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*From the June/July 2006 Review of  
Small Business Accounting Systems*

It's finally here. Microsoft has made a few forays into the small business market in the past, but this time they may have gotten it right — the future will be the judge of that. Microsoft Small Business Accounting 2006 (SBA) is offered as an expansion to the software vendor's Microsoft Office suite of products, integrating with most of the primary components of the suite, including Excel, Word and Outlook. The program is geared toward companies with up to 25 employees, with support for up to five concurrent users. A single-user license of the program costs about \$149 at retail stores such as Staples and CompUSA, with one free year of full technical support.

An upgrade of the Office suite called Microsoft Office Small Business Management Edition 2006 costs about \$499. The bundled package includes Small Business Accounting plus the latest versions of Excel, Word, Access, Publisher, Outlook, PowerPoint and Business Contact Manager for Outlook. Professional accountants who join Microsoft's free Professional Accountants' Network receive a free copy of SBA, with one year of free support and 27 hours of CPE credits.

**Ease of Use/Basic Functionality — 5 Stars**

Microsoft has long been the standard bearer for interface design. SBA follows this tradition, using an interface that strongly resembles Outlook with several panels for accessing various data. A left panel provides tabs for the program's key modules. When selecting a function area, such as Company, Customers, Vendors, Employees, Banking and Reports, the program provides icons and links in a workflow

diagram in the main area of the screen, allowing access to features and tasks

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users through selection of chart of account templates and company, vendor and customer data entry. All program features are very easy to access and utilize, with intuitive design features and the familiarity of a Microsoft Office program further easing program operation.

### **Modules/Customization/Expandability — 4 Stars**

SBA's general accounting functions include GL, AP and AR, while additional functions include inventory, employee management, job cost tracking, payroll, and customer and vendor management. The system uses a traditional double-entry method and allows closing out of periods, with further protection offered by a full-time audit trail. The program has excellent vendor and customer data screens that offer the ability to store deep levels of data that include account histories, financial summaries and the ability to add custom fields.

The program's banking features have simple checkwriting and printing functions, as well as the ability to use electronic banking and reconciliation. Microsoft also offers add-on services for credit card acceptance.

The inventory system offers the ability to create and track multi-part items and kits, but only supports FIFO and is somewhat limited on pricing levels and doesn't support serialization or subcategories for items. Similarly, the program's payroll system offers barely the basics for those wanting to manage their own payroll, but SBA integrates with ADP, which offers various service level options. A variety of third-party add-ons are available to enhance inventory, billing and checkwriting functions and to give more vertical customization

for construction, VARs, retail, wholesale and other industries. There are no higher versions of the program to move to when growth requires more than five concurrent users or a more robust system. However, migration tools are available

to ease the transition to Microsoft Dynamics, the mid-range Microsoft accounting

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and reports directly from the program.

### **Audit Trail, Integrity & Accountant Control Tools — 4.5 Stars**

SBA maintains a full-time audit trail that cannot be turned off, monitoring all transaction entries and changes, noting user, time and data changed. Security is also available, enabling management to limit access to specific areas such as payroll, financial reporting or any other area of the system. Period closing is supported.

### **Import/Export/Integration — 5 Stars**

SBA was designed as a Microsoft Office product, so integration with Word, Excel, Outlook and Access are probably the best on the market for accounting systems. The mail-merge function simplifies creation of customer letters and envelope generation, and outstanding Excel integration is a boost with list export. Customer and vendor management functions are also enhanced by the Outlook integration. The program can import company data from QuickBooks 2004 and earlier releases, and can also pull data in Excel, Access, XML and text formats. As noted earlier, the system integrates with ADP for payroll services.

### **Help & Support Options — 4.5 Stars**

As with any Microsoft program, SBA houses an excellent built-in Help utility replete with right-click menus, assistance panels and query tools. The program also comes with an actual printed user's manual. Microsoft is currently offering one year of full technical support, which includes live phone assistance as well as an overwhelmingly comprehensive online support network.

### **Relative Value — 4.5 Stars**

Considering its price point and capabilities, SBA is probably better compared to the mid-level versions from the other major small business accounting vendors. It offers strong core accounting features and a full-time audit trail, along

with outstanding integration with Word and Excel, but reporting options are

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