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*From the September 2009 Issue*

Over the past 25 years of running my practice, I've witnessed the popularity of payroll services come and go... and come again ... in mainstream accounting. Currently, we are experiencing a "come again" phase. Payroll is creating a buzz in the profession, and many firms are talking about it. I believe that payroll offers a significant revenue opportunity. In my own practice, "winning with payroll" means providing a value-added service for clients that creates another revenue stream for the firm. And rest assured, the software and technologies exist to enable any small firm to provide payroll like the big guys.

I prefer to offer services in my firm that are ongoing and self-directed. I'm talking about services that can be offered over and over again to multiple clients using the same workflow process, managed by para-professionals (not me), and generating regular income. This is accomplished by applying the right technologies to maximize workflow efficiency. For all these reasons, payroll represents the type of profitable service offering I like, and it also provides a much needed client service.

Let's explore how a paperless payroll process can work today:

- Your client visits your website to enter hours.
- Data seamlessly flows into your payroll software, eliminating rekeying of data (and transcription errors).
- Payroll is processed and deposited to each employee bank account electronically (you can also use pay cards for employees who do not have a bank account).
- With the click of the mouse, all employee paycheck stubs are posted within their private portal, where they can conveniently access payroll information

(including W-2s).

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process. As I travel around the country and talk to hundreds of accounting firms, I'm occasionally asked if providing information through portals (or within "the cloud") means that we are losing touch with clients.

My response is typically to offer the following example: If you had to choose between two banks and one did not offer ATMs, online banking or electronic bank statements because they preferred to do business the old fashion way (face time only), would you choose this bank? I think we all know the answer. The point is that convenience is key. We can still provide our clients with personalized service — encouraging face-to-face meetings — but in the end, all clients will want the option and convenience of web-based services.

There are several solutions on the market that can help firms accomplish an automated, paperless payroll process. And taking operations to "the cloud" is easier than you might think. I've been a big fan of cloud computing for some time, mainly because there are so many powerful solutions available to support it, especially for payroll services. The power behind these solutions are high-quality, mega-secure data centers that enable round-the-clock uptime and with anytime/anywhere access.

As you read various payroll-related articles within this issue (see the payroll review that begins on page 6 in this issue.), whether you are already providing payroll services or you're just contemplating it, make sure you think about all the capabilities that these solutions provide. Firms should evaluate their service offerings each year to ensure they are employing the best technologies and implementing tested and proven workflow strategies to maximize efficiency and profits. I'm confident that if you do your homework, you will find that your firm can also be "winning with payroll!"

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