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**COMPUTER SOFTWARE REVIEWS**

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**QuickBooks 99**Stephen R. Heller<sup>†</sup>

SRD, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20899

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With all the restructuring in the chemical and pharmaceutical fields in the past few years, more people are starting their own businesses as consultants. Most all of these people have come from very sheltered jobs in which there was an accounting department, a billing department, a payroll office, and so on. While these activities are critical to running a business, they are also generally difficult and time consuming to do on your own. Many, like myself, use programs like TurboTax to do our personal federal and state taxes. Many also use Quicken for personal home finances. QuickBooks Pro<sup>1</sup> is an easy to use and accurate accounting software package for small business.

Installation of QuickBooks Pro 99 is simple. Just put the CD-ROM into the CD-ROM drive, and the installation is quick. The software requires a standard PC with a printer and needs about 55MB in hard disk space. To use the Microsoft Word and Excel features described below requires that you also have these software programs. Registration of the software can be done directly over the internet. The program then starts up with an "interview" to help you decide what you need to enter and what features you will use so you can get up and running quickly. Starting with company information, tax numbers, bank account information, and so on, the interview takes you through payroll information and setting up accounts for invoicing and billing of customers and paying vendors. QuickBooks Pro 99 is also multiuser, allowing (for an extra cost) to have more than one PC at a time connected into the system.

QuickBooks Pro 99 is year 2000 compliant and uses four digit dates for the year. It allows you to merge a company logo into you invoices to give them a more professional look. Having an interface with Microsoft Word and Excel allows one to take financial data and integrate them easily into a letter or into a spreadsheet for analysis. You can set up invoices to be one time or recurring, should you routinely do work for a particular client. You can create a wide variety of reports on accounts payable, profit and loss statements, purchases, sales, and cash flow and reports by time, client, and vendor. QuickBooks has a mailing label feature that allows you to sort and print mailing labels to qualify for bulk mailing rates. To me the best part of the software is the minimal amount of accounting jargon that you come across in using the software.

This latest version of QuickBooks has a timer/stopwatch feature, which installs as a separate module in case you do not need it for the type of business you are doing. I have found this time tracking feature is very nice for those consultants who do searching, analysis, or other time

dependent work. You can set up a different customer job file for each client and keep track of particular work activities for a client, in case detailed billing information is required. You can even indicate if the time spent was billable or nonbillable, so you can keep track of exactly how you are spending your time.

Intitut has also set up a web site, [www.quickbooks.com](http://www.quickbooks.com), for easy access to a wide variety of business tools, information, and advice. The site is updated daily, which is nice particularly at tax time in April (in the USA), when this review was written. The web site also has free online seminars on various aspects of QuickBooks, as well as an e-mail service for notifying you of software updates and other technical matters. Of course it also has the usual FAQ's (frequently asked questions), like, How does QuickBooks handle New Jersey Retirement Plans?

While there are lots of help messages available within the software package, many of which appear as pop-up boxes called QCards, and a 500+ page manual, it is sometimes good to have some additional help. I found a book on QuickBooks by Gail Perry<sup>2</sup> to be helpful in a number of cases where I was not completely sure what to do. This book has 29 chapters, 4 appendixes, and a glossary on different aspects of QuickBooks, as well as related tax and accounting information. The book is well-written with lots of figures to show you exactly what you will see when you perform a given function.

Overall this is a nice, easy, and very useful software package to have. It is reasonably priced. For small businesses it helps track your daily business needs and allows you print out the necessary information at the end of the year to send to an accountant for preparing your IRS and state taxes.

**REFERENCES AND NOTES**

- (1) QuickBooks Pro 99 is available from Intitut, Inc., P.O. Box 7859, Mountain View, CA 94039-7850. Phone: 1-800-466-8848; url: <http://www.quickbooks.com>. The list price of the QuickBooks Pro 99 software is \$219.95. Rebates are available for those who own an earlier version of QuickBooks. QuickBooks 99, which does not have the Word, Excel, Timer, job costing, and estimating and is not a multiuser package, is \$119.00.
- (2) Perry, G. *Special Edition using QuickBooks & QuickBooks Pro 99*; Que Publishing: 1999; ISBN: 0-7997-1965-7. The list price of the book is \$29.99.

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<sup>†</sup> [srheller@nist.gov](mailto:srheller@nist.gov).