As a business grows, money gets harder to manage with a spreadsheet and a stack of receipts. You may need to track expenses, understand cash flow, run payroll, estimate the cost of a new hire, and figure out why the amount on a paycheck differs from the employee's salary. The right software can bring those tasks into a more reliable workflow—but no single tool does everything equally well.

For many US small businesses, a practical starting point is to compare QuickBooks for accounting with Gusto for payroll and benefits. They solve different problems and can work together, but they are not interchangeable. Your best choice depends on how you handle bookkeeping today, whether you have employees, what reports you need, and the total cost of the software and related services.



This guide explains what to look for in a financial software comparison, how to use free small business calculators, and how to estimate the true cost of hiring and retaining employees. It also covers the details that deserve a closer look before you sign up, including state-by-state payroll requirements and add-on fees.

## What Counts as Financial Software?

"Financial software" is a broad category. It can include tools for accounting, invoicing, payments, payroll, employee benefits, budgeting, tax preparation, and financial reporting. Some platforms bundle several functions; others focus on one job and connect to the rest of your business systems.

Growing businesses often need at least two distinct capabilities:



- **Accounting software** to record income and expenses, reconcile bank accounts, manage invoices, and produce financial reports.
- **Payroll software** to calculate wages and deductions, handle tax filings and payments, and give employees access to pay statements and tax forms.

Financial management is the bigger picture: using accurate records and timely reports to make decisions about hiring, spending, cash reserves, and growth. Software can support those decisions, but it cannot replace a sound process or professional advice when your situation is complex.

## QuickBooks vs. Gusto: Different Tools for Different Jobs

Tool Best known for Good fit when Check before choosing QuickBooks Small-business accounting and financial reporting You need to organize transactions, invoices, bills, and business financial reports. Plan availability, user limits, add-ons, payment processing costs, and accountant access. Gusto Payroll, employee onboarding, and benefits administration You have employees and want help running payroll and managing related tasks. Base subscription, per-person charges, state coverage, benefits availability, and service fees.

### QuickBooks for accounting

QuickBooks is commonly used to keep a business's books in order. Depending on the plan and setup, businesses can use it to categorize transactions, reconcile accounts, send invoices, track bills, and create reports such as a profit and loss statement. Those records help answer questions like "Are expenses rising faster than sales?" and "How much cash did we collect this month?"

Before choosing a plan, list the features you actually need. A solo consultant with a handful of invoices has different requirements from a company with inventory, multiple users, and regular contractor payments. Compare current plan limits, reporting features, integrations, and support options. Promotional pricing can change, and the ongoing price may differ from an introductory offer.

### Gusto for payroll and people operations

Gusto focuses on payroll and related employee workflows. Depending on the plan and state, its services may include payroll calculations, tax filings, direct deposit, onboarding, and benefits administration. For an employer,

centralizing these tasks can reduce manual handoffs and make payroll records easier to find.

Payroll is especially sensitive to setup mistakes. You need correct employee information, pay schedules, work locations, tax forms, deductions, and state registrations. A payroll platform can help with calculations and filings, but it does not remove the employer's responsibility to review information and meet applicable deadlines.

### Do you need both?

If you have employees, you may use QuickBooks for your books and Gusto for payroll. Confirm how the products currently connect and what data the integration sends. Then test the workflow with your bookkeeper or accountant: payroll entries should land in the right accounts, and wage expenses, employer taxes, and benefit costs should be categorized consistently.

An integration is not the same as a complete financial system. Reconciliation, review, and occasional corrections may still be necessary. Ask who will own those tasks—your internal team, an outside bookkeeper, or your accountant.

## How to Make a Useful Financial Software Comparison

Comparing monthly subscription prices alone can lead to the wrong decision. Consider the total cost and the work the tool will handle. Use this checklist:

- **Core job:** Is your biggest problem bookkeeping, payroll, cash flow visibility, or all three?
- **Full price:** Include the base subscription, per-employee charges, add-ons, implementation, and payment processing where applicable.
- **Coverage:** Check whether the product supports the states where your employees work and the services you need there.
- **Workflow:** Find out whether bank feeds, payroll data, benefits deductions, and reports connect cleanly to your existing tools.
- **Access and controls:** Check user permissions, accountant access, approval steps, and audit history.
- **Support:** Confirm support hours, available contact methods, and whether the help you need is included.
- **Exit plan:** Ask how you can export your records if you switch providers.

Also check the pricing page and contract details for the fees and gotchas that are easy to miss: charges for extra users, year-end forms, expedited payments, benefits administration, or services that are not available in every state. Pricing and features change, so verify current terms directly with each provider rather than relying on an old comparison chart.

## Free Small Business Calculators: Useful for Planning, Not Certainty

Free small business calculators can help you make a first-pass estimate before you commit to a hire, adjust a salary, or change a budget. Useful options include a hiring-cost calculator, employee turnover cost calculator, paycheck estimator, and take-home pay calculator. Some software providers offer calculators; government agencies and reputable payroll or financial education sites may offer others.

Use a calculator as a planning aid, not as a final payroll instruction. Check what assumptions it uses, whether it reflects the relevant tax year, and whether it includes your state and locality. A calculator that asks only for annual salary and filing status will not capture every deduction or tax circumstance.

### Estimate the true cost of hiring an employee

An employee's salary is only one part of the employer's cost. A basic planning estimate is:

**Estimated annual employer cost = gross wages + employer payroll taxes + benefits + insurance and required coverage + recruiting and onboarding costs + equipment and software**

For example, consider a hypothetical employee earning $60,000 per year. If you budget an additional 12% of wages for employer payroll taxes, benefits, and insurance, that adds $7,200. If recruiting, onboarding, equipment, and software add another $3,000, the estimated first-year cost is $70,200. That is a back-of-the-envelope estimate—not a universal percentage or a payroll quote. The actual total depends on benefits, tax treatment, location, job, and coverage requirements.

State and local rules matter. Employer unemployment insurance rates, workers' compensation requirements, paid leave rules, and other obligations vary by jurisdiction and can change. A remote employee may create compliance work in a state where your business has not previously had employees. Check with a payroll professional, insurance broker, or relevant state agency when needed.

### Calculate employee turnover cost

Turnover costs can include more than recruiting. A useful estimate separates direct expenses from lost productivity:

1. **Recruiting:** Job advertising, agency fees, interview time, and background checks.
2. **Departure and transition:** Offboarding, knowledge transfer, and temporary coverage.
3. **Replacement onboarding:** Training time, equipment, and manager support.
4. **Productivity gap:** Work delayed or missed while the role is vacant and the new employee ramps up.

Suppose a role costs $4,000 to recruit and onboard, and the vacancy and learning period create an estimated $6,000 in lost business permits by state output. The estimated turnover cost is $10,000. That figure is only as good as the assumptions: avoid treating revenue as lost profit, and do not count the same manager hours twice. A calculator can make the assumptions visible, but it cannot tell you exactly what an employee's departure cost your business.

## Paycheck and Take-Home Pay Estimates

Gross pay is the amount earned before deductions. Take-home pay is what remains after withholding and other deductions. A paycheck estimate typically starts with gross wages, then accounts for federal income tax withholding, Social Security and Medicare taxes, state and local withholding, benefit premiums, retirement contributions, and any other deductions.

For a simple sanity check, a salaried employee earning $60,000 annually has gross pay of about $5,000 per month before deductions ($60,000 divided by 12). That is not the monthly take-home amount. The final deposit can differ based on pay frequency, the employee's tax forms, benefits, retirement contributions, location, and other personal circumstances.

When using a paycheck calculator, gather the following information if available:

- Gross salary or hourly rate and expected hours
- Pay frequency and any overtime or bonus assumptions
- Work state and, where requested, city or locality

- Tax withholding information supplied by the employee
- Health insurance premiums, retirement contributions, and other deductions

For employers, distinguish between *withholding* and the employee's final tax liability. A paycheck estimate predicts the amount withheld from a particular check; it does not guarantee what the employee will owe or receive when filing a tax return. For employees, use the result to compare scenarios, not as a promise of an exact deposit.

## A Practical Setup for a Growing Business

If you are choosing tools for the first time, keep the process simple and deliberate:

1. **Map your workflow.** Write down how sales, bills, bank transactions, payroll, and benefits are handled today.
2. **Separate accounting from payroll needs.** Decide which tasks need a dedicated tool and who will review the results.
3. **Estimate total cost.** Compare the expected annual price, including add-ons and per-employee fees—not just the advertised entry price.
4. **Check location requirements.** List every state where employees work and verify availability and compliance support.
5. **Test the handoff.** Confirm how payroll data flows into accounting and how corrections are handled.
6. **Set a review routine.** Reconcile accounts monthly, review payroll before submission, and revisit the setup as the business changes.

## The Bottom Line

QuickBooks and Gusto are worth considering for different parts of a growing business's financial management: QuickBooks for accounting records and reports, and Gusto for payroll and related people operations. Whether you need one or both depends on your business model, employee footprint, internal expertise, and current tools.

Use a financial software comparison to look beyond feature lists and advertised prices. Check the full cost, state coverage, integration workflow, support, and export options. Free calculators can help you estimate hiring costs, turnover, and take-home pay, but treat their results as planning numbers. Verify assumptions against your actual benefits, payroll setup, and state and local requirements before making a financial or employment decision.