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Brian Tankersley • Jun. 11, 2014

Basic System Functions

In addition to its publishing products, Bloomberg BNA offers two software tools which are designed to help companies and practitioners stay up to date on tax rates and prepare accurate forms.

Practitioners and taxpayers should understand that tools like the two offerings from BNA reviewed here are best used in connection with the detailed instructions available from each state department of revenue or sales tax reference titles from major information services like Bloomberg BNA, CCH Intelliconnect, or Thomson Reuters Checkpoint.

BNA Sales & Use Tax Rates Online

This subscription website (salestax.bnasoftware.com) with the Rates Exporter provides users with downloadable composite rates for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and thousands of cities and counties which levy sales and use tax. Users can export data in four formats – Microsoft Excel, XML (extensible markup language), CSV (comma-delimited text) – or plain text, and updates can be scheduled to be automatically exported weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually.

The rate tables present a simplified view of the complexity of the thousands of rules and regulations associated with tax rates by presenting the composite tax rates for most applications, and in a few isolated cases they do not communicate the complexity associated with the laws and jurisdictions in some states.

- One example is Tennessee, which may have a multi-tier calculation for the sale of a

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Although the specific states have special tax rates which apply to a small number of specific locations in an area.

- Some states tax some items such as uncooked food, fast food, software, livestock feed, and services at rates other than the general rate which applies to most tangible product sales. Although the details we looked for are available when the user browses to the specific jurisdiction and expands the footnotes, this critical information must be sought out by users who are not familiar with the rules of the state.

Although sales tax rate information is provided in formats for import into point of sale and computer applications, users may have to manually filter and rearrange data into the specific format mandated by the device or application. Users may also need access to online property tax rolls or other databases to confirm whether specific addresses are included in the boundaries of a municipality or are outside its borders.

BNA Sales & Use Tax Forms Online

This tool is a traditional forms completion utility, and it includes over 3,400 different forms which can be filled out interactively or from stored data using a proprietary application for Windows PCs. Other than the delivery method for the updated forms changing to an Internet site instead of CDs and DVDs, the application is a traditional sales tax forms library application.

The forms coverage appears to include all major sales and use tax forms and the vast majority of minor forms, instructions, and publications for the states, although this opinion is based on cursory review of a very limited number of states, and was not a comprehensive reconciliation of the two lists. A listing of the forms included with the application is available on the company's website at

http://bnasoftware.com/Products/BNA_Sales_Use_Tax_Rates_and_Forms/Sales_Use_7

Both applications provide users with an online manual, a support website with

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- Organizations that would like to save time by prepopulating forms with key information for multiple clients/taxpayers or those that would like to import tax rate updates from a trusted source rather than manually keep up the information from state and local taxing authority announcements.

Strengths:

- Rate tables are updated at least monthly, and they include a comprehensive listing of rates for each US jurisdiction.
- The user interface for both products is simple to understand, and the Forms interface appears to have changed very little since I first used for the BNA Sales Tax Forms almost 15 years ago.
- The Forms product includes over 3,400 forms, and all items in the database are accepted by the taxing authorities for filing on paper. The collection of available forms is impressive, and is probably appropriate for someone who needs to prepare tax forms for paper filing.
- The tax rates application's optional Rates Exporter can be set to automatically schedule and send users updated rate tables on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual basis.

Potential Limitations:

- No options are available for electronically filing any of the forms created with the Sales & Use Tax Forms application.
- The rate tables exported from the Sales & Use Tax Rates product may be configured to list both the name of the jurisdiction and the five digit zip codes associated with each jurisdiction. Since multiple local tax jurisdictions can exist within a single zip code, users may need to verify whether a parcel is included or excluded from the borders of a city, town, or other special district.

Summary & Pricing

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Sales Tax

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