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Jun. 01, 2007

To many small business owners, accounting can seem like a foreign language and can be as hard to comprehend as the hypotheses of Dr. Stephen Hawking. On the other hand, some people just get it. Hopefully, most of you reading this are in this latter group since you are in the tax and accounting profession. You understand the science behind it, more than just the generally basic math.

You understand the necessity of properly maintained accounts and the methods by which to track and correct errors and imbalances. And, in some cases, you have the cunning ability to don the gumshoes of a sleuth to find the causes of more serious financial irregularities. It is the combination of these capabilities that brings the accounting profession near to being an art form. Well, sort of.

We are not, of course, espousing the use of creative license when it comes to your clients' financial records, but rather pointing out that the broad scope of accounting functions requires both logic and the touch of a muse. Not all are gifted with these attributes, but small business owners still need to accurately maintain their business records on a day-to-day basis. This is the job of small business accounting software, for which small business owners have a wide variety of options.

In addition to keeping proper books, these programs can improve efficiency, help them better serve their customers, perform payroll tasks and related compliance issues, offer invoicing and correspondence functions, offer analysis and planning, and many other functions. But since your small business clients are not likely to be as knowledgeable and adept at accounting and business process functions, a small business accounting program's ease-of-use is often paramount to whether it is properly employed.

And that is where the vendors and software programmers exercise their mix of science and creativity. Make no mistake, what they do certainly is art, for they are

charged with taking the complex, interrelated scientific accounting principles and

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and reconciliation, automatic tax and payroll updates, and even fully web-based accounting systems.

These systems now offer features that would have been available only in very high-end programs just a few years ago, including varying levels of inventory support, industry-specific templates and workflow processes, strong sales and invoicing, decent customer relationship management modules, highly customizable report options, integrated communications, analysis capabilities and scheduling functions. In short, these programs have essentially become enterprise resource planning systems (ERPs) for small businesses, integrating all core functions of the business.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Key Small Business Accounting Features:**

- GAAP-Compliant Double-Entry Accounting w/GL, AP, AR
- Inventory Management
- Sales & Invoicing
- Electronic Banking & Reconciliation
- Integrated Sales Tax
- Payroll Functions w/Tax Updates
- Reporting Options
- Audit Trail

### **Advanced Small Business Accounting Features:**

- Strong Customer Relationship Management
- Remote Access/Fully Web-Based Systems
- Schedule Management

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off point, with all products scored based upon Ease of Use/Basic Functionality; Core Features/Expandability; Reporting & Management Functions; Audit Trail, Integrity & Accountant Control Tools; Import/Export/Integration; Help & Support Options; and Relative Value. □

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### [A-Systems Corporation — Visual Bookkeeper](#)

Visual Bookkeeper from A-Systems provides an all-in-one accounting system for small businesses, with two versions available for various entity types and their accounting needs. A-Systems offers the Small Business Advantage System and the Preferred Edition, which is reviewed here, for small and midsize businesses with more complex requirements.

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### [CheckMark Software — MultiLedger](#)

Now in its 21st year, the MultiLedger system is one of the few small business accounting systems that offers support for both PC and Mac operating systems, with traditional GL, AR, AP and inventory functions, along with reconciliation, budgeting, planning and cash flow tools, job tracking functions, strong security features, MICR printing capabilities and an optional add-on payroll system

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### [Hilbert Software — 21st Century Accounting](#)

ProSystem *fx* 21st Century Accounting initially started with some of the original BPI programmers, attracting users of that program and of the former ACCPAC DOS series. The program provided them with a more evolved accounting

package that met their small market and mid-range needs, while still offering

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that offers industry-focused versions, the program has become the standard bearer for small business accounting applications.

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### Microsoft — Microsoft Office Accounting Professional 2007

After some adjustments and name changes to its products since Microsoft debuted its accounting system last year, the company seems to be settling in for the long run with two primary packages. Microsoft Office Accounting Express 2007 is a free single-user system for very small businesses, providing users with GL, AP, AR, invoicing, online banking and integration with PayPal and eBay...

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### MYOB US — Premier Accounting Small Business Suite

MYOB's line of small business accounting products includes basic and more advanced programs that are offered in both PC and Mac versions, providing an integrated suite of business management, accounting, communications, payroll and other tools. The top product offering is Premier Accounting Small Business Suite...

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### NetSuite — NetSuite Small Business

Based on the enterprise-level NetSuite 11.0, NetSuite Small Business provides a web-based accounting system for smaller and midsize enterprises, offering impressive functionality through various modules for general accounting, sales, inventory, shipping, e-commerce, HR and customer relationship management. The small business program uses role-based interfaces with the ability to handle

any number of concurrent users, and supports multiple currencies and multiple

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AP, AR, inventory, payroll and contact management functions, along with additional features for job costing, data analysis, time & billing, and fixed asset management.

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