Manage Financials Using Out-of-the-Box Software

By Robert Bates, CPA

Typically, small businesses use various stand-alone tools for their finances—from pen and paper to Microsoft (MS) Excel to full-blown accounting software. Today's accounting software, however, intimidates many start-up and small business owners who have no financial background. Now, there's a new solution: Microsoft Office Small Business Accounting 2006 (SBA), a full-featured financial program allowing small business owners to manage their financials using out-of-the-box software in a familiar Microsoft environment. SBA is priced at $149 after a $30 mail-in rebate.

Small Business Accounting 2006 integrates fully with other Microsoft Office applications
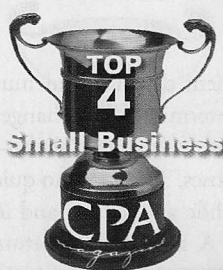
Features

SBA has features and functionality that experienced accountants can appreciate, but that require little or no accounting training to implement. By simplifying the financial management process, Microsoft made the application easier for business owners and employees to access more business information and, subsequently, make better, more-informed decisions.

Designed to meet the financial management needs of small companies with 25 employees or less, SBA includes and goes *beyond* just the key features with applications in a number of areas. These include GL, AR, AP, PR, sales order processing, purchase order processing, inventory management, employee management, banking and reporting.

By integrating SBA with other MS Office applications, including Word 2003, Excel 2003, Outlook 2003 and Business Contact Manager Update, small businesses combine financial and customer information to get a complete view of the business, build stronger customer relationships and provide employees with the information they need to be effective.

Because SBA maintains financial and customer information in one place, users can:

- access business data in true multi-user fashion;
- perform basic financial tasks like creating quotes, sales orders and invoices with Outlook 2003 and Business Contact Manager Update;
- utilize the always-on audit trail
- track billable time by using Outlook 2003 with Business Contact Manager Update;
- manage employee time records; and
  - take advantage of the ADP integrated payroll service.

With the Virtual Private Network (VPN) desktop sharing feature, users log in remotely. Based on its functionality, I predict that third-party hosting companies like TADTechnology will pick up SBA as soon as they see it catching on with accountants and new businesses.

As with most new applications, SBA has a few "quirks." For example, it is only possible to *import* data from QuickBooks. Microsoft promises to release service packs and updates after more customers use the application.

Additional issues surfaced during our trial. Several times I felt that, because of their appearance, *grayed-out* fields in the application were not accessible. However, when I clicked on them, I could drill down as needed.

Like most other MS Office packages, SBA is available at retailers nationwide; however, Microsoft has an exclusive offer. Small businesses can order a trial kit of the software from the MS Office Web site, *https://www.www.accountingtrialkit.com/store.asp.* The kit includes a trial version of SBA 2006, as well as a trial version of MS Office Professional Edition 2003 and an information CD.

Summary

The best customer for SBA is a start-up or a small business that does not yet have accounting software. After this new package has a track record, it could be worthwhile for some QuickBooks' customers to consider converting to SBA if, given their particular needs, they would experience significant benefits.

Overall, SBA is quite impressive. Apparently Dell Computer concurs, because it is pre-installing the software—along with other Microsoft Office products—in its computers.

Microsoft Corp.
www.microsoft.com/accountants
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