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One of the things that is hard to get across in tough times is that a well-timed

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short-term, and even more in the long term. The right tool for the job makes all of the difference.

Too many times in the accounting world, we try to cut corners to solve our challenges, and don't get the right tool for a job. While we should be good stewards of our resources (and our clients'), tax and accounting professionals don't always have to stand for "cheapest price available." The investment for buying and implementing a business management application pales in comparison to the ongoing cost of using outdated systems that don't meet your business needs. I see this when I travel around the country consulting and speaking to accountants at seminars and conferences. Successful organizations are continually investing in the systems, tools and training needed to be market leaders in their niche fields, and are responding to the increasingly competitive environment by competing with the best people, tools and training they can find. Other organizations who are struggling have stopped making investments, and are drifting without purpose, hoping for "good luck" to save them.

An example of this is how companies who have specialized accounting and reporting needs, such as manufacturers, nonprofits and local governments, continue to use outdated applications from a generation ago. We often ignore the payroll costs of the additional work it takes to manually accumulate the data needed to run the business. Those systems were designed for a world that had just graduated from storing manual books, and integration of information between business processes and CRM applications was still a long way from reality. Modern tools free us from these spreadsheets, reconciliations and manual tracking lists, and allow us to focus on listening and responding to customer needs instead of patching broken systems.

Specialized industries like manufacturing and nonprofits have operational processes and reporting needs that are different from many generic service businesses. Many times, we understate the importance of those operational requirements and end up

spending more money in payroll costs because we have to track so many things

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designed to provide integrated features like workflow management, shipment tracking, payment processing and e-mail marketing for the business needs of these specialized industries.

For public accountants and consultants, Sage recently announced the Sage Nonprofit Solutions package for the Sage Accountants Network. This package provides popular nonprofit fundraising and financial management tools like Sage Fund Accounting, Sage Fundraising Online and Sage Grant Management at a very reasonable cost. Members receive discounts on training, technical support and other tools to help them understand and implement better business solutions. For accounting professionals who would like to expand their services to the nonprofit and government sectors, this package provides a wide array of tools and connected services at a minimal cost.

There is a better way to use technology to serve clients, and it involves spending less time doing back office tasks and more time face to face with customers solving business problems. Are you and your clients investing in your processes and people so you can be dominant in the future, or are you trying to work the same way you did a generation ago? Your approach to this challenge says a lot about the reality you will create for your organization. Will you invest so your firm can lead, will you aspire to work for a follower, or will you just close up shop and get out of the way?

Technology

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