May. 27, 2005

Visual Bookkeeper from A-Systems is a low-cost small business accounting package that includes GL, AP, AR, payroll, cash management, purchase order, contact management, sales order and inventory functions in the core product with no additional modules necessary. The system is built on the company's original JobView construction accounting software, which has been in production since 1978. Visual Bookkeeper has been adapted to serve virtually all small businesses, with flexible charts of accounts and productivity features. Two versions of the system are available. The Preferred Edition is $995 for a single user, with additional concurrent users costing $100 each. The lesser-featured Small Business Advantage Edition is $39.95. This review looks at the Preferred Edition.

Ease of Use/Basic Functionality – 5 Stars

Visual Bookkeeper assists users in setting up a company's chart of accounts, balances and other information via a series of wizards and other help tools. The system can also be used to support multiple companies. After company setup, it opens to a simplified screen that provides a non-traditional, but well-crafted vertical icon menu on the left that provides access to the primary functions of the program, including management overviews, the GL, AP, Sales Orders, AR, Payroll, Purchase Orders and Inventory. When selected, each of these icons provides a text-based sub-menu of options, such as the Payroll menu, which offers access to employee timesheets, check handling, payment records and reports. All data entry, including posting of transactions in the GL, entering invoices or working with inventory, is performed on data-entry sheets that are fairly easy to understand and navigate, with a consistent design. The program employs a batch-based transaction posting system for posting all transactions. Overall, the program is well designed, with an interface that is easy to navigate and features that are simple for even novice users.

Available Modules/Customization for Vertical Industries – 4 Stars

Expandability – 4 Stars

As mentioned earlier,
A-Systems offers the Small Business Advantage version of the accounting software, which is a much more limited application, but provides core business bookkeeping functions for very small firms. Those outgrowing the small business version can easily migrate up to the Preferred Edition, since the programs share the same code base.

Reporting & Management Functions – 4.5 Stars

Visual Bookkeeper has a good set of predefined report templates that can be customized as needed and saved as a template for future use. The system also allows "favorite reports" to be accessed via an icon at the top of the system screen. It also includes an optional report writer called DataView, which provides additional customization options. All reports can be previewed prior to printing, and individual pages of reports can be printed separately. Stock reports include GL transaction reports, financial statements, detail
by account, posted invoice analysis, vendor and customer lists, aging and history reports, sales tax summary, payroll reporting, and various federal and state reports. The system also prints forms 1099, W-2 and W-3 on plain paper.

Visual Bookkeeper's Overview screens provide a good summary of data from various components, including AR, AP, and company financials, with graphical displays of the balance sheet and other items, as well as drill-down capabilities. New for this year, the program includes a contact management function that allows users to manage contact and sales data for current and prospective customers, as well as tracking and recording communications. This system can also be used to generate letters, e-mail and faxes. Visual Bookkeeper's inventory module includes the ability

to attach an image to an inventory item, which is a great idea, especially when the

percent of gross or net, or an amount per hour.

Audit Trail, Integrity & Accountant Control Tools – 5 Stars

Once a transaction has been posted in Visual Bookkeeper, it becomes a permanent part of the file and cannot be altered. Any adjustments have to be done by an adjusting journal entry, which also becomes part of the audit trail. This system maintains excellent data integrity because it does not allow anyone to alter data in previously posted transactions. The system also automatically performs a "data integrity check" during transaction posting and alerts the user if data does not reconcile based on a series of comparisons.
Visual Bookkeeper has an extensive user-level security system, allowing restriction or access to the program's more than 100 individual functions and processes, including limit- ing users to only a specific module like AP, or limiting within a module such as preventing a payroll staff member from viewing executive payroll data. As well, the system includes a built-in external data backup utility.

Help & Support Options – 5 Stars

The program's help utility provides a very good format, including pictures of the screen that the user is on and detailed explanation of each data-entry field in the system. The help utility also includes a Procedures Guide that instructs on use of the software and a "crash course" in bookkeeping called "Bean Counting 101" to help novice non-professionals gain a little insight into the various principles of accounting. It was written by the company's president, Arnold Grundvig. A-Systems provides multi-media training videos and sample company data sets with each copy of Visual Bookkeeper, as well as free online training. Annual support packages are available at an additional cost and include all program updates. Both support and program updates may also be purchased on an as-needed basis.

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us