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Summertime in tax and accounting firms provides one of the few lulls in activity that allows firms the opportunity to evaluate and implement new products to streamline their core production processes. The transition to a digital environment is making firms evolve how they are creating, storing and linking information that was simply not possible in a paper-based environment. In many cases, today's digital information can be integrated with other applications either directly or through import routines, both saving time in re-keying this data, as well as by reducing the time required to reconcile the information in multiple locations. While the obvious place to look for integrating your accounting tools is within the same accounting product suite, there are also opportunities to link generic data from different vendors. Below, is a list of the best locations to evaluate for integrating your applications and taking advantage of the capabilities within today's accounting applications. Spending time now looking through these features within your firm's accounting products will save you time in the long run.

- **Organizer Production:** Most of today's organizers have a cover letter feature that can be edited to include the firm's standard engagement letter and instructions so there is no need to print them out separately and hand collate them. While digital organizers have been minimally used by clients, they do allow the importing of data directly into the tax return, which streamlines processes if done properly the first time.
- **Tax Projections:** Some of the tax programs have their own projection software while the leading product has the ability to import data directly from these tax vendors. One caution on any of these linked projection

tools is to be sure to provide training since analysis and printing of reports

Research and Forms: Some of the top tax programs have the capability to jump directly to their research and forms applications from within a tax return, which saves time launching another application. Often times, firms selected their research and forms products based on their history with the paper services so today it makes sense to re-evaluate the benefits of linking within the same suite, which can also lower the firm's overall costs.

- **Trial Balance to Tax:** For business returns, many firms utilize their audit/trial balance application to do adjusting entries. These trial balances can be set up with tax groupings to transition this data to the tax return. While the initial training and setup may require a significant amount of time, most firms feel it is well worth the effort in future years.

- **Trial Balance to Financial Statements:** Each of the top audit document containers can either link to Word/Excel for financial report preparation or have their own report writing tool. By using the linked processes, firms can make an adjusting entry and then reprint the report with the corrections flowing through. These programs also have integrated print macro features to allow multiple documents to be printed into one PDF document so the financial reports are printed consistently.

- **General Ledger to Trial Balance:** One of the first steps in the audit process is getting the trial balance from the client. By requesting this in a digital format such as Excel, it can be imported in most of today's audit document containers, saving time with keying and looking for out-of-balance amounts.

- **Tax Workflow:** Traditionally, firms have had a system for tax lead schedules, another for due date monitoring, and another for managing the staffing of the jobs. With today's workflow tools that are often integrated with document management, this information is keyed into one

application

to help firms assess audit risk and improve overall reporting of results to clients. Many of these tools can integrate with the audit document containers for easier use of this information.

- **Data Extraction:** While data extraction has traditionally been done with third-party products, some of the vendors are now including this capability within their audit tools on top of Excel, which is the most common format for clients exporting their files.

- **E-mail File Transfer:** Many firms continue to utilize e-mail for sending and receiving client files. Some of the document management products have tools to simplify the importing of attached documents into their programs.

- **Accounting Product to Write-Up:** While many firms and clients have transitioned to QuickBooks, Peachtree or other small business accounting products, they are not always happy with the financial statement formatting they get out of these applications. Most of today's integrated write-up products can import this information, which can then be linked to the tax return.

- **Payroll Services:** Many firms utilize external payroll services but are still physically delivering paystubs. Most of these services now integrate with their portal solutions that streamline the delivery of digital paystubs so that the employee can look up their information online and the firm does not have to.

- **Microsoft Office Integration:** Virtually every accounting application has the ability to export to Word or Excel for easier formatting or manipulation. In addition, these tools can link to Outlook for communication with clients so it is usually just a matter of being aware of these items and training personnel.

For any of the processes listed above where the firm experiences a bottleneck, I recommend that you contact your vendor for both products to see what tools

and training are available to streamline their usage.

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