



# The Project Viewer Manifesto

## *The Wisdom of Significant Cost Savings and a Smarter Tool for Your Users*

An Executive Brief

### Summary

With the emergence and acceptance of the enterprise project management (EPM) model, many organizations are standardizing on project management tools and methodologies. For a large number of companies, this involves purchasing volume licenses of Microsoft® Project. Two problems arise: first, many users don't need the full functionality offered by Microsoft® Project. Second, project managers are increasingly frustrated by unauthorized modifications to the files they author and maintain.

The solution to both of these problems is to provide Microsoft® Project to the group of users who truly need it (project creators) and to provide **project viewers** for the rest of the users (project consumers) who only need access to the information in the file. The use of project viewers results in significant cost savings and is a much better match between the needs of the users and the solution that is provided.

When selecting a viewer, you should make sure that the solution you choose is low cost, easy to use, desktop-based, and legal.

### The Problem

#### Birth of EPM

In the beginning, only project managers used Microsoft® Project, and it was good. Sharing project information was typically done with paper printouts and Microsoft® PowerPoint slides.

The past decade has seen the emergence of the Enterprise Project Management (EPM) model. Organizations are migrating to a unified set of standard tools, methodologies, and processes for managing projects and resources across the entire enterprise. Project management software vendors have enjoyed the adoption of EPM, because with this adoption came large purchase orders for project management software licenses.

Initially, software vendors made it as painless as possible for the widespread standardization and adoption of project management software. Volume and site licenses were offered at discounts, and companies saw real and tangible benefits in their increased use of project management software.

## Two Unpleasant Side Effects

With project management tools on everyone's desktop, two problems emerged.

First, despite the discounts for volume and site licenses, many organizations are paying for much more functionality than they actually need. Additionally, the early adopter discounts are disappearing in favor of a subscription model that counts installed licenses, regardless of how and if they are being used. The price of EPM is going up annually, and many organizations are feeling the strain financially.

Second, giving non-project managers the ability to modify project plans is often dangerous. The authenticity of the "real" master project file is cast in doubt the moment another user makes a modification to a copy of the project plan. Project managers are frequently frustrated with the wide scale distribution of Microsoft® Project licenses.

## Microsoft®'s EPM Solution

Microsoft® offers an expansive and impressive EPM solution that addresses many of the "access" problems described above. Access to project files can be restricted to the right groups of users, and those only needing to view the project information can do so with a less expensive client access license.

For some organizations, Microsoft®'s EPM solution is near perfect, and we strongly recommend it in those cases. For many other organizations, the Microsoft® EPM solution is not ideal for a number of reasons:

- It requires a significant financial investment. Microsoft® Project Server goes far beyond the desktop project management application. It is a large, distributed, three-tier enterprise application, and it requires at least one dedicated server running Microsoft® SQL Server and SharePoint™ Services.
- It requires a significant IT investment. The deployment and transition to Microsoft® Project Server in an organization is itself a significant project, requiring executive sponsorship and a dedicated project team. Because the deployment is often outsourced, a number of consulting companies have filled the need by specializing in the deployment and transition to Microsoft® Project Server. Of course, their services do not come cheap.
- It requires a serious commitment to EPM methodologies. The tools themselves are only part of the solution. The organization must commit to standardizing on a centralized, coordinated way of planning and executing their projects. Many organizations are unwilling or not yet prepared to make the changes necessary for this transition.

## The Solution: Project Viewers

In the past couple of years, thousands of organizations have found a better solution: providing Microsoft® Project to the group of users who truly need it (project managers) and to provide **project viewers** for the rest of the users (project consumers) who only need to access the information in the file.

Microsoft® Project viewers are software applications that at a minimum allow you to view the information in a Microsoft® Project file. While some project viewers attempt to clone the Microsoft® Project user interface, the best-in-class project viewers focus on the task at hand: providing easy access to the information in the project file.

Microsoft® Project was designed for creating, tracking, and modifying project files. It is a complex application that requires training and project management skills to be used

effectively. A viewer, on the other hand, should be intuitive and easy to use for anyone, whether or not they use Microsoft® Project.

## Benefits

### Significant Cost Savings

The primary benefit of using a project viewer is the significant reduction in license fees that it brings. In most organizations, between 30% and 80% of the Microsoft® Project licenses that are purchased are delivered to users (project consumers) who can use a project viewer instead. A project viewer license is typically less than 10% of the cost of a Microsoft® Project license, so the cost savings can be dramatic.

### The Correct Tool for Your “Project Consumer” Users

Project viewers prohibit the user from modifying the project file, so the problem of users modifying copies of project files is eliminated. This in turn tends to increase the willingness of the project managers to share the project file, which increases collaboration and communication throughout the organization.

## How to Select a Viewer

### It should be low cost

The main benefit of using project viewers is cost savings, so it follows that a viewer **must** be priced significantly less than Microsoft® Project. Otherwise, the benefits are marginal.

### It should be easy to use

The users who don't need a full copy of Microsoft® Project are almost always uncomfortable using it anyway. Microsoft® Project is a complex application; a viewer should be as simple to use as possible.

### It should be desktop-based

Project files tend to be large (several Megabytes) and Microsoft® Project and project viewers can use large amounts of RAM. In the same way that you wouldn't want hundreds of users opening large spreadsheet files or word processor documents from a central server, it's best to run project viewers locally (on the desktop PC).

Microsoft® Project Server alleviates this problem by storing project information in a high-speed database, where transaction processing operations are finely tuned. Server based project viewers simply open the project file and read it into RAM, which can result in nightmare-like performance when multiple users access project files simultaneously.

### It should be legal

As with any software purchase, you should be sure that the software you are purchasing does not violate any third party copyrights or license agreements. Some points to consider:

- If a third party software application accesses the Project Server database, Microsoft® requires you to purchase a Project Web Access Client Access license (CAL). Any project viewer that claims to be an alternative to accessing the Project Server database should be examined very closely from a legal standpoint.
- When it comes to user interfaces, there *is* such a thing as too similar. Viewers that copy icons, menus, dialog boxes, etc. from Microsoft® Project are putting themselves and their customers at risk.
- Evaluate the software vendor's relationship with Microsoft®, and ask for proof of any partnership claims they might make.

## Steelray Project Viewer

Steelray Project Viewer is the leading Microsoft® Project viewer. Steelray is a compelling choice for enterprise customers for several reasons:

- Steelray Project Viewer is low cost, easy to use, desktop-based, 100% legal, and Steelray is the only project viewer vendor that offers proof of this.
- Steelray doesn't clone the Microsoft® Project user interface. Instead, it is the only project viewer to offer true innovation. Steelray invented the Microsoft® Project .mpp viewer, and we are constantly introducing new and innovative features (true navigation, built-in search engine, Excel support) that aren't offered in any other product.

Steelray was designed from the ground up around navigation, making it the world's first and only **project navigator** or browser. It functions similarly to a web browser, with the same level of ease of use. Users can point and click on actual data to navigate to more detailed views centered on that data. Back and Forward buttons let the user navigate between recently visited views, in much the same way a web browser works. A built-in search engine provides an easy and quick way to locate information.

- Steelray is used by thousands of organizations in over 40 countries. Steelray is the best choice for enterprise installations. We support silent installation, site-wide license keys, and a simple licensing process.

For more information, visit <http://www.steelray.com>.

Microsoft and Microsoft® Project are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation. There is no affiliation between Microsoft Corporation and Steelray Software.