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Stephen L. Nelson, MBA, CPA

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**by Stephen L. Nelson, CPA,
MBA (finance), MS (taxation)**

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Introduction

Running or working in a small business is one of the coolest things a person can do. Really. I mean it. Sure, sometimes the environment is dangerous — kind of like the Old West — but it's an environment in which you have the opportunity to make tons of money. And it's also an environment in which you can build a company or a job that perfectly fits you.

In comparison, many brothers and sisters working in big-company corporate America are furiously trying to fit their round pegs into painfully square holes. Yuck.

You're wondering, of course, what any of this has to do with this book or with QuickBooks. Quite a lot, actually. The whole purpose of this book is to make it easier for you to run or work in a small business by using QuickBooks.

About This Book

As you start your reading, though, I want to tell you a couple of things about this book.

First off, know that I fiddled a bit with the Windows display settings. For example, I noodled around with the font settings and some of the colors. The benefit is that the pictures of the QuickBooks windows and dialog boxes in this book are easier to read. And that's good. But the cost of all this is that my pictures look a little bit different from what you see on your screen. And that's not good. In the end, however, what the publisher found is that people are happier with increased readability.

Next point: To make the best use of your time and energy, you should know about the conventions that I use in this book, which are as follows:

- ✔ When I want you to type something, such as **With a stupid grin, Martin watched the tall blonde strut into the bar and order grappa**, it's in bold type. When I want you to type something that's short and uncomplicated, such as **Jennifer**, it still appears in boldface type.
- ✔ Except for passwords, you don't have to worry about the case of the letters you type in QuickBooks. If I tell you to type **Jennifer**, you can type **JENNIFER** or follow poet e. e. cummings's lead and type **jennifer**.
- ✔ Whenever I tell you to choose a command from a menu, I say something like "Choose Lists⇨Items," which simply means to first choose the Lists menu and then choose Items. The ⇨ separates one part of the command from the next part.
- ✔ You can choose menus, commands, and dialog box elements with the mouse. Just click the thing you want.
- ✔ When I provide step-by-step descriptions of tasks, something I do regularly within the pages of this tome, I describe the tasks by using bold text and then below the boldfacing give a more detailed explanation in the text that follows the step. You can skip the text that accompanies the step-by-step boldface directions if you already understand the process.

Foolish Assumptions

I make three assumptions about you:

- ✔ **You have a PC running Microsoft Windows.** (I took pictures of the QuickBooks windows and dialog boxes while using Windows 8, in case you're interested.)
- ✔ **You know a little bit about how to work with your computer.**
- ✔ **You have or will buy a copy of QuickBooks for each computer on which you want to run the program.**



This book works for QuickBooks 2014, although, in a pinch, you can probably also use it for QuickBooks 2013 or 2015. (I have to say, however, that if you have QuickBooks 2013, you may instead want to return this book and trade it in for *QuickBooks 2013 For Dummies* by yours truly. Furthermore, even though I'm no fortuneteller, I'm willing to predict that you'll be able to buy a *QuickBooks 2015 For Dummies* book when QuickBooks 2015 comes out.)

Icons Used in This Book



The Tip icon marks tips (duh!) and shortcuts that you can use to make QuickBooks easier.



Remember icons mark the information that's especially important to know. To siphon off the most important information in each chapter, just skim through these icons.



The Technical Stuff icon marks information of a highly technical nature that you can normally skip over.



The Warning icon tells you to watch out! It marks important information that may save you headaches when working with QuickBooks.

Beyond the Book

This book is packed with information about using and benefiting from QuickBooks. But you'll be glad to learn, I'm sure, that you can find additional relevant content at the www.dummies.com website:

✓ The online **Cheat Sheet** is available at

www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/quickbooks2014

This cheat sheet is a handy reference that you'll use over and over, or you can refer to it when you don't have the book handy.

✔ **Online articles covering additional topics at**

www.dummies.com/extras/quickbooks2014

Here you can find tangential articles about minimizing (legally) your business's tax burden, tricks for increasing your business's profitability, and ways to speed up the way that QuickBooks works.

✔ **Updates to this book, if any exist, are at**

www.dummies.com/extras/quickbooks2014

Where to Go from Here

This book isn't meant to be read from cover to cover like some Stieg Larsson page turner. Instead, it's organized into tiny, no-sweat descriptions of how you do the things you need to do. If you're the sort of person who just doesn't feel right not reading a book from cover to cover, you can (of course) go ahead and read this thing from front to back. You can start reading Chapter 1 and continue all the way to the end (which means through Chapter 21 and the appendixes).



I don't think this from-start-to-finish approach is bad because I tell you a bunch of stuff (tips and tricks, for example) along the way. I tried to write the book in such a way that the experience isn't as rough as you might think, and I really do think you get good value from your reading.

But you also can use this book the way you'd use an encyclopedia. If you want to know about a subject, you can look it up in the Table of Contents or the index; then you can flip to the correct chapter or page and read as much as you need or enjoy. No muss, no fuss.

I should, however, mention one thing: Accounting software programs require you to do a certain amount of preparation before you can use them to get real work done. If you haven't started to use QuickBooks yet, I recommend that you read through the first few chapters of this book to find out what you need to do first.

Finally, if you haven't already installed QuickBooks and need help, jump to Appendix A, which tells you how to install QuickBooks in ten easy steps. And, if you're just starting out with Microsoft Windows, peruse Chapter 1 of the *Windows User's Guide* or one of these books on your flavor of Windows: *Windows XP For Dummies*, 2nd Edition; *Windows Vista For Dummies*; *Windows 7 For Dummies*; or *Windows 8 For Dummies*, all by Andy Rathbone.

Part I

Quickly into QuickBooks



Check out the web extras online at <http://www.dummies.com/extras/quickbooks2014> to ease your setup workload with handy tricks.

In this part . . .

- ✔ Understand the big picture stuff about why, how, and when you install the QuickBooks accounting software.
- ✔ Get practical stratagems and commonsense tactics for quickly getting your accounting system up and running.
- ✔ Load the QuickBooks master files with startup information so you're productive and efficient from day one.

Chapter 1

QuickBooks: The Heart of Your Business

In This Chapter

- ▶ Benefitting from a tool like QuickBooks
 - ▶ Discovering what QuickBooks actually does
 - ▶ Understanding why QuickBooks is a popular choice
 - ▶ Getting started (in general) with QuickBooks
 - ▶ Succeeding in setup and use of QuickBooks
-

I want to start this conversation by quickly covering some basic questions concerning QuickBooks, such as “Why even use QuickBooks?” and “Where and how does a guy or gal start?” — and, most importantly, “What should I not do?”

This little orientation shouldn’t take more than a few minutes. Really. And the orientation lets you understand the *really* big picture concerning QuickBooks.

Why QuickBooks?

Okay, I know you know that you need an accounting system. Somebody, maybe your accountant or spouse, has convinced you of this. And you, the team player that you are, have just accepted this conventional viewpoint as the truth.

But just between you and me, why do you *really* need QuickBooks? And what does QuickBooks do that you really, truly need done? And heck, just to be truly cynical, also ask the question, “Why QuickBooks?” Why not, for example, use some other accounting software program?

Why you need an accounting system

Start with the most basic question: Why do you even need an accounting system like QuickBooks? It's a fair question, so let me supply you with the two-part answer.

The first reason is that federal law requires your business to maintain an accounting system. More specifically, Section 446 (General Rule for Methods of Accounting) of Title 26 (Internal Revenue Code) of the United States Code requires that you have the capability to compute taxable income by using some sort of common-sense accounting system that clearly reflects income.

If you decide just to blow off this requirement — after all, you got into business so that you could throw off the shackles of bureaucracy — you might get away with your omission. But if the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) examines your return and you ignored Section 446, the IRS gets to do your accounting the way *it* wants. And the IRS way means that you pay more in taxes and that you also pay taxes earlier than you would have otherwise.

Here's the second reason for maintaining an accounting system. I sort of go out on an editorial limb, but I'm going to do it anyway. My strong belief — backed by more than three decades of business experience and close-hand observations of several hundred business clients — is that you can't successfully manage your business without a decent accounting system. Success requires accurately measuring profits or losses and reasonably estimating your financial condition.

This second reason makes sense, right? If your friend Kenneth doesn't know when he's making money, which products or services are profitable, and which customers are worth keeping (and which aren't), does he really have a chance?

I don't think he does.

To summarize, your business must have a decent accounting system, no matter how you feel about accounting and regardless of how time-consuming and expensive such a system is or becomes. The law requires you to have such an accounting system. And successful business management depends on such an accounting system.

What QuickBooks does

Go on to the next question that you and I need to discuss: What does QuickBooks do to help you maintain an accounting system that measures profits and losses and other stuff like that?

QuickBooks truly makes business accounting easy by providing windows that you use to record common business transactions. For example, QuickBooks has a window (you know, a Windows window that appears on your monitor's screen) that looks like a check. To record a check you write, you fill in the blanks of the window with bits of information, such as the date, amount, and person or business you're paying.

QuickBooks also has a handful of other windows that you use in a similar fashion. For example, QuickBooks supplies an invoice window that looks like an invoice you might use to bill a customer or client. You fill in the invoice window's blanks by recording invoice information, such as the name of the client or customer, invoice amount, and date by which you want to be paid.

And here's the neat thing about these check and invoice windows: When you record business transactions by filling in the blanks shown onscreen, you collect the information that QuickBooks needs to prepare the reports that summarize your profits or losses and your financial situation.

For example, if you record two invoices (for \$10,000 each) to show amounts that you billed your customers, and then you record three checks (for \$4,000 each) to record your advertising, rent, and supplies expenses, QuickBooks can (with two or three mouse clicks from you) prepare a report that shows your profit, as shown in Table 1-1.

| | <i>Amount</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| <i>Revenue</i> | \$20,000 |
| Advertising | (\$4,000) |
| Rent | (\$4,000) |
| Supplies | (\$4,000) |
| <i>Total Expenses</i> | (\$12,000) |
| Profit | \$8,000 |



The parentheses, by the way, indicate negative amounts. That's an accounting thing, but back to the real point of my little narrative.

Your accounting with QuickBooks can be just as simple as I describe in the previous paragraphs. In other words, if you record just a handful of business transactions by using the correct QuickBooks windows, you can begin to prepare reports like the one shown in Table 1-1. Such reports can be used to

calculate profits or (ugh) losses for last week, last month, or last year. Such reports can also be used to calculate profits and losses for particular customers and products.

I know I'm kind of harsh in the first part of this chapter — bringing up that stuff about the IRS and business failure — but this accounting stuff is neat! (For the record, that's the only exclamation point I use in this chapter.) Good accounting gives you a way to manage your business for profitability. And obviously, all sorts of good and wonderful things stem from operating your business profitably: a materially comfortable life for you and your employees; financial cushioning to get you through the tough patches; and profits that can be reinvested in your business, in other businesses, and in community charities.

Let me also mention a couple other darn handy things that QuickBooks (and other accounting systems, too) do for you, the overworked business owner or bookkeeper:

- ✔ **Forms:** QuickBooks produces, or prints, forms, such as checks or invoices, by using the information you enter into those check windows and invoice windows that I mention earlier. So that's neat. And a true timesaver. (See Chapter 4.)
- ✔ **Electronic banking and billing:** QuickBooks transmits and retrieves some financial transaction information electronically. For example, QuickBooks can e-mail your invoices to customers and clients. (That can save you both time and money.) And QuickBooks can share bank accounting information with most major banks, making it easy to make payments and transfer funds electronically. (See Chapter 13.)

What Explains QuickBooks' Popularity?

No question about it — you need a good accounting system if you're in business. But you know what? That fact doesn't explain why QuickBooks is so popular or why you should use QuickBooks. (I ignore for one moment that you probably already purchased QuickBooks.) Therefore, let me suggest to you three reasons why QuickBooks is an excellent choice to use as the foundation of your accounting system:

- ✔ **Ease of use:** QuickBooks historically has been the easiest or one of the easiest accounting software programs to use. Why? The whole just-enter-transaction-information-into-windows-that-resemble-forms thing (which I talk about earlier) makes the data entry a breeze. Most businesspeople already know how to fill in the blanks on these forms. That means that