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Unless you know me personally, you wouldn't know that I've spent my entire professional career involved in creating accounting software for computer systems. In some cases, I have written the software; in some cases I have designed the software. And in many other cases, I have advised developers on strategies. I have taught CPE and reviewed accounting software for over 30 years. There has definitely been progress to the good over the last 20 to 30 years. The changes in the last decade have been both subtle and phenomenal. If you have not considered the accounting software you are using in your firm or what you've been recommending for your clients in the last few years, you may be making a strategic error. I can't teach you everything in one short article, but here are some notable trends.

– **Software as a Service, SaaS, is coming of age.** Running accounting software (and many other applications) through a web browser is working quite well. For example, Intacct, SAP Business ByDesign, AccountantsWorld Power Practice and Accounting Relief, XCM, Thomson Reuters GoFileRoom and GoSystem RS Tax, Avalara AvaTax, Sage Billing Boss, FreshBooks, and QuickBooks Online are all examples of SaaS accounting products with growing acceptance.

– **Connected Services from accounting software is solving many problems.** More than one major publisher is enabling their software by leveraging Internet technologies. Offerings like Sage Payment Solutions enable most of the Sage accounting software product line to process checks, credit cards and handle ACH entries while maintaining PCI compliance. Sage has multiple web-enabled and connected services offerings, such as Sage Fundraising Online, which inexpensively creates fundraising websites for your not-for-profit clients. Likewise, Intuit has been on a connected services strategy for several years. Many point solutions are being integrated as computers talk to other computers to solve specific business problems.

– **Accountant Networks & Community programs are improving and trying to help**

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accounting in house with QuickBooks, Peachtree, Thomson Reuters CBS and AccountantsWorld Accounting Relief. However, for various reasons, many organizations are pushing accounting services back to tax and accounting firms and, as a result, bookkeeping is back in vogue and can provide very profitable, recurring revenue streams. Specific write-up products from Thomson, Intuit and CCH enable firms to make greater profits and deepen client relationships while saving clients money. You'd be surprised at the number of firms that have entered the payroll business again using today's software to create a reliable, recurring revenue stream. (See page XX of this issue for a review on several client write-up products.)

– **Not-for-Profit Accounting products are making significant moves.** About 5 percent of all businesses in the U.S. market are NFP operations, and leaders like Sage, Blackbaud, CYMA, Intuit, Serenic, Open Systems TRAVERSE, and AccuFund have made important improvements in their software. Fund raising and grant management features have improved in the product lines, too. Sage MIP has introduced very affordable entry-level software that scales up larger than with prior versions. This Sage division is proactively asking for design suggestions from customers and non-customers alike to build better products in all of their existing categories. (See page XX of this issue for a review of several not-for-profit accounting products.)

– **Reporting is improving, but mostly in third-party products.** This part of the accounting software market has had more change than most of the other segments in the last five years. XBRL reporting from Rivet Software has made reporting easier and more flexible. BizNet Software's BizInsight has enabled powerful Excel reporting for most of the mainstream accounting products like MAS 500, MAS 200, Dynamics GP, Epicor and more. Even built-in reporting options from Intuit QuickBooks and Sage Peachtree have made good advancements. Repeatable reporting that takes very

little intervention to create a final work product, like the reporting in

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MISys for manufacturing, BillQuick for Time and Billing, Big Time for DCAA project management, and Wasp Barcode offerings are just a few of the examples. More are listed at www.accountingsoftwareworld.com/industry_solutions.

– **Traditional software is improving, too.** After spending so many years watching, helping and implementing software from QuickBooks to SAP, I can definitively state that most software publishers are continuously working to improve their products. Few have stood still. If you or your clients are not on the most current version of any of these software products, you are not getting the benefit of your software maintenance. You potentially have the opportunity to solve annoying problems by upgrading and training your people.

Hopefully, this brief tour through the accounting software market has given you enough reasons to invest some time to look around at what is new ... and what could benefit your firm and your clients. Using accounting software more than five years old is not saving your clients money; in fact, it is draining productivity, wasting both time and money. Staying on the same old software is just false economy. It is probably time to make a change! But please don't make the mistake we see firms making left and right in the market. Don't make an emotional purchase decision without doing an accounting software selection process. Buying accounting software without a selection process is a sure path to failure and squandered resources. In addition to the reviews you read in *The CPA & NSA Technology Advisor*, you can find additional information on accounting software at www.accountingsoftwareworld.com, including a selection process, reviews and other information. Best of luck in making the changes that I'm betting are needed for your firm and your clients. n

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