From the November 2007 Issue

Write-up services have long been one of the core offerings of year-round accounting firms. Whether performed monthly, quarterly or periodically, client write-up is not an exact process, per se, but often includes entering transactions like bills, invoices, periodic expenses, bank reconciliation and asset treatments, with the end-goal of producing financial statements that explain the fiscal health of the entity. Write-up is often joined by other periodic but technically independent tasks such as after-the-fact payroll, sales tax compliance and other issues. As such, it is an excellent way to keep in contact with clients, which can lead to additional services and revenues.

But write-up has fluctuated in popularity among accountants over the past few years, especially since the boom of self-service accounting software in the later 1990s. The reason why is pretty easy to figure out, too: Many SMB products made it easy for clients to royally mess up their books, so write-up turned into a form of forensic accounting. Gone are the days when the work was basically after-the-fact accounting and clients would just bring in their boxes of receipts, their check ledgers, bills and bank statements. With clients entering transactions themselves, and sometimes editing them without an audit trail, or posting incorrectly and making other errors, the software would give them incorrect feedback on the financial condition of their business.

That's
when accountants started dreading write-up. The time required to perform the service increased dramatically as professionals had to diagnose more complex account discrepancies and make countless adjusting entries. The growth of online banking helped with reconciliation as statements could be imported, but client

errors and creative bookkeeping practices made the process more cumbersome than

I guess.

Other significant changes have included improved online capabilities such as data transfer, which allows clients to send their books to their accountant. It also includes online access tools that have allowed accountants to log into their clients' accounting programs remotely and either work within it or grab the data and work within their system. But the most dramatic technological shift has the potential of getting rid of data transfers completely. No more synching or "bridges" either.

Unified Professional/Client Accounting
The whole client write-up model exists in its current form because of the need to have the professional access and fix client data, and then provide reporting. This necessarily requires somehow moving data from a client's software to their accountant's software. Meanwhile, the time in-between is somewhat of a limbo period, but most systems have managed this period. But what if there was no need to transfer client data?

Improvements in online accounting systems, Internet speeds, security and other factors have affected many areas of the professional/client relationship. Notable among these have been secure client portals that allow greater collaboration and sharing of documents and data files. But these same technological advances have allowed developers to bring a new breed of accounting system to bear. These programs are built for accountants and either integrate or have various modules to accommodate all of the other services that a firm provides. But most dramatically, they also have a client-side component. That is, the system is controlled by the accounting firm, but day-to-day transactions, vendor and customer records, invoicing and billing, even payroll, can be performed by the client who logs

into an online extension of the system designed for their use. The specific

- Asset Management
- Financial Statement Generation

- Inventory Adjustments

The two most prominent such systems on the market are Thomson Tax & Accounting's
CS suite of professional accounting products with the addition of Client Bookkeeping Solution, and the Accounting Relief AC system from AccountantsWorld. Thomson Tax & Accounting's offering, formerly branded Creative Solutions,
is most commonly utilized as a server-installed program on the firm's
side, with the optional online component for clients and with data synching
into the professional program. Accounting Relief AC, on the other hand, is a
totally web-based system that automatically includes the web-based client
accounting
system.

Intuit's QuickBooks doesn't quite fit this definition, even with
the online version, since the client and professional each have separate installations
of the core program. NetSuite, although totally web-based, also doesn't
quite fit this definition, since it is primarily an in-house product that, while
a company can grant their accountant full access to, is not primarily geared
toward in-firm use by public accountants serving multiple business clients.

Unified accounting systems are a whole new breed that will likely redefine
write-up, since the systems will enable public accountants to have total control
and supervision of client books at all times. Client errors won't go away
entirely, but the process will be more efficient and take much less time, while
also strengthening the client relationship.

—————————————————————————

CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business

— ProSystem *fx* Write-Up

ProSystem *fx* Write-Up is one of CCH's newest additions to the *fx* product line of tax and workflow management systems for professional accounting practices, providing powerful financial statement preparation, bank reconciliation features, trial balance, options for integrated or online client payroll processing...

Read Full
Review

CCH Small Firm Services —

TaxWise Client Write-Up & ATX Client Write-Up

After CCH's acquisition last year of the TaxWise and ATX tax systems, the parent company moved the two professional preparation packages into a new division, CCH Small Firm Services.

Read Full
Review

CYMA Systems, Inc. — CYMA

Accounting for Windows Client Write-Up

CYMA Accounting for Windows is an accounting platform for mid-market companies, offering modules for management of GL, AP, AR, reconciliation, inventory, payroll, POs, job costing and other functions.

Read Full
Review

Intuit — QuickBooks: Premier

Accountants Edition

Intuit offers two professional write-up systems

Financials system, which provides business bookkeeping for small and mid-sized businesses, and the Xpert Write-Up system.

Read Full
Review

PC Software Accounting, Inc.
— Client Write-Up for Windows

The Client Write-Up system from PC Software Accounting, Inc. is geared toward providing professional accountants with the ability to produce customizable client financials, GL and journal management, integrated bank reconciliation and after-the-fact payroll functions, along with W-2 and 1099 reporting capabilities.

Read Full
Review

Thomson Tax & Accounting
— Write-Up CS

Thomson Tax & Accounting is one of only a few software vendors that offers fully integrated applications across the spectrum, from an in-house client bookkeeping solution, through write-up and trial balance, and even continuing through tax planning and compliance. The company's Write-Up CS is one of the leaders in the genre, sharing data with the other programs in the Thomson Tax & Accounting CS suite (formerly Creative Solutions).

Read Full
Review