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At Root & Associates, we put a lot of thought and discussion into finding the ideal plan for our 2012 tax workflow. Over the past year, I had the opportunity to speak with and gain insight from hundreds of firms about their 2012 tax season plans. So as I began to think about our plan, I started with these basic premises in mind:

- I want to promote and encourage as many clients as possible to use online client access (portals).
- I want to use up-front scanning to get documents digitized as early as possible in the process.
- I want to electronically file all returns.
- I prefer to print as few paper copies of returns as possible.
- I want our workflow system to electronically track the process and status of each return.

With these ideas in mind, we mapped out our 2012 tax process and began to discuss ways we could improve upon our existing processes. From tax organizer creation to final return delivery to the signature on the e-file form, we diligently discussed every detail of the process.

Organizers

We first thought about the organizer. We wanted to print as few organizers as possible. In 2011, we emailed the majority of our organizers sensitive information such as SSN, bank account Information and birthdates redacted. I've always felt a bit uneasy about emailing organizers due to the lack of security with email. I realize we redacted the sensitive information, but I still felt uneasy about it. This year, our plan is to put all organizers in our portals for online client access. The goal is to get clients to go to our website early in the tax process to encourage adoption. Clients can choose to print their organizer from their portal or just fill it out online.

Source Documents

Practice Management

Implementation of a practice management application is critical to project tracking, due date monitoring, database management and billing. For several years, our office has had the ability to electronically track projects from creation to completion. In my conversations with firms, I've found that this area of their practice has been slowest to adopt the latest technologies.

Electronic Filing

Electronic filing is a must today. The IRS made sure of that in 2010. Our firm has electronically filed all returns for many years and can't imagine *not* doing so today. The issue we continue to struggle with is the best way to get the e-file forms signed. We have, for the past several years, hoped the IRS would begin accepting electronic signatures on the form to better facilitate the process. And although the Service recently issued additional guidance on the topic, I don't feel their solution gets us to where we need to be to make the process more efficient.

Electronic Deliverables

Finally, our goal is to continue adoption across our client base of the electronic delivery of the client copy of the return. This means we need to continue to educate and encourage our clients to use our website, via the online client access, for the delivery of their returns. Close to 90% of our clients have already adopted this method of delivery from us. My goal for 2012 is to continue to make this form of delivery the preferred method.

Evolving

Our goals and processes are continually evolving. Some things work as anticipated, and some have to be tweaked along the way. The key is to realize that the path to continual improvement involves planning, executing and re-evaluating. I hope you