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Microsoft Business Solutions — Small Business Financials

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From the September 2005 [Review of Mid-Range Accounting Software](#)

Formerly known as Small Business Manager, Microsoft has geared Microsoft Business

Solutions Small Business Financials North America Edition to be a step up from off-the-shelf small business programs, with modules for managing financials, sales, purchasing, inventory, payroll and reporting that offer greater depth than those programs, while maintaining a focus on the core needs of closely held businesses. Additional add-on options for fixed asset management, payroll, magnetic media, FRx Designer and Crystal Reports are also available for specific industries, and the program integrates with Microsoft's Office programs.

The program organizes tasks around three primary objectives: Financial Management,

Supply Chain Management and E-commerce. Small Business Financials includes Microsoft

SQL Server 2000 Desktop Engine (MSDE 2000) and is also compatible with Microsoft

SQL Server.

The program is available in a suite that combines core modules for GL, AP, AR, Inventory, Sales Orders, Purchase Orders and Bank Reconciliation, or modules can be purchased individually. The suite costs \$995 for a single user and \$400 for each additional seat, making the software cost for a five-user system \$2,595. Support costs 18 percent of the software cost.

EASE OF USE/TRANSACTION ENTRY — 5 Stars

Microsoft may get panned by the hardcore techies and certain government agencies when it comes to some issues, but it generally receives rave reviews for the usability of its products. The company has dominated the operating system and office productivity market and, as such, people are accustomed to how their programs work. Small Business Financials (SBF) is no exception, sporting an intuitive interface with a traditional Windows look and feel. The system uses horizontal menus across the top, including an icon bar for accessing the system's various modules, and houses a selection of tabs on the left for accessing customized shortcuts and lists of customers, vendors and items. As with other Microsoft programs, these menus are customizable and moveable, allowing users to set up their desktop as they desire.

Setup of the program is very easy, with wizards for creating new companies, configuring the chart of accounts, importing existing data from other applications and setting up suppliers, customers and inventory. Templates for traditional company types also expedite setup tasks. Most data-entry screens open into tabbed subwindows that provide very intuitive navigation and grouping of related tasks and strongly resemble data entry in Outlook, with calendar access when entering dates and lookup lists as well as pull-down menus where beneficial. The system provides overviews of key data through its SmartList function that can also be customized, enabling users to keep tabs on back-ordered inventory, open POS and AR issues, or whatever the user wishes it to track. The program was designed with an open architecture, which means that there are a number of ways that software developers can add-in features or otherwise tweak the application for the needs of specific niche markets.

NOTABLE FEATURES — 4.5 Stars

SBF's core financial management modules include Banking, Financials, Fixed Assets, Foundation Services, Purchasing, Reporting and Payroll. A full-time audit trail and a variety of security options are available through the system. SBF supports up to 13 fiscal periods and can manage an unlimited number of companies

with any number of subsidiary departments or entities. The program offers Excel-based budgeting tools to help manage vendor relationships and inventory. Additionally, it supports flexible account structures, intelligent transaction processing and advanced financial reporting capabilities. The system maintains historical information for an unlimited number of years.

SBF's inventory functions allow multiple item types such as stock, kit, labor and service, as well as the ability to set up user-defined fields. Costing methods include FIFO, LIFO and average, and the system has the ability to assign specific pricing to individual customers, back order management, real-time adjustments, and integration with sales and purchasing processes. Items can be assigned lot and serial numbers or users can group separate items sold as a single unit into kits. The program includes a cashflow calendar that automatically provides current and projected information, as well as forecasting future inflow and outflow. Transactions can be posted either by batch or individually.

INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT — 5 Stars

Integration with other Microsoft applications, specifically Excel and Word is exceptional, generally with one-click access. The program also enables import of data from Great Plains, QuickBooks and Peachtree. Information can be imported or exported by other databases or applications utilizing ODBC.

REPORTING — 5 Stars

Small Business Financials includes 150 customizable reports that include analysis tools and other methods of monitoring key business financial statements and planning reports. Users can also build cross-company financials using the FRx add-on, and have enhanced reporting features with Crystal Reports. Reports output to Excel, Word, HTML, *.PDF and plain text, and can be e-mailed from within the system.

SUPPORT/TRAINING/HELP SYSTEM — 3.5 Stars

The program houses an excellent help utility with context-sensitive assistance and right-click menu options, as well as system user guides and tutorials. An online knowledgebase provides further information, and technical support is available through subscription agreements. Initial online training is included with the purchase of a service plan. The program is sold through Microsoft Certified Partners who also provide service and training options.

SUMMARY

Small Business Financials is built on the Great Plains database, so the product can provide a stepping stone to that larger accounting suite if the business grows to need more financial management capabilities. Its intuitive navigation and integration with Excel and Word are outstanding.

2005 Overall Rating — 4.5 Stars

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