# *Data Conversion Strategies for Yardi Voyager™*

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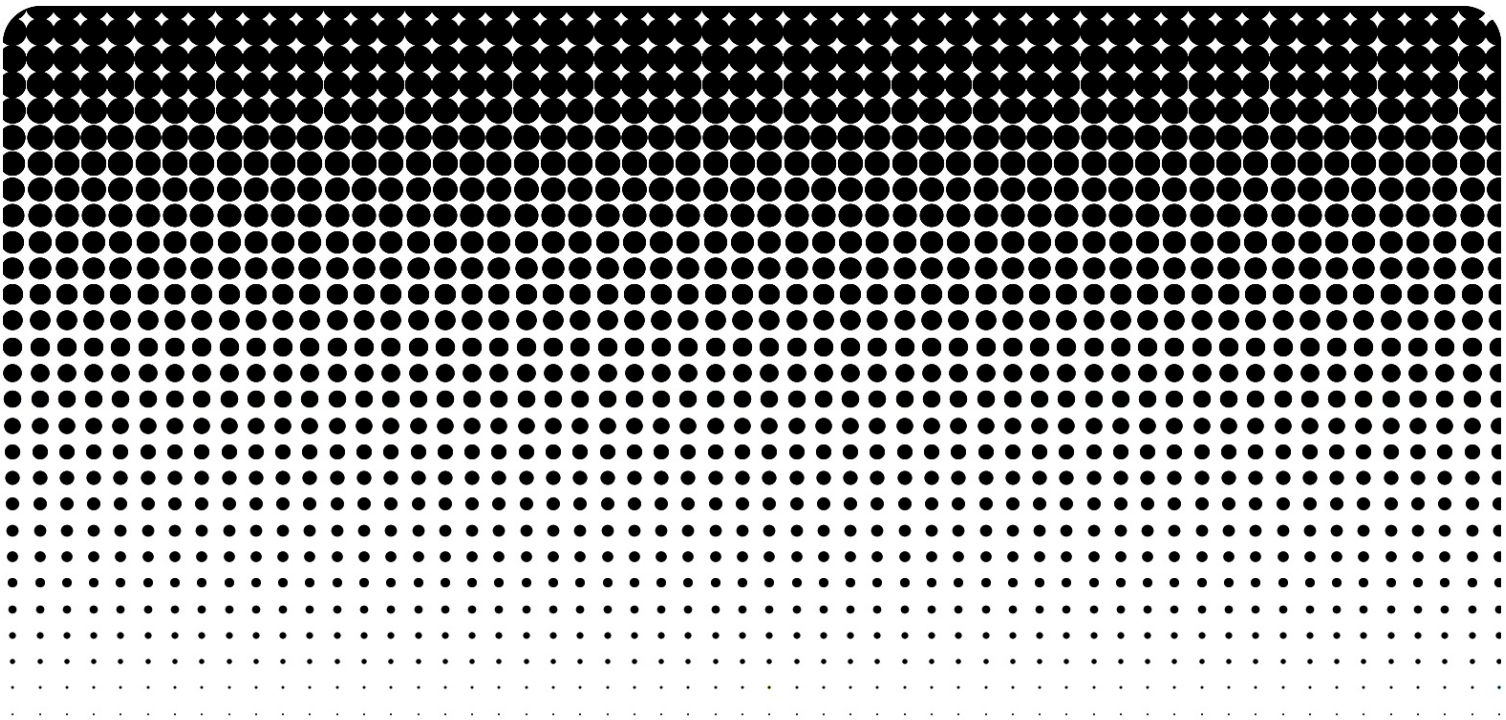

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## Is there a list of software systems that Yardi Voyager™ can convert from?

Using their ETL tool, Yardi has the ability to natively go into several software packages and extract data. Generally speaking, Yardi can electronically convert from any system that has the ability to produce certain source reports directly to Excel. The Excel files are an intermediate step between the initial data extract from the source system and the import of the file into Yardi. Once the data has been saved as .xls file, then the user can manipulate the extract further. Manipulation examples would include tasks like formatting dates a certain way, adding constants, and deleting NULL values. Once the .xls file is formatted, it will be saved as a .csv file and imported into Yardi.

***Do you have to be technical to do the exports/imports?***

*To create new ones, yes. You need to have some abilities in Transact-SQL, know the Yardi schema, and have some abilities and experience in using Yardi scripting. To actually import the files, no. You just need training on how to navigate the import function in Yardi Admin.*

## What is a .csv file, and why is it relevant to importing data and transactions into Yardi?

.CSV stands for comma separated value. If viewed in a text editor, such as Notepad or Wordpad, the information comes across as a string of data separated by commas. This is relevant to Yardi, because the Yardi scripting engine was originally written to only import .csv files. Although Yardi was later updated to include .xml files as well, most companies still use .csv, because it is easy to save and view the data in Excel.

## Is there an ideal time during a Yardi Voyager™ software implementation to convert data?

It depends on the data. The conversion of GL (General Ledger) history, for example, will usually start at the beginning of the implementation. This is because, generally, there is between 12 and 24 months of history that needs to be converted, and it can take a while to validate all of this data – particularly if the chart of accounts has changed between the two systems. Year-to-date vendor payments are typically converted after go-live, but before January 31 of the next year – the due date for 1099s. Variable operational data (e.g. tenant balances) will be done during the "go dark" period while end users are being trained. Static data – data that doesn't change (e.g. units) – can be completed any time during the implementation process. However, because time gets tighter the closer you get to go-live; you will want to get this done sooner, rather than later.

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## If this is a mid-year conversion, is it better to bring over year-to-date vendor payments for purposes of producing 1099s out of Yardi, or to produce two 1099s -- one from Yardi and one from the old software product?

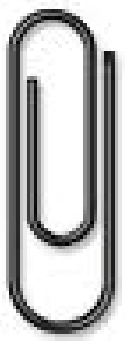



We've seen this both ways. It's easier to do two 1099s, because there aren't any conversion ramifications. (You just print a 1099 from each system.) This is fine with the IRS. Remember that 1099s are not part of the company's mission - it is a reporting requirement by the IRS with a $50 fine per vendor if you don't do it. If you decide to produce the 1099s for the entire year out of Yardi, then the best use-of-time strategy is to wait until after the implementation is done to import and validate the data. It's not necessary to have imported Year-to-Date vendor payments as part of a core go-live strategy.

## What is data mapping – and how is the mapping best handled?

First of all, it's important to realize your old software system and Yardi Voyager store data differently - they are different systems. So, in order to electronically convert the data, the fields in the old system must be mapped to the fields in Yardi system. Most users are going to need help doing this, because they are familiar with the schema of the old system, but not necessarily with Yardi's. If you are in charge of mapping the data, **it is best to work backwards from Yardi's schema to the source system's schema**. This is due to Yardi being the 'catcher' of the data - the source system being the 'pitcher.' Since we are migrating to Yardi, then its schema and data rules are what will dictate during the mapping process. Begin with the mandatory columns for a table in Yardi and work backwards to an equivalent column in the source database. If a column is in Yardi but not in the source database, then this is considered a 'gap'. Gaps can be ignored, or the relevant data can be compiled outside of the source database and entered/imported into Yardi.

## Is there any benefit to storing history as an attached .pdf file?



Yes. The reason is that there is no validation of the tenant balance and no importing of transaction that needs to occur. The data is actually now residing both inside and outside of the system. It's inside as an attachment, so you have a link to the particular object that you're storing history for. It's outside in that it does not hit the Trans table; therefore, *it is not technically a transaction*. One down side to the data not hitting the Trans table is there's no drill down available on this stored history; it's just sitting there as a text object.

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## How many iterations of data conversion orchestration should occur?

*Think of the data orchestration process as a dress rehearsal - you just might have several of them before you are ready for a live performance.*

You need to orchestrate the conversion of the data *until it is right.* That could be 1 time or 20. In my experience, it usually takes 4-5 times to get everything down correctly. Time is of the essence when you are going live, and you have to know that the routine is going to work. You don't want to be messing around with import scripts when the organization is down for two or three days without a system. Think of the data orchestration process as a dress rehearsal - you just might have several of them before you are ready for a live performance.

## Is there any benefit to converting some of the tenant information early in the process, and then bringing in the remainder of the tenant data later in the process?

It's an approach that has some merit. What it allows you to do is to enter or import a minimum amount of information required in order to save a tenant record in Yardi. Once a tenant record is saved in Yardi, the system assigns a tenant ID. When tenant IDs are established, you can go work on other areas of the data conversion that relate to a tenant. It just depends on the implementation plan, and what you are trying to accomplish. For example, if a primary goal of the implementation is the have the work-order history entered early in the process, then you need to have a tenant record established. Later on you can bring in the less important information. It's a time-saving strategy. Establishing tenant records early (even if you don't have all of the desired tenant information) can free you up to work on other areas of the implementation. The down side to this approach is that you are now doing two imports.



## Does the ability to convert data into any Yardi table exist?

Yes. The ability does exist if you can write custom import scripts. To do this, you need knowledge of:

- SQL
- Yardi's database schema
- Yardi scripting methodology

After you have written the custom import scripts once or twice, you will be able to adapt that knowledge into importing into any Yardi table .

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## What is the difference between Import Trans and Import Scripts on the Yardi menu?

Import Trans is what you use to import financial transactions. (A financial transaction would be a journal entry, payable, AP check, tenant charge, or tenant payment.) Import Scripts is the system function to import everything *but* financial transactions.

## What is the difference between static and variable data, and how does that affect your go-live strategy?

Static data is data that, for the most part, doesn't change. An example would be units in residential real estate. The tenants change, but generally speaking, the units do not. Static data can be converted at anytime during the implementation process - the earlier the better, since time is at a premium as you near the go-dark time frame.

Variable data is data that is unknown until you go dark ('dark' being that brief time period where you don't have a system), and your final data conversion is occurring. An example of variable data would be a tenant's outstanding balance. This data cannot be converted until you close down the old system.

The variable data conversion should be orchestrated and tested for a couple of cutoff periods prior to the go-dark/live process. You want to build a conversion protocol that gets executed during the 1-2 days of the final variable data conversion. **The orchestration process allows you to build a conversion routine that is tested for all conceivable scenarios prior to the go-live data conversion**. It is not unusual at all to encounter problems during the orchestration process. In fact, that's why you do it…to find and correct data extraction problems in a safe environment where you have the time to think through all of the data issues.



## How much GL history should be converted?

There is no right answer here, but it is a big time cost/benefit issue. In other words, is the time it takes to enter and validate all this data worth it? And, more importantly, are you actually going to use this information? Clients have had their initial go-live date moved back because the project moves faster than their ability to convert and validate the data -- validation of the general ledger history taking the longest time. This can be compounded even more if you are changing your chart of accounts, because you are validating accounts and balance information, but the GL accounts are no longer the same. What do we see most often? Answer: summarized GL history for the current fiscal year and one prior fiscal year, so our client can facilitate current and prior year comparative reporting.

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## Should the data in the old system be archived?

Yes, it should – particularly the data that is not converted to Yardi. Sometimes, you will have access to the legacy system forever. If this is the case, then just let the data stay there, and access it as you need it. As time goes on, you will have fewer reasons to go back to the old system. If that is *not* the case (and, especially if you are paying license fees on the old system), then you either need to print reports in hardcopy or save the files to use in an electronic library folder system – this way you can easily go back and find the information.

## Is it better to convert summarized GL transactions, each individual transaction, or can just trial balance information be imported?

There is no better or worse. The ease at which the data is pulled from the source system should dictate your choice. For some source systems, it may be easier to pull individual transactions. For others, the best solution would be to bring in a trial balance. It really depends on the capabilities of the source system, its reporting capabilities, and how that data is stored in the source system. Know that pulling individual transactions will result in a slower import process because of the sheer number of transactions that will be brought in. A summarized journal by month by property and by GL account will always go faster from an import standpoint (but the summarized entry might be more difficult to create or 'pull' from the source system…)

## Does the data conversion effort have to be done electronically or can it be done by manually entering the data into the system?

It can be done manually, and sometimes it should be. The fact of the matter is development of the conversion routine takes the same amount of time, whether you are converting 1 property or 100. Sometimes, it is faster and easier to just enter the data in by hand. There is no hard and fast rule. It somewhat depends on your abilities with data, SQL, and schema. If you are good technically (or become adept at using the ETL templates), then you will probably be more inclined to go the import route. There is a point, though, where taking the time to build data conversion templates will save you a lot of time.

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## About the Author



David Wolfe, CPA is widely regarded as a leading authority on software selection and evaluation. He has been the lead consultant on numerous software selections and implementations since he founded his software consulting firm, Lupine Partners (http://www.lupinepartners.com), in 1993. His rational and systematic approach to software selection and implementation has won him loyal clients across the United States. When he is not traveling and assisting companies with their software concerns, David lives in Dallas, TX with his wife Susan.

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