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Pro, Enterprise, and the Premier Edition reviewed here, which can be used to support several companies concurrently. Intuit also offers QuickBooks: Online Edition for those who prefer a web-based accounting solution. Premier is available in versions tailored to specific types of businesses and industries. Intuit also offers a wide array of add-ons, including point-of-sale systems, payroll options, advanced client management applications and additional programs and services. The single-user version of QuickBooks Premier costs \$499.95; \$1,499.95 for up to five users. For businesses upgrading from any older version of the program, the costs are \$379.95 and \$1,349.95, respectively.

Ease of Use/Basic Functionality – 4.5 Stars

All versions of QuickBooks are centered on simplified navigation throughout the program and operation of its primary features, since the program is specifically geared for small business owners who may not have a solid understanding of accounting and bookkeeping practices. The system includes wizards and an EasyStep Interview process that assist in initial setup of the company's charts of accounts and other records. By default, the program opens to the Customer Navigator, which is the primary interface for producing estimates, invoices and cash flow activities, and presents a flowchart of the functions in this area and how they relate to other activities. The Navigator screen also includes text-based links to Related Activities, access to frequent reporting tools and related add-on products. Additional Navigators include and overview of the Company, Vendors, Employees, Banking, Business Services, Reports and Help & Support. All of these are accessible from a menu on the left of the screen. The system also provides traditional pull-down and icon menu bars across the top of the window.

Another navigation feature especially useful for novices is the Reminders section, accessible from the icon bar. This function provides alerts on due bills, past-due

invoices, inventory warnings, POs, and other items. Overall, QuickBooks Premier is

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specifically designed for retail, manufacturing & wholesale, contractors, professional services, non-profits and accountants. These versions are the same cost as the general Premier version. Intuit also offers a specialized Point-of-Sale system for retail concerns that includes POS hardware and offers more advanced inventory, sales and customer tracking. Also available are several add-ons and services, including checks and forms, a variety of payroll options, credit card processing services, and the fairly new QuickBooks Customer Manager, which provides additional customer relationship management support. Many third-party add-on solutions are also available for specific niche industries via the QuickBooks Solutions Marketplace.

Expandability – 4.5 Stars

The entire QuickBooks line is upward compatible, and many products are downward compatible, as well. This provides a good measure of scalability. As very small businesses grow, they can easily move up to versions with greater functionality, from the Simple Start version for extremely novice users with simple business needs, through the Basic and Pro versions, and then into the Premier version, which also allows remote access. The system can import data from several third-party applications and can export to many tax preparation programs. Ultimately, if the business outgrows this version, the Enterprise level provides added support for multiple concurrent users and remote access. The Premier version can be used to support multiple companies.

Reporting & Management Functions – 4.5 Stars

The industry versions of QuickBooks Premier include customizable pre-designed reports tailored to the specific industry, as well as the ability to create a variety of statements, invoices and other reports. Through the system's Reports Navigator,

users have access to summary and detail income statements and balance sheets; YTD

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includes monitoring raw materials and finished goods and allows setting of “per item’ price levels. Premier also includes forecasting, planning and budgeting capabilities, providing an automated one-year forecast, basic budget reports with just a few clicks, and a step-by-step guided business plan developer that includes a three-year projected pro-forma balance sheet as well as P&L and cash flow statements. As well, the new Expert Analysis tool allows comparison to similar businesses, with data for more than 130 industries.

Audit Trail, Integrity & Accountant Control Tools – 4 Stars

QuickBooks has audit trail capabilities, but the audit system can be easily turned off, which may limit its effectiveness in some environments. When employed, the system provides information on changes made, including the user, action, amount, account number and transaction number. The system includes adequate password protection capabilities that can limit access to managerial functions.

Help & Support Options – 5 Stars

Intuit provides excellent help and user support through its built-in help utility and several online support features, including a knowledgebase with FAQs, numerous video tutorials, links to additional support locations, and a variety of support plans. Additionally, web-based, CD-based and instructor-led seminars are available, as well as support from local QuickBooks resellers who are certified as ProAdvisors.

2005 Overall Rating – 4.5 Stars

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