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From the October 2010 issue.

Last year, in a blog item for the electronic side of this publication, I declared that the fax machine was a technology dinosaur that should be relegated (like the IBM Selectric Typewriter) to a corner display at the Smithsonian.

Simply put, fax technology is too expensive, too inefficient and almost totally unnecessary for the accounting profession. Why buy the machine, the paper, an additional phone line and faxing software when you can simply save a document in PDF format and email it?

Steve Adams, the vice president of marketing for Protus (whose line of communication services includes the <http://www.Myfax.com> site) sees it differently. He points out while the fax machine itself may be obsolete, the technology is alive and well on the Internet and serves some useful purposes. One example is in the construction industry, which was a leader in the development of electronic ordering systems — systems that were built around fax technology. Other examples are industries like law and real estate, where hard signatures are required on contracts.

Adams has a point, but not one I can buy into for our firm. The truth is that most accounting firms operate at the leading edge of technology, where many law firms do not — and most of the realtors I know are technologically clueless. Accounting firms already have flat bed scanners and Adobe Acrobat or other PDF-creation software. So it is relatively simple to create a PDF, even one with a signature attached. For legal matters, it is a simple thing to print out a document, sign it and then scan as a PDF for distribution.

It's fast, and it's reliable. There are no busy signals, no 60-page

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a trusted source. Get public and private keys. Sacrifice a chicken while standing on your head on a Tuesday with a full moon. You get the idea.

I use a different system. First, I signed my name neatly on a blank piece of paper. Then I scanned it and cropped the image into a small, neat signature graphic in JPG format. When I need it, I just drop it into a document. Then I stepped it up a notch, spent a hundred bucks and got my own font. That is, I paid a company to take my written list of letters and my name to create a custom font. The advantage of this is that I can add a personal note to a letter or report that actually looks like my handwriting. And my signature is available in initials, first name, full name, etc.

At this point, the legal purists are, I am sure, rushing to their computers to fire off a blistering rebuttal about how such signatures are not legal, or valid or even permissible. Give me a break. In a pinch, my office manager signs my name better than I do. Many a time, I have been caught on vacation or on business travel out of the country when a document demanded immediate signature. And I can't begin to tell you how many payroll checks in days of old had her signature on it rather than mine. Neither the banks nor the employees cared. The fax is not dead yet, but it is terminal in stage 5. And PDF is rapidly emerging as the document format that will dominate forms and agreements in the next few years.

Reality Check

A compendium of ideas, products, rants and raves from the viewpoint of the author. Not that the author has no financial interests in any of the products mentioned. Feel free to disagree, or to share your ideas by sending them to davemcclure@cpata.com.

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of faxes your firm sends and receives. If the volume is high, it makes sense to select a site that offers low per-page costs combined with a minimal monthly fee. For companies with only minimal faxing needs, it makes sense to pay a little more per page with no recurring monthly or annual fee.

Google.

Just when you think that Google may be growing up into a real company with a real future, they do something silly. Fresh off of tweaking the noses of more than a thousand municipal bureaucrats nationwide with its “we might build a fiber network in your town” contest, the search giant is signaling it may get into the wireless spectrum game after all ... maybe even create its own national wireless network. Does this company actually have a plan? Or is it just having fun dabbling in broadband?

Netbooks. I have long been a fan of these slimmed-down, small-screen portables, especially for business travel. Priced under \$300, they seem to be a good balance of price and performance. But lately I have been seduced by a slightly upgraded version — call them a

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use as plain old telephones. Not true. Voice use of smartphones (in spite of the iPhone, Android et al) still outpaces data use by four to one. What does that mean for the cell phone manufacturers? Perhaps the problems with the iPhone antenna are a big thing after all.

Mini

Bluetooth Adapter. My BlackBerry allows for Bluetooth synching, but my desktop PC doesn't have Bluetooth capabilities. To the rescue:

A little nub of a Bluetooth adapter that plugs into any USB port and provides full Bluetooth capabilities. At prices of \$2 to \$20, these little buttons should be a permanent addition to a machine's USB ports.

Technology

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