

▶ Design Manager

Design Manager vs. QuickBooks:

The Side-by-Side Every Residential Designer Should See

The Problem: You Went to Art School, Not Business School

Most residential interior design firm principals are running a multi-hundred-thousand-dollar procurement operation on a general accounting tool that was built for a restaurant or a law firm. QuickBooks tracks what you spent and what came in. It has no idea what project that money belonged to, what markup you intended, or whether that \$12,000 deposit sitting in your account has been applied to an invoice yet.

You do not know what questions to ask your accountant. You feel uncertain about your financial picture even when projects are active and clients are paying. You are spending Sunday nights reconciling data that three separate tools cannot agree on. That is not a you problem. That is a tool problem.

The Side-by-Side

Capability	Design Manager	QuickBooks
Project-level profitability reporting	Yes, per project and per item	No, general ledger only
Item-level markup tracking	Yes, from spec to invoice	No
Markup enforcement and error flagging	Yes, flags items below policy markup	No
Client deposit management	Yes, tracked at project level	Requires manual workarounds
Sales tax handling for design firms	Yes, design-specific tax workflows	Basic, requires manual configuration
Purchase order to invoice connection	Automatic, no re-entry needed	Manual, error-prone
Change order documentation	Built into project workflow	External, not connected
Multi-vendor procurement tracking	Yes, item status per vendor	No
Cash flow by project	Yes, real-time	No project-level visibility
Standard accounting / tax filing	Full accounting included	Yes, industry standard
Bank reconciliation	Yes	Yes
Free trial available	Yes	Yes
Built for residential design	Purpose-built	Generic
Guided onboarding for design firms	Yes, design operations experts	No design-specific support
Support response time	24-hour response	Community-based, variable

Highlighted rows = capabilities where Design Manager provides direct value that QuickBooks does not.

Key Workflows Design Manager Handles That QuickBooks Cannot

<p>Markup Strategy and Pricing</p> <p>Set markup percentages by category at the item level. Markup flows automatically from specification to purchase order to client invoice. Flags items invoiced below your policy markup before they reach the client.</p>	<p>Client Deposit Management</p> <p>Deposits tracked at the project level, applied to invoices at the correct stage. Prevents premature income recognition and the tax liabilities that follow. No manual workarounds needed.</p>
<p>Multi-Vendor Procurement Tracking</p> <p>Track item status, vendor communications, freight timelines, and delivery confirmations across every vendor on every project. All in one system, visible to everyone on the team.</p>	<p>Cash Flow Forecasting by Project</p> <p>See accounts receivable and accounts payable at the project level, not just the general ledger. Know which projects are cash-positive and which are exposed before payroll becomes a problem.</p>

What Design Manager Customers Report After Implementation

8-10 hrs saved per week	Principals report recovering 8 to 10 hours per week previously spent on manual reconciliation, invoice corrections, and data transfer between disconnected tools. That time goes back to design and client relationships.
Fewer billing disputes	Firms report significantly fewer billing disputes and client-facing errors after implementation, because invoices are generated from verified purchase order and markup data rather than manual re-entry.
Real-time margin visibility	For the first time, principals can see project-level margin in real time, not just at the end of a project. This changes how decisions get made: on the next purchase order, not the post-mortem.

Built For

Design Manager is purpose-built for residential interior design firms with 5 to 10 employees and 3 or more active designers, running 5 to 15 concurrent projects with multi-vendor procurement workflows.

It is the right fit for firms that:

- Have outgrown spreadsheets and disconnected tools and are ready for a single source of truth
- Need project-level financial visibility, not just a general ledger
- Want markup enforcement that does not depend on individual designer discipline
- Are managing client deposits and need accurate accounting without a full-time bookkeeper
- Want an accounting system their bookkeeper can access and trust, without rebuilding their data structure

The Next Step

Design Manager offers a free trial and transparent pricing. There is no enterprise commitment required, no month-long implementation gauntlet, and no requirement to stay on QuickBooks.

You can bring your own bookkeeper, or we can connect you with a Design Manager-specialized accounting partner. Forty percent of our customers work with partners who know the platform and understand design firm financial workflows.

[Start Your Free Trial or Schedule a Walkthrough](#)

www.designmanager.com | Replace the chaos. Protect the margin. Focus on design.