

<http://www.accountingweb.co.uk/cgi-bin/item.cgi?id=172840&d=526&h=524&f=525>

First sight of QuickBooks 2008. By John Stokdyk

The UK release of QuickBooks 2008 introduces Microsoft's SQL Server database to give the accounting application greater capacity, better stability and access to a catalogue of third party applications, according to Intuit product manager Kamlesh Rajyaguru.

In a live product demonstration for AccountingWEB, Rajyaguru highlighted the new features that have been attracting attention during previews with QuickBooks professional advisers.

Apart from dealing with the underlying database, which standardises the UK edition of QuickBooks on the same architecture as its north American relatives, the developer focused its attention on user interface improvements to make the program easier to use, a new global VAT engine and better integration with Microsoft Office.

With two-way synchronisation to Outlook supported within the core accounting application, Rajyaguru confirmed that Intuit had discontinued its embryonic Customer Manager contact management module. "With better integration, we felt there wasn't a need for a separate product," he said.

"Outlook synchronisation caters for the majority of users and those who have advanced needs can use the Intuit software developer's kit (SDK) to link into existing products. Quickbooks already integrates with ACT! and Salesforce.com in the US, and now we are on the same SDK, they will automatically integrate with the UK version too."

During his demonstration, the QuickBooks product manager highlighted the following new features in the 2008 edition.

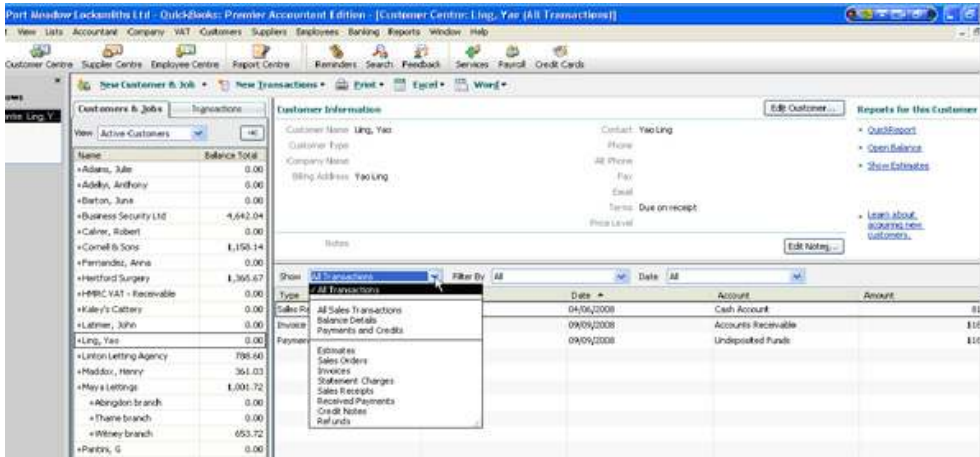
Streamlined set-up process

Customer feedback indicated that it was taking up to 2.5 hours to create a company using the old QuickBooks Easy Step interview process, so the wizard was completely revamped to make it possible to complete within 30 minutes, Rajyaguru said. "We've kept the essentials that every business needs, but with the help of accountants, we reduced the number of screens from 126 to 28."

Revised process maps

QuickBooks claims to have pioneered the graphical process maps that are now standard in rival applications such as Sage 50 and MYOB Accounts. To differentiate QuickBooks, Intuit has consolidated the program's cost, customer, banking, supplier and employee "centres" into a single "one-click" home page process map. Responding to the need to focus on customer service, each Centre page includes a list of customers in the left hand pane so users can access their records quickly. If someone is on the phone, the user can click their name on the list and select all the transactions and documents associated with them, or use filters to narrow the choices (see below). Double clicking an item in the list will take you to the source document.

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Notes and contact history

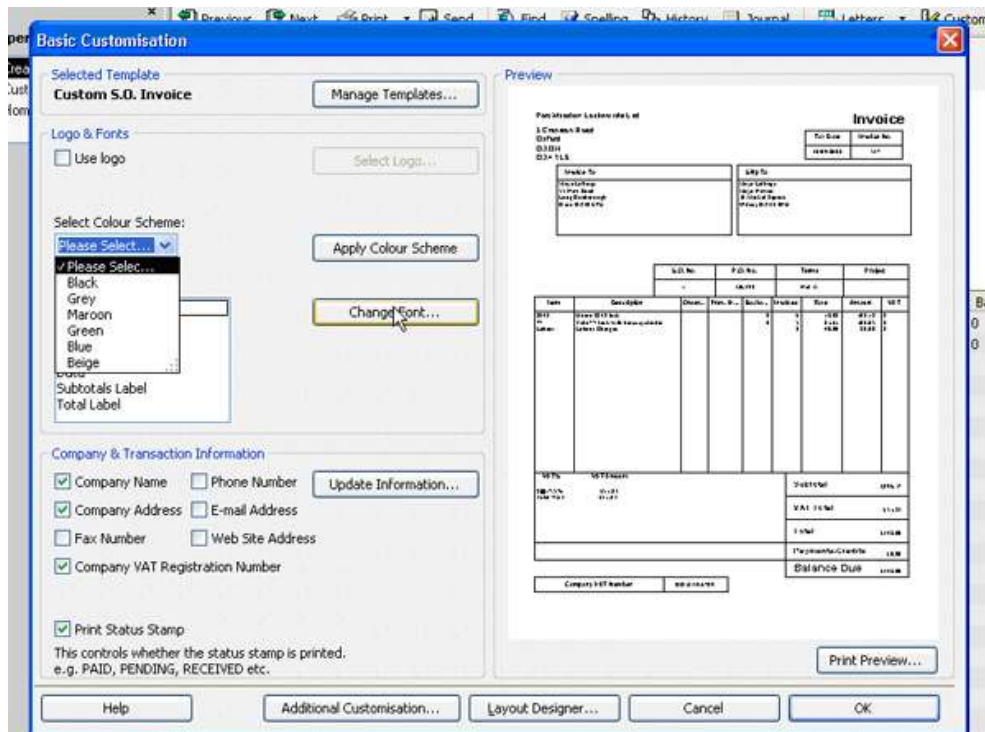
The Customer List screen includes a notes section, so that users can record conversations and actions within the customer record - with a date stamp facility. That makes it easier for someone else working on the account to see what's going on, Rajyaguru said.

Customisability - on-screen and reports

All of the on screen grids - for customers, accounts, suppliers and so on - are now fully customisable in QuickBooks 2008 in a manner that would earn David Carter's approval. The records can be sorted by clicking the top of each column and the grid can be altered by moving columns around, or deleting them.

Similar flexibility is also available for the forms and invoice produced from QuickBooks 2008. "The first thing a business does is create an estimate. That piece of paper is going to say a lot about the business," said Rajyaguru. The Create Invoice command includes a range of Customisation controls (below) that let the user change fonts and colours, or add logos to their invoices. "We've given users the ability to change layouts, fonts and colour schemes and save money on printers," he added. A live preview of the form is visible on screen, so there is no longer any need to close the Layout Designer and go into Print Preview to see the impact of your graphical enhancements. The response from QuickBooks professional advisers to this new facility has been very positive, Rajyaguru said.

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Integration with Microsoft Office

Integration with Microsoft Word is evident in the Prepare an Invoice option, which fires up a letter wizard with options to create a cover letter or a letter with invoice details included. The data will go straight into Word with two clicks and be ready for printing and sending. Or you can choose the option to Email an invoice, which sets up an Outlook message with the document included as a PDF attachment.

Reducing errors?

Feedback from QuickBooks-using accountants indicated that "the last thing they want to do is spend time correcting clients' bookkeeping entries", Rajyaguru said. "So we've programmed QuickBooks to learn what the previous entry was for a supplier or customer - what accounts they related to and so on. So the next time a bill comes from the same supplier, it will automatically prefill with their expense account." While the program will default to the last posting, the ability to alter the destination account is still provided by a pull-down menu.

Cheque module

Reducing errors was also the objective of the upgraded Check Writing option in the Banking module. "If there's someone on the phone and you write a cheque under pressure and there's an outstanding bill, your accounts payable will be out," says the Rajyaguru. If there is an outstanding bill from the cheque recipient, QuickBooks 2008 will remind the user.

VAT module

Intuit has devised a global VAT engine that is now built into QuickBooks 2008 (see below). The new system redresses the program's shortcomings at dealing with cash-based VAT accounting, which is applied by half the program's UK users. Previously, there was no way for a cash-based VAT trader to flag transactions that had already been filed on a VAT return, which made reconciliation difficult. A Cash Basis report will now flag up these transactions and tag them with a file state, so that if someone posts a late entry, you can enter the original date and it will be picked up in the following return. However, there are no equivalent routines for coping for the VAT flat rate scheme, so the user or accountant will need to apply workarounds that are explained on the QuickBooks website.

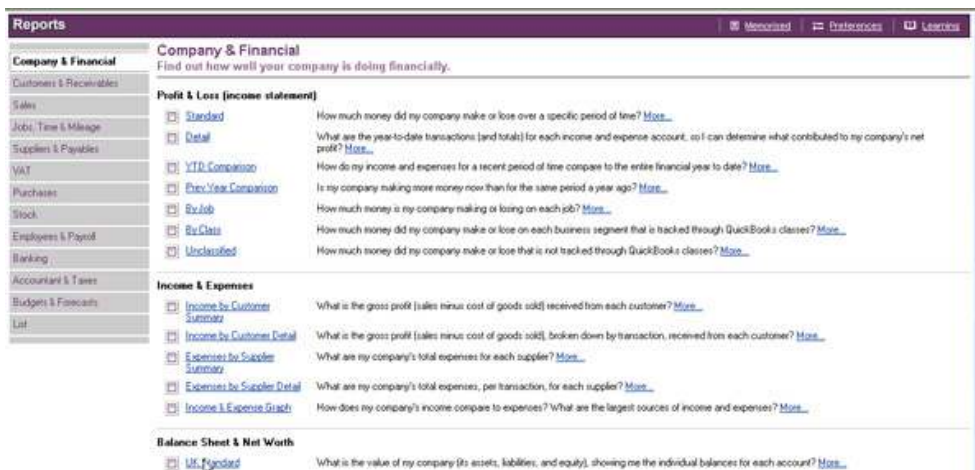
The new VAT module includes support for electronic filing, with Pay Now and Pay Later options, and one for those who choose to pay their VAT liabilities in monthly instalments.

Reporting enhancements

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QuickBooks 2008 features a new Report Centre (see below) which doesn't alter the scope of many reports, but does present them in a more comprehensible way, Rajyaguru explained. The report templates are stored in subject categories, with hyperlinks to text explaining their purpose and use (for example, an explanation of what a balance sheet means for a non-accountant user). By hovering over the report's icon, you can see a thumbnail preview, or clicking the blue hyperlink will open the actual report.

As in previously, reports can be modified and "Memorised" into the Report Centre library for future use.



Google Desktop

Intuit has done a deal with Google so that the search engine's Desktop tool is available as an option within QuickBooks. The search facilities allow you to search within the accounting application alone, or for any other related documents held on the local machine. One click on the search hyperlink will open the selected document.

Database and SDK enhancements

The migration to Microsoft's SQL Server will be almost invisible to users, but having a common relational database engine and SDK with the US version of QuickBooks opens the door to more than 400 third party software applications listed in the [QuickBooks Solutions Marketplace](#). Around 240 of these programs came up when filtered for the UK QuickBooks Premier 2005 version.

"If people who take sales orders want to send them via PDAs, they'll have the ability to do that using third party applications," said Rajyaguru. "Or if someone wanted an online timesheet application, there are some available that can bring the data into QuickBooks. Now that we're on the same SDK, they are all available in the UK. It's one of our best kept secrets."

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