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The last 18 months have been a period of significant change for the document management systems of many accounting professionals and their firms.

- Popular small firm tax software publisher RedGear ceased operations in April 2013, and sold their customer lists to Thomson Reuters.   Users of the ArkWorks

document management system had to convert to another application last year.

traditional document management systems as they once after different needs in their home grown systems.

- Use of document storage systems on mobile devices like tables has resulted in many solutions creating mobile applications or web portals which access information the firm's document storage systems.
- Many on-premises applications providers like Office Tools Professional, Thomson Reuters, and Drake offer hosting services through partner companies like Cloud9 RealTime or internally hosted versions of their products to customers. The hosting solutions make it possible for firms to work with on-premises applications with the programs, data, and settings all stored in a remote, secure commercial data center.

These changes have made many firms rethink their processes, and are driving the adoption of workflow management and client portal initiatives in the second year after conversion. We believe that much of the activity with document management systems and document storage systems will be related to new firm creation, firm mergers, and the dissolution of firms which do not have viable succession plans.

Document Storage Solutions are one of several classes of applications which accounting professionals may use in a firm to store, organize, search, and retrieve their digital documents. Document storage applications are most commonly compared with document management solutions (which we cover separately in this issue). The primary distinction between document management and document storage solutions is the breadth and depth of functionality.

- **Document Storage Solutions** (DSS) typically have a more focused set of features and functions, which are often targeted to a specific niche such as direct integration with a particular tax prep package, integration with QuickBooks, or providing a secure file sharing solution. These applications are generally designed

to index data in a single (or small number) of ways, and may have a fixed

- **FileCabinet CS** by Thomson Reuters
- **Document Management Systems** (DMS) are designed as comprehensive enterprise solutions for automating the capture, storage and dissemination of all electronic documents and files in an organization. DMS applications typically, but do not always, have the ability to connect with products from multiple vendors and multiple index fields so that a single document can be simultaneously filed more than one way.

This year's review of Document Management Solutions includes six applications.

- **Cabinet SAFE CLOUD** by Cabinet
- **Axcess Document/ProSystem *fx* Document** by Wolters Kluwer, CCH
- **iChannel** by Conarc
- **eFileCabinet**
- **Doc-It Suite** by Doc-It Software
- **GoFileRoom ES** by Thomson Reuters

Document storage solutions are less sophisticated than document management systems, and typically offer fewer options for how documents are stored, indexed, and retrieved. Users should also carefully review the integrations for each package, as most packages have tight integration with one or two tax applications, while offering little to no integration with the other tax solutions.

As mentioned earlier, Document Management Systems are more sophisticated than Document Storage Solutions (which we will review in the July issue). DMS applications are designed address the need for long-term storage and tracking of documents throughout a specified useful life. Common features which are available in a DMS which are typically not included in a simple document storage product include:

- **Check In and Check Out** – This feature allows users to select and download a file

Multi-Layer Security – This feature allows firms to have complex permissions at different levels of granularity depending on the user's needs. For example, a firm could have assign rights to staff at the client level, the engagement level, and the file level.

While there are some good implementations of each solution, there are many bad implementations, especially where the firm decides to cut corners on training and consulting for the configuration and initial setup of the software. We agree that these services are expensive – but your services and wasted staff time are expensive also, and one wonders how many more staff and consultant hours a firm will throw at a botched self-implementation.

Professional assistance from a trained professional who is intimately familiar with the DMS/DSS product to be implemented are just as valuable as the services you receive from a hair stylist, an attorney, or a dentist. Just as you would not dream of cutting your own hair, representing yourself in court, or filling your own cavities, we think it every bit as foolish for your firm to implement one of these products without some significant consideration of the initial setup choices like:

- What is the firm's document retention policy?
- How will I organize my documents?
- What are the naming conventions and schemes for existing documents?
- Will I scan old paper documents like permanent files (probably) or prior year working papers (probably not)?
- What data will I port over from my old document management system into the new application?
- How will I restrict access to firm administrative documents so that internal HR matters are not shared with all employees?
- Will the application and related data be stored on a local PC, an internal server, or hosted by a commercial hosting provider?

- How will completed files be locked down so that they cannot be changed after

more likely to require training and consulting to successfully implement your application. While there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, it is important that firms deliberate and modify their internal processes to best take advantage of the tools in the new application. Planning before implementation reduces the number of documents which have to be manually refiled, reindexed, and de-duplicated due to a poorly thought out setup strategy.

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