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A-Systems Visual Bookkeeper

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A-Systems Visual Bookkeeper is a Windows-based general accounting application which has its roots in A-Systems JobView solution for the construction industry. The product has been on the market since 1978, and the company has released two significant updates to the product since our review in July 2012. The product has enough sophistication to support a company as large as a 700 employee company with \$400 million in sales, and is flexible enough for a company as small as \$100,000 in revenue. The Company also offers an enhanced version of the application called Insight Accounting which has a number of additional features designed for larger organizations.

Visual Bookkeeper is available in two editions: a single user edition called "Small Business Advantage," and a multi-user Preferred Edition. The company noted that some SBA users have added the multi-user function, and that some users host the application on servers and access the application remotely, although the majority run the application on their internal network.

Basic System Functions: 4 Stars

A-Systems Visual Bookkeeper is a traditional batch-oriented Windows-based accounting system with very granular control of the details of a business. It is a debit and credit oriented system with traditional accounting periods which is best suited for experienced bookkeepers and internal accountants, or for public accounting professionals. The application has some complexity associated with its flexibility, but the navigation icons on the left side of the screen as well as the drop down menus and toolbar at the top of the screen make the application relatively easy to navigate.

The product has a relatively simple setup wizard with a single included chart of

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Visual Bookkeeper has traditional features for general ledger, accounts receivable, and accounts payable. The product helps users manage cash flow by tracking the due dates of invoices and bills, and cash requirements forecasting for dates up to 120 days in the future is included in the application. Users must manually post invoices to accounts receivable and bills to accounts payable to update the general ledger balances. The product provides two-step import of transactions from financial institutions using common formats like Microsoft Money and Quickbooks, but does not have direct online integration with banks.

Downloaded bank transactions are matched and items are marked as reconciled. Any unmatched bank transactions are imported directly into a batch in the G/L for review and editing before posting. Bank reconciliation process and other screens have the comfortable feel of most traditional accounting software. Batches of transactions from merchant services can be imported into the application and posted to the general ledger using a menu option.

The application supports multiple sales tax rates, and can assign sales tax based on zip codes. The product supports both multi-jurisdiction U.S. sales tax calculations as well as Canadian-style GST calculations. Users can then run the Sales Tax Report by State for a selected date range as a source for the manually-prepared sales tax return.

E-mail can be used directly for all reports for sending to clients or other users. The application will store a user's e-mail address, the servers needed to send mail, and a message signature block.

Visual Bookkeeper has a strong built-in payroll system with free downloadable tax table updates, built-in direct deposit, and user-accessible editing of the tax tables. The application allows both import and export of timekeeping data, and companies using a third party payroll processor can import if the program can export to CSV

files. The system also has an interface with PayChex that allows data to be imported

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A Point-of-Sale module is available, although the program does not have ecommerce functions such as support for shopping carts. Other transactions for cash sales can be entered individually. There are a number of usually construction-oriented features in the application, which can also be used by non-construction entities, including support for charging out equipment, billing time, and tracking and valuing inventory. Purchase orders are supported, and some basic contact management functionality is built into the application.

Visual Bookkeeper has a good inventory module, and supports multiple valuation methods (LIFO, FIFO, standard cost, last cost, average cost, or serialized tracking) as well as multiple locations for the same item (e.g. bins, warehouses, or trucks). Although this application does not support job costing, the Company's premier product, Job View accounting for contractors, offers full job costing capabilities. Bar code scanning is available within the product using standard, off-the-shelf hardware.

Online bill payment from within the application is not supported, nor is integration with e-marketing services or online marketplaces like eBay. Merchant service integration is available, and batches can be imported and posted from screens on the menu structure.

Management Features: 5 Stars

Non-modifiable dashboards exist for most financial indicators, including accounts receivable, accounts payable, the income statement and the balance sheet (examples are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 above). Users can drill down on numbers in dashboards by clicking on the numbers to see specific reports or detail.

Visual Bookkeeper supports ODBC connections to the database, and the company's DataView custom report writer can be used to create reports using standard database

and report writer statements in addition to the long list of predesigned reports which

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application.

The application's preconfigured role-based security configurations are found in the user configuration area, one tab per module/role, allowing a user to be allowed into none, all, or selected functions within each "role," and administrators can also restrict user access to each line item and feature for each user. Settings for a new user can be copied from another user for consistency. Businesses are encouraged, but not required, to have separate passwords for each user.

Integration and Import/Export: 3.5 Stars

There is a built-in conversion feature to import data from Intuit's QuickBooks, and almost all data in the application can be imported or exported. The application records transactions as "batches", so if an import creates a problem with the database, the batch can be easily removed, analyzed, and reimported. Most reports can be formatted as PDF files, sent to a word processor or spreadsheet, or e-mailed to a recipient from the preview window.

The program does not include portals, but does offer a group communication function that can be used for e-marketing functions such as blast email campaigns. Data from a client's company file can be zipped and transmitted to a CPA firm, but no portal service is integrated into the application, and there is not a menu feature which allows clients to import only the accountants changes into the application.

Help & Support: 5 Stars

The company offers U.S. based telephone technical support (800-841-2666) during normal business hours. The company reports that all telephone support functions, including directing a user to the proper specialist, are performed by humans instead of phone system menus. Unlimited Technical Support and Updates are priced at \$375

per year. Users who are not on a maintenance plan can pay as they go for updates

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updates have shipped since our last review of this product in July 2012. Each update is accompanied by a change listing which succinctly describes the improvements and features added for each module.

Summary & Pricing

Visual Bookkeeper is available in two editions: a single user edition called “Small Business Advantage”, and a multi-user Preferred Edition. The **single user license is \$79.95, while the multi-user version is priced starting at \$995.**

2013 Overall Rating: 4.25 Stars

Small Business

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