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Business Accounting Systems*

Sage Software's Peachtree line has maintained the number two position in the small business accounting space over the years because of its relationship with its users and professional accountants who service these small businesses. The key concern for many such accountants regarding other programs has always been the integrity of the books, since many programs have offered audit trails that could be turned off or were not as thorough as the one in Peachtree. On other fronts, Sage has kept Peachtree at the forefront of business management technologies, introducing dashboards two years ago, and bundling in a multitude of enhanced functions, such as financial analysis, advanced inventory, new cash flow management tools, enhanced reporting and alerts, and more powerful payroll options.

Sage also provides industry-specific versions of the system for nonprofits, manufacturers, distributors, construction businesses and professional accountants. Peachtree Premium costs \$499 for a single user, or \$1,199 for a five-user value pack, with industry versions (except Accountants) priced at \$599 and \$1,299, respectively. Additional products in the Peachtree family range from the more basic Peachtree First Accounting, through the top-end Peachtree Quantum, which is geared for small enterprises with more complex needs and more users.

Ease of Use/Basic Functionality — 5 Stars

Initial installation and creation of a company's books is guided by a setup wizard that provides more than 100 template charts of accounts for various business types. With operation of the program centered on several Navigation Centers, Peachtree Premium's interface is exceptionally well-designed

and provides abundant, seemingly unending customization options, including

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& Purchases, Employees & Payroll, Banking and Company, all of which can be tailored to each user's preferences. Additional customization options include resizing and relocating panels, graphical elements and other items. Users also have the ability to set up alerts, to-do items and calendars. In the basic and industry-specific versions, the program generally uses non-accounting terminology, which can aid less-experienced users. Transaction entry screens are consistent throughout the program, providing intuitive navigation and utilizing smart entry fields and selection lists that help speed account, customer, vendor and item lookup, while a tabbed interface simplifies moving to other functions.

Core Accounting/ Security Functions — 5 Stars

At the heart of Peachtree Premium Accounting is its automated double-entry accounting system that includes a full-time audit trail and screen-level security settings, utilizing true period closing/locking to maintain appropriate GL accounts and journals. The system provides full AR capabilities, with advanced billing options that allow for progress billing, job costing, job WIPs, transaction histories, setting of credit limits and electronically broadcasted invoices. Customer quotes can be easily converted to sales invoices. The payables module offers multiple transaction reports and can support electronic payments via EFT. Premium's inventory management is likewise strong, supporting FIFO, LIFO, average costing and specific-unit control costing with the ability to set up to 10 price levels per item, in addition to tracking serialized inventory and assembled items.

Items can have user-defined attributes, like color, size or style, while users can keep on top of inventory replenishment tasks with automated purchase orders that are created when items hit a specified quantity level. Additional noteworthy features include Peachtree's improved Cash Flow Management tool, which helps users track projected cash fluctuations, with data exportable to Excel

for further examination. The program also includes fixed asset management and

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can be saved into and edited using Microsoft Word or Excel, or output into PDF format. Client invoices, collection letters and other statements and reports can also be e-mailed from within the system. The program can support any number of businesses, and its budgeting tools and improved Cash Flow Management utility can support unlimited scenarios for each business. Wage and contractor reporting forms can be printed through the system.

Import/Export/ Integration — 4.5 Stars

Peachtree Premium integrates with Microsoft Word and Excel for report editing and Outlook for contact management, while the system can also import data from QuickBooks and export reports into PDF. Integration with Sage's Timeslips program is also offered for time-based billing, and remote access options are available.

Help & Support Options — 5 Stars

Peachtree includes a built-in Guided Tour, along with more than 20 instructional demonstration videos to help users learn common tasks and functions. The program also includes an interactive "How Do I?" feature that provides tips while within certain program areas, and offers task-specific assistance and right-click menus throughout. The company's online support center includes a Knowledge Base, product updates and support contacts. Tech support is included for the first 30 days and by subscription following this period.

Relative Value — 5 Stars

Sage's Peachtree family of small business accounting products offers excellent scalability, allowing the smallest of concerns to get started with a true, double-entry system and then gradually and easily move up to more power systems as their business needs require. Premium Accounting 2009 is among the most powerful systems

on the market, providing core financial management components, along with

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