

CFO Challenges and Priorities in 2021 And Beyond



In a business climate radically altered by both digital transformation and major disruptors such as the COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic, companies who want to compete, grow, and innovate effectively need both flexibility and resilience.

Securing competitive advantage means mastering emerging technologies and developing strategies that incorporate risk management, data-driven decision making, and a collaborative, agile approach.

For chief financial officers (CFOs), this need is even more urgent. As procurement and financial departments take center stage in crafting the strategic business models necessary to compete in today's economy, today's CFOs are tasked with finding ways to minimize risk, maximize performance, and protect business continuity while maintaining sufficient flexibility to take full advantage of emerging opportunities.

Today's CFO Challenges Are Bigger Than

Ever

In the past, the CFO served largely as a finance chief. They were a liaison between the finance team (along with procurement) and upper management in the C-suite.

They focused the lion's share of their time and skill set on dealing with regulatory issues, guiding their teams in cutting costs, managing cash flow, and enforcing budgeting initiatives, and then reporting the results.

But in the age of digital transformation, the role of the CFO is rapidly evolving. They don't just lead the finance team or spearhead initiatives to reduce costs.

Instead, more and more companies are elevating the CFO to a primary strategic role within the C-suite, and relying on the finance function to create value, secure and enhance competitive advantage, and improve overall business performance—all while reducing risk and continuing to perform their traditional roles.

Doing business in the new normal has underscored the importance of accurate and strategic financial planning paired with strategic flexibility, both aligned tightly with organizational goals for business performance.

From optimizing internal processes to meet stakeholder expectations to forging strong bonds with vendors to ensure supply chain resilience, finance leaders are tasked with finding immediate and lasting solutions to unprecedented challenges.

Consequently, today's CFOs need *new* skill sets and talents. They need to understand emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and robotic process automation.

They need to understand and know how to effectively leverage financial business intelligence, risk management systems, and new business models built on collaboration, innovation, communication, and both resilience and flexibility.

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Top Challenges and Priorities for CFOs

While chief financial officers have different priorities with regard to their specific industries, company size, and areas of expertise, today's CFOs face a set of common challenges that must be addressed to ensure their organizations are able to compete and grow effectively today and into the future.

1. Digital Transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic has been both vilified as a killer of traditional business paradigms and praised as an unlooked-for blessing for businesses swift, innovative, and lucky enough to adapt to rapidly shifting market conditions.

But even before the pandemic struck, digital transformation was redefining the parameters within which the finance function must operate—and creating new opportunities to seize competitive strength through data-driven process optimization and analytics.

Digital transformation technologies grant finance leaders and their teams hitherto-unimaginable capabilities. Accounts payable (AP) automation eliminates the need for manual data entry, boosts the speed and accuracy of high-volume, otherwise tedious processes, and eliminates human error while simultaneously freeing staff to apply their valuable skill sets to more important tasks no computer can handle (at least, not yet).

AP automation immediately lowers costs—still the number one priority for CFOs in 2021, according to Deloitte research—and sets up further cost reductions over time via continuous improvement via self-guided process optimization.

It also supports important internal process improvements such as guided buying and full integration with vendor systems, reducing or even eliminating common (and costly) issues such as maverick spend and invoice fraud.

Deep data analytics, combined with rich and intuitive reporting and forecasting tools, make it easy to monitor spend in real time, create accurate and strategically valuable reports drawn from actionable insights, and support the alignment of procurement and AP processes with organization-level goals.

Centralized data management, paired with a fully integrated software

environment, connects all applications—from enterprise resource planning (ERP) to accounting software to marketing and customer management platforms—while providing role-appropriate, secure access to all stakeholders.

It also eliminates data silos and reduces the risk of miscommunication. It improves data quality, which in turn improves the strategic utility of analytics, forecasting, reporting, and decision-making.

Cybersecurity also improves thanks to state-of-the-art encryption, centralized data storage on the cloud (rather than local servers), and secure, single sign-on (SSO) access.

Simply by implementing a cloud-based, comprehensive procure-to-pay (P2P) system like PLANERGY, today's CFOs can kickstart digital transformation for their organizations and begin to integrate core concepts such as continuous improvement, strategic sourcing (including more soft-value concerns such as ethical procurement, sustainable sourcing, etc.), and data-based business continuity planning into workflows at all levels.

The result? Greater competitive strength, more agile and flexible responses to both business disruptors and unexpected opportunities, and improved risk management.

CFOs who invest in digital transformation and make strategic use of emerging technologies are far better equipped to ensure financial activities generate value for their organizations and provide a direct, demonstrable, and positive impact on profitability, business performance, and growth.

2. Adapting the Company Business Model to Fit a Changing Marketplace

Today's global marketplace is complex. Businesses who want to push past the competition rather than play catch-up need strategies in place to help them pivot in time to minimize disruptions and capture profitable opportunities for growth and innovation.

When the pandemic struck, for example, many restaurants, retailers, and grocery stores were swift to either modify their business models to incorporate delivery or partner with emerging businesses such as DoorDash and Uber Eats.

Elsewhere, brick-and-mortar institutions whose employees were quarantined at home found themselves formulating and implementing remote working protocols and procedures—either as an expansion of existing work-from-home programs or for the first time in their histories.

As business leaders, CFOs are taking an increasingly large role in the decision to pivot their companies' business models. As financial activities and the data they generate have a more profound effect on the overall strategic and financial planning for the business, CFOs must consider questions such as:

- What uncertainties are we facing, and how does that affect our risk exposure?
- What limitations are inhibiting growth, and how can we scale effectively to move beyond them to ensure revenue grows faster than costs?
- Which emerging technologies do we need to compete effectively, and are we ahead of or behind the competition in implementing them?
- What changes are necessary to maximize our procedures, protocols, and processes for maximum performance and efficiency—both in the finance department, and the organization as a whole?
- Which metrics should we track to develop and implement these changes?
- How can we improve cash flow management to ensure we have sufficient working capital for investment in growth opportunities as well as covering emergencies and meeting our financial obligations?

Carefully considering the answers to these questions will help CFOs and the rest of the C-suite react effectively and make intelligent business decisions when faced with a changing business environment.

3. Managing Cash Flow

While Deloitte found that cutting costs remained the number one priority for respondents in its Q2 2021 survey of CFOs, finding ways to increase liquidity was a close second.

That's not exactly surprising. Cash is the lifeblood of most businesses, and if the flow grows sluggish or erratic—or worse yet, stops altogether—then crisis isn't far behind. Keeping sufficient working capital helps companies insulate themselves against risk created by supply chain disruptors.

On the other hand, keeping too much cash free can hamper business growth and performance when that cash is simply stashed rather than put to work via investment.

Cash flow management is closely tied to inventory management, supplier management, and supplier relationship management.

For inventory in particular, the situation is very similar to cash. Keeping enough on hand to meet demand is important, but too much can end up costing you, either in stock loss/deadstock or by tying up capital that could be generating a profit via investment, product development, etc.

Taking a collaborative approach to supplier relationship management can help improve cash flow. Strong relationships make it easier to negotiate better pricing and payment terms, capture discounts reserved for the best customers, etc.

Ultimately, these complex, interconnected systems and their shared dependencies require careful oversight and proactive management strategies, which is another reason why digital transformation is so important.

Without the right data management, automation, and forecasting tools, it's very difficult for even seasoned CFOs to get the clear and complete picture they need of the various "moving pieces" involved in optimizing cash flow.

4. Building a Diverse, Growth-Minded, and Collaborative Corporate Culture

While corporate culture might seem more the province of human resources than the chief financial officer, modern CFOs understand that getting all the stakeholders in their organization on board with their plans and policies will ultimately lead to a more cohesive corporate culture driven by a shared vision for success.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives—both within their companies and as part of external initiatives such as vendor diversity programs—are one of the ways in which CFOs are providing the leadership needed to build this kind of corporate culture.

- Companies with DEI programs are up to 120% more likely to hit their financial goals;

- Companies employing an equal number of men and women produced up to 41% higher revenue;
- Companies with diverse management staff reported up to 19% higher revenue than those without it.

Beyond the financial benefits, diversity initiatives help strengthen the interpersonal bonds between team members.

They empower employees by letting them know their voices will be heard and respected. And best of all, diversity naturally fosters innovation and collaboration through the inclusion of new viewpoints, skill sets, and voices.

(Diversity also attracts new talent and boosts a company's reputation, providing soft value that can lead to more sales, new markets, etc.)

Innovation is also at the core of growth, another important aspect for finance leaders looking to build a corporate culture focused on the future. Savvy CFOs understand and leverage techniques such as cross-functional collaboration to help *all* stakeholders understand not just their own roles in the company's success, but the ways in which their team members contribute to the same.

Forward-thinking CFOs:

- Prize innovation and education, making smart investments to expand skill sets, support research and development to secure new markets and customers, improve products, increase sustainability, etc.
- Put a premium on attracting top-shelf talent familiar with digital transformation technologies and the strategies they support.
- Augment the existing skills of their team with additional training, and aren't afraid to outsource to secure new skills or build remote teams.
- Prioritize work-life balance and strive to connect with their teams as human beings while simultaneously encouraging team members to build strong professional relationships with one another.

These same CFOs also invest in strategic initiatives and partnerships. They make targeted acquisitions to lower costs, improve quality, and further streamline internal processes. They prioritize agility and look for opportunities to protect business continuity in every process.

Are You Ready to Tackle Today's Biggest CFO Challenges?

Cutting costs is just the beginning. Today's CFOs have a powerful opportunity to shape not only their companies' financial health, but their strategic planning and competitive strength.

Make digital transformation a priority, and use its tools to improve liquidity, reduce risk, and boost performance and profits.

Guide your entire organization toward a diverse, collaborative culture focused on shared purpose and success. Prioritize effective responses to today's biggest CFO challenges, and make sure your business is ready to take advantage of tomorrow's opportunities

QuickBooks Desktop for small and mid-sized businesses

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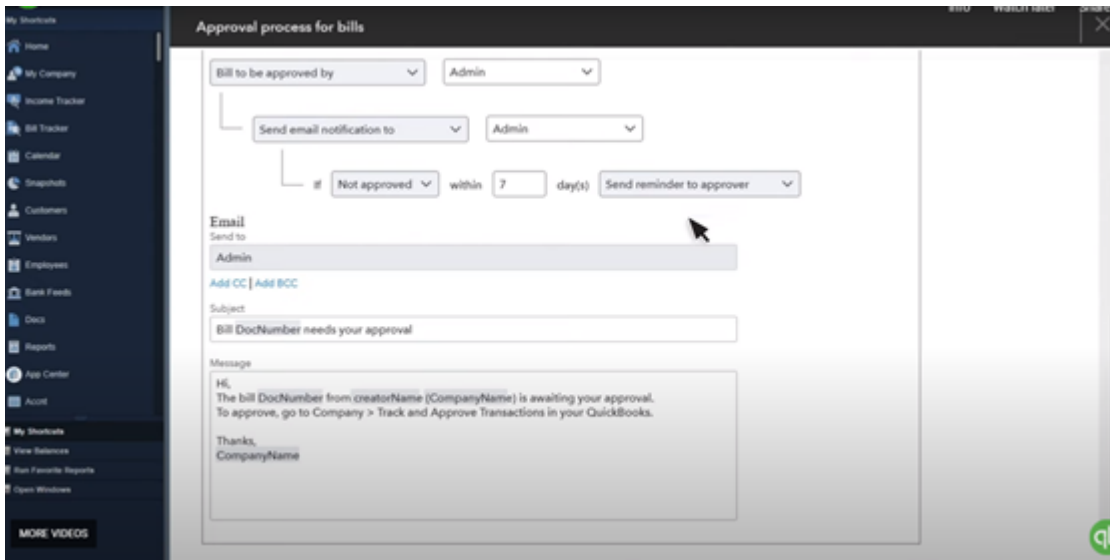
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QuickBooks Desktop Professional Services does that and more. Designed for those providing services rather than selling products, the Professional Services edition is available in both the Premier and Enterprise versions of QuickBooks Desktop.

In this article, we'll take a look at QuickBooks Enterprise for Professional Services, which is designed for mid-sized businesses and can support up to forty system users. However, if your business has less than five QuickBooks users, you may want to consider using QuickBooks Premier Professional Services, a better option for smaller businesses.

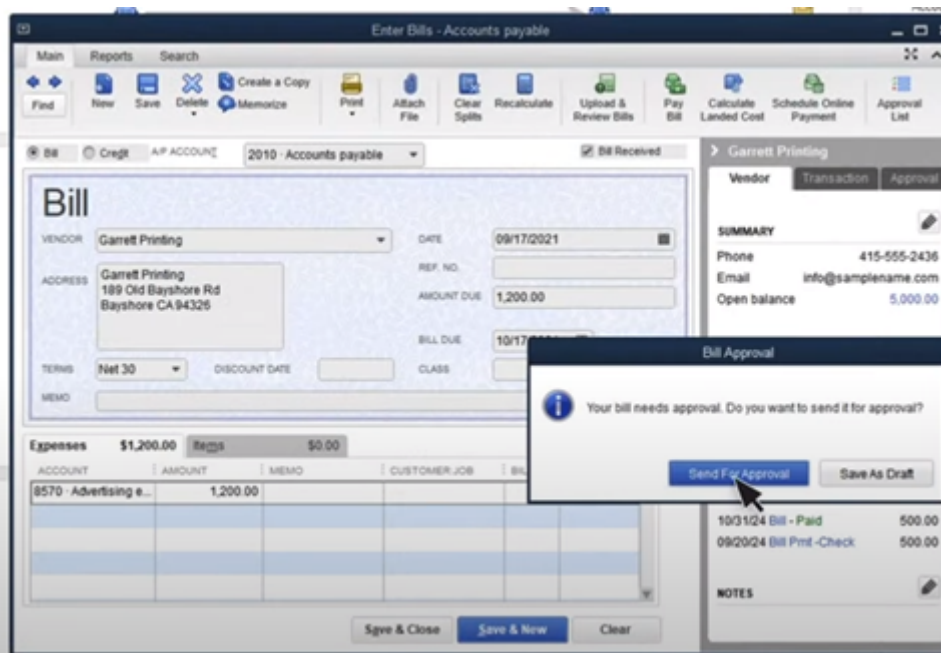
Today, QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services is loaded with features, including all those found in regular QuickBooks Desktop applications, such as double-entry accounting, online banking, bill payment, and invoicing. But it also includes features and functionality designed specifically for service professionals. Here's a breakdown of some of the latest features.

*** Bill Workflow Approvals - (Platinum version)** Bill workflow approvals is a brand new feature that allows you to better manage your cash flow by creating customizable workflow approvals. This new feature also includes reminders when approval deadlines approach.



You can set up custom workflows with the new Bill Workflow Approvals feature.

You can choose the custom workflow to suit your business, and can even customize the email message that the assigned recipient will receive. You can also choose whether you wish to copy anyone on the email. Once a workflow process has been set up for a particular vendor, whenever you enter a bill for that vendor, you will receive a message that the bill needs approval.

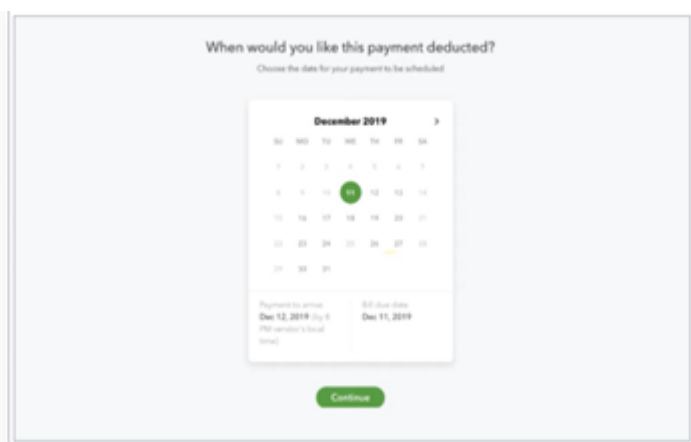


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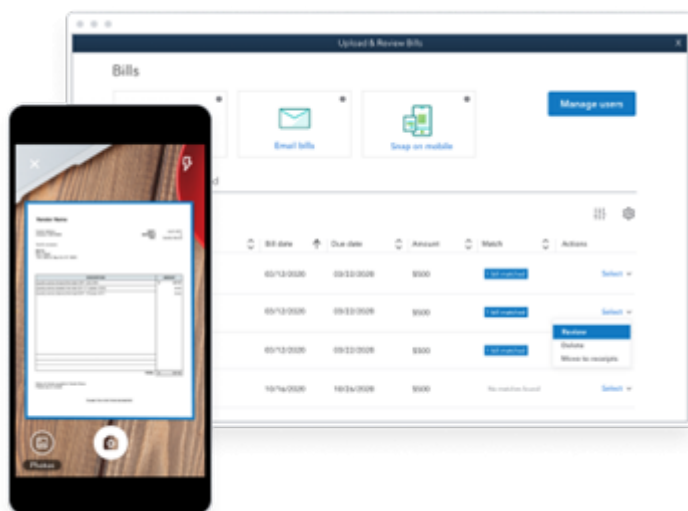
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The Scheduling and Bill Payment feature allows you to schedule bill payments.

When scheduling a payment, you have the option to choose the form of payment you wish to use including bank transfers or a physical check.

*** Upload Bills to QuickBooks** - Using the QuickBooks Desktop mobile app, you can now upload your bills directly into the application.

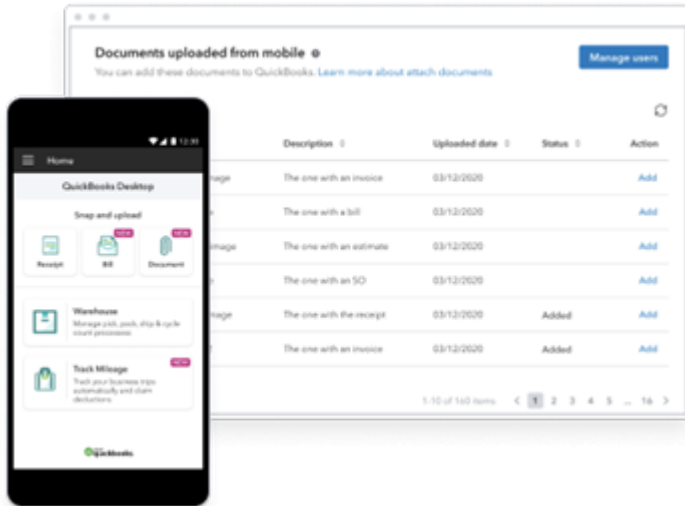


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All you have to do is snap a photo of the bill and click on the import feature. You'll be able to review the bill for accuracy before it posts into your account. Another benefit to using this feature is that you can have your vendors email their invoices directly to QuickBooks, where they will be available for you to review.

*** Attach Documents to Transactions** - Along with uploading invoices, you can

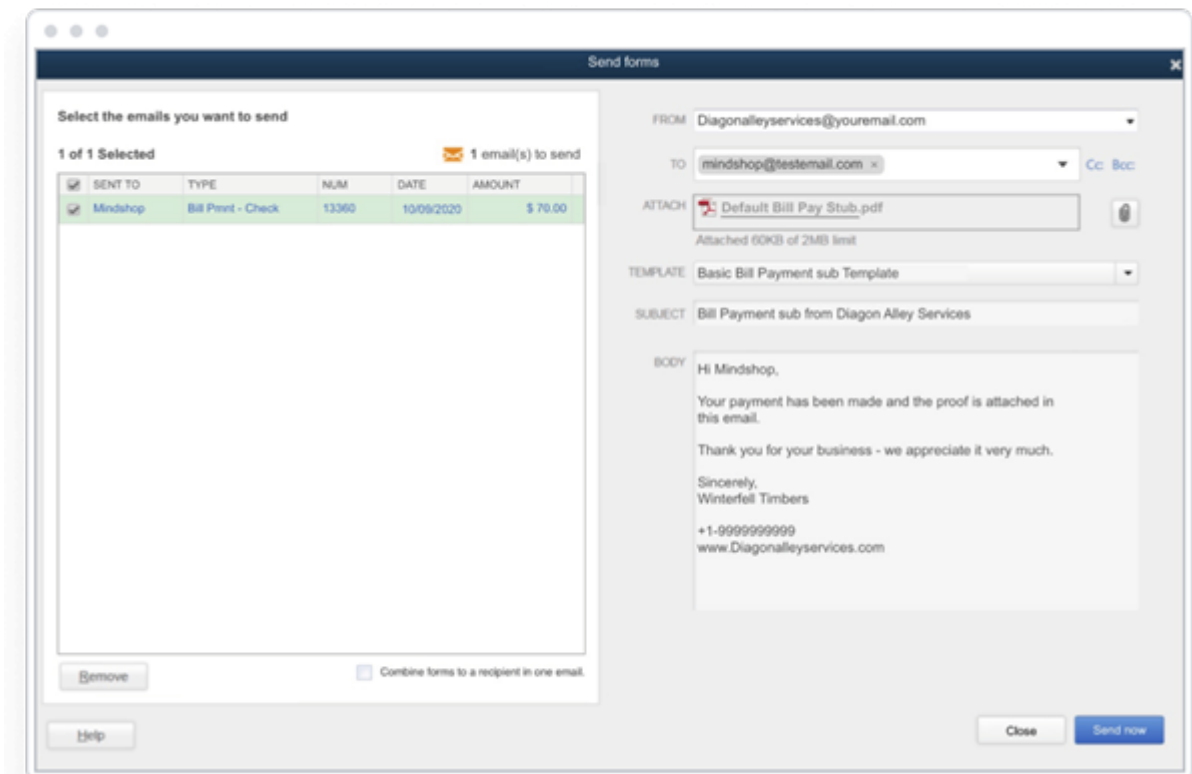
also attach documents to any transaction using the mobile app.



Use the QuickBooks Desktop Mobile App to attach documents to any transaction.

Doing so eliminates the need to store multiple documents on your system. You can also upload and attach multiple documents simultaneously if desired.

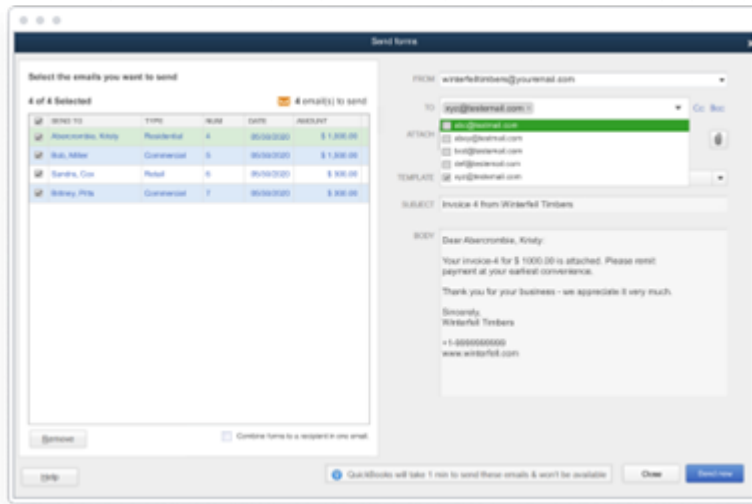
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You can now customize bill payment stubs for all of your vendors.

You can choose the vendors you wish from the dropdown list and create a custom email to send along with the bill payment stub.

*** Multiple Email Contacts** - Do you have a newsletter, targeted sale, or other information you wish to send to a select group of contacts? Using the multiple email contact feature, you can do just that.



The Email Contact List allows you to choose the recipients for a group email.

This is a great way to get custom messaging out to the appropriate recipients without having to manually enter each email address.

The professional services industry offers several challenges that need to be appropriately addressed including solid time tracking capability, flexible billing rates, and the option to better track project data.

Other features

Along with these new features, QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services also offers numerous features designed for professional services businesses. These include:

Time Tracking with QuickBooks Time Elite (formerly TSheets Elite) - Time tracking is important for any business, but particularly so for service businesses who have to manage timesheets and bill their time accordingly.

Using QuickBooks Time Elite, professional services users can track time spent on any project. But even more important, the time can then be automatically rolled up into any subsequent project reports as well as into QuickBooks Payroll, eliminating the need to enter data twice.

This allows users to track their time from any location, whether it's from their home, the office, or the client's office.

Project Costing - It can be difficult to know if a client project is profitable if all of the project management components are not tracked properly. Not only can you easily track project cost projections in real-time using the job costing dashboard, but you can also track the actual expenses to see if you're on track for profitability or if cost adjustments are needed.

Best of all, QuickBooks Enterprise will automatically create client invoices based on data entered in the system, eliminating the need to bill clients separately.

Flexible Billing Rates - As a professional services firm, your billing rates likely change frequently, depending on the job completed, who completed it, and the level of difficulty in completing the job. That's why being able to assign different billing rates to your employees based on a variety of criteria is so important.

By setting custom billing rate levels, you can assign a rate for a particular level rather than by an employee. For example, at a CPA firm, partner billing rates would be assigned at a different level than entry-level employees.

Reporting - Good reporting options are available in all QuickBooks Desktop applications with the Enterprise edition of QuickBooks Desktop offering more than 200 reports that can be customized to suit your needs. Any customized report can be saved in the application as a template, so you can use the same reporting criteria in the future without having to set it up again.

Advanced Reporting - Advanced reporting allows Enterprise users to access raw data to create reports and graphs from scratch. In addition, the Professional Services edition of QuickBooks (and all niche editions) also offers bundled reports designed specifically for professional services businesses. These reports include:

- **Billed and Unbilled Hours** - This report can be run by person or by

project, and provides management with a good view of all billable hours as well as how long an employee has spent on a particular project.

- **Costs by Project** - Costs need to be looked at throughout the life of a project. Running the Costs by Project report allows you to see exactly how much you've spent to date, allowing you to make adjustments to your forecast mid-project when needed.
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- **Project Status** - One of the most important reports for management, the Project Status report provides a summary view of all projects in progress along with a guide that shows you whether the project is on track for on-time completion.

Payroll Processing - All QuickBooks Enterprise editions come with QuickBooks Enhanced Payroll, which allows you to pay both employees and contractors. Enhanced Payroll also includes both printed check capability as well as free direct deposit. For those that want additional help with payroll, a subscription to Assisted Payroll will take care of all payroll taxes including filing and payment.

QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services also includes a custom chart of accounts, can monitor project progress, track unbilled time, and electronically invoice clients. Multi-level data permissions are available, so management can establish permission levels for multiple groups of employees, ensuring confidentiality throughout the life of the project.

In addition, you can prepare custom proposals for potential business, accept mobile and credit card payments from your clients, and even integrate with Salesforce CRM for better client and sales management. For those that require integration with outside e-commerce channels, an optional e-commerce integration add-on is available that offers seamless integration with online stores and marketplaces.

Like all QuickBooks products, QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services is designed to work on a Windows platform and is not currently available for Mac systems. Available as an annual subscription, Intuit offers three versions of Enterprise:

1. **Gold** - The Gold version of QuickBooks Enterprise includes Advanced Reporting, access to QuickBooks Priority Circle, and QuickBooks Enhanced Payroll. The Gold version supports up to 30 system users and starts at \$1,489.50 for the first year.
2. **Platinum** - The Platinum version includes all Gold level features as well as Advanced Inventory for tracking inventory items, Advanced Pricing, and Bill Workflow Approvals. The Platinum version supports up to 30 system users with a subscription starting at \$1,831.50 for the first year.
3. **Diamond** - The most advanced version of QuickBooks Enterprise, the Diamond version can support up to 40 users and includes advanced features such as QuickBooks Time Elite, and the Salesforce CRM Connector. Diamond subscribers also have access to QuickBooks Desktop Assisted Payroll. The Diamond version of QuickBooks Enterprise starts at \$3,618 the first year.

All subscription levels include customer support, online data backup storage for all QuickBooks data, product upgrades, and training tools.

Is QuickBooks Enterprise Right for Your Business?

A great option for mid-sized and growing professional services businesses that are looking for a better way to manage project costs and billing, QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services is an all-in-one application that you will not soon outgrow.

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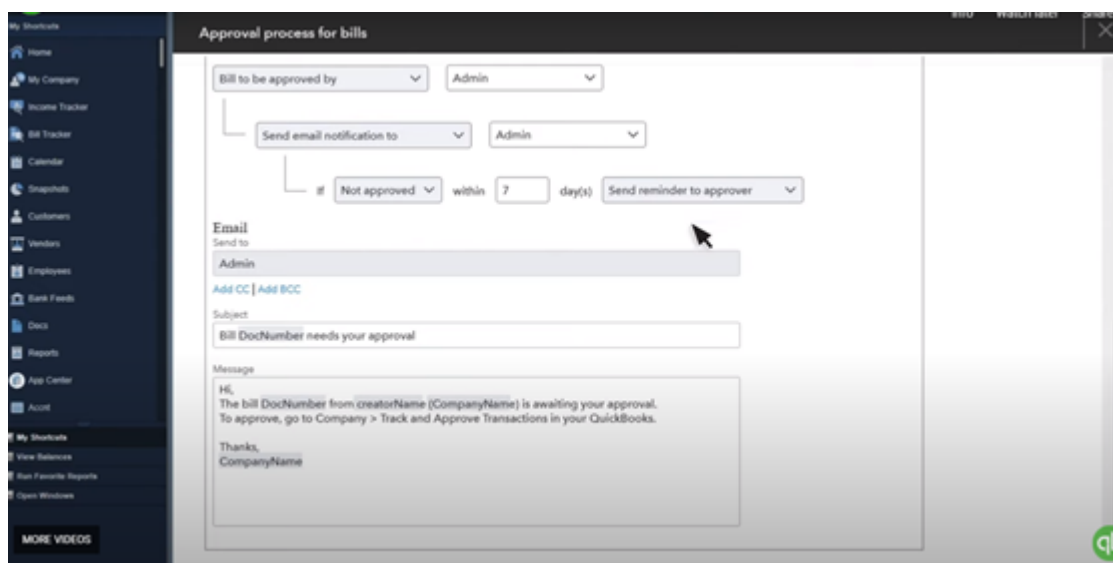
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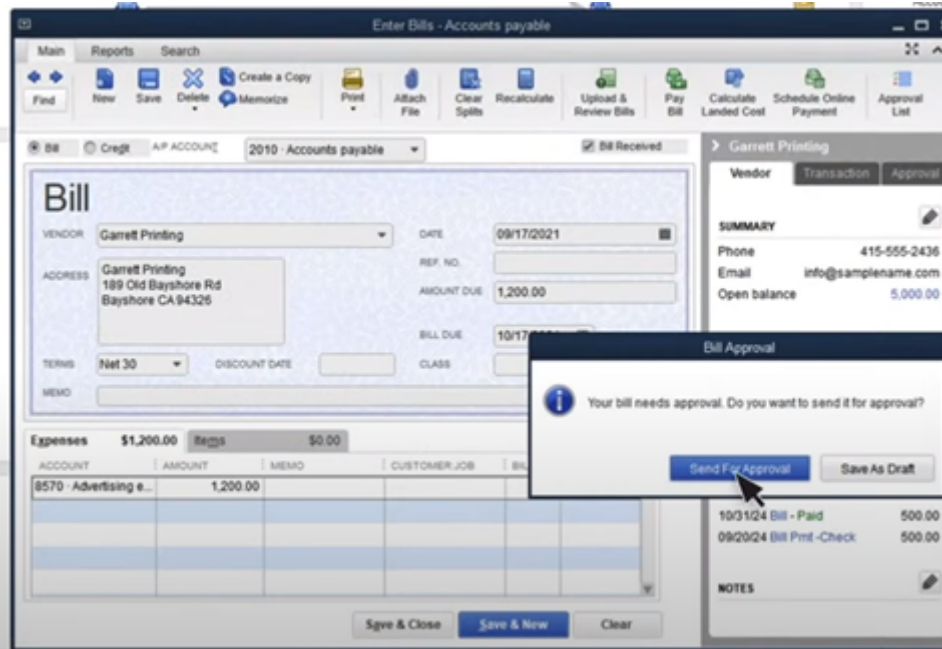
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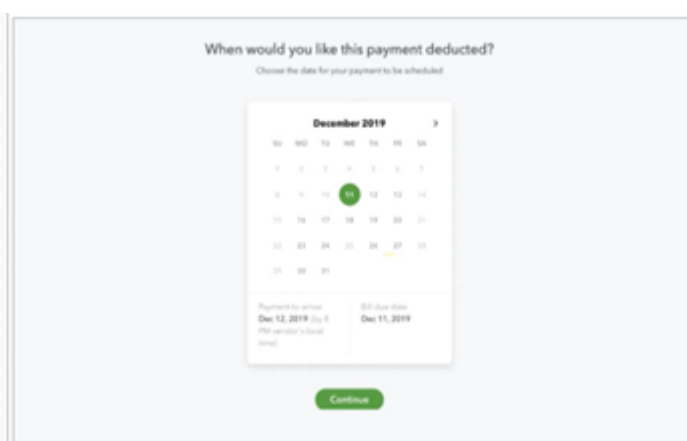
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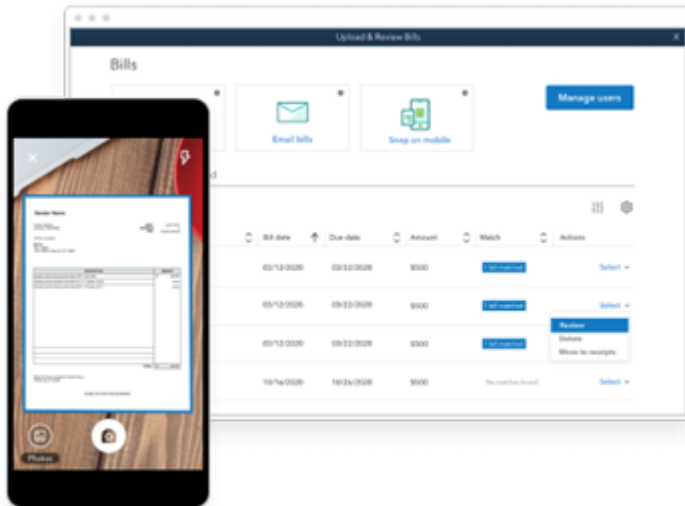


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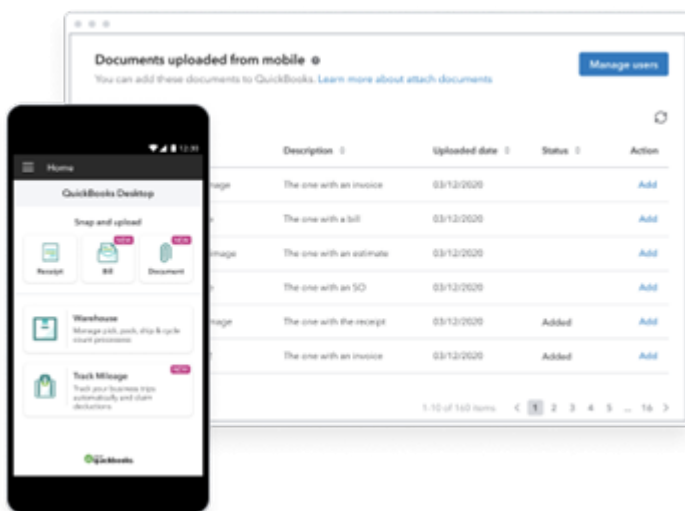
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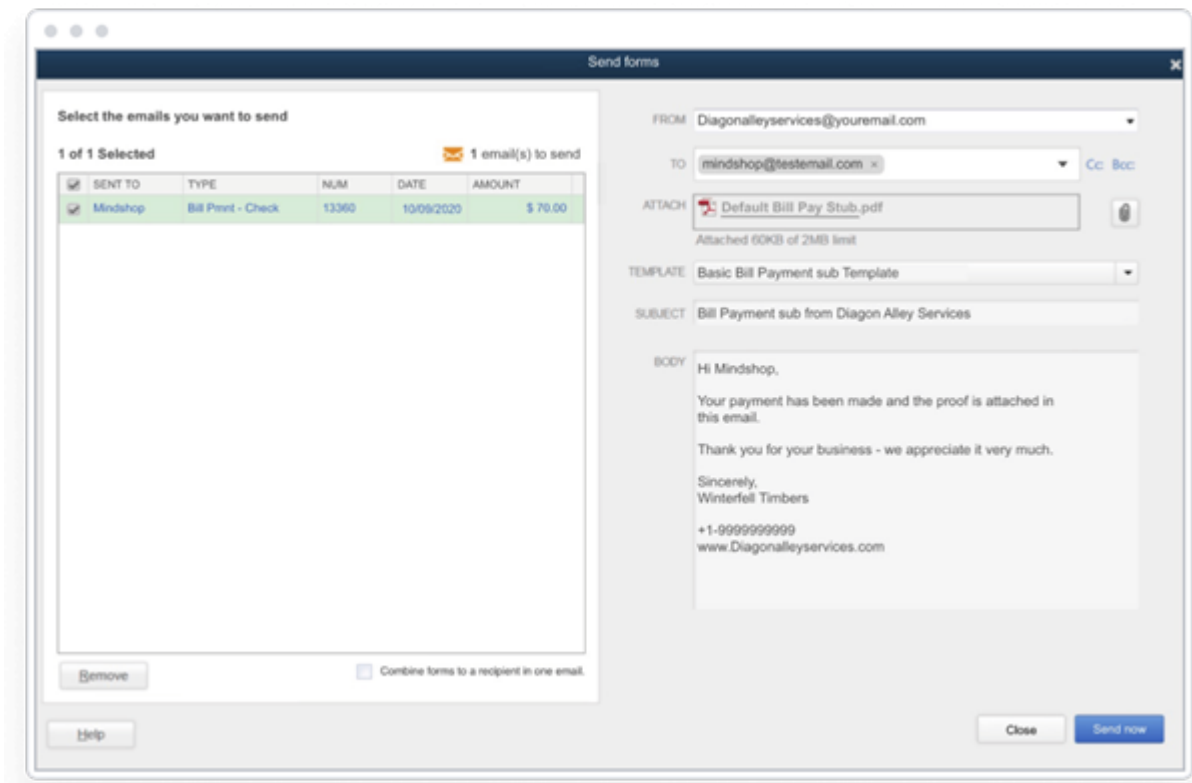
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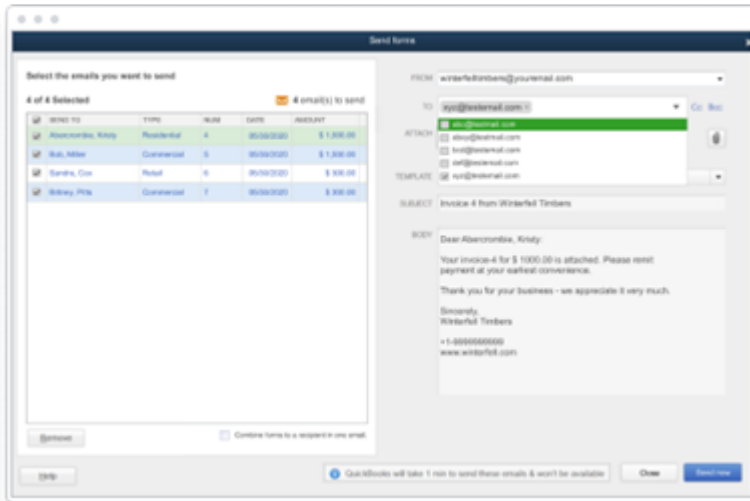
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A great option for mid-sized and growing professional services businesses that are looking for a better way to manage project costs and billing, QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services is an all-in-one application that you will not soon outgrow.

QuickBooks Desktop for small and mid-sized businesses

QuickBooks Desktop is a flexible accounting software application designed for small to mid-sized businesses. While the desktop application cannot compete with custom-designed ERP applications, many larger businesses have continued to use QuickBooks Desktop applications for their bookkeeping and accounting needs.

QuickBooks Desktop was first introduced in 1998 and modeled after Intuit's first financial application, Quicken, which provided personal accounting capability, but no double-entry accounting. When QuickBooks Pro was initially introduced it was aimed at the non-accountant small business owner looking for a way to do accounting other than an Excel spreadsheet. In 2000, additional features were

added to the application, but it still lacked the specificity that many small business owners were looking for.

That all changed in 2003 when Intuit introduced the first industry-specific editions of QuickBooks, which have grown in popularity and are now available in several editions, including the professional services version, which we'll talk about in this article.

What is QuickBooks Desktop Professional Services?

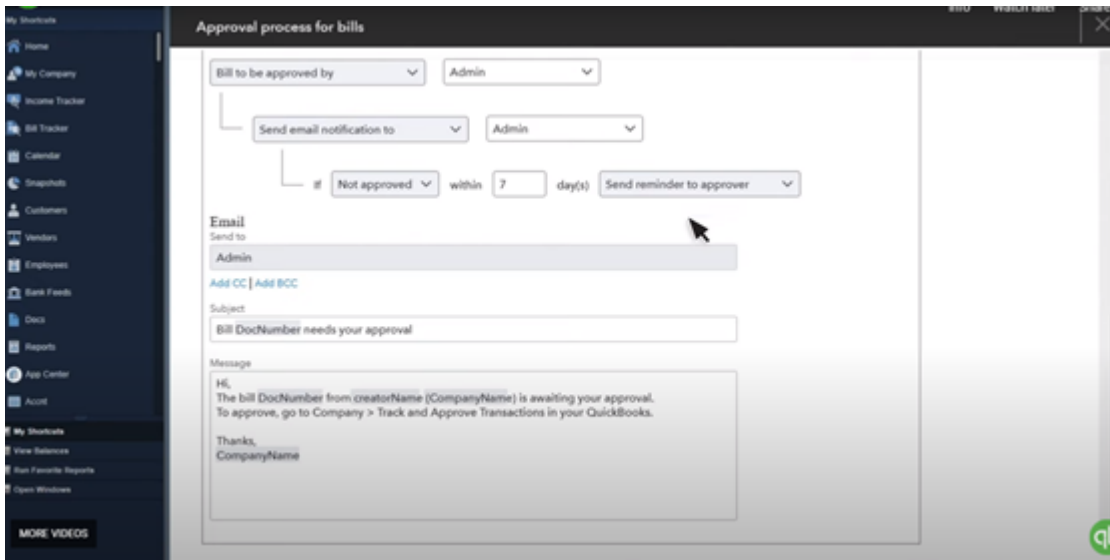
While all niche industries can make an argument for an application designed specifically for their business needs, the professional services industry offers several challenges that need to be appropriately addressed including solid time tracking capability, flexible billing rates, and the option to better track project data.

QuickBooks Desktop Professional Services does that and more. Designed for those providing services rather than selling products, the Professional Services edition is available in both the Premier and Enterprise versions of QuickBooks Desktop.

In this article, we'll take a look at QuickBooks Enterprise for Professional Services, which is designed for mid-sized businesses and can support up to forty system users. However, if your business has less than five QuickBooks users, you may want to consider using QuickBooks Premier Professional Services, a better option for smaller businesses.

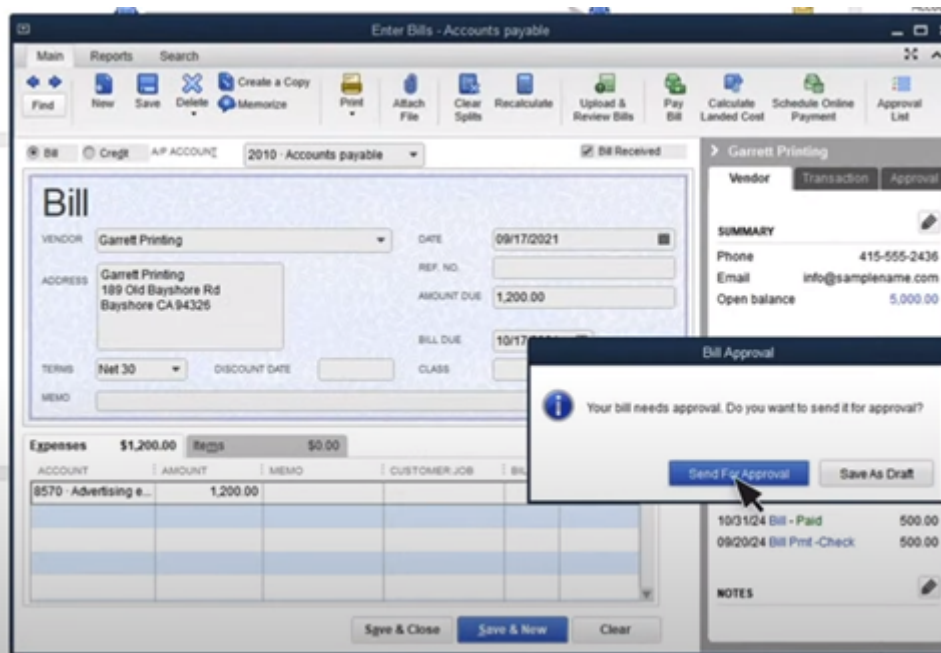
Today, QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services is loaded with features, including all those found in regular QuickBooks Desktop applications, such as double-entry accounting, online banking, bill payment, and invoicing. But it also includes features and functionality designed specifically for service professionals. Here's a breakdown of some of the latest features.

* **Bill Workflow Approvals - (Platinum version)** Bill workflow approvals is a brand new feature that allows you to better manage your cash flow by creating customizable workflow approvals. This new feature also includes reminders when approval deadlines approach.



You can set up custom workflows with the new Bill Workflow Approvals feature.

You can choose the custom workflow to suit your business, and can even customize the email message that the assigned recipient will receive. You can also choose whether you wish to copy anyone on the email. Once a workflow process has been set up for a particular vendor, whenever you enter a bill for that vendor, you will receive a message that the bill needs approval.

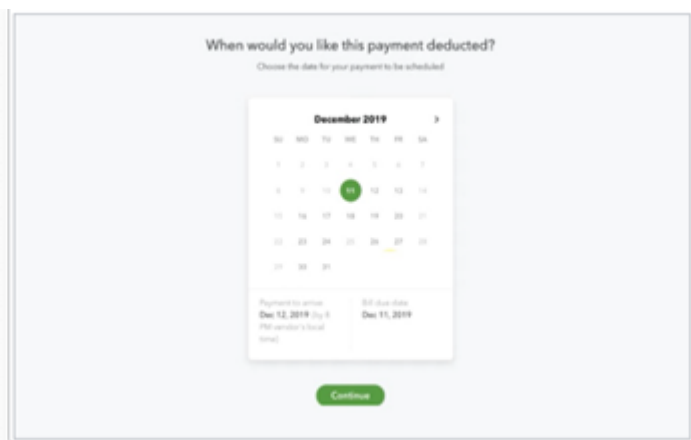


The Bill Approval option appears when a custom workflow has been set up for that vendor.

This message serves as a reminder that the bill has to be submitted for approval before processing.

*** Scheduling and Paying Bills** - Another new feature in QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services is the option to schedule

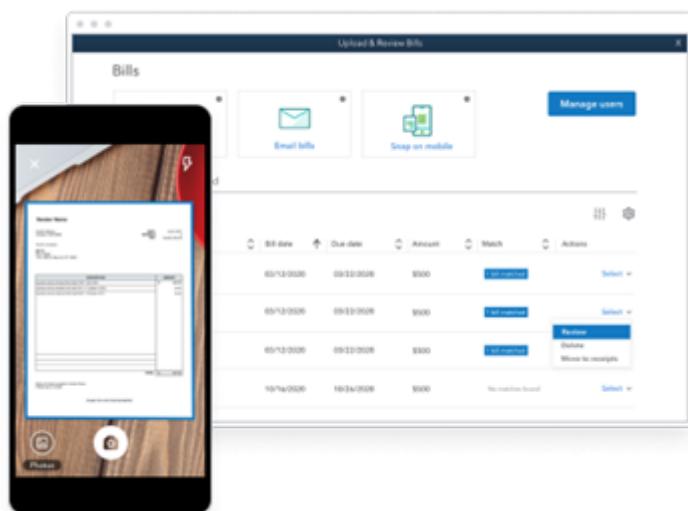
bills for payment. A particularly useful feature for smaller businesses with limited cash flow, using the billing scheduling and payment feature allows you to review any open balances, track sales orders, and plan in advance when to pay a bill.



The Scheduling and Bill Payment feature allows you to schedule bill payments.

When scheduling a payment, you have the option to choose the form of payment you wish to use including bank transfers or a physical check.

*** Upload Bills to QuickBooks** - Using the QuickBooks Desktop mobile app, you can now upload your bills directly into the application.

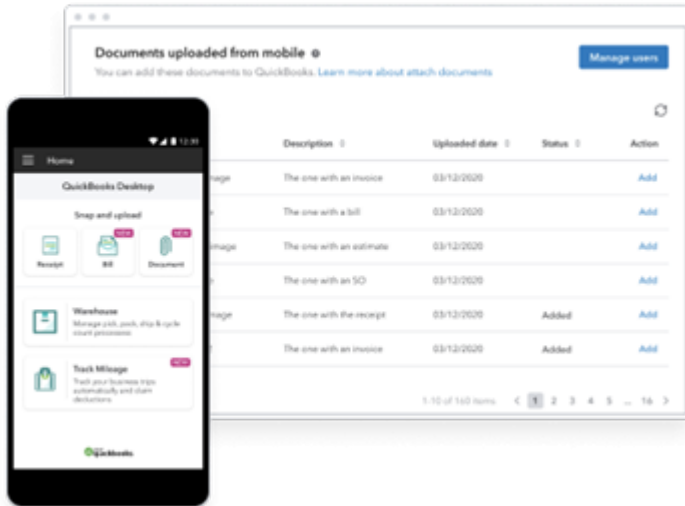


Using the QuickBooks Desktop Mobile App, you can easily upload bills.

All you have to do is snap a photo of the bill and click on the import feature. You'll be able to review the bill for accuracy before it posts into your account. Another benefit to using this feature is that you can have your vendors email their invoices directly to QuickBooks, where they will be available for you to review.

*** Attach Documents to Transactions** - Along with uploading invoices, you can

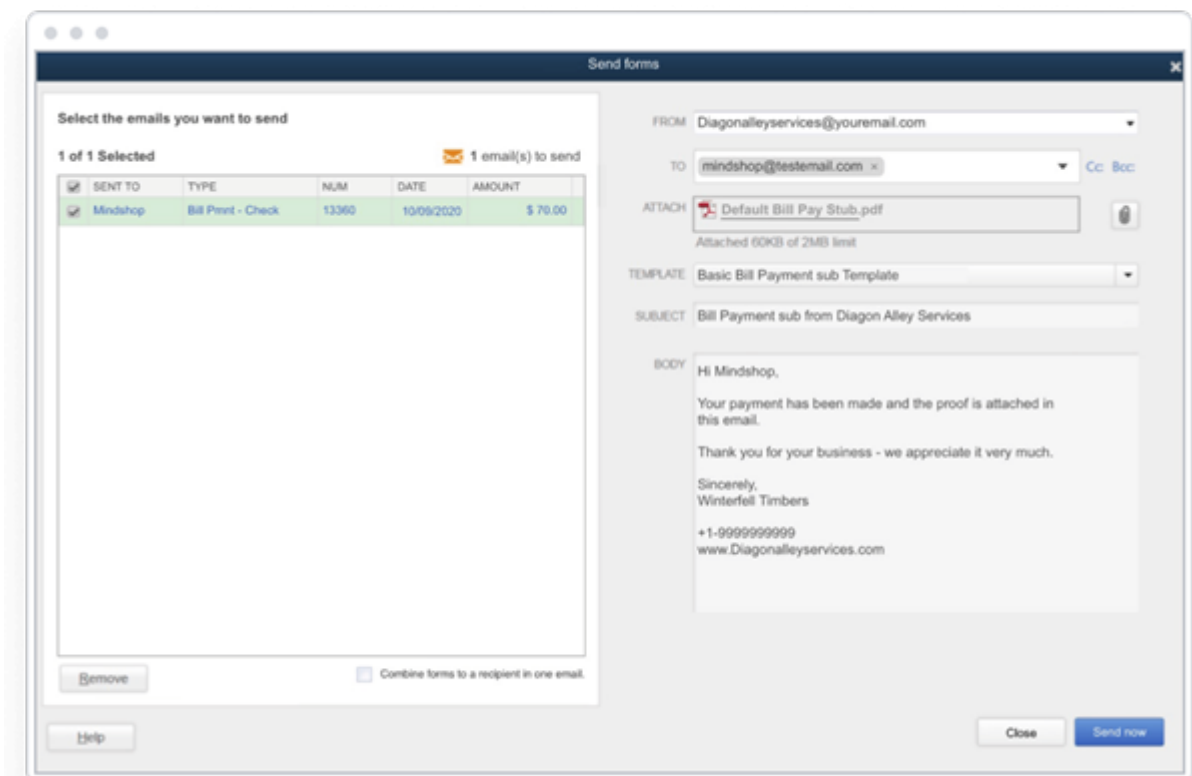
also attach documents to any transaction using the mobile app.



Use the QuickBooks Desktop Mobile App to attach documents to any transaction.

Doing so eliminates the need to store multiple documents on your system. You can also upload and attach multiple documents simultaneously if desired.

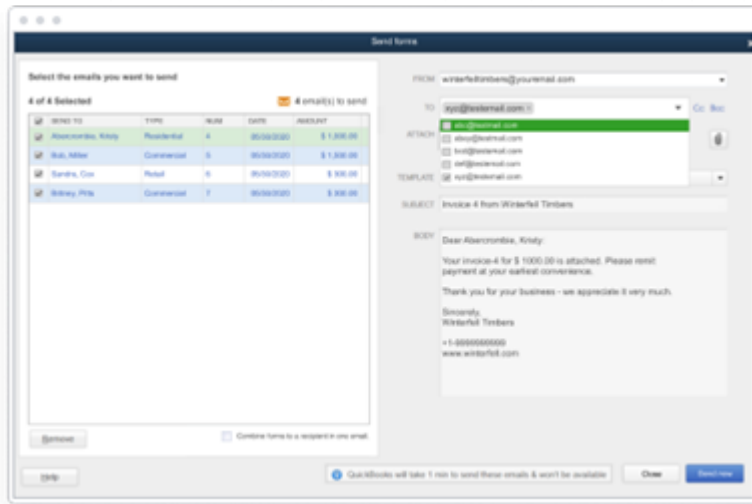
*** Customize Bill Payment Stubs** - Your vendors no longer have to wait for a paper check to receive a bill payment voucher. Using this feature, you can add your business logo and format the payment stub to suit your business.



You can now customize bill payment stubs for all of your vendors.

You can choose the vendors you wish from the dropdown list and create a custom email to send along with the bill payment stub.

*** Multiple Email Contacts** - Do you have a newsletter, targeted sale, or other information you wish to send to a select group of contacts? Using the multiple email contact feature, you can do just that.



The Email Contact List allows you to choose the recipients for a group email.

This is a great way to get custom messaging out to the appropriate recipients without having to manually enter each email address.

The professional services industry offers several challenges that need to be appropriately addressed including solid time tracking capability, flexible billing rates, and the option to better track project data.

Other features

Along with these new features, QuickBooks Enterprise Professional Services also offers numerous features designed for professional services businesses. These include:

Time Tracking with QuickBooks Time Elite (formerly TSheets Elite) - Time tracking is important for any business, but particularly so for service businesses who have to manage timesheets and bill their time accordingly.

Using QuickBooks Time Elite, professional services users can track time spent on any project. But even more important, the time can then be automatically rolled up into any subsequent project reports as well as into QuickBooks Payroll, eliminating the need to enter data twice.

This allows users to track their time from any location, whether it's from their home, the office, or the client's office.

Project Costing - It can be difficult to know if a client project is profitable if all of the project management components are not tracked properly. Not only can you easily track project cost projections in real-time using the job costing dashboard, but you can also track the actual expenses to see if you're on track for profitability or if cost adjustments are needed.

Best of all, QuickBooks Enterprise will automatically create client invoices based on data entered in the system, eliminating the need to bill clients separately.

Flexible Billing Rates - As a professional services firm, your billing rates likely change frequently, depending on the job completed, who completed it, and the level of difficulty in completing the job. That's why being able to assign different billing rates to your employees based on a variety of criteria is so important.

By setting custom billing rate levels, you can assign a rate for a particular level rather than by an employee. For example, at a CPA firm, partner billing rates would be assigned at a different level than entry-level employees.

Reporting - Good reporting options are available in all QuickBooks Desktop applications with the Enterprise edition of QuickBooks Desktop offering more than 200 reports that can be customized to suit your needs. Any customized report can be saved in the application as a template, so you can use the same reporting criteria in the future without having to set it up again.

Advanced Reporting - Advanced reporting allows Enterprise users to access raw data to create reports and graphs from scratch. In addition, the Professional Services edition of QuickBooks (and all niche editions) also offers bundled reports designed specifically for professional services businesses. These reports include:

- **Billed and Unbilled Hours** - This report can be run by person or by

project, and provides management with a good view of all billable hours as well as how long an employee has spent on a particular project.

- **Costs by Project** - Costs need to be looked at throughout the life of a project. Running the Costs by Project report allows you to see exactly how much you've spent to date, allowing you to make adjustments to your forecast mid-project when needed.
- **Project Costs Detail** - Still wondering exactly why your project has gone over budget? Run the Project Costs Detail report to see exactly how funds were spent.
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