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QuickBooks Premier Contractor Edition builds on the company's popular general accounting package to address the unique needs of construction contractors. It has a familiar feel to anyone acquainted with Intuit's QuickBooks line, and will appeal especially to any construction business that has already been using QuickBooks, but wishes to gain greater business management control by using job estimates, invoicing, costing and bill payment. QuickBooks Premier: Contractor Edition costs \$499.95.

### **Learning Curve ' 5 Stars**

QuickBooks can integrate and take advantage of other optional third-party software including Word, Excel, Outlook and ACT. The program is multi-user ready (with additional licenses) for two to five users with a Windows peer-to-peer, Windows server or Novell server configuration. By default, the main screen work area provides a 'Contractor Navigator' window with a pictorial workflow diagram and shortcut links to the most common accounting tasks, such as estimates and change orders, purchase orders, enter bills, etc. Other links on the navigator lead to other related activities and memorized reports. For other tasks, you'll have a standard Windows drop-down menu and toolbar. Use of the navigator screen is optional, and all tasks are accessible from the menu system.

Data-entry screens throughout the program are some of the most easy to use. Screens are designed to simulate real-world forms, such as checks, invoices and so forth. In addition to the instant familiarity, you get all sorts of features like the ability to just type in the first few characters of the customer name, job name, account name, or whatever type of data is applicable in the field. As you type, QuickBooks finds the closest match and allows you to accept that choice or drop a list down and select from the list. In addition, you can typically add items on the fly just by clicking the list item.

## Modules & Functionality ‘ 4 Stars

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balance, notes, job status and estimate total. The list can be quick-sorted on any column by simply clicking the column header. As jobs are completed, they can be marked as inactive so that they no longer clutter the list with completed jobs.

As bills are entered, they can be charged to any job in the list. The additional ‘Class’ field can be used to further detail the cost using any user-defined classification desired, such as cost type or job phase. Invoicing is slightly more complicated, since there are a number of ways you might want to present information to customers when billing. A wizard helps you select the best invoicing options that reflect the way the business operates. Various options allow for sales tax, discounts, online billing, online payment and inventory tracking. Based on your choices, the program suggests either an invoice, sales receipt or statement. As with payables, receivables can be specified for any job and class.

Estimates are entered in a manner similar to invoices. You can create multiple estimates per job and duplicate estimates to help save time. You can also track change orders directly on estimates. Whenever you modify an existing estimate, you have the option to save your changes as a change order on the estimate. The change order is added to the bottom of the estimate. Invoices can be created from estimates by simply clicking the ‘create invoice’ button on the estimate screen.

New for 2005, the Job Costing Center lets you see a snapshot of your jobs and provides information such as your three most profitable jobs, three least profitable jobs, job costing highlights, and shortcuts to some of the most critical job costing reports. In addition, you can now create more accurate time-and-materials billings with the ability to set rate levels by employee. With Microsoft Word integration, you can also create invoices formatted as letters from within QuickBooks.

## Import/Export/Integration ‘ 3.5 Stars

Since QuickBooks is a more self-contained product with a proprietary database, it

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Intuit provides whatever level of support you need. For your first 12 months, the company provides free support for issues regarding installation, upgrading, QuickBooks-specific product error messages, and product defects. In addition, the company has paid support plans at several levels, including a per-call basis. Several different forums are provided for training, including web based, CD-ROM-based, instructor-led seminars, printed publications and the Intuit Education Program. The 2005 version added a new series of built-in multimedia tutorials, representing a nice selection of user interface basics as well as a number of 'best practices' suggestions. Intuit also actively supports a network of Certified QuickBooks ProAdvisors ' private accountants and consultants who can provide customized and one-on-one services.

### **Reporting ' 4 Stars**

Numerous reports have been pre-defined to provide job cost and job management information. Customizable reports include Job Status, Job Costs Detail, Billed/Unbilled Hours by Person, Certified Payroll ' Box 1 Employee Information, Unpaid Bills by Job, and Expenses not Assigned to Jobs. The 2005 edition added six new job costing reports, including Cost-to-Complete by Job Summary and Job Cost by Vendor and Job. All reports can be exported to Excel.

### **Relative Value ' 5 Stars**

Although this package may not meet the heavy-duty needs of large contractors, it is almost a no-brainer for any business that is accustomed to the QuickBooks accounting programs or is already using one of the Intuit general accounting packages. Any construction businesses with up to 20 employees should take a look at this nicely designed and easy-to-use package.

**2005 Overall Rating: 4.5**

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