated into one invoice.
- The consolidation of all orders from a single company and receiving them at one time with the option of releasing them as one invoice. This is common in situations involving containers where multiple orders are being received either partially or completely under one invoice.
- The consolidation of all orders at one location and receiving them at one time.

Transfer Orders

Discussion – Transfer orders are internal orders that allow you to easily move and track inventory between company locations. Transfer orders fill the gap between a sales order and a purchase order and, in a sense, they have elements of both. An order is created, line items are added, and the order is released and processed. The single biggest difference is that they both ship and receive the items. This special type of order allows you to

- Have a dedicated, identifiable order to move inventory.
- Print a pick ticket and go through the shipping and receiving process.
- Track the value of inventory in transit with a GL account number.
- Instantly transfer inventory through a special “Ship and Receive” function.
- Set up a consignment location and control the inventory positioned there.

Current and Future Logs of Activity

Discussion – ALERE has activity screens which allow you to easily see what is going on in inventory. With these screens you can look up an item and

- See a list of the sales orders that it was shipped on and drill down to those actual orders.
- See a list of the purchase orders that received it and drill down to those actual orders.
- See a list of the work orders that it was issued to along with the ones that made it and placed it back into inventory as a finished good when you using manufacturing.
- Look into the future and get a list of sales orders that will require the item and drill down to those actual orders.
- Look into the future and get a list of purchase orders that will restock the item and drill down to those actual orders.
- Look into the future and get a list of the work orders that require the item along with the ones that will make it and placed it back into inventory as a finished good when you are using manufacturing.

Default Store and Bin by Inventory Location

Discussion – At each location in inventory an item may be assigned a default store and bin. The benefits are

- Simplified receiving by location.
- A reduction in inventory location errors.
- The default location, store and bin can be looked up for an item and automatically entered on work orders in manufacturing.

General Ledger Module Features

Automatic Period Closings

Discussion – In essence, automatic period closings remove the necessity to make period closing entries and to release batch postings to the general ledger before you are able to operate in the next period. This is accomplished by having any business transactions in ALERE that produce GL journal entries do so in real time to the general ledger. On the first day of the next period ALERE simply begins posting to that period. Since journal entries are date sensitive, adjusting the date of entry allows you to post any required closing entries. Naturally, the ability to post to prior periods is password protected.

There are a number of substantial benefits to this design. They are

- No disruption occurs to company activities because, without a mandatory closing process, ALERE is always available for use. This is especially important if you are managing multiple companies that must be closed in turn before they can be used.
- Processing errors are reduced because you are always operating in the current period.
- Batch closing processes associated with period closings are frequently failure points on a network due to the large amount of records that are being handled at one time and the complexity of the activity. Thus, your data integrity is improved by avoiding these types of processes.
- Choosing when to make closing entries and print the financial reports allows you to better manage your time. In short, it is unnecessary to come in on weekends or stay nights to close a period.
- Critical reports, like *Balance Sheets* and *Income Statements*, are always available to show the current status of your company because all the journal entries are posted in real time to the general ledger.

User Definable Periods

Discussion – ALERE supports up to 99 periods in an accounting year. The start and end days of each period can be individually set. The benefits are

- Each period can be set to start and end on a specific day. This is important to many retail companies who wish to close their books on a Saturday.
- The number of periods can be varied by year thereby support 52/53 week requirements.
- Definitions of fiscal years can be easily changed.

Alphanumeric Chart of Accounts

Discussion – Account numbers may be up to 24 spaces wide and contain six segments. The first segment, called the **Account Major**, must be numeric. However, the segments after that may be alphanumeric. An example would be using the segments to distinguish between domestic and international sales like this: 41000-DOM or 41000-INT. The benefits are

- A more useable and intuitive chart of accounts.
- A shorter learning curve for users.
- Easy to read reports.
- Fewer errors in journal entries.

Treevision™ Chart of Accounts

Discussion – Treevision is a product developed by TIW that is used to graphically display information in a manner similar to the way Windows™ Explorer displays folders and files. In ALERE, Treevision has been used to visually organize the chart of accounts. This permits you to

- Construct and maintain the chart of accounts on just one screen where you can readily see the organizational structure as it is built.
- Easily add and edit accounts.
- View account balances at a glance.
- Drill down for detail.

GL Transaction Drill Down

Discussion – Transaction drill down is the ability to choose an account number, see a list of the GL transactions that are associated with it, then choose one of the transactions and view the original GL journal entry. In ALERE, this process can be done right from the Treevision Chart of Accounts or from a separate Transaction screen. This capability is important because with it you can rapidly find incorrect transactions, determine what caused them, and take corrective action.

Enhanced Support for Journal Entries

Discussion – Making a GL journal entry is the most fundamental of accounting tasks. In ALERE a number of design features have been added to assist the entry process. They are

- The entire journal entry is accomplished with only one screen.
- Pending journal entries may be created and saved rather than posted.
- Transactions may be inserted or removed on any line.
- Debit/credit buttons make it easy to swap amounts entered in the wrong column.
- Individual entries may be duplicated or reversed using a Copy button.
- Reversing entries can be scheduled for any date in the future.
- Templates can be applied to automatically distribute amounts across several accounts.
- Previous entries can be found and viewed using the Forward, Backward and Get buttons. This is especially useful if you are called away from entering a number of transactions and need to view the last one to see where you left off. In addition, the Get button allows you to find and view all entries filtered for reference, description, or date information. For example, you could see all the entries for your electric company listed together.
- The final transaction can be forced to balance with a simple click of a button.

GL Journal Notes

Discussion – A journal entry consists of two or more transactions each of which may have a note added. This allows

- Individual transactions to be documented.
- Notes to be integrated with document management and include scanned documents, pictures, web links, etc.
- Notes to provide a completely documented audit trail.

Dated Income Statement

Discussion – Traditionally, an income statement reports on a predefined accounting period or year. The *Dated Income Statement* enormously expands on that function by allowing the report to be run for any beginning and ending dates. A companion report, *Dated Income Statement Comparison*, permits any two date ranges to be compared. The benefits are

- These reports break the restriction of analyzing financial results only from the accounting period perspective by using date ranges to produce income statements. Thus, profit and loss can be reported for a day, week, quarter, or even for multiple years. This provides more timely and flexible control.
- The ability to compare the financial results from any two date ranges makes it easy to review the differences between weeks, quarters, whole years or even individual days side-by-side.

Reversing Entry Date Assignment

Discussion – Reversing entries allow you to book an expected liability or expense into a current period and then reverse it when the actual liability or expense is incurred. What ALERE does differently is that it allows you to set the date on which the reversing entry is to be made. A screen lists the queued up entries and permits them to be released when they are scheduled or on demand. The benefits are

- Better control over the reversing entry process.
- A central location to review the list of pending reversing entries.
- The ID of the journal entry that initiated the reversing entry is readily available.

Custom GL Accounts Inquiry Tab

Discussion – The purpose of the *Custom General Ledger Accounts* screen is to permit you to establish rules that govern which GL accounts are used in a given situation. For example, you may want to record domestic sales separately from international sales. Or you may want to track sales by product line. In use, the different combinations of these rules can become quite complex. The *Inquiry* tab permits you to test which GL accounts will be used under different conditions. The benefits are

- “One screen” control of a normally difficult area of accounting to learn and use.
- Reduced posting errors and the costs associated with them.
- Validation of the use of GL account segments.
- Conveniently displays the results of complex rule interactions.
- Easy identification of the rule that was the source of any given GL account.
- Reduced set up time for new companies because the *Inquiry* tab makes it unnecessary to walk through processes, like generating an invoice, and then trying to trace the general ledger activity to make sure the correct accounts have been used.

Multi-Company Consolidation

Discussion – The purpose of business consolidation is to combine the financial results of two or more companies into one *Income Statement* and one *Balance Sheet*. While this capability is common among the better accounting packages, ALERE offers the following additional benefits:

- A dedicated or any existing company can produce consolidation reports.
- The chart of accounts in each company does not have to exactly match. Instead the least common denominator is used when producing the reports.
- Consolidations can be performed for grouping of companies by selecting them from a list.

Budgeting

Discussion – The purpose of budgeting is to prepare a plan showing the company's objectives and how management intends to attain those objectives. This is commonly done by using a budget-to-actual comparison. ALERE offers more than one alternative with the following benefits:

- For companies with simple budgeting requirements, the annual budget numbers can be entered using the chart of accounts. Period budgets are automatically calculated from these numbers. This approach has the advantage of being easy to use and maintain.
- For companies with more complex budgeting requirements ALERE will prepare, using actual financial data, one or more Excel budget templates. Spreadsheets pre-loaded this way are then used as a starting point to produce multiple variations of budgets that can then be compared to actual performance.

Financial Report Generator

Discussion – A general purpose report generator will create financial reports. You can define accounts and account ranges to be included in each section of the report and selectable sets of general ledger account values are used. An all-purpose general ledger report is included. The benefits are

- The user can easily create an unlimited number of custom financial reports.
- The reports can be saved and reused as required.
- The report allows as-of dating, detail level options and filters, and multiple types of totaling.
- No third party reporting packages are required.

Configuration Module Features

Sales Order Configuration

Discussion – Sales order configuration (SOC) allows features and options for an item to be chosen as it is being entered on an order. There are many benefits to the use of the SOC:

- Novice users are guided through taking orders for items with options.
- Orders are more accurate.
- Less intervention is required by “product experts” to review and release complex orders.
- Choices on orders can be dependent. For example, when taking an order for a bicycle, there may be a choice between a street bike and a mountain bike. Choosing a street bike might result in a different set of tire choices than if the mountain bike was chosen.
- Choices can be preselected and assigned a finished good item number. This permits the correct item number to be automatically substituted for a “generic” number when the choices are made or allows the finished good item number to be entered and the preset choices to be used.
- The number of ways a product can be sold can be defined and controlled.
- It eliminates the necessity to have expensive product manuals and specifications on hand and does away with the overhead associated with that literature.
- Item price and cost can be recalculated with the press of a button based on the features and options selected.
- Default configurations can be established for use when an item is ordered.
- Data mining can be used to extract information on the most commonly requested options.

Kitting

Discussion – Kits may contain features and options that require choices during the process of taking an order. When an order is placed for a kit the components that make up the kit are automatically allocated in inventory. For companies using manufacturing, the MRP report will include the kits and their components in the material planning process. Components of kits are included on picking tickets. When the kit is shipped the components are issued from inventory. The benefits are

- Kitting is native to the accounting package.
- Kits that can include features and options vastly expand the capabilities of what is considered standard kitting. For example, a kit can be built on-the-fly by choosing the components from a list and entering the quantity required for each.
- The real time allocation of kit components, and the placing of those kits “on order”, provides much better inventory control than systems that only rely on back flushing components when kits are shipped.

Multi-Currency Module Features

Multi-Currency

Discussion – Having multi-currency allows companies to receive orders from customers and place purchase orders with suppliers in a currency other than their own. The benefits are

- A list of currencies is easily defined using both “buy” and “sell” rates.
- Exchange rates can be quickly updated.
- A history of exchange rates is kept and can be graphically charted.

- Default currencies can be assigned to customers and suppliers.
- Making and receiving payments using a foreign currency is supported.
- Special GL accounts can be used to post variances due to currency fluctuations.