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## Client Misunderstanding and Misuse

Column: The QuickBooks Advisor

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*From the Oct. 2008 Issue*

As my friend Greg LaFollette puts it, "It's a great time to be in public accounting."

If you've followed The Sleeter Group for long, you know that our group of more than 600 consultants serve somewhere around 180,000 small and mid-sized businesses. We focus where the rubber meets the road. That is, we provide the critical link between what businesses require, what software products can do, and how the software is used by each client. What makes this field so fun is working with so many different types of businesses, people and technology solutions.

So yes, it really is a great time to be in public accounting, and I think the part that is the most fun is accounting software consulting. Specifically, the area of helping people find the right solutions, and then getting them set up and teaching them how to properly use the software to manage their business.

What continually surprises me is just how crazy things get when seemingly simple parts of the software are misunderstood by clients, and how that leads to "misuse" and often disaster. I suppose it underscores the difficulties of creating software that is, on one hand, powerful and feature-rich but, on the other hand, so simple that every user understands how to use it, without any training or manual-reading. Ha! I've spent my lifetime on this topic, and although we're seeing great progress, I don't think we'll

ever really get there. Consultants who help troubleshoot and fix disasters will

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of the new smaller company file. Is there any way that I can archive this copy now and possibly get rid of the "Archive Copy" line across the top without setting up a new company file, or is that my only option at this point?

### **The Answer**

The short answer is no. The archive copy of the company file will always have the words "Archive Copy XX/XX/XXXX of Companyname.QBW" at the top of the window in QuickBooks. You can rename the file on the hard drive, but you won't be able to remove the words Archive Copy from the top of the QuickBooks window for that file.

For the long answer, and for the fix to the problem, you have to go much deeper. So let's go on a little journey of why archive files exist, how they're created, how they should be used and, finally, how you can unwind a client who has unwittingly gotten mixed up between their real company file and the archive of their file.

### **Archive Files: The Process, Purpose & Problem**

When you use the Clean Up Data Utility, QuickBooks "condenses" the data file by deleting all the transactions you no longer need and replacing them with monthly summary entries. At the same time, this utility will create two files. One is an archive of the data file (in QBW format), and the other is a backup of the file (QBB).

If your company file is called DougsCompany.QBW, then two things happen when you run the Clean Up Company Data function. First, QuickBooks forces you to create a backup (QBB) of the file, which will be named DougsCompany (Backup Dec 31, 2008 2:00pm).QBB. Then QuickBooks creates the "archive file." This is a complete copy of the pre-condensed data file, named "Archive Copy 12-31-2008 DougsCompany.QBW." Then, QuickBooks continues with the

“condense” process, removing old transactions from the original

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that cannot be fixed by other means, you should always restore from the backup (QBB), not the archive copy. Of course, the QBB and the archive company file will have the exact same transactions in them (assuming they were both created during the same Clean Up Company Data session), but the archive data file is meant to be read-only. In fact, QuickBooks Help screens erroneously say the archive copy is read-only, but there is nothing that prevents users from entering transactions into the archive file.

So about now, you might be asking why we have this archive file at all. Since it's not read-only and QuickBooks forces you to create a backup file when you use the Clean Up Company Data function, then why have the archive data file at all? I suppose Intuit would answer that question by saying it's about convenience for the user. It's much faster to be able to open the archive file to research older data as opposed to restoring from a backup file.

But the problem with the archive file is that most users don't really understand its purpose. And the lack of understanding often leads to misuse, as evidenced by the original question above. The unfortunate result is that people get in trouble by entering data into two different files (their main data file, and the archive file), so that neither of their files have all of the real data. This situation is really hard to remedy because you have to tediously go through both files and see which data was entered where and then enter the missing data into the one you consider your true master data file.

That's very time consuming and usually very expensive because clients will either pay overtime or incur big consulting fees. Transaction copier programs are available from Karl Irvin (see the Data Transfer Utility at [www.q2q.us](http://www.q2q.us)), and from Big Red Consulting (see Transaction & List Copier for QuickBooks from [www.bigredconsulting.com](http://www.bigredconsulting.com)), but even with these products, the issue is that

a human has to go through and identify which transactions need to be copied

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1. Set the color scheme in the file to a different color so that it's immediately obvious when you open the file that you're in the old file.

Go to [Edit > Preferences](#), then click [Desktop View](#) and pick a [Color Scheme](#).

2. Set the closing date to the date of last transaction in the file (or later). Go to [Edit > Preferences](#). Then click

[Accounting > Company Preferences](#). Then click [Set Date/Password](#) and set the date. This prevents users from entering transactions before that date.

3. Change the Admin password on the file to something different from your main file. Make sure you keep the password in a special place so you can look it up if you forget it.

I know a lot of consultants never use the clean up data feature due to this and other problems and instead prefer to start over with a new file when the file becomes too large. If you do use it, make sure you clearly explain to your clients how the archive file works, why it's created, and that the client should never enter data into that file. Also, use our tricks above to help prevent the clients from getting mixed up between their real data file and the archive file.

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Mr. Sleeter is the founder of The Sleeter Group, a national group of QuickBooks and accounting software consultants who serve small and medium-sized businesses. He is the author of several books including the QuickBooks Consultant's

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