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If you use QuickBooks 2006 or higher on a network, here are some tips for “tuning” your environment to provide the best performance. The issues discussed here apply to QuickBooks Pro, Premier and Enterprise, regardless of the edition you are running. This also applies to Windows XP and/or Windows 2003 server, and has not yet been tested in a Windows Vista environment.

Which Database Engine Should You Use (Premier or Enterprise)?

Thanks to Joanie Mann of CPAASP.com for her contribution to this part of the column. She and her team discovered the issues as they went about resolving performance issues for their customers. The recommendations apply to anyone who is hosting more than five simultaneous “sessions” between a server (or peer) computer and other clients on the network. It may even apply if these sessions are not multi-user access to the same data file.

According to Joanie, the Pro and Premier versions of the Sybase database engine for QuickBooks is the same engine. This database engine was “tuned” to a maximum of five concurrent users and an associated level of database transaction handling. We already know that a QuickBooks Pro or Premier data file is limited to allowing up to five users in multi-user mode in any given file, but this database engine tuning speaks to the total number of users and data files being served by the file server (and database transactions being performed), not to the number of users in a single data file. The file server, where the database engine resides, typically hosts the QuickBooks data files. When the engine in use on the server is Pro or Premier, that file server is expecting to serve up to five concurrent users and their associated data files.

In a large network, this becomes a problem because there could be a larger number of users (users with QuickBooks properly installed and licensed on their PC workstation), and all may be accessing files stored on a central file server. If the

number of concurrent QuickBooks users exceeds five (regardless of whether they are

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When a network has a potential number of concurrent users greater than five, and where multiple data files are located on a central file server, my recommendation is to use the Enterprise edition database manager rather than using the engine that ships with Pro or Premier. The Enterprise database manager is compatible with Pro and Premier data files, and it significantly improves file server performance. For Pro and Premier users on larger networks, this means that you should plan the additional expense of a multi-user Enterprise license for the file server. The workstations can continue with their Pro/Premier versions.

In addition to the above recommendation, it's worth noting that if the user launches QuickBooks via a shortcut to the data file rather than launching the program first and then "opening" the file, it could possibly crash the database engine or, at a minimum, limit the functionality of the application once it launches. For example, if there are multiple versions of QuickBooks installed on the machine, Windows will launch the most current version (which is not necessarily the version required to open the data file).

How Big is Your File?

Another important part of performance tuning is to consider the size of your QuickBooks data file.

To find out how big a data file is, open the company file and press F2 (or Ctrl+1). This displays the "Product Information" screen (Figure 1), and the file size is shown on the file information section of this screen.

In general, I recommend keeping data file sizes to within the following limits:

- For SimpleStart, Pro and Premier editions (through QuickBooks 2006), keep the file size to 100MB or less. For Enterprise Solutions, the file should

not be much larger than 250MB.

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The rate of growth of a QuickBooks data file varies from company to company. No “average” or “typical” data file size exists since every business tracks information differently in QuickBooks. How quickly a data file grows depends on the number of transactions, the amount of information entered per transaction, and the number of “links” per transaction.

How to Reduce File Size

So if you've decided your file is too big, what should you do about it? Well, this is perhaps one of the hardest things QuickBooks consultants face. You essentially have two options:

- Use the Clean Up Company Data utility (Figure 2) to remove older data. This used to be called “condensing the data file.”
- Use the Clean Up Company Data utility to remove ALL data.

Understanding the Clean Up Data Utility

Condensing the file (now called Cleaning up the Data File), is not usually very productive. But depending on the data, it might moderately shrink the data file. During the “clean up” process, QuickBooks creates summary transactions (Journal Entries) for the transactions it deletes from your file. There is usually one summary transaction per month that represents the deleted transactions. For example, there will be one journal each month with the total of the Checks written for that month, along with the total amount in each account used on the deleted Checks. Note that you will not be able to edit any transactions created by the Clean Up Data Utility.

In all my years of consulting with QuickBooks, I've never found this “condensing” process to be very useful. The reason is that the Clean Up Data Utility is not quite as simple as it seems on the surface. After cleaning up a file, you may discover that

QuickBooks retained numerous cleared Checks, paid Bills or closed Invoices. At first,

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- Is the transaction “connected to” or “linked to” a transaction matching one of the conditions above?
 - Example: If a Deposit transaction in the Checking account includes five Checks, but one of the Checks was for partial payment on an Invoice, the whole chain from the originating Invoice (Invoice, Payment and Deposit) will not be deleted during the clean up process. Also, since the other Checks on that same Deposit are associated with the open Invoice (because they are on the same Deposit), the rest of the five deposited Checks and their chains will not be removed. To fix this rather simple example, close the Invoice that still has an outstanding balance by issuing a Credit Memo (if appropriate). Then, apply the Credit Memo to the Invoice. Alternatively, you can change the original Invoice to match the amount received against it. However, it is usually better to create the Credit Memo since doing so will provide a better audit trail.

Consider the following before you use the Clean Up Data File Utility:

- If you have a large file, the utility usually runs for several hours.
- Quite often, the actual shrinkage in the file is small, especially if the client uses inventory or has numerous open or uncleared transactions.
- Investigating the cause for why transactions were not deleted is tedious and may take more time to troubleshoot than is economically viable.

Instead of Condensing, Use Remove All Transactions

If you want to remove prior period information from the data file, starting over with a new file is

a much cleaner way to accomplish the goal of shrinking the file. Of course, this requires more effort. But if your goal is to shrink the file, there is no free lunch. Starting over allows you to significantly streamline the data file and correct

problems with the setup of the data file, if applicable. If you decide to start over with

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(blank) data file. One such utility is the Beginning Balance Transfer Utility by Karl Irvin (www.q2q.us). The Beginning Balance Transfer Utility allows you to take the ending balances in one QuickBooks file (as of any date) and make them the beginning balances in a new QuickBooks file. After transferring the beginning balances to the new file, you can transfer transactions from the beginning balance date to the current date using the Data Transfer Utility from the same vendor.

Take a Roundtrip to a Portable Company File

After removing the data, you might find that your data file is still much larger than it should be. To reduce the size, you can first save a “portable company file” and then restore that portable file back to a working data file. This “roundtrip” to a portable data file will strip all of the database indexing from the file and then rebuild the indexing for the reduced number of transactions.

Confirm Your Network Setup

In addition to upgrading to the Enterprise Database manager, and to shrinking the data file size, you should confirm that your network is set up properly for QuickBooks hosting.

QuickBooks 2006 and 2007 use a new database that requires a different multi-user installation and setup as compared to earlier versions. For QuickBooks 2005 and prior, you setup multi-user access to the QuickBooks data file by simply installing QuickBooks on each workstation in your local area network and placing the QuickBooks data file

(*QBW) in a folder accessible to all of the workstations. This shared folder could be on one of the workstations (peer-to-peer) or on a server.

With QuickBooks 2007, there are two separate parts of the QuickBooks application

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Network Environment Description

You use QuickBooks in a network environment (i.e., with multiple users) if you:

- Have a client-server network where the server runs Microsoft Windows 2000 Server, Microsoft Windows 2003 Server or have a peer-to-peer network with all peers running Windows 2000 or above.
- Store QuickBooks data file(s) on the server in a shared folder. Alternatively, you can store the data in a shared folder on one of the workstations. Note that you should locate the QuickBooks data (and database server software) on the computer with the most available RAM and processing capability.
- Install QuickBooks on two or more workstations in order to open a QuickBooks data file on multiple workstations simultaneously.

Requirements

Verify that you have the following:

- Multiple QuickBooks licenses. You must have at least one license for each QuickBooks user in the network. You may install the Database Server Manager on one additional computer (the data server) above the number of license(s) you purchased without purchasing a separate license.
- QuickBooks Pro edition or above. QuickBooks SimpleStart does not support multi-user access.
- On the server computer (the computer on which the data files will be stored), you want Windows 2003 server, but the minimum requirement is

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2007 is shown visually in Figure 4.

As you can see in the illustration, it is important to store your data files on the computer you designate as the “server” for your network. This server can actually be any one of the clients on your network, but the differentiating aspect of this machine is that it runs the QuickBooks Database manager, which takes control of all network accesses to files stored on that server. All other computers on the network need only to have the QuickBooks Client software installed, and thus will never become the “host” of any data files.

To provide access to all users on the network, you'll need to put the QuickBooks data files

(*QBW, *.ND, *.TLG, etc.) in a shared folder on your server computer.

Verifying Proper Multi-User Hosting Setup

As discussed above, there must be a “host” for the QuickBooks data file in order for QuickBooks to work in multi-user mode. In the recommended setup, you are setting up the server computer to “host” (or “serve”) data to other client machines on the network. This step is critical for the server to provide high-performance hosting of your data files. To verify that you have set up the server correctly, follow these steps:

- **Step 1** — On the server, press F2 and check the bottom section of the Product Information screen. The “Local Server Information” will show your server's computer name somewhere in the text string of the “Server Name” field (see Figure 5 above).
- **Step 2** — On each client computer, open the data file located on the server. Press F2, and verify that all of the fields are empty in the “Local Server Information” section (see Figure 6 below). This ensures that you are using the server as the host of the data file, and that none of the clients are acting as the host of the data file (i.e., you have no “floating hosts”).

- **Step 3** — If any of the client workstations report that it is the “server” of the data

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don’t have that problem.

So if you’re still having problems, consider upgrading your hardware. RAM is the first thing to consider, followed by faster processors, more hard drive space and faster hard drives. If you find other interesting performance enhancements, send me a note, and I’ll pass your advice along.

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