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New Years bring new opportunities. Most firms have stabilized their network infrastructures and production processes, and are now experiencing a minor lull in activity before the busy season really kicks in. This lull provides all of us with an opportunity to contemplate new technologies for the year ahead as well as dream about those that are on the horizon.

This month's column is dedicated to 12 future technologies and predictions to give you something to mull about over your next cup of coffee.

1 PORTAL STANDARDIZATION

All tax and accounting firms will utilize a portal solution that is integrated either with their tax workflow application or their document management application, so that it is easy to use for both clients and firm personnel. While most will be in-house for 2008, there will be a push towards web-based solutions managed by the big three vendors (CCH, Thomson, Intuit) as they can provide enterprise-class security and management.

2 OVERSIZE & MULTIPLE SCREENS

According to the 2007 AAA Paperless Benchmark Survey, the majority of firms had standardized on dual-screen monitors this past busy season, and 10 percent had someone with triple screens, which we expect to be the standard in

2008.

3 SECURITY GETS TOUGHER

With virtually all data within a tax and accounting firm being digitized, the need to proactively protect this data will be driven home. Firms will outsource more and more security requirements such as using outsourced e-mail/spam
services, network monitoring, and having formal security audits performed.
Access controls will tighten up beyond just changing passwords to include security tokens and biometrics. All data within the firm and offsite will be encrypted using tools such as PGP.

4 INTELLIGENT ENTRY

Reliability of scanning applications will improve dramatically this year to push scanning to the front end, creating a standard bookmarked PDF source
document. Within a few years, these applications will import data directly into the appropriate space on the tax return, particularly once IRS mandated
bar coding allows this information to be input with 100 percent accuracy.

5 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT RULES

The ability of firms to capture and manage knowledge
will become a priority in the next decade, as all data is stored digitally
in Terabytes of hard disk space either within the firm or to an Internet site.
Tools such as SharePoint and Groove will drive collaboration between firms
and their clients, further cementing the trusted advisor relationship. These Microsoft knowledge
management capabilities could evolve to become the document

management systems

out not only from the Practice Management (time and billing) applications,
but also from tax workflow providers and document management applications.

7 WIMAX & BROADBAND CELLULAR DRIVE "THIN LAPTOP" ADOPTION

Verizon, Sprint and AT&T will roll out 1Mbps and faster broadband connectivity
either through WiMax or other broadband
cellular services. This will allow remote users to connect to firm resources
via Citrix/Windows Terminal Services and access firm data and resources without
having any data locally, reducing the security implications of a lost or stolen
laptop.

8 TOUCH TECHNOLOGY EVOLVES WITHIN ACCOUNTING APPLICATIONS

The multiple touch capabilities of Apple's iPhone and Microsoft's
Surface computing platform will fire up the imagination of developers to allow
us to deliver data access capabilities that will get us to a truly "paperless"
world. Imagine the ability to review multiple documents on a flat electronic
desktop and "push" them onto a projection screen, to an e-mail
account or to a document management system with a touch of the screen or a
flick of the wrist. Next-generation auditors and tax personnel will review
and analyze data in a fashion similar to the movie "Minority Report,"

but on huge conference tabletop screens. The first working phase will

(QuickBooks integration) to develop a relationship with consumers that will
eventually carry over into small business and then larger organizations. Google's
web-based office productivity tools will gain market share in small business
and home use, forcing Microsoft to accelerate development of ASP-optimized
versions of Word, Excel, Outlook and other Office tools.

10 VISTA/OFFICE 2007 LEADS TO TAX AND ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONAL ASPs

Vista and Microsoft Office 2007 will become the standard in tax and accounting
firms for at least the next six years.Firms and vendors will standardize on
Office 2007 for longer than previous versions of Office, as the rest of the
business world transitions to web-based applications and "Software as
a Service." Microsoft and Google will duke it out to deliver these completely
web-based applications, most of which are not compatible with today's
accounting vendor applications. The longer Office lifecycle will be forced
as accounting vendors scramble to rewrite their applications to run with Microsoft
WinMin and a thin web version of Office that downloads just what you need,
just when you need it. In the interim, there will be a HUGE opportunity for
a comprehensive accounting suite that is completely web-based and written
in current programming languages to evolve and take measurable market share

during the next decade as the product is scalable to any size firm and has

release of the first service pack.

11 VoIP EVERYWHERE

More firms will replace their aging phone systems with Internet-based systems
that also allow for "softphone" capabilities. Softphones can be
carried outside the office and provide office extension access wherever these
phones can get an Internet connection. Digital cellular providers will also
begin offering VoIP plans that will provide a virtual phone extension anywhere
the recipient can get a signal.

12 EYEGLASS PROJECTION SYSTEMS

As smartphone devices proliferate and can access and process virtually every
firm application and data, the ability to see the complete document on a screen
projected into video glasses will happen and also provide privacy in viewing
these documents. Prototypes such as Lumus Video Eyeglasses will eventually
be made small enough to attach to any eyeglasses to see full-screen documents
so you can provide laptop-like functionality in a hand-held device. With the
continued development of ultra-mobile PCs, the lines between a smartphone
and PC will blur.

The wonderful thing about technology is that it constantly evolves and provides

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