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Business Accounting Systems*

When it initially debuted, many professional accountants were a bit skeptical of Microsoft's Office Accounting. This was in part due to the tech giant's previous half-hearted attempts at entering the small business accounting space. But many of these professionals have come to respect the program, now in its third year, as one of the most capable products on the market. It combines the comfortable work environment of a true Microsoft Office program with a complete feature set and accountant-quality back-end processing, audit trail and security features.

The Office Accounting Professional system includes full GL, AP, AR, inventory management and invoicing, along with support for multiple currencies, job costing, check printing, online banking, remote access, accountant access, and payroll and e-commerce options. The program also houses contact management functions and integrates completely with other Office programs, including Excel, Word and Outlook with Business Contact Manager.

Microsoft Office Accounting Professional retails for $149.95 for a single-user license when upgrading from a previous version, or $199.95 new. A three-user license costs $499.95. Office Accounting Professional can support any number of businesses and subsidiary units, and up to eight total concurrent users, with appropriate licensing. Microsoft also offers a free downloadable accounting system called Microsoft Office Accounting Express, which offers many of the core benefits of the Professional version, but with less scalability.

Ease of Use/Basic Functionality — 5 Stars
Millions of people use Microsoft's Office suite every day, and Microsoft

extends the same interface design and assistance features to Office Accounting

flow and bank balances. These panels can also be set to show quick views of invoice activity, inventory alerts, payroll functions and a to-do list. Search features also simplify finding information located in any part of the program, including customer, vendor and employee records; inventory; journal entries; and transactions. Key function areas are accessible from centralized areas that provide detailed overviews for related tasks, such as vendors, customers, transactions, employees, banking and online sales, with direct access to an easy-to-use, yet comprehensive reporting system. Contact management functions are readily available from within vendor and customer files.

Core Accounting/ Security Functions — 4.5 Stars
Microsoft Office Accounting Professional includes full GL, AP, AR, checkwriting and inventory management features with multi-level charts of accounts, along with integrated payroll capabilities through a partnership with ADP. Inventory features include kit and assembly items, and multiple pricing levels, with the ability to set customer discounts. The program provides cash flow forecasting and budgeting tools, supports multiple currencies and is now available in a Spanish language version. Microsoft has also built in online banking functions and the ability to accept credits cards or use eBay and PayPal, with transaction data automatically tracked and posted within the accounting system. Office Accounting Professional includes a full-time audit trail, along with security features that can limit users to specific activities/tasks. New in the 2008 version of the system are several accounting enhancements, including the ability to schedule and memorize documents for recurring transactions, additional budgeting tools, automatic re-ordering of inventory at user-defined levels, and the option to convert sales orders into purchase orders. Other new features include a Resource

Center, the ability to bulk e-mail documents, and import data and transactions

dashboard called the Accountant View page simplifies import and export of client data and management of journal entries for multiple clients. The report center provides an easy-to-use interface that provides more than 70 predefined, customizable reports, including financials, cash flow, sales, aging, item profitability and transactions.

Import/Export/ Integration — 5 Stars

Accounting Professional is a full-fledged part of the Microsoft Office family, sharing all of the navigation features and assistive features found in Word, Excel and Outlook, and providing instant, usually one-click integration between the accounting system and these other programs. This includes e-mailing of electronic invoices that include PayPal links, advanced report generation and customization, and spreadsheet-based data analysis functions. Accounting Professional can also export files into new and previous Word versions, Excel, *.CSV, PDF, Access and XML formats.

Help & Support Options — 4.5 Stars

The assistive features built into the Accounting Professional system are numerous and easy to use, with right-click menus, content-sensitive Help, search features, and links to support and the Resource Center. Support is free for the first 30 days, with subscription packages available thereafter.

Relative Value — 4.5 Stars

Microsoft Office Accounting Professional provides a comprehensive business management system with excellent integration with Microsoft's Office family, along with useful electronic banking, payment and e-commerce functions. Through third-

party

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