

# Sydney Morning Herald

## SOHO

### Small Office Home Office

#### Better bookkeeping

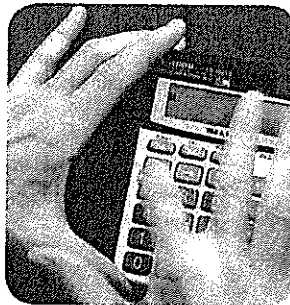
Looking for a word processor or a spreadsheet is easy. While you may ultimately end up choosing an alternative, Word or Excel are highly likely to feature on your shopping list.

At the very least you'll probably want to benchmark other programs against Microsoft's offerings in terms of cost, performance and capability.

Quicken's range of accounting applications are similar benchmarks when it comes to financial software – particularly at the SOHO end of the market.

As with Microsoft Word, there are alternatives. But Quicken ([www.quicken.com.au](http://www.quicken.com.au)) didn't get to be this country's most visible brand of small business accounting tools for nothing. The company's products tend to be robust and complete, but more importantly, they are nicely tailored for Australian conditions and they are relatively easy to use.

This last point matters; small business owners might be good with balancing budgets and so on, but it's easy to trip up on some of the more arcane aspects of accrual accounting. My personal bugbear lies in not



knowing whether certain transactions should be debits or credits – it isn't always obvious to a non-accountant.

Even Quicken's \$99 Quickbooks Easystart, the company's most basic small business package, eliminates this problem. The software is user friendly to the point of being obsequious. When you first start the program, you'll see a graphic charting the way money flows through a business. This is divided into three groups: Money In, Money Out and Your Business. The first deals with sales receipts, invoices, customer payments and bank deposits. Money Out deals with cheque writing, recording expenses and issuing refunds. Your Business is where you examine banks accounts and look at your company's profit and loss.

A panel on the display's left side shows the same three groups and provides quick access to tasks associated with each group, such as writing cheques. At the bottom of the panel are links to help screens that deal with whatever activity is taking place in the main panel.

Almost every task in Quickbooks EasyStart is a matter of filling in a form or reading a report. That's about it. As the name suggests, it's not a comprehensive program, it's just enough to get you started.

**Bill Bennett**