Jun. 02, 2010

From the June 2010 Issue

Today's small businesses are learning how to run lean all of the time. This isn't necessarily a new reality, but the tight economy of the past few years has certainly caused small business owners to be increasingly aware of every dime they spend and every one they bring in. Both of these dimes are equally important to the potential success of the business, but at the end of the day you hope to have more in the "bring in" column than in the other.

Fiscal responsibility is a good thing, of course, and always has been. But working harder doesn't always equal greater productivity or a stronger bottom line. As the saying goes, sometimes it takes money to make money, and sometimes you've got to spend in order to achieve better savings in the long term. The key is to ensure that these expenses are investments that will result in better efficiency, productivity or other positive effects that will produce the most beneficial return on the small business' investment.

There are simply too many technologies on the market that promise to help businesses run more efficiently to possibly cover them all here. And no one has the time to weed through all of them, especially when each one may have greater or different benefits depending on the kind of small business for which it is used. For accounting professionals whose small business clients often turn to them for technology advice, this can be particularly challenging. That's why, each year, we dedicate some of our time and space to highlighting a handful (or two) of technologies that may be useful to some or all of your small business clients.

Since your profession depends on your clients' success, it's in

Overview: As its name would suggest, ExpenseWare is geared toward tracking and reporting of expenses, but the system offers several additional benefits for businesses. Since it is web-based, users can access it from anywhere, which helps get rid of the excuse of lost receipts and paperwork because the business or client expenses can be immediately entered as they are incurred.

ExpenseWare provides several customization features that let small and mid-sized businesses set up the program to allow for expense allocations by category, company departments, company clients, jobs/projects or other factors, as well as the ability to split or itemize expenses. After entry and allocation of expenses, a supervisor approval process can be used based on an employee's position and security level rights, with supervisors having access to reporting and the ability to flag individual expenses, add comment or return the expense report to the employee to clarify questions, with optional automatic email alerts that keep staff and management informed of the process. After entry and approval, the business' bookkeeping or internal accounting team receives the expense report in a format that allows data import and entry of transaction items into QuickBooks or other small business accounting programs.

Potential Benefits: In addition to increasing the accuracy of expense reporting and decreasing lost or forgotten entries, the automation features in ExpenseWare can help speed customer expense collection processes and the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses by employees. Reports can be imported into all small business accounting systems and, because it is web-based, employees can enter expenses from anywhere, and managers can view reports and make approvals from anywhere and at anytime.

BILL.COM

Target Small Business Type: Generally any small business

an invoice and upload it to the secure Bill.com service. After setting up basic vendor information, including TIN, address, contact data, account, etc., scanned/faxed invoices are assigned to clients and scheduled to be paid based on the contract terms or invoice due date. Bill.com can be used in multi-user environments where approvals are required, with the program automatically routing e-mail reminders and sign-offs to responsible supervisors. After final payment approval, Bill.com sends out payment to the vendor.

A recent addition to Bill.com is the ability for vendors to sign up to receive their payments electronically directly into their banking account, which speeds up payment and receipt for both parties, while also removing paper checks from the process. Since mailed checks are vulnerable to theft and loss, not only does this save the vendor a trip to the bank, but it also heightens their payment security.

Bill.com automatically synchronizes with QuickBooks and Intacct, and reports can be imported into any other accounting system, with invoice, payment, account and other data directly routed into the payables and GL.

Potential Benefits: Automated bill management and online payment to vendors helps reduce stacks of invoices, while also ensuring that vendors get paid on time. The web-based system is extremely easy to use and requires no contracts, and integration with QuickBooks and Intacct means it seamlessly transfers data as necessary when the payments have been processed.

QVINCI PRO

Target Small Business Type: Small businesses with reliance

With Qvinci, all authorized staff at a business can look at the same key business indicators, which are updated in real-time and displayed in dashboard views for various levels of responsibility, including options specific to small businesses, executive needs, business intelligence, financial accounting, QuickBooks reporting and Excel integration. By using dashboards and always ensuring that users are looking at the same live data, staff members are better able to collaborate and work toward goals and objectives, as well as establishing metrics for improving performance. Managers get better control over productivity, with quick overviews of key indicators, activities, budget-to-actual reports, early warning indicators and other reports.

Potential Benefits: Qvinci is available in several versions depending on the number of staff and level of performance management small businesses
need. The system is ideally suited to businesses running QuickBooks, providing owners, managers and investors quick, deep and meaningful insight into their company's performance over time and projected into the future. The dashboard views not only bring this information to the forefront, they make the data understandable.

RE*SOLUTION

Target Small Business Type:
Businesses, especially small technology companies, with recurring billing to their customers for services such as renewals, subscriptions or support fees.

Overview: For software companies and other technology providers, recurring billing for service fees, support and maintenance are an integral

component of their revenue models, but they can be challenging to manage since

processes,
users can easily track, report, forecast and evaluate information, while rules-based access extends functions and management only to appropriately authorized staff. The system includes e-mail-based billing and notices, web-based report sharing, the ability to quickly import and export data and what-if budget scenario testing tools.

Financial and management reporting options further offer value, with the ability to track attrition, non-renewed products, sales, customer information and view unearned revenue.

Potential Benefits: What really makes Re*Solution valuable to businesses that rely on recurring revenue are several key features built around these needs, including matrices for price variance for individual or group, product groupings, tax and renewal information. The system also offers automated renewals functions, down-line invoicing, pro-rating and generous customization options.

TAX-ASIDE

Target Small Business Type: Self-employed earners and small business owners paying quarterly estimated taxes.

Overview: Working for yourself can be an incredibly liberating experience, but it can also be an educational one when it comes to taxes. For new entrepreneurs who previously had been W-2 employees, this can be especially so, as the realization that your income taxes and FICA contributions aren't

automatically deducted. And wait, what's with the self-employment tax

to properly calculate self-withholding in smaller periodic amounts, and also helping to schedule these set-asides and get reminders of due dates and other activity.

The system is based around the Periodic Estimated Tax Calculator, which simplifies the process of finding how much a self-employed person should set aside based on previous tax obligations, what part of the year they start planning and how frequently (weekly, biweekly, monthly) they wish to have estimated payments set aside. In addition to these calculations, the system offers the ability to manage catch-up payments and factor in credits and overpayments.

The DynaTax system can even be set up to have these estimated tax payment increments automatically transferred into an FDIC-backed and interest-bearing account in their own name, until the quarterly payment is due. Then, the taxpayer can make the quarterly estimated payment electronically through Tax-Aside.

Potential Benefits: Self-employed taxpayers are often vulnerable to underpayment penalties and other issues when it comes to managing their quarterly estimated tax payments. The Tax-Aside system makes managing the process much more efficient, with reminders and alerts, the ability to pay electronically from within the program, and even a scheduler feature for making weekly, biweekly or monthly payments into a taxpayer-held self-escrow account. For many, the thought of paying a smaller, pro-rated amount will be appealing, along with less likelihood of penalties.

XPANDEDREPORTS

Target Small Business Type: Small businesses using QuickBooks

Through direct integration with the accounting and inventory programs, XpandedReports
are much easier to use than Excel, letting users create dynamic or static reports, save reusable report templates, quickly create pivot tables with a single click, and easily combine data from multiple reports. Additional tools include superior filters that maximize search efficiency, unlimited grouping options, memorization features, strong import and export capabilities and greater customization.

Potential Benefits: Greater control over reporting can help small businesses better meet the financial and managerial requirements of any investors or lenders, while also greatly adding to the fiscal monitoring of key business data. Starting at only $19.99 per month, the XpandedReports is a cost efficient way to add more managerial control and gain deeper insight into QuickBooks data.

WORDPERFECT OFFICE X5

Target Small Business Type: Businesses of any size looking for a different office productivity system.

Overview: Microsoft has been the biggest player in the business productivity software realm since the late 1990s. There are, however, many options on the market. And the next largest is WordPerfect, which dominated the market before Microsoft's emergence. Not only is WordPerfect still around, but it is becoming increasingly popular again, especially among professional services firms. The new WordPerfect Office X5 suite is a full office workflow system, providing outstanding word processing, spreadsheet functions, visual presentations and email management. In other words, it does everything that Microsoft Office

does, but with a more streamlined workflow process, enhanced collaboration tools,

Potential Benefits: WordPerfect offers a fully capable office productivity system for significantly less cost than Office, while also offering complete professional support and online collaboration capabilities. The system is compatible with all Microsoft programs, including the SharePoint Server.

Technology

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