



Beyond the basics

How to evaluate a QuickBooks replacement



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Introduction

From day one, your small business is constantly learning.

Whether it's how to better compete in your market, what new tools and services can help support your organization, or which local utility providers will offer the best deal, every new challenge presents an opportunity to adapt your business model and better position yourself for the future. But that doesn't mean learning is easy. Quite the opposite in fact—change and adaptation are uncomfortable necessities, but it's that growth that helps accommodate who you hope to be in the future.

As your business grows, you take on responsibilities and expectations that your previous operations simply weren't designed to handle. At some point, the patterns and resources you've always relied on just don't quite work like they used to.

When that time comes, they're typically three ways to manage that growth:

1. Ride it out

Some organizations hope to ride out those existing challenges with their current solution. If you identify with this, you may feel aimless, frustrated, or overwhelmed by this swell of new growth and hope that things will stabilize and resolve themselves.

2. Hire more people

While this approach is great for easing the initial strain of growth, hiring new people means providing for those individuals as well—benefits, salaries, even work space—and may not be an efficient or cost-effective solution.

3. Buy more tools

Here you may put together a mix and match set of services to keep your operation running. While each individual piece may work well independently, these solutions may struggle to work well together and require additional resources to manage, from backups, storage, data aggregation, management, and maintenance to training people to use those tools.

But what if there was a fourth option? What if you could take a step back and assess what you need from a holistic viewpoint?

4. Rethink your processes

Of these four options, rethinking your processes requires the most self-awareness. This means taking a step back and honestly assessing how your tools and operations work together. Do they help you grow or are they struggling to keep up?

By replacing QuickBooks with cloud-based business management tools, your organization can adopt a comprehensive solution that adapts with you.

Introduction

From reactive to proactive: what this mindset means for your accounting and operations.

As your company grows, QuickBooks can start to hamper your productivity—those familiar tools ultimately limit your ability to realize your potential. Ignoring change is a natural reaction. Change is uncomfortable and foreign. Those oddities make us nervous, so we step back, pretend like nothing is happening, and react as needed. But, when we shift mindsets from reactive to proactive, we can capitalize on those changes and address growing needs in a way that creates a competitive advantage and builds toward future success.

There is a powerful opportunity in learning how to move beyond your comfort limits and manage growth with confidence.

That process works in four stages:

1. Identify what you want

2. Discover the tools that can help

3. Find the solution that's right for you

4. Act on your new solution

Our goal today is to help you walk through these four stages and find the right accounting solution for your unique circumstances. **Let's get started** —>

Chapter 1

Identify what you want



Identify what you want

Finding your ideal accounting solution starts with you.

What's important to you? What do you expect out of your accounting software? By identifying what you want and, perhaps more importantly, what you *need*, you can better pinpoint a solution that meets your long-term goals.

What do you need from your ideal accounting solution?

Check the appropriate box. On a daily basis, I need my accounting software to:

	YES	NO	SOMEWHAT
Connect multiple systems			
Simplify my operations			
Improve my data security and controls			
Make better use of my data			
Provide smarter financial and auditing tools			
Keep up with higher transaction volumes			
Integrate with other technology			
Work from different devices and locations			
Adapt to my business needs and industry standards			

Identify what you want

Now, list some of the goals you have for your business moving forward.

Do you want to open an online store? Perhaps you’re considering going public, acquiring a competitor, or just want to simplify your IT responsibilities. What do you hope to accomplish as an organization over the next five years?

After that, consider how your ideal accounting solution would help you achieve those ambitions. For example, if you’re aiming to land a new round of funding in the next few years, then your ideal solution might consolidate your financial data, and use that information to create accessible reports that show your previous success and future growth trends.

Fill in your own goals on the list to the right. We’ve added a few ideas to get you started:

IF I WANT TO...	THEN MY SOFTWARE SHOULD...
Grow revenues	Handle 30% more transactions each month
Build a sales team	Support additional mobile users
Maintain lean IT staff	Run on the cloud and be managed by the vendor

Identify what you want

Many small business leaders struggle with their own limitations.

Part of sustaining growth is being honest about what tasks you can handle, and which you would be better served passing off to someone else. Sometimes this can mean hiring an expert or a contractor, but it also means finding tools that can automate many of your daily tasks.

Now that we know what you want,
let's look at how you can get there.



Chapter 2

Discover the tools
to help you get there



Discover the tools to help you get there

When it comes to accounting solutions, the entrepreneurial encyclopedia *Founder's Guide* breaks your options down into three main categories:¹

- 1 Database accounting software
- 2 Installed accounting software
- 3 Cloud accounting software

A database accounting software solutions, like Oracle and Microsoft Dynamics 365 for Operations, Enterprise edition, have historically been the go-to accounting solutions for multi-million dollar corporations. These immense systems are designed for banks and top-end enterprises with extremely complex accounting needs and require a significant financial investment to set up, manage, and maintain. QuickBooks works nicely for small businesses with simple accounting needs. It's easy to use, but difficult to customize, distribute, and integrate.

Finally, cloud accounting software connects your financial needs to an online service provider and makes your data accessible to your team from nearly any location or device. Cloud accounting tools are certainly a change, but they can also open up a new world of efficiency, productivity, and security.

According to Deloitte research, SMBs that use an above average number of cloud services grow **26%** faster, and are **21%** more profitable (on average) than those that use no cloud tools.²

When choosing your ideal accounting solution, this stage all about meeting those needs and goals that we discussed earlier. If we look solely as the size of your organization, there's a good chance that cloud accounting software is the most suitable solution for your needs.

With the rise of cloud computing and software as a service (SaaS) solutions, organizations of all sizes can benefit from mobile, secure, and scalable technology without making huge investments in on-premise servers.

Cloud tools equip small businesses with enterprise-grade resources to lighten the load of managed IT and simplify their day-to-day operations. Yet, many companies hesitate to transition from their own on-premise servers and solutions.

To help ease those potential concerns, here are ten reasons to consider the cloud. —>

Discover the tools to help you get there

1 Keep your data safe

With cloud services, you get more than just storage; **you get security**. Not only do cloud solutions feature built-in redundancy to make sure your data's backups have backups, you also leverage your cloud partner's security investment—**millions of dollars** that someone else has paid to ensure your data stays safe.

2 Connect your people, processes, and data

Get ahead of the competition with **united, adaptable, and stable solutions** that work together to connect your teams and streamline your operations.

3 Gain a complete picture of your business

By integrating your accounting data into a cloud solution, you can get **real-time analytics and reporting** to create an accurate and up-to-date picture of your organization's habits and trends.

4 Improve cash flow

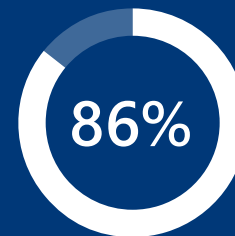
Cloud services typically operate on a monthly, per user license, so **costs are predictable, and limited to your needs**. Pay for what you need, and adapt as your business grows.

5 Eliminate hardware

Migrating to the cloud presents the chance to unload on-site servers, **free up hard drive space, and eliminate the need to monitor and maintain those tools**. That means fewer IT expenses, less administrative oversight, and more space to grow.

6 Reduce IT concerns

By removing your server responsibilities, **your IT team can focus on more value-added tasks** like onboarding new employees and expanding your services.



According to TechAisle, **86%** of small and mid-size businesses in the US have made a SaaS adoption. That number is expected to reach **94%** by 2018.³

Discover the tools to help you get there

7 Simplify mobility

Cloud access controls mean your team can securely work from home or in the field with the full capabilities of an on-site employee. With the cloud you can manage quotes, orders, and projects from nearly anywhere.

8 Get started fast

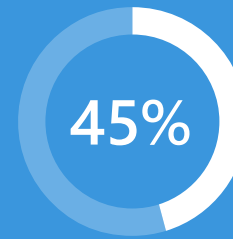
Because cloud solutions are managed by your partner, there's no hardware to set up or software to install—you can get started on day one.

9 Save time and money

Merge bookkeeping, inventory, sales management, and other tasks into a single solution that makes previously time-intensive responsibilities more efficient.

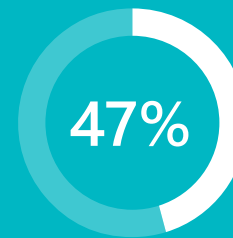
10 Scalability

For a growing business, the flexibility to pay for and use only what you need provides peace of mind that you'll always have the right service at the right time.



of SMBs said their employees got more done in the same amount of time thanks to cloud and mobile technologies.

Source: The Boston Consulting Group⁴



of SMBs said technology is critical to their company's future.

Source: The Boston Consulting Group⁴

Chapter 3

Find the solution
that's right for you



Find the solution that's right for you

Evaluate your vendor as a partner. How do their services align to those goals you wrote down earlier?

When you weigh the different accounting solutions that are available, it's important to find a reputable vendor who is willing to support your adoption through training and education. Can they quickly assimilate with your operations and articulate how their service will help support your goals?

Vendor name		When was this solution first offered?	
How long in business?		How stable is the vendor? Is the solution at risk of becoming unsupported in the near future?	
Market reputation	Established and trusted Known, but inconsistent performance Not well known/never heard of this vendor	Competitive differentiators	What I noticed/liked best about this solution/vendor:
Customer support track record	Able to provide success stories and accessible references Offers in-person training Provides on-site training & support materials Values my loyalty as a customer Acts and responds quickly		
Pricing	Monthly Based on users Based on usage Flexible Practically fits my budget		

Find the solution that's right for you

It can be tough to know exactly what to ask your sales representative as you explore potential accounting solutions. [Here are a few places to start:](#)

What would be our first-time and ongoing costs?		How does the software manage data access and functions by role?	
What is the process and typical time frame for getting set up?		Can we control updates and schedule them on our timeline?	
What business processes can we handle out of the box with your software?		Can we access the full capabilities of the solution on mobile devices?	
In what ways is the software intuitive and user-friendly?		Can we import our historical data?	
Can I configure or customize the solution? How does that impact the price?		Can the solution integrate with third-party applications/software?	

Find the solution that's right for you

It can be tough to know exactly what to ask your sales representative as you explore potential accounting solutions. [Here are a few places to start:](#)

What must we do to integrate third-party software with your software?		What level of data control do you commit to in a service level agreement (if relevant)?	
How many users and transactions can you support concurrently?		What are average response times if we're experiencing an issue with your solution?	
What IT skills will we need to manage and update the software?		Is your customer service on demand or by appointment only?	
What standards are in place to keep my data safe (if relevant)?		Can we get a free trial? If so, how many users does it support and for how long? What functionality will we be able to use?	

"You can't grow and keep your records on paper. You need to make one voice and have one place where you keep all that information."

—Mary Donahue, Director of Web Operations, GEARYS⁵

Find the solution that's right for you

You've assessed QuickBooks and vetted potential changes, now it's time to compare your options.

Rate each vendor (1-5, 1 is bad, 5 is ideal) based on how they meet your needs in the columns below.

	VENDOR 1	VENDOR 2	VENDOR 3		VENDOR 1	VENDOR 2	VENDOR 3
Easy to onboard				Eliminates data synchronization issues			
Data is easy to access and analyze				Supports configurable workflow			
Database grows with my needs				Easy to use			
Supports high volume of transactions, records, and items				Easy to create and share reports			
Reliable audit controls				Vendor support			
Provides a consistent mobile experience				Integrates with Microsoft Office and other existing tools			
Meets capability requirements				Transparent and consistent pricing			
Integrates with third-party services				Your total:			

Live demos are an essential part of any decision. Ask your sales representative for a personalized demo to see how their service will work for your business.

Chapter 4

Put your solution into action



Put your solution into action

As you search for your ideal accounting solution, often the best approach is to try the service for yourself.

Many vendors offer free trials for potential customers, and these create a great opportunity to test run a potential solution for yourself. Keep in mind that sometimes free trials may only demonstrate a limited number of features.

To make the most of a free trial:

Define success in advance and know what you want out of the experience

Share that vision with the users and explain how they fit into the process

Evaluate the experience based on your goals

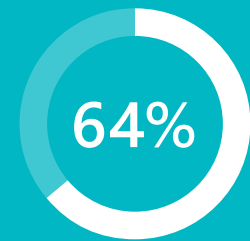
“Accidentally” delete something important, then **follow the audit trail**

Stress test the solution—import your own data and see how it performs

Put your solution into action

Once you're done, rate each solution based on your experience:

	EXCEPTIONAL	ACCEPTABLE	POOR	DOES NOT SUIT OUR NEEDS	N/A
Ease of use					
Permissions by role					
Capabilities needed					
Importing your data					
Record deletion/audit trail					
Ease of report generation					
Create custom reports					



of business owners consider personal trial and error to be the key factor in driving their confidence in a new product or service.⁶

“Whatever case study was loaded in software, almost made or broke what I thought of [the] program.”

—Small business owner⁷

Conclusion

A checklist for success



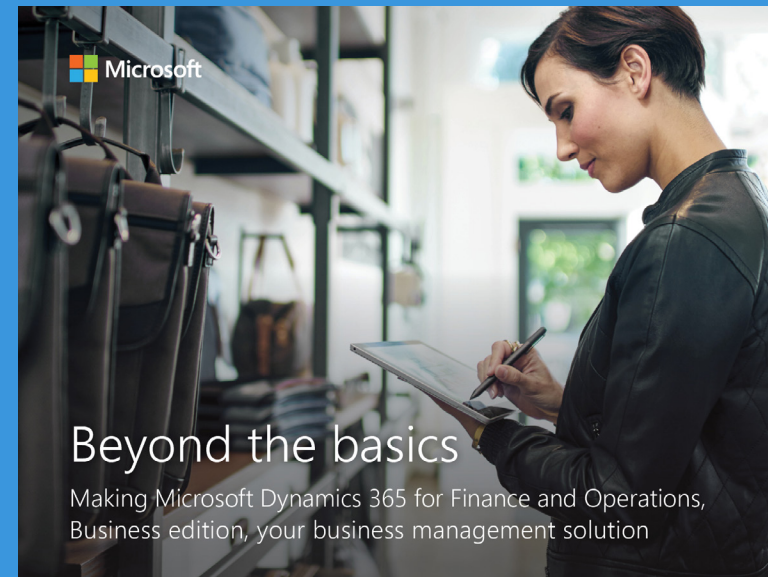
A checklist for success

Taking a proactive approach to your future growth is a great way to reach your long-term goals.

When you know what you need, what's available, and what to ask, wading through the ocean of available accounting software to find your perfect solution is easier than it seems. We hope these tools will help as you sort through your options and find the right tools for your unique organization.

Making the right decision for your business takes time, but you can grow with confidence when you:

- 1 Know what you want
- 2 Discover what tools are available to help
- 3 Find what's right for you
- 4 Put your solution into action



To **learn more** about Microsoft's solution for small business owners, check out our **SlideShare**, **Beyond the Basics: Making Microsoft Dynamics 365 for Finance and Operations, Business edition, your business management solution** or start a **free trial** of Microsoft Dynamics 365 for Finance and Operations today. ➔

1. <http://foundersguide.com/best-accounting-software-for-startups/>
2. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Technology-Media-Telecommunications/gx-tmt-small-business-big-technology.pdf>
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5. <https://app.mavenlink.com/redirect?url=http://customers.microsoft.com/en-us/story/gearys-leaps-into-the-digital-age-using-microsoft-dyna>
6. <http://www.thealternativeboard.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Business-Pulse-Survey-Business-Owner-Buying-Decisions.pdf>
7. Dynamics 365, Business edition, Trends & Insights: Study of small business owners and industry experts in the U.S., conducted by phone in a detailed 1 hour live interview. The survey was commissioned by Microsoft in 2017, and included approximately 32 interviews with small business owners, industry experts, and Microsoft partners, complimented by secondary research.



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