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Chapter 1

Introducing QBO and QBOA

QuickBooks Online (QBO) and QuickBooks Online Accountant (QBOA) are web-based products you can use to manage your business's accounting. This chapter introduces these products and discusses whether you should move into the cloud to manage your accounting. It also examines the system requirements for these products.

QBO for the Client and QBOA for the Accountant

QuickBooks Online offers you the ability to manage your business's accounting in the cloud. The software is divided into two products: one for end users and the other for accountants. Interfaces for both products are available on multiple platforms.

QuickBooks Online (QBO) is the cloud-based product for end users who need to perform typical accounting tasks. QBO is based on the same principles as the QuickBooks Desktop product — that is, it uses lists to, for example, manage customers and vendors, and it includes transactions similar to the ones found in the

QuickBooks Desktop product. But, QBO is *not* simply a "rewrite" of the QuickBooks Desktop product for the web. It was designed and developed as a new product, optimized for web-based usage.

QuickBooks Online Accountant (QBOA) is the cloud-based portal that accountants use to access client QBO companies, work in them, and communicate with clients. QBOA also includes a QBO company in its Your Books section that accountants can use to track the accounting of their own businesses.

Comparing interfaces

QBO and QBOA were initially written and optimized to be used in the major web browsers — Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Microsoft Edge, and Internet Explorer. Later, Intuit added QBO apps that you can use to work in QBO on iOS and Android mobile devices. Intuit also offers a desktop version of QBO referred to in this book as, cleverly, QBO Desktop; this version is *not* a mobile app (it won't work on phones and isn't available in the Google Play Store or the Apple App Store) but it will work on any Mac or Windows computer, including "portable" computers like laptops and tablets running Windows or MacOS, making it somewhat mobile. It also is *not* the QuickBooks Desktop product, which is not a cloud-based product.

In this section of the book, you explore what QBO and QBOA look like in a browser; the next section explores what the QBO Desktop edition looks like as well as detailing some of the things you can do in the iOS and Android mobile app versions of QBO.

In a browser, an open company in QBO looks similar to the one shown in Figure 1-1. We cover the interface in more detail in Chapter 3, but for the time being, the most important thing to notice is the Navigation bar that runs down the left side of the screen. If you've been a QuickBooks Desktop user and you've used the Left Icon Bar in that product, you might find the Navigation bar a familiar tool. The Left Icon Bar and the Navigation bar work the same way; you click a link in either of them to navigate to a portion of the program.

Clicking the three-striped button beside the QuickBooks logo above the Navigation bar enables you to collapse the Navigation bar to view just the icons (and clicking it again expands the Navigation bar back to the view in Figure 1-1). When you collapse the Navigation bar (you see an example of it collapsed in Chapter 3), you have more screen real estate to view the right side of the QBO interface.

At the top of the screen, you see tools that help QBO users create transactions, search for existing transactions, and view settings for the QBO company.

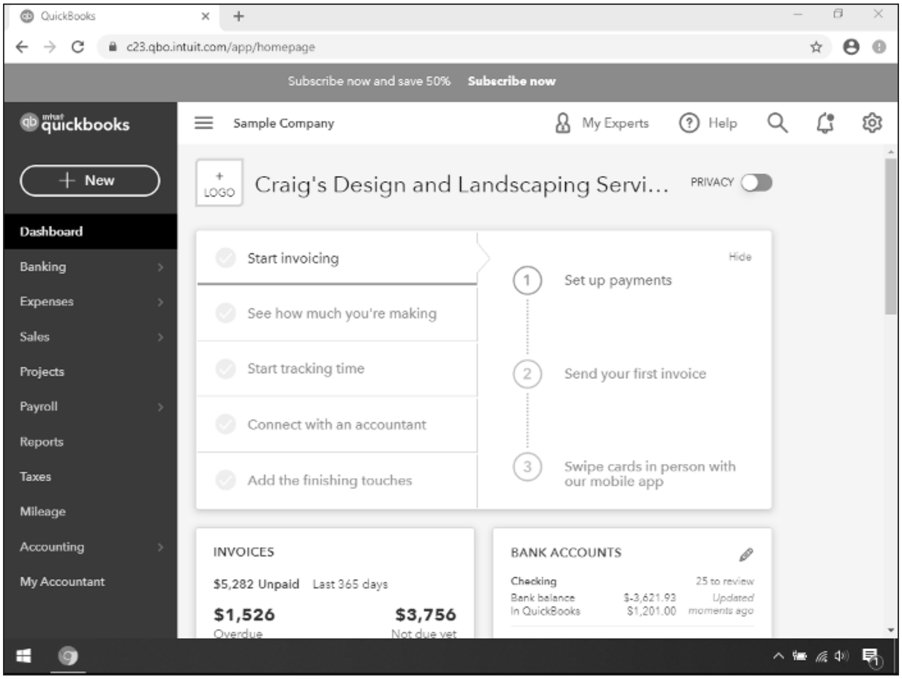

FIGURE 1-1: An open company in QBO.

Figure 1-2 shows what an accountant sees immediately upon logging into QBOA. The Navigation bar changes to support an accountant's needs; you can read more about the QBOA interface in Chapter 11.

When an accountant opens a client's company from within QBOA (see Figure 1-3), the interface resembles what a client sees, with some minor differences. Compare Figure 1-1 with Figure 1-3. First, you know you're using QBOA because the top of the Navigation pane shows QB Accountant. Second, the Accountant Tools menu (the briefcase icon) displays tools not found in QBO that help accountants manage client companies.

Even though an open company looks a bit different depending on whether you open it using QBO or QBOA, the basic functionality doesn't really change, other than accountants have more options than end users have.

REMEMBER

Because QBOA contains functionality that QBO doesn't have, we've organized this book so that QBO users can focus on Part 2 when using the product, and QBOA users can use the information in both Parts 2 and 3 to work in a company online.

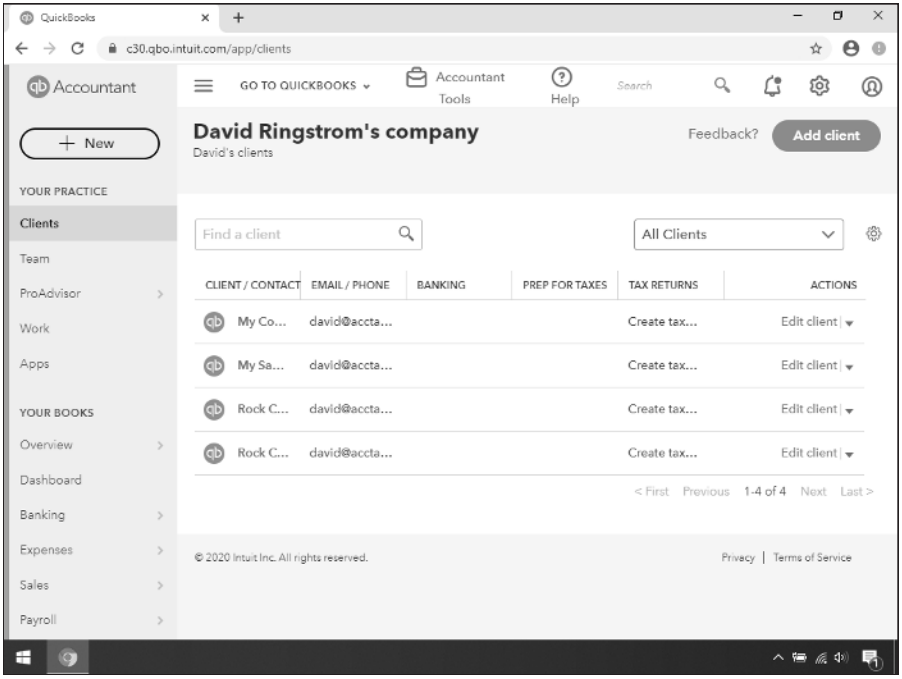

FIGURE 1-2: The first view an accountant has when he opens QBOA.

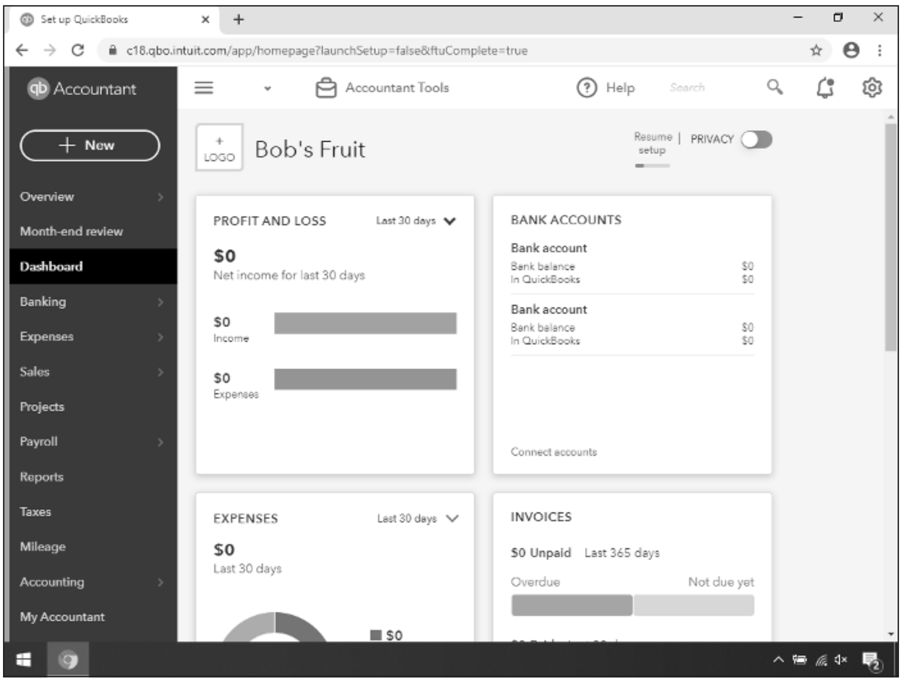

FIGURE 1-3: An open company in QBOA.

Taking a look at QBO Desktop and QBO Mobile

You can work with QBO and QBOA without using a browser; you can use QBO Desktop or you can use the iOS or Android apps.

Introducing QBO Desktop

If you prefer, you can work with QBO using QBO Desktop; it's purported to run faster than QBO in your browser, but we'll let you judge for yourself. To download QBO Desktop, use your browser to navigate to the QBO sign-in page: `https://quickbooks.intuit.com/online/apps/`. On the page that appears, you'll see a Free Download button; click it and follow the onscreen instructions to download and install QBO Desktop.

TIP

Both Windows and Mac users can use the same QBO Desktop app; what you download from the QBO sign-in page works on both platforms. Ingenious, don't you think?

WARNING

The word "app" has become a buzzword and is often used when it probably shouldn't be. In this chapter, we're using the word "app" *only* when we refer to the mobile versions of QBO and QBOA that are available for download from the Google Play Store or the Apple App Store. In many places online, you'll find references to a QBO Windows app — and, at the time we wrote this, there is no Windows app per se. There is QBO Desktop, which allows Windows users (except Windows Phone users) to use QBO while being mobile — on, for example, laptops and tablets — but QBO Desktop *is not* available from any of the "mobile device" stores (Google Play or Apple App) and therefore, we're not calling it an app.

Figure 1-4 shows QBO Desktop with a QBO company open, and Figure 1-5 shows QBOA just after opening it in QBO Desktop (but before opening any client company).

If you compare Figure 1-5 to Figure 1-1, you'll notice that, once again, QBOA users have the same additional options in QBO Desktop that they have in a browser. The menus at the top of the screen are the biggest visual difference between QBO and QBOA in QBO Desktop and QBO and QBOA in a browser. If you've been a QuickBooks Desktop product user, you know that you can use the menus to navigate. Under the hood, QBO Desktop offers some options that you won't find readily available in a browser, such as the ability to work in multiple windows.

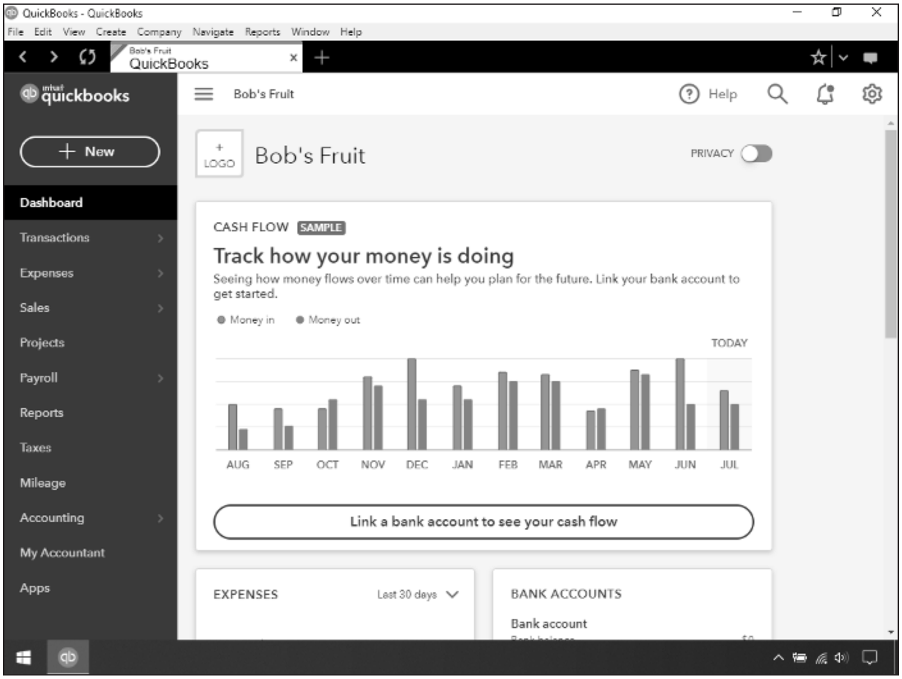

FIGURE 1-4: QBO while working in QBO Desktop.

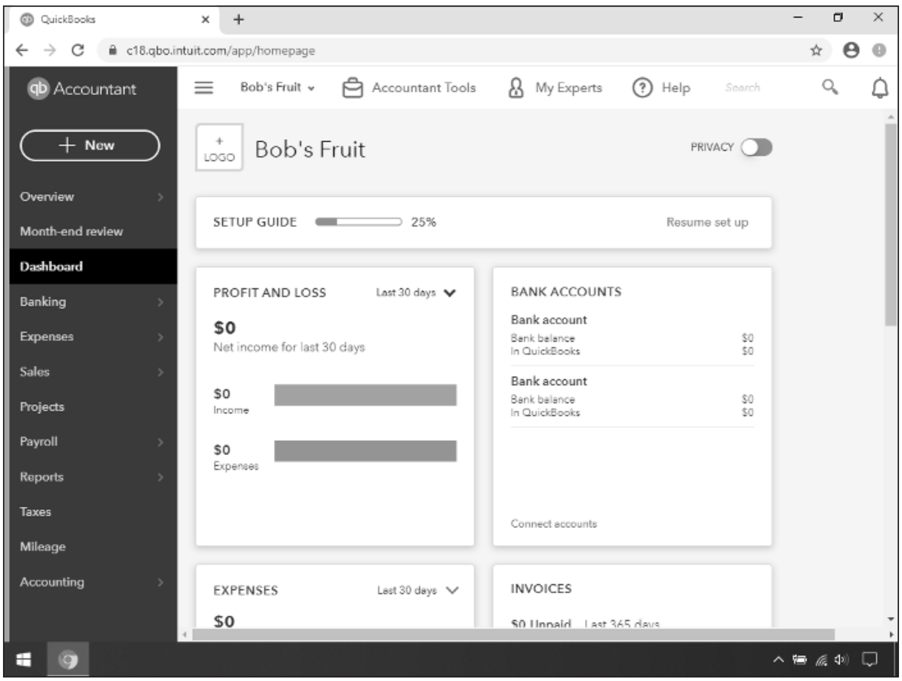

FIGURE 1-5: QBOA while working in QBO Desktop.

Understanding QBO mobile apps

At no additional cost to you, mobile apps are also available for iPhones, iPads, and Android devices. The iOS and Android apps are optimized for touch interaction and on-the-go workflows like customer management, invoicing, estimates, and signatures. You also can use the mobile apps to track the status of invoices, take payments, reconcile bank accounts, capture expenses, and check reports. And, you'll find Pinch and Zoom functionality in the mobile apps and in browsers on mobile devices.

You can get the mobile apps here: `https://quickbooks.intuit.com/accounting/mobile/`. In addition to using the QBO mobile apps for iOS and Android, you also can access the QBO sign-in page and your QBO account from your mobile device's browser at `qbo.intuit.com`.

New features are added often to the mobile apps. For example, you can customize invoice templates from the browser-based QBO and from QBO Desktop. You can customize templates from mobile devices but not using mobile apps; instead, use the browser-based QBO on your mobile device.

REMEMBER

Be aware that the browser-based version of QBO and QBOA has additional functionality and keyboard shortcuts geared towards more in-depth business accounting tasks.

So, take your choice; you're not limited: Work in a browser, work in QBO Desktop, or work in a mobile app, depending on your needs at the moment.

Understanding the Cloud

Just to make sure we're on the same page here, we're defining the *cloud* as software and data housed securely in remote data centers (not on your office premises) and accessed securely using the Internet. Working in the cloud can increase your efficiency by offering you the opportunity to work anywhere, communicate easily with others, and collaborate in real time.

REMEMBER

Regardless of whether you use QBO or QBOA in a browser, in QBO Desktop, or in an app, both the software and the data are housed on servers controlled by Intuit and accessible via the Internet.

In the traditional model of software use, you buy software and install it on your computer. Or you might buy the software and install it on a vendor's server. QBO and QBOA fall into the category of Software as a Service (SaaS). You typically don't buy SaaS software; instead, you rent it (that is, you purchase a subscription).

Because SaaS software is typically web-based software, you (also typically) access SaaS software over the Internet using a browser. A *browser* is software installed on your local computer or mobile device that you use to, well, browse the Internet, looking up cool stuff like what the stock market is doing today, what kind of weather can you expect on Friday when your vacation starts, how to get to your boss's house for the party he's having, and — oh, yes — to work with web-based software such as QBO and QBOA. In the case of QBO and QBOA, you can work with these web-based SaaS products using a browser, QBO Desktop, or an app you download to your mobile device.

Using web-based software can be attractive for a number of reasons. For example, using web-based software, you have access to that software's information anywhere, anytime, from any device — stationary or mobile.

REMEMBER

Some folks see the "anywhere, anytime" feature as a potential disadvantage because it makes information too readily available — and therefore a target for hackers. Intuit stores your data on servers that use bank-level security and encryption, and Intuit automatically backs up your data for you. Other folks see the "anywhere, anytime" feature as a disadvantage for exactly the reason that they have access to the software's information anywhere, anytime, and from any device, offering the opportunity to work more than they'd like. You are in charge of your life, so . . . no comment on this "disadvantage."

In addition, web-based software like QBO and QBOA promotes collaboration and can help you save time. Using QBO and QBOA, accountants, bookkeepers, and clients can communicate about issues that arise, as described in Chapter 14.

Then there's the issue of keeping software up to date. Desktop software such as traditional QuickBooks typically receives a major update once each year, along with periodic software patches that must also be installed. Unlike their desktop cousin, QBO and QBOA are automatically updated every two to four weeks — meaning there's never a new version to install or patches to deal with.

REMEMBER

Because updating occurs so frequently to QBO and QBOA, by the time this book is published, things (and screens) might have changed. Actually, make that "probably have changed."

Should You Move to the Cloud?

Before you make the move to the cloud, you should consider the needs of your business in the following areas:

- Invoicing, point of sale, electronic payment, and customer relationship management
- Financial and tax reporting
- Budgeting
- Time tracking and payroll
- Inventory, job costing, and job scheduling
- Managing company expenses and vendor bills

Beyond the advantages described in the preceding section, the particular needs of a business might dictate whether you can use QBO. For example, QBO *won't* work for you if your business has industry-specific needs or is mid-sized and needs to use ODBC-compliant applications. In addition, QBO won't work for you if you need to

- Track your balance sheet by class.
- Process more than 350,000 transactions annually.
- Track labor costs.
- Manage a robust inventory that supports making and selling finished goods.

In any of these cases, you would probably be better off with one of Intuit's "designed for desktop use" products like traditional QuickBooks Pro, Premier, or Enterprise.

TIP

When QBO and QBOA were first released, the U.S. version didn't support multiple currencies. That feature has been added to both products. And, you can set a "home currency" without enabling multicurrency support. See Chapter 3 for more information.

System Requirements

Using a web-based software product typically doesn't require a lot of hardware and software; in fact, the demands of QBO and QBOA aren't extensive. In particular, you need a Windows or Intel-based Mac computer using Windows 7, 8.1, or 10, or OS X 10.11 or later. You also need

- An Internet connection — Intuit recommends a high-speed connection of 3 Mbps or higher

- One of the four supported Internet browsers:
  - Google Chrome
  - Mozilla Firefox
  - Microsoft Edge
  - Safari, if your operating system is iOS 11.1 or higher
- Adobe Reader 11.0 or higher to print forms

Although QBO and QBOA work in all the major browsers, they work best, in my experience, in Chrome, with Firefox coming in a close second. Therefore, we use Chrome throughout this book, and the Part of Tens chapters cover using Chrome so that you can get comfortable with that browser. If you're a Firefox user, give QBO and QBOA a try in Firefox.

The requirements for QBO Desktop and the mobile apps are basically the same as those outlined here, except that you won't really need a browser on your device (although you'll probably have one). You'll still need an Internet connection, and be aware that, although new features are added to the mobile apps all the time, the mobile apps do not support all features of QBO and QBOA.

Whether you work on a desktop computer or on a mobile device, the computer or device needs to meet the basic requirements of the operating system you use on that computer or device — and then some. For example, if you're using a Windows desktop computer, you need the amount of RAM (random access memory) specified by Microsoft to load the version of Windows on the computer before you ever launch your browser. If you don't have sufficient RAM to run the operating system, you certainly won't be happy with the behavior of QBO and QBOA. You won't be happy with the behavior of the computer, either.

Basic requirements (and we stress the word *basic*) for a Windows 7, 8.1, and 10 computer, as specified by Microsoft, are

- 1-gigahertz (GHz) or faster 32-bit (x86) or 64-bit (x64) processor
- 1 gigabyte (GB) of RAM (32 bit) or 2GB of RAM (64 bit)
- 16GB of available hard disk space for the 32-bit version of the operating system or 32GB for the 64-bit versions of the operating system
- A display that supports at least 800 x 600 dpi
- DirectX 9 graphics device with WDDM 1.0 or higher driver
- An Internet connection for both installation and operating system updates

These versions of Windows work with multi-core processors, and all 32-bit versions of Windows can support up to 32 processor cores, whereas 64-bit versions can support up to 256 processor cores.

And a word on the word *basic*. You'll be a whole lot happier if your desktop computer components have higher numbers than the ones we just listed. If you have a computer that's fairly new — say, three to four years old — you might need only to add some RAM or possibly hard disk space. If your computer is older than three or four years, you should consider purchasing new equipment, simply because you'll be unbelievably happier with the computer's performance. Technology continues to improve dramatically in short spurts of time.

If you buy a new computer, you don't need to worry about meeting more than the basic requirements. We're pretty sure you'd have a hard time finding a new computer containing a 1-gigahertz processor; most computers today come with at least 2.5-gigahertz processors, and they support better graphics than the DirectX 9 graphics listed in the basic requirements. And most monitors available for purchase today don't support low resolutions such as 800 x 600; you most likely own a monitor that supports much higher resolution. In my opinion, 1GB of RAM is insufficient; Intuit recommends that your desktop computer have at least 4GB of RAM, and you'll be much happier if it has 8GB of RAM. On the hard drive requirement, if you don't have the 16GB or 20GB of available space specified, you probably should be considering a hard drive replacement for your computer.

QBO and QBOA have their own hardware requirements — that exceed Microsoft's basic requirements. Visit this page to see the system requirements for QBO and QBOA: `https://quickbooks.intuit.com/learn-support/en-us/install-or-update-products/system-requirements-for-quickbooks-online-accountant-and/00/188943`.

Alternatively, you can visit quickbooks.intuit.com/learn-support and use the search term *system requirements for QuickBooks Online*. If you want to use QBO Desktop, visit this page to see system requirements: `https://quickbooks.intuit.com/learn-support/en-us/download-products/quickbooks-app-for-windows-and-mac-general-support/01/186053#M4087`.

TECHNICAL STUFF

The amount of RAM your computer can successfully use depends on the computer's architecture — in particular, if your computer uses a 32-bit processor, as older computers often did, your computer might not be able to "see" more than 4GB of RAM. So, you could put 16GB of RAM in the computer and only be able to use 4GB. And part of that 4GB goes to other stuff, like your video card; so, with most 32-bit processors (there are a few exceptions), your computer can use only 3GB of RAM. Bottom line here: Newer computers use 64-bit processors and can take advantage of much more RAM, which makes them much faster.