

Sleeter Conference Summary

What follows is my summary of the [Sleeter Group](#) conference which was held in Glendale Arizona from November 10 to 13, 2008. The entire contents are (c) Schulz Consulting 2008 and may not be reposted or reprinted in any form (print or online) without specific permission.

I have no connection to Sleeter Group whatsoever other than having purchased one of their training guides about 10 to 12 years ago. My reason for attending the conference was to assist Sage with their booth and to make a presentation on Sage MAS 90 and 200. I participated as an independent consultant and nothing within this summary has any affiliation with Sage.

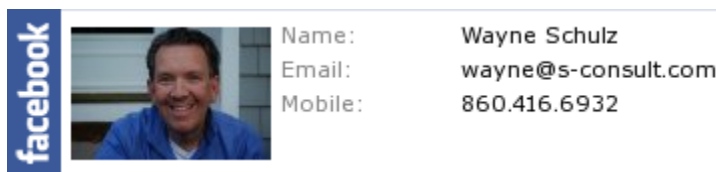
My overall impression of the conference was very positive. If you're involved in QuickBooks I'd recommend that you join Sleeter and attend the conference (my comments below about Powerpoints in the presentation are ones that I'd make at almost every conference - I just can't stand Powerpoint presentations). Sleeter has an [awesome collection of manuals](#) that are reasonably priced (under \$100) and are chock full of tips and tricks for consultants getting started with QuickBooks.

All information below is my personal observation and does not reflect any official information or opinions of any vendors mentioned.

I am making this available for the benefit of those who are interested in what happens at different conferences but may not be able to budget a week to attend them. Use the information below in addition to your own due diligence to reach your own conclusions.

Schulz Consulting is a Sage MAS 90 and 200 Business Partner.

Though I strive to be fair in my summary, I am not independent in my opinions of QuickBooks or other vendors.



Original Unedited Email Provided To My Private Sage Reseller Group

From: **Wayne Schulz** <wayne@s-consult.com>
Date: Thu, Nov 13, 2008 at 9:49 AM
Subject: Sleeter Conference Thoughts
To: Sage Resellers Group

Today's the last day of the Sleeter Conference. I've been here since Monday. I participated at the Sage Booth (MAS90, Accpac, Acct Network, Peachtree) so I met a lot of the people who stopped by and was able to talk a LOT with the Sage folks.

1. Sleeter had about 400 attendees in the biggest keynote. I'm guessing they had a net of probably 250-300 paid and 100 to 150 exhibitors. I had heard they claimed 450 (round number) paid attendees. My very fast count of bodies in the seats during the opening keynote gave me about 400 (I didn't have time to count every single person). Last year's attendance was about 750 total.
2. Most telling slide of the entire show was at the start - where Doug Sleeter gave demographics on the attendees and something like 67% were engaged in payroll processing. This tells me that most of those in the Sleeter group are bookkeepers who may not be deriving their primary income from consulting. Their services may be complimentary (bookkeeping, payroll) to QuickBooks.
3. Sage was very visible at the conference. The attendees I spoke with seemed to have dealt with Sage in the past but overall were not really familiar with the current products (Question: Has Sage branding paid off? To me people seemed more confused about the dizzying array of products), though this is perhaps understandable because in the Sleeter member environment Sage is the competition. Still questioning whether our branding has paid off.
4. Intuit's Jill Ward gave a keynote that included only one slide on QBES. And she muttered "single sign on" before moving to the next slide. To me this says two things. Sleeter is not the group to target QBES toward (they are probably mostly mom and pop bookkeeper types) and two that the QBES is still a work in process (or it would have been shown) and there's a problem similar to Sage with a lot of bolt on products being used to make the package whole.
5. Virtually no sessions on QuickBooks Enterprise -- very odd again but could be due to Sleeter being mostly small bookkeeper types. Lots of questions in my mind about this omission. I emailed Rich Walker of Intuit (PR Guy) directly after the session. He gave a very terse reply that basically said Jill Ward didn't have time to get more in depth. Worth noting that Jill had time to spotlight some esoteric web sites on at least two slides -- but spent under 30 seconds on QBES which I believe is a strategic product. No pitch by Jill from the podium for the advisors to do anything with QBES.
6. Nina gave a good keynote which was a Sage corporate overview - at this level of crowd Sage might have gotten more mileage by doing some general session demos put on by product managers. One of the great presentations was given by a product manager from Intuit. In hindsight I think the crowd seems to identify with the worker bee type more than the CEO type.
7. Sage is pushing big on their community forums. Also worth noting is that Intuit is also pushing their communities very aggressively and even linking from within their help files (this might be a future enhancement).
8. If you're thinking of going to Sleeter conferences for a lot of hands on training - skip it. Most of the presentations I went to (Report Writer, Business Intelligence) were 50 minutes of Powerpoints and 10 minutes of product demo. Even in the general sessions there were few demos. However if you're a Powerpoint lover - -this may be your crowd!

So, did I leave thinking that QuickBooks is an area that I'd navigate to?

No.

At least not the level that Sleeter group members play in.

This continues to be a market where QuickBooks services are nice compliments to existing services such as bookkeeping and tax preparation. As a standalone source of revenue I think it's a hard sell. I had lunch with one QBES VAR who reminded me that all QBES purchases include one year of support direct from Intuit.

For anyone going up against QuickBooks, here is where I see their weaknesses (based on sessions and attendee chit-chat):

- Reports -- there are several add-on report writers and I think QBES supports a link to Crystal Via ODBC. At least one of the third party report writers requires that QB be open and on the company that you are wanting to report on. The report writers (except Crystal) all looked like there is a canned set of options (not as flexible).

- Financial Statement Report Writer - Intuit is introducing a new Excel based financial report writer. The big flaw is that you cannot edit anything inside of Excel (no changing formulas, formats) -- everything must happen by changing template styles. This demonstrates pretty well but you must point out that the person doing the demo won't (cannot) make any changes inside Excel -- they'll have to do all formatting and formulas from the QuickBooks report writer. I think this leaves a huge security flaw because end users will try making changes directly in Excel. I'm pretty sure the Intuit report writer locks the spreadsheet for editing and I'm unsure whether it could be end user unlocked -- though if it could I would point out that if someone starts making free form changes to the financials that the validity could be questionable.

- Multi-User - Intuit seems to have lots of multi-user issues (judging from comments from the audience) - they promise to make it better in the next version. I have no doubts they will because this will hold them back if they continue to have people complaining about an inability to concurrently use the software.

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