

VNU Labs

Usability Test of Simply Books and QuickBooks 8.0

Test date: 16th August 2001

**(Followed by -
Sage Instant Accounting Version 6)**

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Executive Summary

The following report details the findings from a usability test carried out by VNU Labs on the 16th August, commissioned by Simply Books Ltd. The test compared Simply Books with QuickBooks 8.0.

Method

Four testers with no previous experience of either product carried out the same set of tasks on each of the packages. To avoid bias, two testers evaluated QuickBooks first, and the remaining testers used Simply Books first. All testers were experienced PC users.

During the test, participants were asked to record how long tasks took to complete, as well as the number of times they referred to the online or manual help. They were also asked to complete a short questionnaire that assessed their satisfaction with the products. These findings were then used to derive the four usability measures shown in this report:

- Productivity - the amount of accurate work completed over time
- Intuitiveness – progress made without reference to any form of help
- Satisfaction – testers’ subjective rating of the product’s capabilities
- Usability – the average of the above scores

At the end of the day, testers gave their opinions on both products in a focus group. During the focus group, they were asked to give feedback on subjects such as who they felt might use the products, as well as some general advantages and disadvantages for each product.

Results

Simply Books scores more highly than QuickBooks on all of the above indices. Table 1, below shows the relative scores for all indices:

Product	Usability	Productivity	Intuitiveness	Satisfaction
Simply Books	1.66	2.28	1.24	1.46
QuickBooks	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

- The productivity scores mark the biggest difference between the two products. All testers’ productivity results showed a similar pattern, and everyone completed more tasks in less time using Simply Books.
- Testers needed to refer to the help materials regularly when using both products and this is reflected in the closer intuitiveness scores. However, three of the four testers needed to access help more frequently when using QuickBooks.

- All testers returned higher satisfaction scores for Simply Books than for QuickBooks. One tester's scores show little difference between the two products, but the remaining testers show a significant difference.
- Comments made by testers during the evaluation showed that they considered Simply Books to be more suitable for very small businesses than QuickBooks. They also felt that Simply Books was more appropriate for users with limited PC skills.
- One tester felt that Simply Book's lack of colour and less innovative interface would be a disadvantage, but the other testers were unconcerned by the product's appearance.
- Three of the four testers said that they would choose Simply Books over QuickBooks if they were setting up their own business.

1. Introduction

This report details the findings from a comparative review of QuickBooks 8.0 and Simply Books, carried out by VNU Usability Labs on the 16th August 2001. It provides qualitative analysis from the tests, as well as quantitative feedback collected from testers during the sessions.

1.1 Method Used

How we tested

Testers used Dell 733MHZ Pentium III PCs with 256 MB of RAM, running Windows 2000 for these tests. They carried out the same set of tasks on each product in turn. A summary of the tasks can be found in Appendix A. To avoid bias, participants tested the products in a different order.

The testers

Our four testers were computer literate and had all used either a spreadsheet or manual processes for keeping track of their own personal finances. All were familiar with Windows 2000 and used to learning how to use new software products.

What we tested

We asked testers to record certain types of data, such as the time they took to complete each activity and how many times they accessed the help system. They also completed a short satisfaction questionnaire. This information was then used to generate the usability indices shown in Section 2. The following measures were recorded:

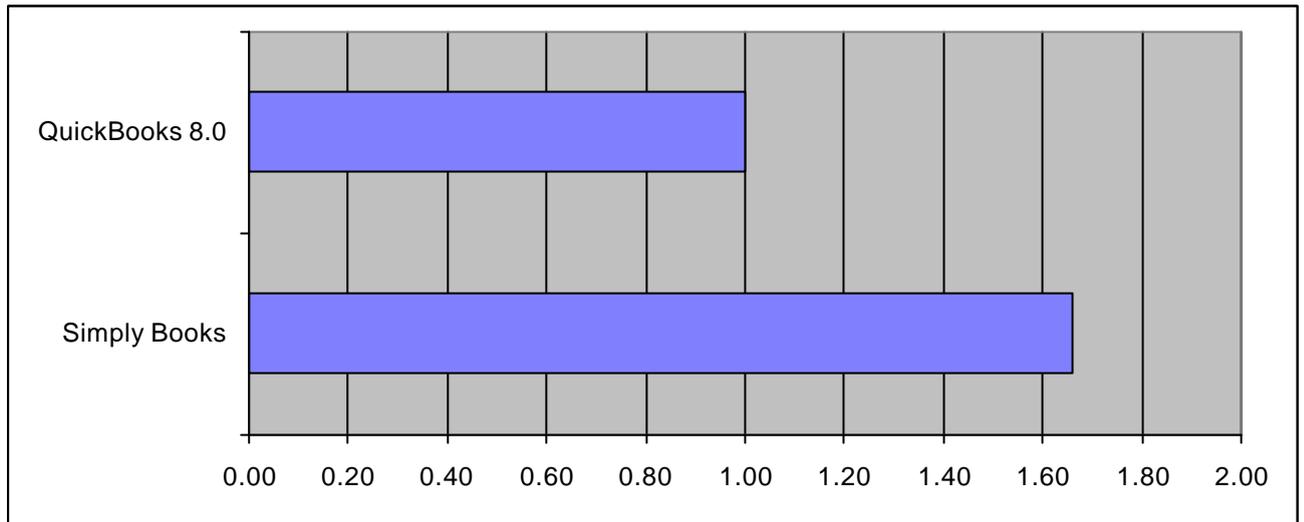
- Productivity - the amount of accurate work completed over time
- Intuitiveness – progress made without reference to any form of help
- Satisfaction – testers’ subjective rating of the product’s capabilities
- Usability – the average of the above scores

2. Results

2.1 Usability Measures

The following measures show the results from the usability tests. Appendix B contains a further breakdown of these statistics. In all instances, higher scores indicate better results.

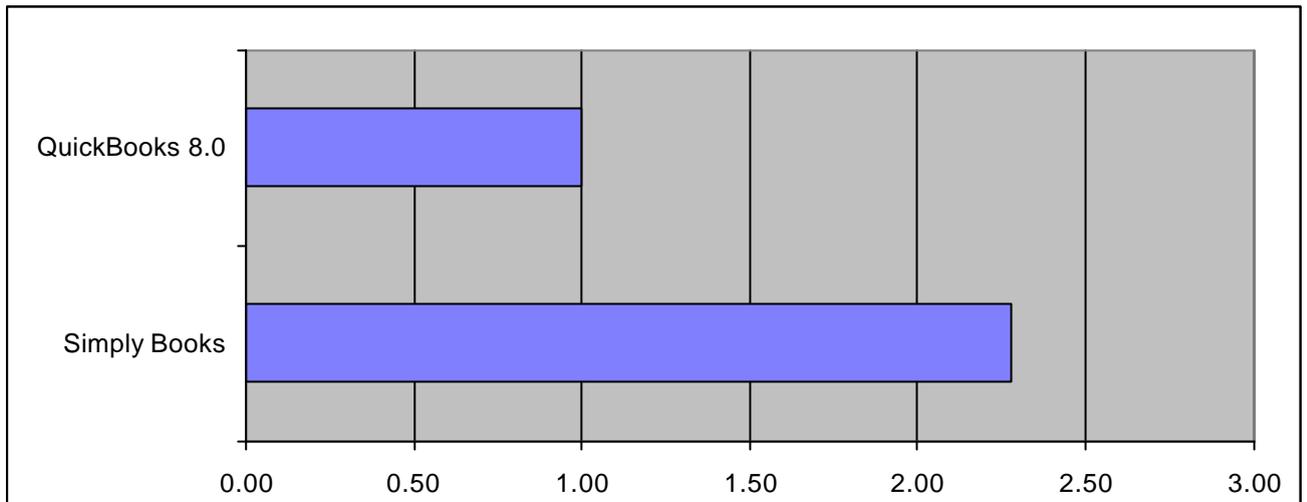
2.1.1 Overall Usability



Simply Books	1.66
QuickBooks 8.0	1.00

This score shows the average of the results from the productivity, intuitiveness and satisfaction indices. Simply Books' superior scores on all of these indices mean that it achieves the highest overall usability result.

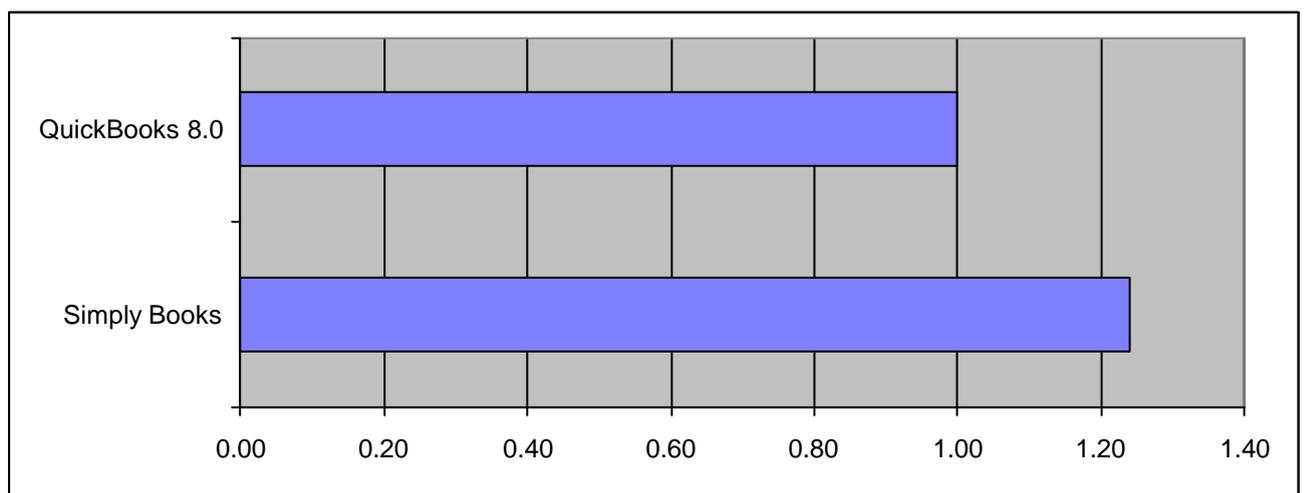
2.1.2 Productivity



Simply Books	2.28
QuickBooks 8.0	1.00

Simply Books’ produced better productivity scores than QuickBooks for each section of our tests. Every tester recorded a higher productivity score using Simply Books, meaning that they completed more work in a shorter time. Simply Books’ higher result on this index is mainly due to testers’ faster sales and purchase invoice entry. All testers completed this task in Simply Books, but no- one completed it in QuickBooks.

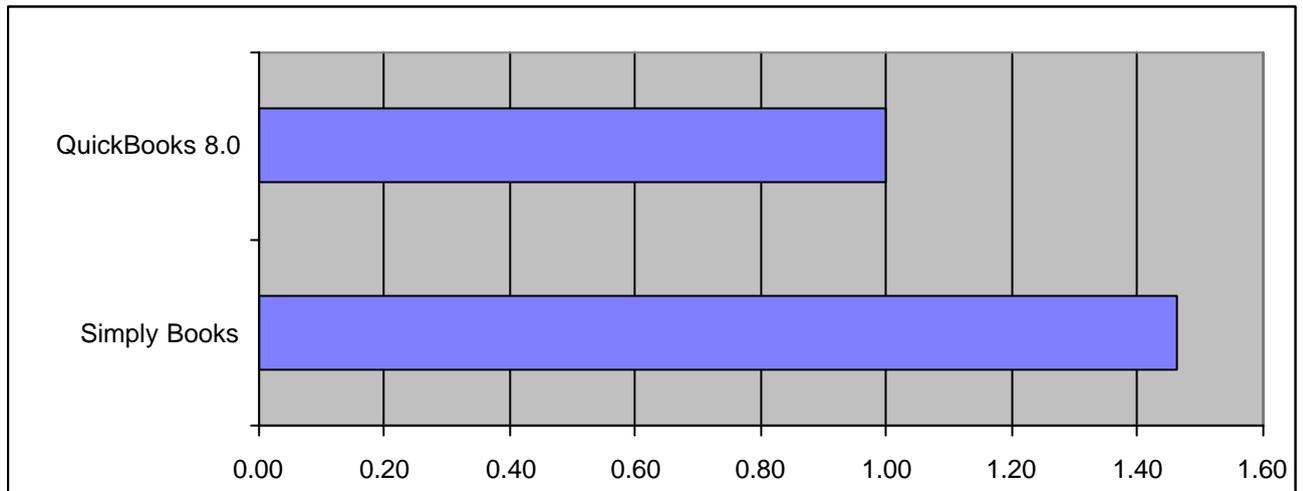
2.1.3 Intuitiveness



Simply Books	1.24
QuickBooks 8.0	1.00

During the evaluation, testers made frequent references to online and paper-based help in both products. However, testers found the answers to their queries more quickly using Simply Books’ help materials. They also required less external assistance from the supervisor when using Simply Books.

2.1.4 Satisfaction



Simply Books	1.46
QuickBooks 8.0	1.00

In addition to being able to work more productively with the product, testers' subjective satisfaction scores show that they found Simply Books to be easier to use than QuickBooks 8.0. All testers rated the product above QuickBooks on our satisfaction questionnaire.

A further breakdown of these findings is available in Appendix B. These results show comparisons between scores for each individual tester.

2.2 Qualitative Feedback.

In addition to recording the data used to derive the metrics in section 2.1, testers were also asked to make comments about their experiences with both Simply Books and QuickBooks. Section 2.2.1 contains a summary of the comments made about Simply Books ONLY. Comments are grouped together for each task that testers carried out, according to the following breakdown:

- Familiarisation – testers were asked to give their first impressions of the products, including manuals and introductory tutorials.
- Creating a new business and entering names for customers and suppliers - testers were asked to set up a new business, and to enter name and address details for customers and suppliers. The customer and supplier information was supplied to testers as a part of the test script.
- Entering sales and purchase invoices - all testers were given the same selection of sales and purchase invoices to enter into the software.
- Entering cheque details, credit card slips, paying in book entries and petty cash vouchers - as above, testers were all supplied with the same collection of expenses materials to process.
- Processing a bank statement and a credit card statement – testers were supplied with two months’ worth of bank and credit card statements to reconcile using the products.

Please note that not all testers commented on every task. A profile of each tester can also be found in Appendix C, and a further breakdown of the above tasks is shown in Appendix B.

At the end of the day’s testing, testers were also asked to give some general feedback about the tests as part of a focus group. These comments are recorded in section 2.2.2, below. Comments in this section address both of the test products.

[Below is an edited version of the rest of the report. It has been edited in the following way:

- 1. The testers' feedback, which was recorded by note taking, has been largely omitted as it contains both strong and sometimes inaccurate opinions of both products. Rather than edit parts of it, we decided to remove it all. The final section of comments is retained to give a flavour of the exercise.**
- 2. Appendix A ("Further breakdown of testers’ scores") has been omitted in the interest of brevity.]**

Would you choose QuickBooks or Simply Books for your own business ?

If I hadn't gone through the test, I would have chosen QuickBooks, as it looks good. Simply Books is less impressive visually. However, after the test, I would choose Simply Books.

The extra features in QuickBooks would make it better for more experienced accountants, but for beginners I'd choose Simply Books.

Simply Books is simpler, it's better if you don't want to be bogged down by detail. However, you could move on to QuickBooks at a later date when you're more experienced.

With no knowledge, I would go for Simply Books, but on appearances, I'd choose QuickBooks.

Appendix B – Test script summary.

The following text describes the tasks used for the evaluation. Testers were all provided with additional materials such as invoices and purchase orders to accompany the tasks. All testers received the same materials.

Familiarisation

Please take some time to explore and experiment with the software. Allow yourself about half an hour for this activity. Whilst you are looking at the product, please bear the following topics in mind:

- What are your first impressions of this product ?
- What do you consider to be its strengths?
- What do you think of any tutorials/'guided tours' available ?
- What do you think of the overall screen design and layout of the software ?

Scenario

A relative (Andy, who puts up the capital) has started a VAT registered company with a couple of friends, designing graphics for T-shirts, posters for concerts, adverts, and any other work they can find.

They have a small office and one full-time junior (Tom, the only person on PAYE) who looks after the office, answers phones, and generally makes sure everything runs smoothly when they are out on assignments.

You have agreed to fit in some part-time work doing their book-keeping because you are numerate and used to using computers.

Your job

You must install a new software system to do the company's books (their accounts) and input the data for the first two months.

Task 1 – Create a new company

Create a new set of accounts for Wicked Design

Enter the details for Wicked Design's customers and suppliers, from the invoices and purchase orders in your folder

Task 2 – Enter sales and purchase invoices

Enter the sales and purchase invoices in the folder in front of you

Task 3 – Enter cheques etc.

1. Enter the cheques in the folder in front of you
2. Enter the paying in book slips
3. Enter the credit card receipts

4. Enter the petty cash vouchers

Task 4 - Process statements

1. Process the bank statements in the folder in front of you
2. Process the credit card statements in the folder in front of you

Appendix C – Tester profiles

The following table shows testers’ responses to an introductory questionnaire, designed to gauge their level of background experience in book-keeping and general PC use. Testers subjectively rated their level of PC experience.

Tester	Experience in book-keeping	Use of accounting packages/other software for tracking accounts	General PC experience
Tester 1	None	Spreadsheet – Yes QuickBooks – No MYOB – No Sage Instant Accounting – No TAS Books – No DO\$H Cashbook – No Quicken Deluxe – No Microsoft Money – No	Average
Tester 2	None	Spreadsheet – Yes QuickBooks – No MYOB – No Sage Instant Accounting – No TAS Books – No DO\$H Cashbook – No Quicken Deluxe – No Microsoft Money – No	Average

Tester	Experience in book-keeping	Use of accounting packages/other software for tracking accounts	General PC experience
Tester 3	None	Spreadsheet – No QuickBooks – No MYOB – No Sage Instant Accounting – No TAS Books – No DO\$H Cashbook – No Quicken Deluxe – No Microsoft Money – No	Average
Tester 4	Following my own finances and cash records	Spreadsheet – Yes QuickBooks – No MYOB – No Sage Instant Accounting – No TAS Books – No DO\$H Cashbook – No Quicken Deluxe – No Microsoft Money – No	Experienced

VNU Usability Labs
Comparative test of Simply Books and Sage
Instant Accounting Version 6
15th November 2001

Report date: 19th November 2001

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Executive Summary

The following report details the findings from a usability test carried out by VNU Labs on the 15th November 2001, commissioned by Simply Books Ltd. The test compared Simply Books with Sage Instant Accounting Version 6.

Method

Four testers with no previous experience of either product carried out the same set of tasks on each of the packages. To avoid bias, two testers evaluated Instant Accounting first, and the remaining testers used Simply Books first. All testers were experienced PC users.

During the test, participants were asked to record how long tasks took to complete as well as the number of times they referred to the online or manual help. They were also asked to complete a short questionnaire that assessed their satisfaction with the products. These findings were then used to derive the four usability measures shown in this report:

- Productivity - the amount of accurate work completed over time
- Intuitiveness – progress made without reference to any form of help
- Satisfaction – testers’ subjective rating of the product’s capabilities
- Usability – the average of the above scores

At the end of the day, testers gave their opinions on both products in a focus group. They were asked to give feedback on subjects such as who they felt might use the products, as well as some general advantages and disadvantages of each package.

Results

Simply Books scores more highly than Instant Accounting on all of the above indices. Table 1, below shows the relative scores for all indices:

Product	Usability	Productivity	Intuitiveness	Satisfaction
Simply Books	1.49	1.62	1.15	1.70
Sage Instant Accounting	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

- All testers completed more tasks using Simply Books than with Instant Accounting. Out of a total of 10 tasks, testers completed an average of 9.5 tasks with Simply Books, compared with 6.75 using Instant Accounting.
- Testers also rated Simply Books significantly higher in terms of Satisfaction. Everyone felt that they found Simply Books easier to use than Instant Accounting.
- Everyone needed to access help regularly in both products, but Simply Books’ manual and online help were considered to be better than Instant Accounting’s help facilities. As a result, testers could solve more problems themselves in Simply Books.
- Testers praised Simply Books’ clear screen design and thorough manual.

1. Introduction

This report details the findings from a comparative review of Sage Instant Accounting Version 6 and Simply Books, carried out by VNU Usability Labs on the 15th November 2001. It provides qualitative analysis from the tests, as well as quantitative feedback collected from testers during the sessions.

1.1 Method Used

How we tested

Testers used Dell 733MHZ Pentium III PCs with 256 MB of RAM, running Windows 2000 for these tests. They carried out the same set of tasks on each product in turn. A summary of the tasks can be found in Appendix B. To avoid bias, participants tested the products in a different order.

The testers

Our four testers were computer literate and had all used a spreadsheet for keeping track of business accounts. Three testers also had experience of manual book-keeping processes. All were familiar with Windows 2000 and used to learning how to use new software products. A summary of testers' experience is available in Appendix C.

What we tested

We asked testers to record certain types of data, such as the time they took to complete each activity and how many times they accessed the help system. They also completed a short satisfaction questionnaire. This information was then used to generate the usability indices shown in Section 2. The following measures were recorded:

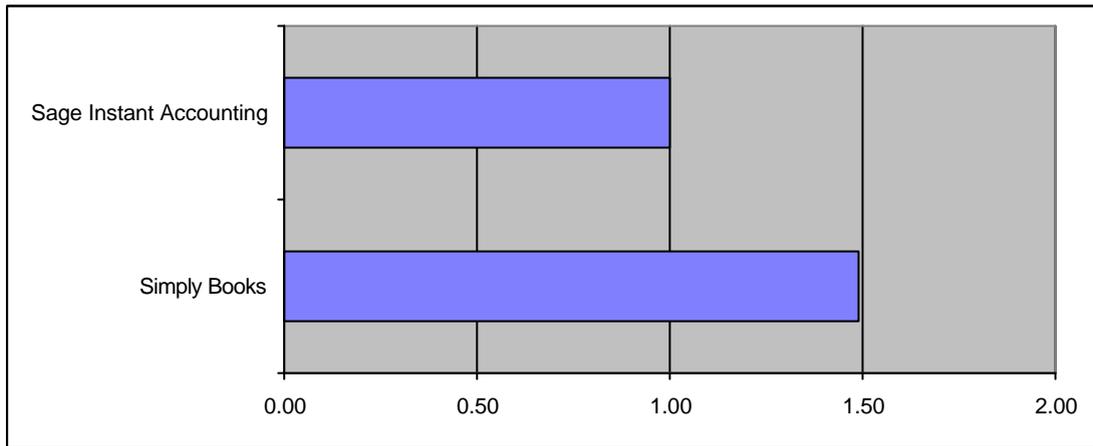
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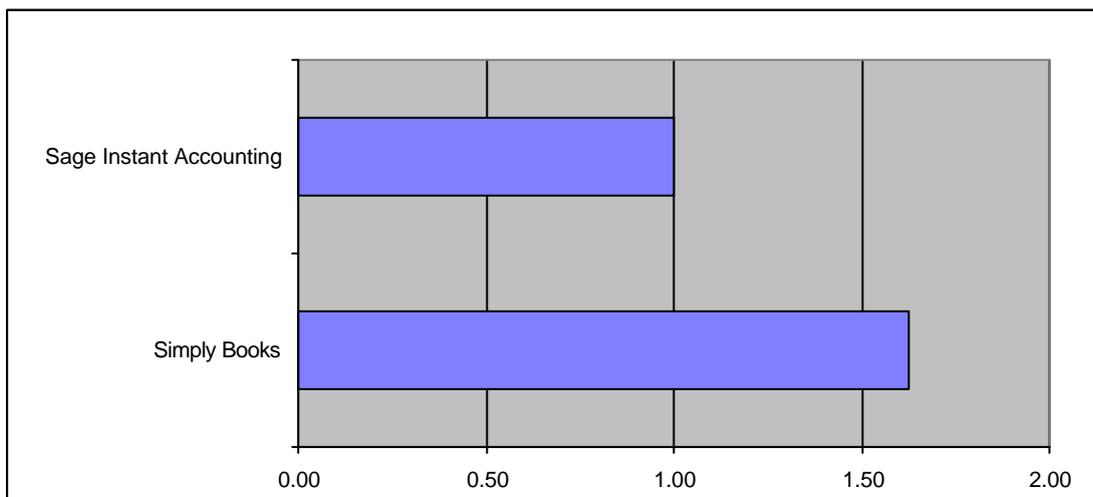
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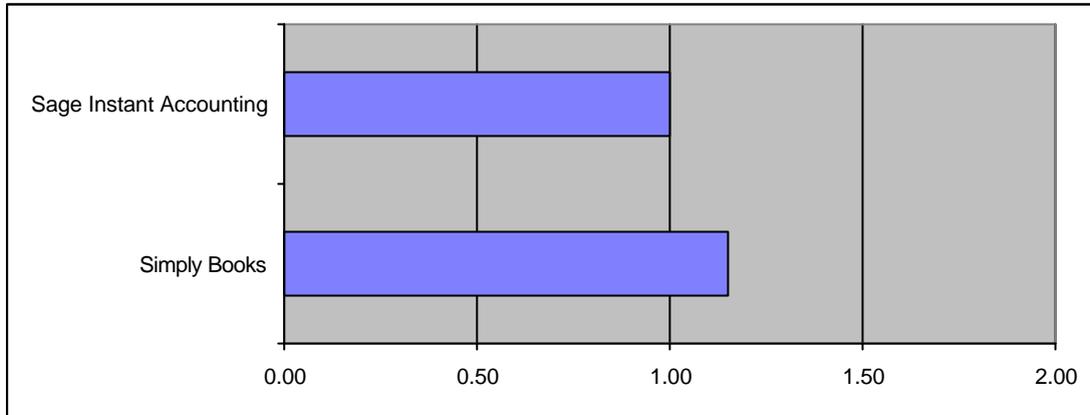
2.1.2 Productivity



Simply Books	1.62
Sage Instant Accounting	1.00

All testers completed more tasks with Simply Books than with Instant Accounting, and therefore Simply Books has a higher productivity score. No participants completed all of the tasks with Instant Accounting, but two completed everything using Simply Books.

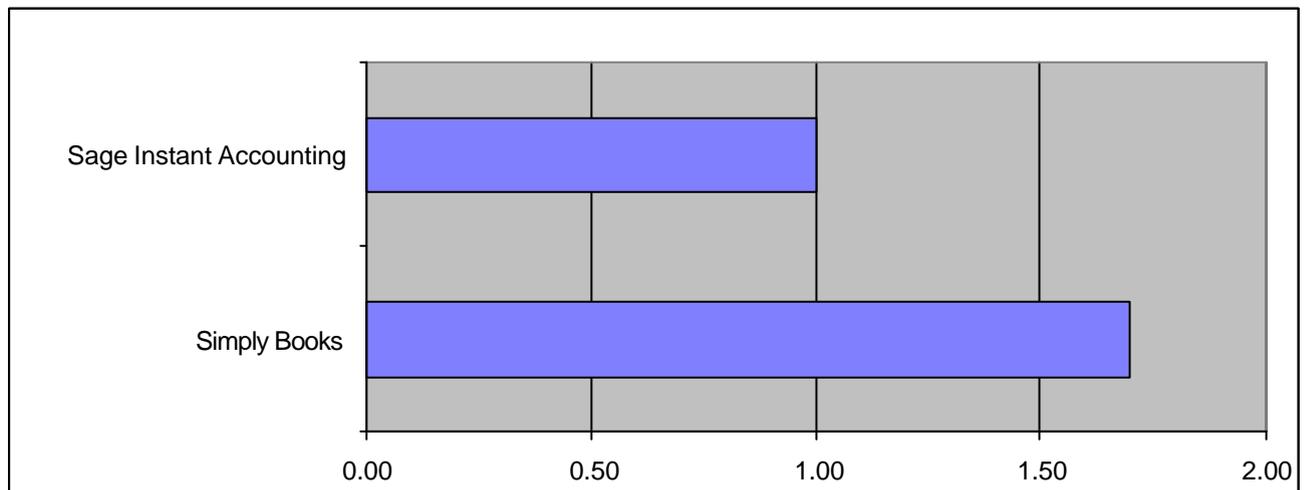
2.1.3 Intuitiveness



Simply Books	1.15
Sage Instant Accounting	1.00

Testers needed to access help regularly in both Simply Books and Instant Accounting. However, Simply Books requires less references, and also enabled testers to complete more tasks without reference to help, so achieves the highest productivity score.

2.1.4 Satisfaction



Simply Books	1.70
Sage Instant Accounting	1.00

The Satisfaction scores show the greatest difference between the two products. All testers rated Simply Books higher than Instant Accounting on this index.

2.2 Qualitative Feedback

In addition to recording the data used to derive the metrics in section 2.1, testers were also asked to make comments about their experiences with both Simply Books and Instant Accounting. Section 2.2.1 contains a summary of the comments made about Simply Books ONLY. Comments are grouped together for each task that testers carried out, according to the following breakdown:

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Please note that not all testers commented on every task.

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- 4. Appendix A ("Further breakdown of testers' scores") has been omitted in the interest of brevity.]**

Would you choose Instant Accounting or Simply Books for your own business ?

All four testers chose Simply Books over Instant Accounting for their own business.

Appendix B – Test script summary

[See (same as) Appendix B in the Simply Books / QuickBooks report]

Appendix C – Tester profiles

The following table shows testers' responses to an introductory questionnaire, designed to gauge their level of background experience in book-keeping and general PC use. Testers subjectively rated their own level of PC experience.

Tester	Experience in book-keeping	Use of accounting packages/other software for tracking accounts	General PC experience
Tester 1	Carried out some manual book-keeping, no experience with automated accounts for business or personal finance	QuickBooks – No MYOB – No DOSH Cashbook – No Pegasus Capital Gold – No Microsoft Money – No Quicken – No	Intermediate
Tester 2	Used a spreadsheet to track both accounts and personal finances. Some experience of manual book keeping. 'Standard manual income and expenditure accounting and petty cash ledgers'.	QuickBooks – No MYOB – No DOSH Cashbook – No Pegasus Capital Gold – No Microsoft Money – No Quicken – No	Intermediate
Tester 3	Used a spreadsheet to track personal accounts. Some experience of manual book keeping 'Some experience as a cashier in an international market. Foreign exchange, taking in rent payments were the main tasks.'	QuickBooks – No MYOB – No DOSH Cashbook – No Pegasus Capital Gold – No Microsoft Money – No Quicken – No	Intermediate
Tester 4	No previous experience of book keeping.	QuickBooks – No MYOB – No DOSH Cashbook – No Pegasus Capital Gold – No Microsoft Money – No Quicken – No	Intermediate