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Isaac M. O'Bannon • Nov. 01, 2009

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Small businesses turn to their public accountant for many different reasons. Some want their taxes done; others want business consulting, payroll services or countless other functions that your firm may provide. But almost never will a client ask for “write-up” because it’s a word used by professionals. It’s a term of art that you know really means, “cleaning up client mistakes and ensuring that their books are really in order.”

Write-up may seem like a thankless task at times, but without this core service, most of the other functions you provide to clients would be without a foundation. Without having confidence in a company’s financials, most accountants would be leery to complete tax engagements or provide advice on business management strategies. It would be similar to a physician advising surgery or attesting to a patient’s health without first performing a physical and perhaps advanced tests.

While the term doctoring the books is obviously worth avoiding, the medical analogy is appropriate, especially for small businesses without an experienced bookkeeper in-house, because the data is prone to error. And so, without periodic examination of a business’ financial health, it can be futile to even try to give clients the services they think they want and need. The results of write-up can also give accountants a better ability to perform more advanced analysis and identify potential sales, cashflow, inventory and other trends that the client should take steps to either take advantage of or avoid.

At the heart of write-up, however, is the occasionally grueling work of going

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Likewise, the leading client-side accounting systems have become more controllable, providing audit trails, advanced security features, and other ways to help minimize errors and intentional misuse by business users. Mistakes still happen, of course, but that is what leads to the need for write-up services.

At their most basic level, write-up packages are essentially just professional accountant versions of bookkeeping programs, providing GL, AP, AR, check writing, payroll and other traditional business accounting needs. But true write-up packages add to these core elements with modules specifically designed for analyzing transactions more quickly, streamlining reconciliation, and producing professional GAAP and IFRS compliant financial statements, with accompanying compilation or review letters.

The more advanced write-up programs provide greater flexibility in reporting and customization of user interfaces to allow for individual preferences, while also offering streamlined integration or import of client data, and corresponding export of corrected data back into the client's bookkeeping system. Many also offer after-the-fact payroll, since the end product of payroll results in transactions that need to be appropriately managed in the clients' books, and the professional accountant can use the data for wage reporting and compliance purposes.

All of the programs reviewed in this section offer professional-level capabilities for managing virtually any number of client businesses. But just as a small business accounting system can play a significant role in the operations of a client, the selection of a professional write-up system that will assume an integral position in the practice is a major decision. Firm management should

find a solution that meets the needs of the firm as it relates to integration

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services, including reconciliation, reporting, check writing and full GL, along with trial balance capabilities and options for after-the-fact payroll, live payroll and other programs.

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CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business

– ProSystem *fx* Write-Up

CCH is one of the most well-known technology providers to the tax and accounting profession, offering its ProSystem *fx* Suite of integrated programs that cover virtually every aspect of client engagements and practice management, including tax compliance, trial balance, engagement management, document management, asset depreciation and workflow tools, along with many others.

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CCH Small Firm Services – ATX

Client Write-Up & TaxWise Client Write-Up

CCH Small Firm Services, which includes the ATX and TaxWise professional tax compliance suites, also offers professional accounting systems geared toward practices who offer additional services to their clients.

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CYMA Systems, Inc. – CYMA After-the-Fact Module

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Edition 2010

QuickBooks is to small business accounting as Microsoft is to operating systems or the iPod is to portable music. By far the dominant vendor in the space, Intuit offers several general versions of QuickBooks, starting with Simple Start and moving up into the more comprehensive Pro, Premier and Enterprise Solutions.

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Micronetics, International – Accounting Xpert Enterprise Edition

Micronetics recently released Accounting Xpert Enterprise Edition – Client Write-up, a completely new program from the vendor, which has been developing accounting software since 1978. The new Enterprise Edition of Xpert continues in the tradition of the company's Xpert Write-Up system.

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

On the market for nearly 15 years, the Client Write-Up for Windows system has continued to evolve over this time, providing core write-up features that include GL, bank reconciliation, and after-the-fact payroll with compliance reporting. It also has an optional Job Costing feature.

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[BlackLine Systems – Financial Close Software Suite](#)

Many technology vendors develop business accounting systems for the broad market, providing customization options that allow financial managers to tailor some of the functions and features to their needs. But for those businesses that manage their close processes internally and have more complex processes and reporting requirements, a general purpose solution can't always provide all of the functionality they require.

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2009 Review of Client Write-Up Systems— Comparison Chart

Technology

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