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Tools To Make You More Effective & Efficient

From the January-March 2007 Issue & [2007 Tax Season Survival Guide](#)

It's that time of year — time for tax, audit, new business plans, new technology implementation and the cold of winter spreading over the northern half of the United States. If I had a choice of all the previously listed items, I would probably choose winter. On the realistic side of life, however, is the fact that tax and accounting practitioners have many things to do during what has become affectionately known as “Busy Season.”

You have a lot to do, despite your specialty, client load and commitments. This article highlights various quality technology tools that can be found, obtained and implemented NOW, and any of these products can make your work more effective. You'll notice that we did not provide you with a glossary of all printers or all laptops or all cell phones available — not every product in every category is included. With time at a premium, the information is presented to give you a few good ideas that you can use now — usable, useful products that can make your voyage through busy season a little easier.

You'll also notice no mention of the Vista operating system and Office 2007 in this article. Even though Microsoft will be shipping these products early in 2007, I strongly recommended that you wait until after busy season to determine when you want to install these substantial upgrades.

Detail specifications for each product included in this article can be located at various websites or in company or magazine reviews. All products mentioned

in this article are available in the United States, and all prices provided

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laser jet in your office is not overkill. The printers are small enough for a desktop, but they may be a bit noisy. Whatever printer you choose to use, make sure that you have at least one spare toner cartridge in-house. It isn't worth the risk to see if your current cartridge will last until you can get to a store and purchase replacement ink. Also, keep in mind that when printing with color printers, the cost per page for color is five times that of the black and white page. When printing paper drafts, use black rather than color.

HP

Color Laser (1600, 2600, 3600) — \$300 – \$500

This printer comes in three models. Besides the price difference of \$100 per model, you'll notice a difference in the feature set, such as a built-in duplexer, built-in networking, and increased print speed. All models have a 14x14x10-inch footprint and weigh 25 pounds without the second paper tray.

This printer would be a good fit for your office or home office.

Xerox

Phaser 6120 — \$500 (currently discounted to \$300)

My first Xerox product was the vendor's 914 copier ... a LONG time ago. The 6120 color laser printer has only been on the market since November

2005. This is a very good printer for a small office; slightly larger offices can buy two printers. This color printer has an add-on to support duplex printing

and uses a native postscript driver, which makes access to new equipment and

new operating systems easily implemented. With a second paper tray, you can

print 1,000 pages without a refill. Connections include a USB 2.0 connector

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Canon

PIXMA MP830 — \$300

The Canon PIXMA MP830 is clearly a graphics and photo printer: The inks area

is both pigment-based and dye-based to enhance color rendering.

Measuring

19.7×19.2×11.5 inches and weighing in at 32 pounds, this printer can print in duplex mode and has an extra paper tray. Output quality is better than most ink jets, and the photo rating is high. Text and graphics are both good. Most fonts are readable at four points. Graphics are not as sharp as a laser, but they are acceptable. Good speed and fine output makes the MP830 a quality general printer and a superior photo printer.

LAPTOPS

The use of a laptop over a desktop is a personal decision. If mobility is an integrated part of your work life, then a laptop is essential. You need sufficient hard disk space (at least 80GB), enough memory to upgrade to Vista (at least 1GB), and a built-in wireless connection. Everything else depends on personal preferences — keyboard, size of screen, overall weight, CD/DVD drive, USB, Firewire, audio, etc.

There are two categories of laptops:

- **Desktop Replacements** — These have as much horsepower as any desktop, weigh seven pounds or more with screens that are 14-inch to 17-inch, and can have a TV tuner and widescreen playback as well as a full-size keyboard.
- **Lightweight** — These laptops typically have a small footprint with screens less than 14 inches, weigh less than six pounds, can

have a tablet screen for writing and often have a keyboard that is less than

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Recommending a change to a laptop that is less than what you require is a waste of your time and money.

Dell

XPS M1210 — \$1,200

This laptop is a good lightweight and is usable in all venues, including an airplane coach seat. The XPS M1210 weighs four pounds and has a 12.1-inch screen. It uses the latest Intel Core Duo processor options and has a performance ratio that exceeds its small form factor. Overall dimensions are 8.7×11.7×1.2 inches.

The XPS M1210 focuses on communications with an optional integrated Mobile Broadband card, a built-in 1.3 megapixel camera, an omni-directional microphone, and a mobile broadband antenna. It can also plug into Skype software to support VoIP applications.

Toshiba

Qosmio G35 — \$2,400 and up

This desktop replacement is one of the best in class. Using Intel's core duo chipset, the laptop has every feature except a kitchen sink. It offers a 17-inch screen, a DVD drive that is double-layered, and the TV tuner is included. The Qosmio weighs in at 10 pounds and has outside dimensions of 16×11.5×2 inches. The full-size keyboard and all connector ports provide for a professional, amateur and multimedia set of experiences. Networking is supported

by Ethernet, wireless, dial-up modem and Bluetooth. Even without a separate keypad, tax and accounting professionals can use this laptop for all computing needs.

Fujitsu

LifeBook T4210 Tablet PC — \$2,100

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low weight, convertible screen, and full computing capabilities make the LifeBook worth a serious look.

SCANNERS

Scanning enables the transfer of paper documents to digital format. Very often, tax files arrive in shoeboxes, audit work papers are prepared by clients, and so on. Having a scanner will make digitizing documents accurate, quick and easy, facilitating the creation of digital documents that can be sent using e-mail attachments or direct scan from your computer, which is especially helpful when paper documents, such as legal contracts need to be sent across town or across the country.

Epson

GT-2500 — \$600

This is an excellent office-based flatbed scanner. The imaging technology and 50-sheet automatic document feeder, automatic duplexing and one-button

scanning combine to support office scanning needs. Affordably priced, the GT-2500 can scan index cards to legal size at 1200×1200 dpi for quality text or graphics detail. The Epson GT-2500 is no larger than a desktop printer, which makes a small enough footprint for any office. Flatbeds make it easy to scan books, bound workpapers, stapled tax returns and more. Of course, you do have to keep the glass clean. With the auto feed, unstapled papers can be fed, scanned and digitized at a speed of 27 ppm for black and white documents.

Fujitsu

ScanSnap — \$500

The ScanSnap is a spool-feed scanner. The footprint is 5.9×11.2×5.7 inches. The document feeder holds 50 pages. Its resolution is only 600 pixels per

inch (ppi), which makes it a little light for graphics but just fine for text.

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the file name and location and then scan the document(s). The ScanSnap is bundled with a document manager, and users can direct scan to Adobe PhotoShop, Outlook or other OCR programs.

CELL PHONES

Everybody has at least one cell phone. Some of you may have more than one. The key is to understand the difference between what you use the cellular equipment for and the features that are currently available on equipment that is used to make and receive telephone calls. Do you have a need to receive e-mails, take pictures, listen to music, watch television programs, access the Internet, use computer applications, edit documents, and so on? It is important to know your use and search for the equipment that maps to your need. For example, if you need e-mail and Internet access, the monthly fees for cellular service will double — one fee for telephone access, a second fee for Internet. So make sure you get all of the information before committing to a particular phone and service provider.

Sony

Ericsson W600I — \$360

This phone is very usable as a Walkman, and, by the way, it is a phone. The innovative form factor is 360° swivel action, so you can talk with the phone opened, closed or angled to your own style. EDGE technology gives you faster data transfer, and W600 supports all existing GSM network frequencies, creating a reliable world phone. Plug in your headphones, crank up the volume and experience the music-phone revolution.

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from the LG LG is a robust entertainment package for the road warriors, providing access to multimedia messaging, e-mail access, and live chat through instant messaging service providers. The busy mobile professional can decide which services work best during their travel time.

Cell Phones/PDA Combo

One step up in price and a lot of steps up in features, the Cell Phone/PDA combos can replace two handheld devices with one. The key to using these devices centers on how much you use each of the two devices. If you have a need for on-the-road activities such as e-mail access, Internet access, text messaging, etc., then the combo unit is for your consideration. Important when doing your review, the total price has to include the equipment PLUS the extra monthly service cost for Internet connections. This monthly service fee is typically \$30 to \$50.

Motorola

Moto Q — \$200 plus service

The Motorola Q combines ultra-thin design, Windows Mobile software, and standard cell phone features to provide a very usable PDA/phone device. It is the best designed device in this category, as of today. The Q can be synched with your computer e-mail program of choice through USB, infrared or Bluetooth. Integrated

Bluetooth also enables earphone connection so you don't have to hold

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color screen, one hand phone functions and overall usability makes it a definite

option for the cell phone/PDA combo category. Its size is 4.2×2.2×0.8 inches,

and it weighs just 4.2 ounces. The typing keys are separated enough that fat fingers like mine can get at them. The keyboard is RIM's SureType hybrid, which has two letters on most keys and uses a very good predictive text system

to decide which letter you want to complete the word or phrase. It will take practice to arrive at a comfort level. Previous users of BlackBerries will have an easier training time. Of special note is the recent announcement from

the AICPA that RIM has been added to its growing portfolio of AICPA Member

Elite Values Programs. AICPA members can now get the best available pricing

and support services for the BlackBerry handsets, software and accessories by visiting www.blackberryforthecpa.com.

Cingular

8125 — \$250 (special deals with two-year service contracts)

The Cingular 8125 is one of those Swiss army everything included smart phones.

Unfortunately, with all these features, the phone is a bit large and heavy.

While the call quality is just okay, mobile professionals can obtain all the tools they need. Cingular offers two versions: one equipped with a 1.3-megapixel

camera and one without (the Cingular 8100). The phone measures 4.3×2.3×1 inch.

It is thicker and heavier (5.2 ounces) than a flip cell phone so you would

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features, such as vibrate mode, a speakerphone, voice dialing and Bluetooth. The Cingular 8125 is rated for five hours of talk time and up to seven days of standby time.

Palm

Treo — \$400 (with service contract and data plan)

The Palm Treo was one of the first combo units, and the good keeps getting better with the Treo. The Treo 700p runs Palm OS 5.4.9, has 128MB of memory

with 60MB available. It's currently available only in a CDMA version so it is only usable on the Sprint and Verizon services. The PDA functions are controlled by various buttons and will take a little training to speed up the use. These buttons do support one-handed use for basic functions.

Any

Internet activity is hobbled by slow access connections. A ton of third-party applications have been developed under Palm OS, everything from usable business

applications to games.

PORTABLE HARD DRIVE

Maxtor

— \$130

Maxtor will soon merge with Seagate, but, at the time of this writing, products

carry individual names. Maxtor has been making fixed and portable hard drives

for a long time. This pocketbook-sized device has 100GB. The device ships

with software for automatic data backup and synchronization. The System

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2-Bay Network Storage — \$230

D-Link has a 2-Bay Network Storage Enclosure designed to enhance all kinds

of usable file sharing — data, music, video, etc. The enclosure supports any two internal 3.5-inch SATA hard drives that you purchase separately. A built-in FTP server enables the accessing of stored files through the Internet,

built-in UPnP audio visual (UPnP AV) or a media server. Backup and mirroring

applications are part of the base components. There are four different hard drive modes (Standard, JBOD, RAID0, RAID1) so the user can select the configuration

best suited for his/her needs. This device is especially useful for SOHO networks

that want to use advanced features when connecting external file storage.

D-Link ships with an Easy Search Utility software that permits easy location

of files and data.

OTHER

Microsoft

Ergonomic Keyboard 4000 — \$60

Carpal tunnel syndrome sufferers, meet the Natural Ergonomic Keyboard 4000.

Although awkward to use at first, especially with the reverse slope attachment,

the keys conform to the finger bend. The keyboard has a great tactile feel.

If you know how to touch type, then go to your nearby computer store and

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program

commands? If so, then you'll want to check out this keyboard. Holding down the added "optimize" key transforms many of the keys to command functions. See the graphic for examples. You can convert the number pad to lots of cursor moves like arrows, page moves, home and end. Combining the optimize and shift keys offers even more selections. As with other keyboards,

be aware that if you really like this keyboard, you will have to keep it with you (it connects via USB). Using a different keyboard will be difficult.

MojoPac — \$50 MojoPac (www.mojopac.com)

from RingCube Technologies allows for the temporary use of programs and data

from one computer to another. Applications such as tax planning, financial planning, decision analysis and so on, can be used at a distance with ease.

MojoPac software is installed on any USB or Firewire Flash Drive with enough

disk space to install your version of a program. Your data and program preferences

are also copied. At no time is the software disabled on your main computer. You plug the flash drive into another computer and run your program(s) as if you had lugged your multi-pound laptop with you. When finished, you unplug

the flash drive, and the temporary host computer is back to the way it was.

Your data and program were not saved on the temporary computer, and there

is no security issue. MojoPac has tested and verified a lot of programs, but you should check with the company before the dreaded "assumptions" push you over the edge. It should be easy to test; all you need are two

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The Dock has a vertical design for a smaller desktop footprint. It also reduces any problem of resting the laptop and its battery on top of another electronic device. When you carry the laptop away from your office, it is very useful to have an easy one-plug connection between the laptop and accessories, such as a second monitor, network connections and audio speakers.

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Technology

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