

Top Free Accounting Software Options

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Update 7/13/2017: We've updated this piece with additional details and options based on new offerings and suggestions from readers.

You have to spend money to make money – that much is true.

As it turns out, though, you don't have to spend money to track the money you're making.



[Accounting software](#) comes in all shapes and sizes, and one of those sizes is free.

Free accounting software for small businesses

There's an obvious value to anything free—it's free. That *doesn't* mean free things always have more value than their paid alternatives, though.

Free is only truly free if you don't place a high value your own time and effort. The "best" free software of any kind is easy to learn, easy to use, and doesn't create an unending series of hurdles to overcome.

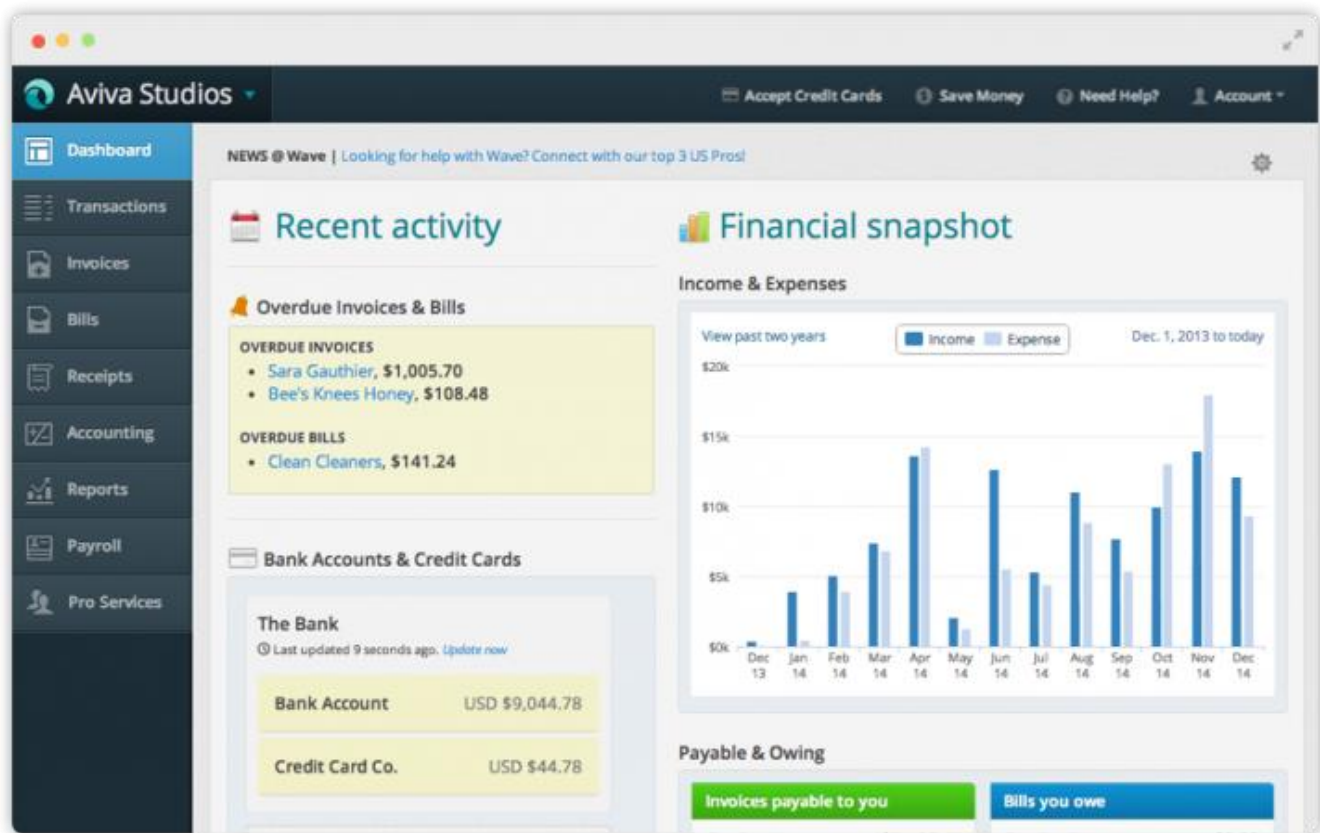
Clearly, there are tradeoffs to be made. For example, open source software has value in being flexible, extendible, and malleable. It requires time and effort to take advantage of those things, but the time you spend balances with the value you get when you're done.

When choosing free options, I'm looking for those that fill a need without requiring you to sink needless hours into the system.

All six options presented here are listed in the Capterra [accounting software](#) directory and have positive reviews. They're presented here alphabetically.

Wave Accounting

Wave bills its accounting package as “the world’s fastest growing small business accounting software.” The company offers a 100% free, no upgrades available, what you see is everything there is program. Funded by ads shown to users, Wave is an accounting package that’s aimed at businesses with nine or fewer employees.



The Wave interface. Alt: Wave accounting

Who is it for?

If you're an aesthetics person, Wave Accounting is a good place to start. The software is nothing if not attractive. The engine under the hood is strong too, allowing you to run reports, connect to your bank, and integrate Wave's invoicing and payroll systems (payroll has an associated fee)

While the software is aimed at smaller businesses, Wave tells me that the real goal is to appeal to business owners that are running their own accounting. That can be any sized business.

What's the catch?

Folks who have an aversion to targeted ads might need to look elsewhere. As with most free products, when you're not paying, you're the actual product. Wave displays targeted ads in its software, which is how it can afford not to charge you. While the site makes it clear that you can turn off the targeting in the ads and that no identifying information is shared, you're going to be stuck with ads no matter what.

If you've used Wave, [leave a review here](#).

GnuCash

GnuCash is an open source, double entry accounting solution for small businesses and individuals. With a deep feature set and consistent updates, GnuCash offers businesses of all sizes a slew of resources to keep their books in line. With more power and insight than some of the other software offered, GnuCash has plenty of guides and tutorials to help newcomers – or “GnuComers.”

Who is it for?

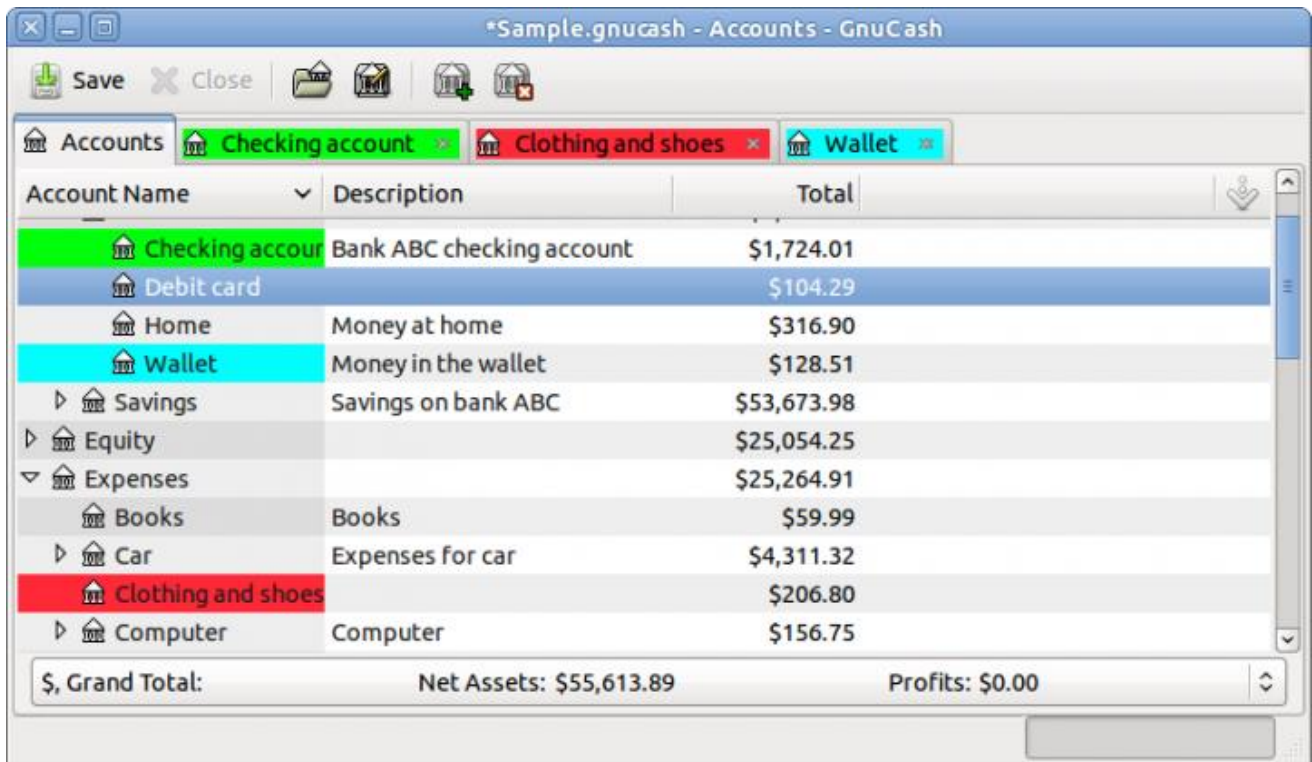
One of GnuCash's main limitations is that it works on [the double entry system](#). If your business uses a different accounting system, you're out of luck. If you can manage it, though, GnuCash gets consistently good reviews as being easy to use, if a bit boring. The user interface is straightforward enough, but it's clear that the program is designed for function, not form.

Overlooking the design elements, GnuCash is a solid option for small businesses using double entry accounting. The program offers a number of highly praised features, including foreign currency rates and a range of reporting features. GnuCash is available on Windows, Linux, and Mac.

What's the catch?

As I mentioned above, it doesn't have a super pretty interface. I want to make it clear that, while it's not going to win a design award, it is very functional and not at all confusing. Sometimes, bad design makes things unusable, and that is not the case with GnuCash.

Also, keep in mind that GnuCash is an open source project, not a stand-alone business. If you need support, you'll need to source it from other users and developers. There's no 800 number or online chat. If you're not comfortable doing some work, GnuCash isn't going to be a great choice.



The screenshot shows the GnuCash interface with the 'Accounts' window open. The window title is '*Sample.gnucash - Accounts - GnuCash'. The interface includes a menu bar with 'Save', 'Close', and several icons. Below the menu bar, there are tabs for 'Accounts', 'Checking account', 'Clothing and shoes', and 'Wallet'. The main area displays a table of accounts with columns for 'Account Name', 'Description', and 'Total'. The 'Checking account' tab is selected, and the 'Checking account' row is highlighted in green. The 'Clothing and shoes' row is highlighted in red. The 'Wallet' row is highlighted in cyan. The 'Grand Total' row shows 'Net Assets: \$55,613.89' and 'Profits: \$0.00'.

Account Name	Description	Total
Checking account	Bank ABC checking account	\$1,724.01
Debit card		\$104.29
Home	Money at home	\$316.90
Wallet	Money in the wallet	\$128.51
▶ Savings	Savings on bank ABC	\$53,673.98
▶ Equity		\$25,054.25
▼ Expenses		\$25,264.91
Books	Books	\$59.99
▶ Car	Expenses for car	\$4,311.32
Clothing and shoes		\$206.80
▶ Computer	Computer	\$156.75
\$, Grand Total:		Net Assets: \$55,613.89 Profits: \$0.00

The GnuCash interface. Alt: GnuCash

If you've used GnuCash, [leave a review here](#).

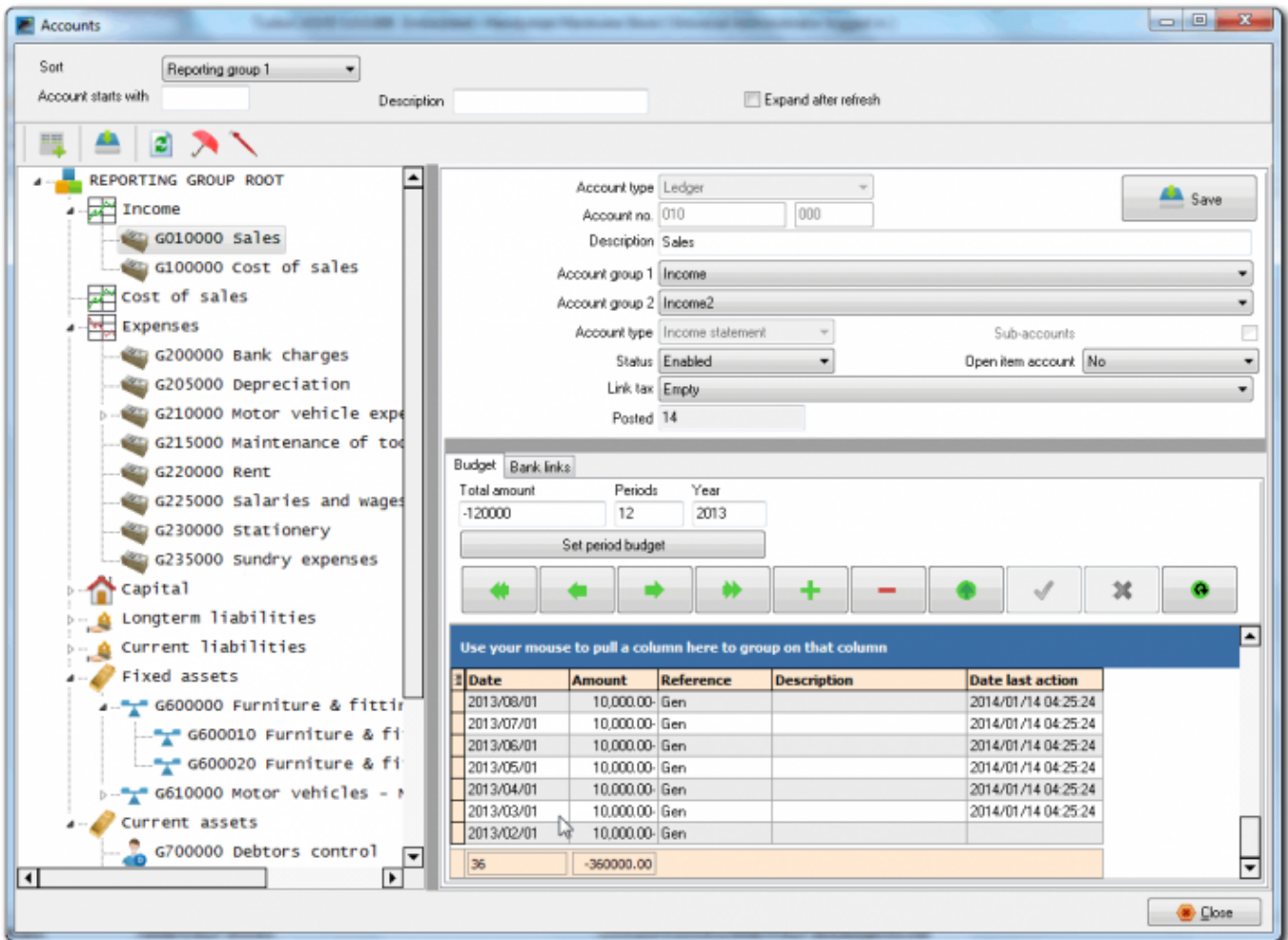
[TurboCASH](#)

TurboCASH is another open source solution, designed to be both flexible and simple to navigate. [The company says that it has over 100,000 users across 80 countries](#). Originally released in South Africa, the software now has regional options and versions, supporting over 20 languages. Third-party plug-ins offer extra options for TurboCASH, though some require a licensing fee before use.

Who is it for?

If you want to have complete flexibility, and you have the time and knowledge to oversee a higher level of accounting detail, TurboCASH is a good solution. Unlike GnuCash, TurboCASH offers a flexible approach to accounting style. The program is more complex to learn and set up, but it comes with a set of example settings for each country, to help get you on the right track. You will still need to set the

program up for your specific business requirements, but there's less chance for error if you rely on the included settings.



The TurboCASH interface. Alt: TurboCASH

What's the catch?

TurboCASH is also community supported, though you can connect with contractors if you have a problem you simply can't overcome. TurboCASH is currently only available for Windows. Of the options listed here, TurboCASH is likely to be the second most daunting for first time or technophobic users, right behind PostBooks (below).

If you've used TurboCASH, [leave a review here](#).

[xTuple PostBooks](#)

xTuple PostBooks is open source [enterprise resource planning \(ERP\) software](#). That means that, in addition to accounting, PostBooks can track sales, has a customer management system, and can integrate inventory, among other features. xTuple offers a free license and a commercial licensing system. The free license is the same program, but it comes without any specialized support.

xTuple maintains a strong online community, where users can support each other, but if you want help from a professional, it'll cost you.



The PostBooks interface. Alt: PostBooks]

Who is it for?

PostBooks requires more technical know-how than any of the other solutions listed here. Not only does it provide more features, it's also designed to extend into more parts of the business and be overseen by professionals. This isn't something you're going to set up in a weekend and never touch again.

If you have the technical team and the need for ERP software, PostBooks has a lot to offer for a big fat \$0. If you lack those things, you can always pay for support and hosting, but then the software's no longer free.

What's the catch?

ERPs are beasts. If you're running a sole proprietorship, focused on marketing—or whatever—you do not need this much technology. ERPs were designed to manage things such as car manufacturing and the production of steel. While they've expanded their remit, it's still more than many small businesses need.

Unlike owning a car with too much engine just for tooling around on the weekend, owning an ERP isn't "fun"—it's just overly complex and expensive to maintain.

If you've used PostBooks, [leave a review here](#).

[ZipBooks](#)

ZipBooks is a free, cloud-based accounting solution. The system is one of the newer players in the accounting space, but it's already gotten some solid reviews and press. Unlike Wave, which makes its money by displaying ads, ZipBooks relies on partnerships with payment providers to generate cash.

The company basically acts as an affiliate for these payment processors, allowing it to provide the accounting side of things for free—you don't have to use a payment processor to use the free accounting software, by the way.

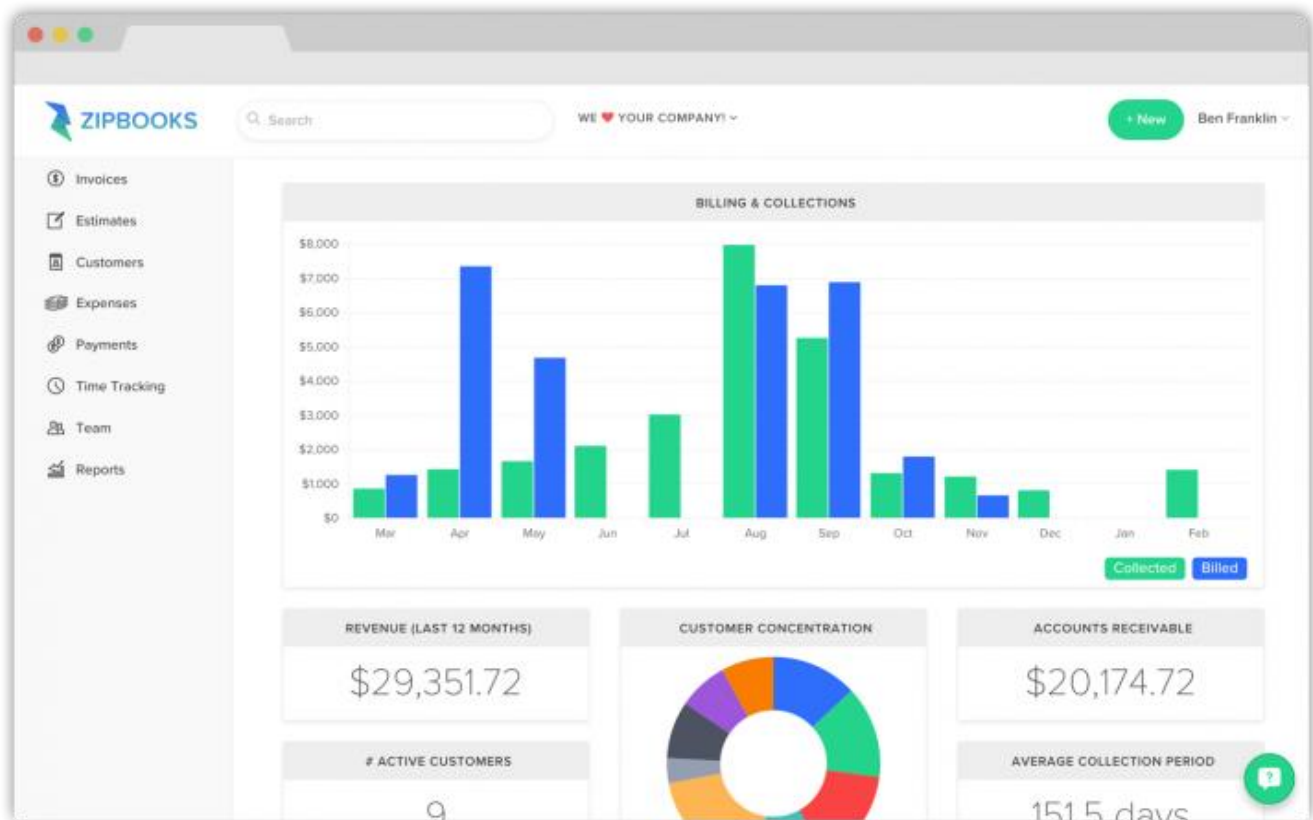
Who is it for?

Small businesses and freelancers will like ZipBooks for its non-existent cost. There are some limitations, so bigger operations or those who need to manage inventory or payroll will want to look elsewhere. ZipBooks also hasn't made getting your data out of its system super straightforward—yet—so you'll need to use its API to pull things out. It guides you through this, but it's not just point-and-click.

Support comes with your free account, so I really like ZipBooks as a starter package or for those folks who just don't have the time or energy to figure all the details out themselves. If you're working with online payments or credit card processing, ZipBooks makes life very easy.

What's the catch?

I intensely dislike the complexity of data exporting in ZipBooks. A truly great system should be both easy to get into and easy to get out of. That's not great for accounting software vendors, but it's great for users. ZipBooks holds on just a bit too tightly to user data.



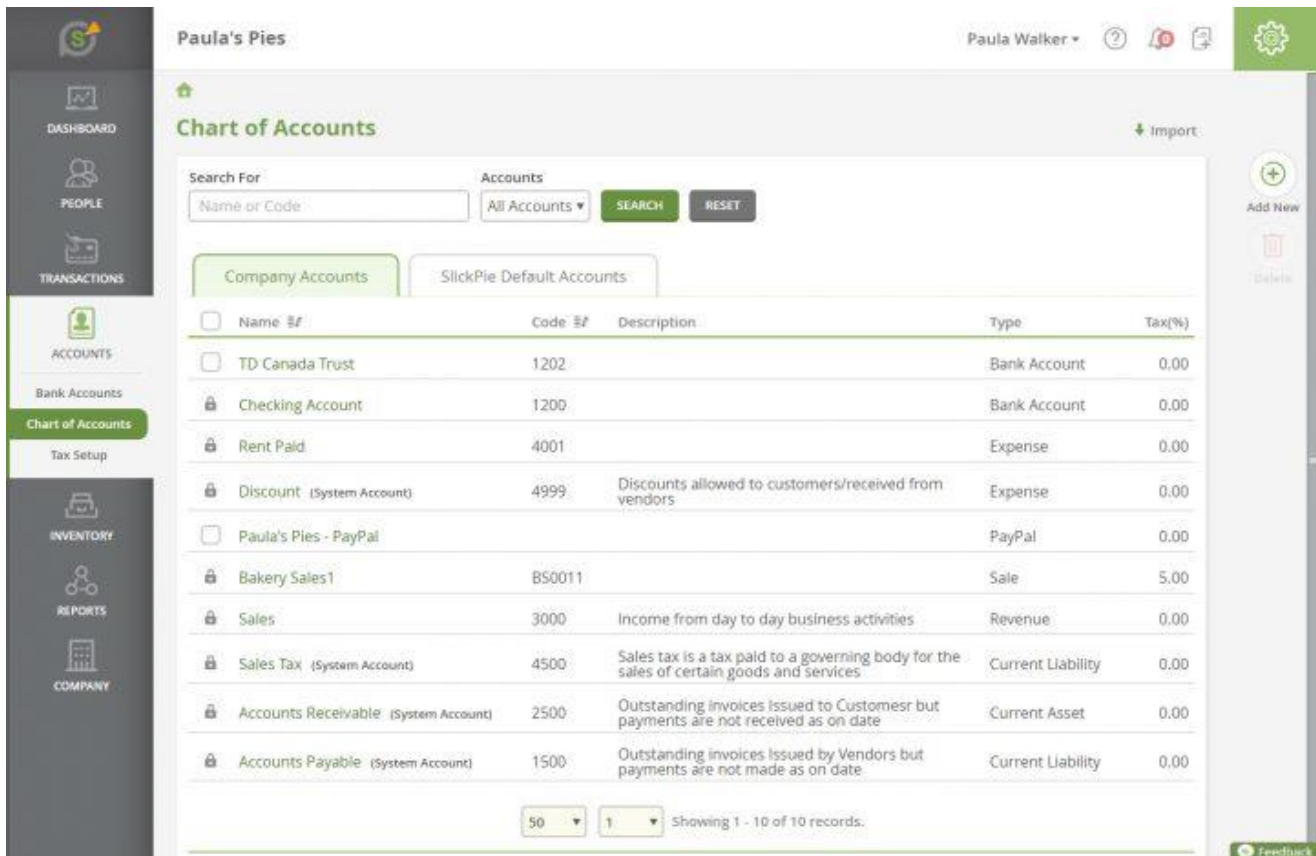
The ZipBooks interface. Alt: ZipBooks

If you've used ZipBooks, [leave a review here](#).

[SlickPie](#)

SlickPie is a Canadian-based accounting software firm that offers a solid free option for small businesses and freelancers. There are some limits to this one, with a \$10 per month level sitting above the free version. With the free option limiting you to 100 invoices and 100 bills per month.

It's a pretty high limit for small businesses and you could ride that for a long time. Everything else in the free version is open to unlimited use, so you'll have access to reports, support, and bank reconciliation at all levels.



The SlickPie interface. Alt: SlickPie

Who is it for?

SlickPie has some nice time tracking options that work well for freelancers and service providers. There are also some good sales tax management tools to help retailers keep everything up to date.

The simple layout and clean design make SlickPie an easy one to learn your way around, so most users shouldn't have too much trouble with the learning curve. I'd hold off on this only if you're outsized due to the billing and invoicing restrictions or if you need payroll management built-in.

What's the catch?

The only real drawback to SlickPie is its limitation on invoicing. One hundred invoices a month might be the limit you never hit, or it might be the limit you hit just six months into your business's life. A lot will depend on the kind of business you run, as wholesalers—for instance—are likely to send many more invoices than landscapers would.

If you've used SlickPie, [leave a review here](#).

Final thoughts

There are plenty of people that you should talk to before you make an accounting software decision. If you have an accountant, see what they need. If you're planning to integrate with other systems, make sure the technology you're using plays nicely with the accounting package you end up with.

Finally, make sure you know where to go for more information. Most free and paid software will allow you to talk to other users in a forum and to post questions to the company or members of the development team. Before you dive in, you can also [check out some steps to get you ready for your accounting software upgrade](#).

Good luck, and let me know in the comments if you've found other free options that work well for you.