



***TECHRIVER***

# Microsoft Access

When Should You Use It (And When You Shouldn't...)

Microsoft Access was developed by Microsoft in the early 1990's at the same time they were developing Visual Basic. The intention was to create an easy-to-use and powerful system that could be customized to create powerful applications. And it is indeed that and it is perfect for certain solutions. Here's a list of where we think you should and should not use Microsoft Access along with the reasons.

## 1. Personal Database Applications

The term Personal Database Applications applies to a suite of applications that are created to manage relatively small and simple amounts of information. For example, to manage wines that you like, or properties that you own. Without a doubt, Microsoft Access shines here. These applications are used by one person. They don't get very complex. They don't tend to get very big. There's little chance for corruption.

## 2. Small Business Applications

Microsoft Access is great to get some processes of a small business up and running. If written well and used well, it can grow along with the growth of the company. However, we've found that they're not frequently written well or used well. So our recommendation is to proceed with caution. Ask yourself:

1. Is this something that many people will need to use?
2. Is what I'm doing somewhat complex?

If you're answering "Yes" to either of these, then you should bring in an expert to do the development. On the other hand, If it's simple and going to be used by relatively few people, you'll probably be OK.

## 3. Departmental Applications

This is similar to a Small Business application. The idea with a departmental application is that it's going to be used by relatively few people. Of course, there are big departments out there and hence our caveat. This follows the same rules as Small Business Applications. If you're going to do something complex with Microsoft Access, make sure that you have someone who knows what they're doing set you up.

## 4. Corporation-Wide Applications

Once you get to company or corporation-wide, you are stepping into deep waters. Consider that what you create here is going to be used for many years and that it's going to be central and pivotal to the growth of your company. Given that, it makes sense that you both put sufficient thought into it and that you hire the right people to deliver something that will have some staying power. In general, Microsoft Access is not the best solution for something like this. It might work in the short term but it's likely to inhibit or, at least, obstruct your growth.

## 5. Web Applications **X**

Most functional web-based applications require a database for persistence. This one is simple. Don't use Microsoft Access for this purpose. It's not built for it. Use an enterprise database server for this such as Microsoft SQL Server. With the frequency that corruption happens with Microsoft Access, you are just asking for trouble.

## 6. Mission Critical Applications **X**

A mission critical application implies that:

- It's used by a lot of people and concurrently
- The business struggles if that application is not up, running and responsive

Don't use Microsoft Access. Use a database that was designed to support mission critical applications.

## 7. Transaction Intensive Applications **X**

This is really the same boat as Mission Critical. A lot of transactions implies heavy usage. Heavy concurrent usage for Microsoft Access is one of the things that leads most quickly to corruption. Granted this is mostly because of how the code is written. And even so, we recommend against using Microsoft Access for this purpose. High transaction volume means that the database behind it needs to be transaction based with roll-back capability in the event that something nasty happens. This is why Microsoft offers SQL Server.

## 8. Business Process Management Applications **X**

This is one of those "It depends" answers. If you've been paying attention, you've seen the common threads that make the red X's and the green check marks show up. If you have a business process that you need to manage and it involves a few people, then Access can serve you. But you must consider growth in your decision. Will it ultimately involve high volume usage? If so, go with an enterprise solution.

## 9. Custom Relationship Management Applications **X**

With the number of off-the-shelf Customer Relationship Management (CRM) applications that are available, it makes no sense to make a custom CRM with Microsoft Access. First see if you can get one of the off-the-shelf to fit your business model. If not and you need to go custom, play big and go enterprise from the start. Then you'll have selected an application that can grow with you.

## 10. Accounting Applications **X**

With its propensity for corrupted data, we think this is the perfect application to avoid. Granted, you can always repair and always restore from backup, is that what you want to be spending your time on?

As you can see, what we're recommending is a system that will grow with you and cause you the least amount of grief in the process. It will probably cost a bit more to create something with Microsoft SQL Server than it will to create something with Microsoft Access. We believe that, in the long run, you'll save a ton of money if you pick the right system for your needs.

[I'm Ready to Replace Microsoft Access!](#)

[My Microsoft Access System Needs Some Love!](#)

If you are in the process of developing an application to increase the efficiency of your business and you'd like a pair of eyes to make sure you're headed in the right direction, drop us a line: [jsinger@techriver.net](mailto:jsinger@techriver.net) or give us a call at **724-538-3878**. We'd be delighted to help you.