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From the June/July 2006 Issue

About 25 million small businesses exist in the United States, and each was started by entrepreneurs with slightly different goals, strategies and expectations than the others. Some cherish their customer relationships above all; others focus on efficiency, while still others are interested in only the money. While a few entities that focus too narrowly on specific areas may get by on luck in the short term, long-term successful businesses are those that realize it takes a carefully balanced blend of customer care, vendor management, employee and asset management, and fiscal discipline to achieve positive bottom-line results.

Small business management programs are designed to help them achieve this balance,

but the subject of accounting for these entities can be tricky. While larger concerns can hire trained bookkeeping and internal accounting teams, smaller businesses generally can't justify the expense, leaving the principals of the entity or their multi-role managers to handle the day-to-day books and then contracting the monthly services of their accountant for more detailed and complex functions.

Therefore, one of the keys to the success of a small business management program is in its ease of use and intuitive operation. Just as many of your clients may get a lost look when you start speaking about accelerated depreciation or accrual-based accounting, small business personnel may find themselves in that same fog if forced to use a program that uses only accounting lingo. People

without an accounting education need a system that doesn't mandate they

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relationship between a small business and its inventory must also be carefully managed, with the system telling the user what and how much of something is available or is coming, what things are out of stock and need to be ordered, and even when to order. For some of these businesses, point-of-sale devices or barcode scanning may also be necessary.

Everything else that a small business management application does is productivity-enhancing

icing, from integration with programs for analysis and editing (like MS Word and Excel), to synchronization with Outlook for mail and contact management. All of the programs in this review cover the basics of accounting: GL, AP and AR. And all provide at least options for inventory, payroll and other features. A few of the systems offer time-based billing capability, built-in analysis tools, forecasting and cash flow projections, while others offer added value services such as credit card acceptance, full-service payroll, and EFT capabilities for payables and receivables. A host of niche features can further aid small businesses, such as multi-currency and multi-language capabilities.

This review of small business accounting systems evaluates programs in the following areas: **Ease-of-Use/Basic Functionality, Modules/Customization/Expandability, Reporting & Management Functions, Audit Trail, Integrity & Accountant Control Tools, Import/Export/Integration, Help & Support Options, and Relative Value.**

The key to helping your client find the right program is to first assess their business' real needs, and then have them test drive a couple of programs that come closest to meeting those needs. □

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MultiLedger from CheckMark Software provides a strong, fully featured accounting application for small and mid-sized businesses, offering a complete suite of accounting modules that includes a GL with full-time audit trail, AP, AR, inventory and an optional add-on payroll module.

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Database Creations — Business!

Standard Edition

Business! Standard Edition from Database Creations provides a customizable small business accounting and management system built on Microsoft Access.

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Intuit — QuickBooks Premier

Intuit has recently completed a significant upgrade to its QuickBooks line of small business software, with increased inventory management features, a new database structure, improved menus and fewer built-in marketing efforts for its third-party partners.

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Microsoft — Microsoft

Office Small Business Accounting 2006

It's finally here. Microsoft has made a few forays into the small business market in the past, but this time they may have gotten it right — the future will be the judge of that.

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[NetSuite — NetSuite Small Business](#)

NetSuite Small Business is a totally web-based, multilingual accounting system for small and midsize businesses, offering a scalable business and financial management application with traditional accounting modules as well as advanced sales, customer management, e-commerce and back office capabilities. The system is built upon the same platform as the vendor's more robust NetSuite product.

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[Sage Software — Peachtree Premium Accounting 2007](#)

Sage Software's Peachtree Premium Accounting 2007, which becomes available at retail in early July 2006, is the continuation of the former Best Software program, incorporating GL, receivables, payables, inventory and strong payroll functions, along with an array of small business productivity features such as contact management, time & billing, financial analysis and advanced reporting functions.

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[Sage Software — Simply Accounting By Sage](#)

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Software 2006 — Executive Summary

Every business has unique workflow processes that determine the amount of time it takes to complete a sale or perform a service. Every business has unique inventory or pricing needs. Every business has unique payroll situations or customer and vendor relationships. Yes, every business is unique, but the general attributes of a business are usually pretty consistent with other businesses in their industry and in their particular trade.

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