

HIGH TECH

New version of Simply Accounting software package aims to simplify the bookkeeping process for small and medium-sized businesses

By Karine Benzacar, CMA

In anticipation of growing competition serving the needs of small and medium-sized businesses, Sage Software, Inc. recently released a new and improved edition of its Simply Accounting software package. There are many enhancements that improve how the system operates for both accountants and non-accountants alike. Sage still has some work to do, but the new version is a step in the right direction.

What's better now ... for accountants

One of the best improvements for accountants is the new Accountants' Edition of the software. This version removes many of the software controls designed to prevent non-accountants from accidentally misfiling their records, thus giving accountants more flexibility. For example, accountants can easily post journal entries to any account, whereas the non-accountant version won't allow posting to certain accounts.

Accountants can also export their clients' general ledgers and make journal entries to their clients' files while their clients continue working on their daily transactions in a separate file. The two files can be merged later. This is a substantial advantage because clients will no longer have to delay their daily work, such as invoicing, while their accountant reviews their books.

The Accountants' Edition also lets accountants do several other handy functions such as renumbering accounts and automatically preparing notes to financial statements.

... for non-accountants

Accountants aren't the only ones to benefit from Simply Accounting's improvements. Buyers of the three other versions of Simply Accounting — Basic, Pro and Premium — benefit from an improved user interface.

Simply Accounting can now store photos of inventory in JPEG and GIF formats. And it's now much more straightforward to import and export files between Simply Accounting and other programs, such as Excel, Word, and tax preparation packages.

The Pro and Premium versions include some improvements unavailable in the Basic version:

- The ability to store and report on historical financial information for up to 100 years;
- The capability to use an unlimited number of currencies;
- A much improved search engine; and



- For those people using contact management systems, there's no longer any need to enter customer or vendor information in Simply Accounting if this information already exists in Microsoft Outlook or Act!

... for everyone

Access to strong technical support is just as important as the quality of any software. Sage Software has dramatically cut telephone waiting times — from over an hour on average early last year to mere minutes now — and has enhanced the quality and knowledge of its telephone support staff.

What still needs to be fixed?

There are still a few inconvenient features of Simply Accounting that Sage Software hasn't addressed. Most have work-arounds but the work-arounds can be cumbersome.

Users can't automatically reverse a journal entry. Instead, they must either reverse an entry manually or open the original entry and delete all the information on it. Sage Software says it will eventually fix this situation.

Invoices and purchase transactions can't be saved temporarily in a "draft" mode. Users must either complete the transaction, redo their transaction entirely, or process an incomplete transaction then adjust it later. This last approach makes the accounting records very complex and harder to trace because the system reverses the original journal entry and creates a new one.

Although users can e-mail invoices directly from Simply Accounting, they can't e-mail invoices to more than one recipient. There is also a limit of about 30 lines of text to accompany the invoice. One can get around these limitations by saving the invoice as a file and attaching it to a regular e-mail.

When viewing or printing an invoice, it isn't easy to see whether or not the invoice has been paid. Instead, users must go to a different area of Simply Accounting, view the customer payments, and determine manually the invoice payment status. This is particularly cumbersome when a customer asks for a copy of a paid invoice. It would be more helpful to display the payment status directly on the screen and on the invoice.

Simply Accounting doesn't include descriptions of GIFI codes (tax terminology for General Index of Financial Information). Users must now look up these descriptions in tax documentation.

Overall, the value provided by the software far exceeds its limitations. The software is now much more flexible and easier to work with for accountants and non-accountants alike. Sage Software has done a good job of solidifying its product prior to Microsoft's launch of a small and medium enterprise (SME) accounting package to the Canadian market, expected within the next year.

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