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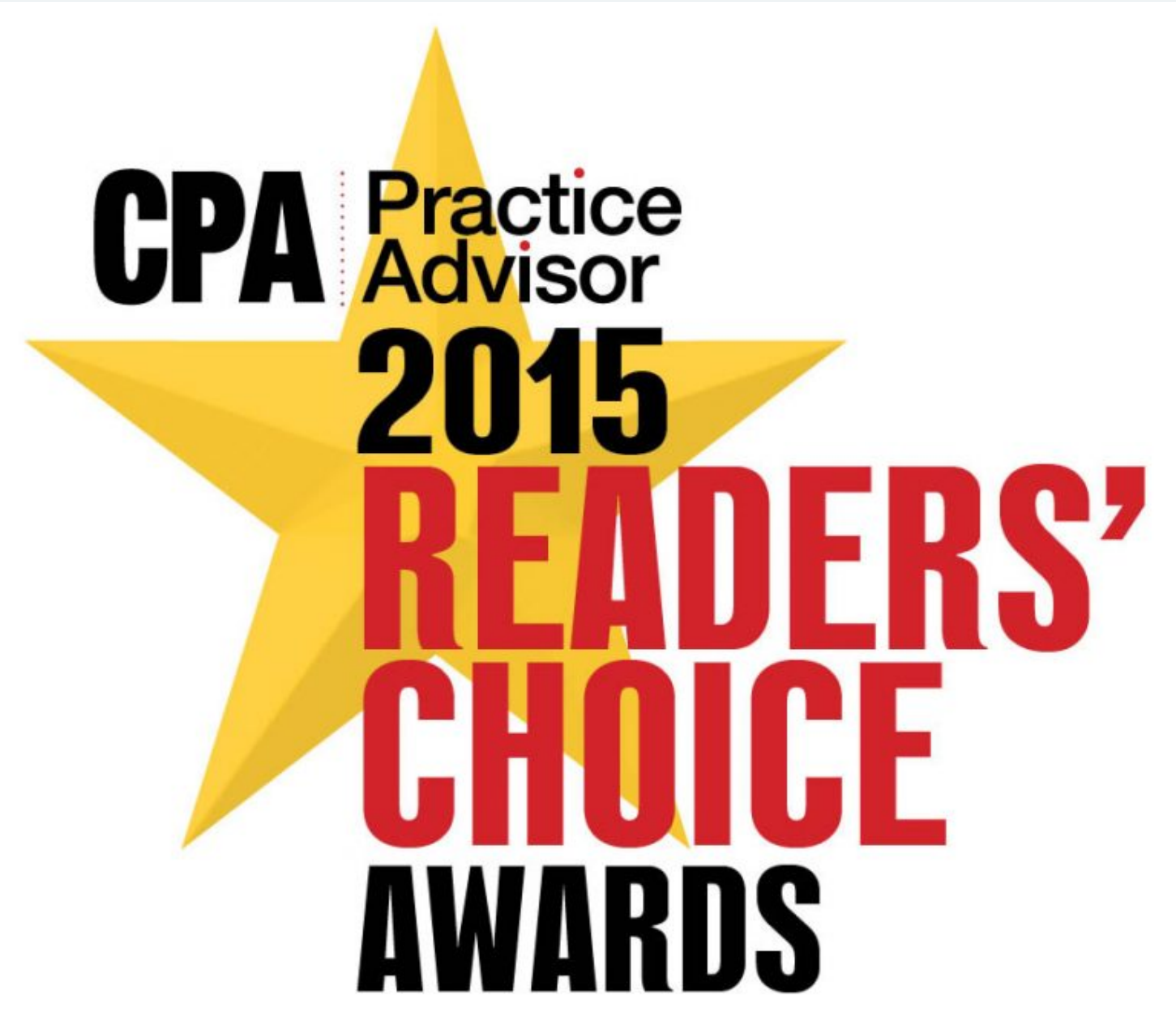
the dramatic changes in workflow processes and productivity.

Isaac M. O'Bannon • Apr. 12, 2015



Technology is at the core of professional accounting firms, and for more than 25 years, this publication has covered the evolution of not on the technology, but also the dramatic changes in workflow processes and productivity.

In this, the 11th annual edition of the **Readers Choice Awards**, we invited our readers

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practices in order to stay competitive in the constantly-evolving tax and public accounting space.

Now, on to the results! And a hearty "thank you" to the more than 5,000 readers who participated this year.

Info about how our users took the survey

- 86% on desktop/laptop
- 8% on smartphones
- 6% on tablets

IN-FIRM TECHNOLOGIES

Federal/State Income Tax Preparation

Insight: With about 92 percent of our Readers Choice voters using professional tax preparation software, the tax question is always the most anticipated. For 2015, the most popular systems were:

WINNER: Drake Software

Runners Up:

- Intuit ProSeries
- Thomson Reuters UltraTax
- Intuit Lacerte
- CCH ProSystem *fx*
- CCH SFS ATX/TaxWise

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Specialty Systems & Tax Prep Tools

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- SurePrep
- Bloomberg BNA 709 & 706 Preparer
- DynaTax

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Tax Planning Systems

Insight: Tax planning engagements have been on the increase, especially with the Affordable Care Act and other recent tax code changes that have taxpayers seeking answers and looking for proactive ways to lessen or at least optimize their tax obligations. They can also help strengthen relationships between a professional and his or her clients. Most tax preparation systems include basic planning capabilities, but for professionals seeking advanced functions that can generate hundreds of scenarios for many years in the future, there are specialty systems designed to optimize this experience. Among the more than 60 percent of voters who selected a product in this category, the most popular systems this year were:

WINNER: Drake Tax Planner

Runners Up:

- Intuit Lacerte Tax Planner
- Thomson Reuters Planner CS

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Tax & Accounting Research Systems

Insight: The ACA/ObamaCare required new forms and a lot of patience in dealing with clients who had seemingly unlimited questions for their tax professionals this

year. Fortunately, professional tax research systems were ready with insight, analysis

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- CCH Accounting Research Manager

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1099/W-2 Compliance

Insight: Getting dozens, hundreds or thousands of W-2s and 1099s ready within a few weeks at the end of the year is far too challenging for business owners, so they turn, of course, to their tax pro or accountant. In turn, the firm is challenged with producing the forms and getting them mailed to recipients, the IRS, SSA and state taxing jurisdictions across the nation. Fortunately, many programs on the market help to automate these processes, providing tools for streamlining workflow. Although many use state agency websites for direct reporting, about 55 percent of this year's voters selected a preference.

WINNER: AMS Software 1099-Etc

Runners Up:

- CCH SFS ATX and TaxWise Payroll Compliance Reporting
- Tenenz Laser Link or TFP

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Sales & Use Tax

Insight: State and local taxes can be not only a chore, but also a potentially expensive exercise for those not ready to handle the myriad differences in laws and reporting rules for the more than 8,000 taxing jurisdictions across the country. For the smallest businesses (one location or no location) with the simplest tax rules, it's not so difficult, but it's surprising how fast a few online or telephone-based sales can

snowball into wide-reaching nexus for the business. About 40 percent of our voters

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Sales & Use Tax Exemption Certificate Management

Insight: Businesses that sell for resell or to organizations that are tax exempt have additional reporting and management needs. While these programs are certainly more of a niche, about 10 percent of our voters have clients for whom these systems are vital.

WINNER: Thomson Reuters ONESource Exemption Certificate Mgmt.

Runners Up:

- Avalara AvaTax Certs
- Vertex Inc. Exemption Certificate Manager
- ISS Line Link

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Write-Up

Insight: Write-up is undergoing a major evolution as more and more firms encourage their business clients to move to cloud-based accounting systems that let them more easily access data and information in real-time. But traditional write-up is still a necessary service for some. The most popular among this year's voters:

WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Accountant

Runners Up:

- UBCC Real-Time Accounting
- Drake Client Write-Up
- PC Software Accounting Inc.

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WINNER: Thomson Reuters PPC SMART Audit Suite

Runners Up:

- CCH Knowledge-Based Audit Tools/Knowledge Coach
- Capital Confirmation

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Payroll

Insight: Many professional tax and accounting firms have taken back the payroll relationships with their clients, and are reaping the rewards as the latest generation of payroll systems are designed to automate virtually all of the recurring tasks and reporting functions necessary with payroll services, and they are designed to manage multiple clients. Add to this the additional benefits of the cloud, and professionals can manage these payroll processing functions from anywhere at any time, while also offering online portal access to their clients and their clients employees. The most popular programs this year were:

WINNER: ZenPayroll

Runners Up:

- QuickBooks Payroll Enhanced and Online Payroll
- AMS 1099-Etc A-T-F Payroll
- PayChex
- ADP RUN Powered by ADP Payroll for Accountants

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Business Valuation

Insight: Valuation services are especially important when planning on sales,

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- ValuSource Express Business Valuation
- NACVA Business Valuation Manager Pro
- MoneySoft DealSense Plus+ & Corp. Valuation Professional

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Practice Management/Time & Billing Systems

Insight: While many firms are transitioning to value pricing, many still either bill by the hour or at least track productivity and other efficiency using hourly-based methods. Practice management and time and billing systems do more than just count hours for invoicing, they also help firms manage many areas of projects and client collaboration, with increasingly mobile time, expense and document tracking functions.

WINNER: Thomson Reuters Practice CS

Runners Up:

- CCH ProSystem *fx* Practice Management
- Sage TimeSlips
- Office Tools Professional

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Online Invoicing/Bill Payment Solutions

Insight: As more and more small businesses and accounting firms move to the cloud, both are looking for ways to speed up invoicing functions, particularly the time it takes to receive those receivables, but also helping to ensure accurate tracking and payment of vendors. Receiving the most votes for 2015:

WINNER: Xero

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Insight: Communicating with clients is essential, and being able to collaborate them on at least the simplest activities can greatly streamline workflow. Client portals allow sharing of files, as well as many automation tools that can help move data to where it's needed. The following systems received the most votes in this year's voting:

WINNER: eFileCabinet Secure Drawer

Runners Up:

- Thomson Reuters NetClient CS Portals
- Citrix ShareFile
- SmartVault
- Doc.It

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Document Management & Document Storage

Insight: This category was once again the largest in this year's Readers Choice Awards voting. While some are simple file folder programs that resemble Windows Explorer, others are much more advanced, providing organizations of any size with options for managing document retention, client collaboration functions and automated workflow.

WINNER: Drake Document Manager

Runners Up:

- Thomson Reuters FileCabinet CS/GoFileRoom

- eFileCabinet

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Canon and the Tic-Tie-Calculate program.

WINNER: Fujitsu

Runners Up:

- HP
- Canon
- cPaperless Tic-Tie-Calculate

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Tax Document Automation

Insight: One day, all client tax documents will be digital from the time they are created until they are imported into their taxes, until then, tax doc automation systems help not only create and manage digital client workpapers, but also can directly integrate with tax preparation systems to import and verify data, greatly streamlining preparation processes. The most popular systems this year:

WINNER: Intuit Tax Import for Lacerte & ProSeries

Runners Up:

- GruntWorx Populate
- Thomson Reuters Source Document Processing
- CCH ProSystem *fx* Scan
- SurePrep 1040Scan Pro, 1040Scan Organize
- CCH Small Firm Services ATX & TaxWise PaperlessPLUS

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Workflow Management Systems

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WINNER: Office Tools Professional Practice Management

Runners Up:

- Thomson Reuters FirmFlow
- XCM Workflow
- CCH Axcess Workflow
- Doc.It

Other Workflow Tools:

WINNER: GruntWorx

Runners Up:

- eFileCabinet
- Thomson Reuters GoFileRoom/Practice CS
- Intuit Tax Import for Lacerte and ProSeries
- Bill.com

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Website Builders & Services for Accounting Firms

Insight: Professional accounting firms need websites, not just Facebook, Twitter or other social media presences. Find a solution, find the people on your staff who enjoy using it, and start providing your website visitors (potential clients) with useful information. It doesn't have to be expensive, since there are many systems out there that provide valuable content and collaboration tools. This year's most popular systems:

WINNER: Drake 1040.com Preparer Sites

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CLIENT SIDE ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS

Insight: Increasingly, accounting firms are directing clients toward online accounting systems, which also often means relying less on a single vendor all functions, but instead finding what they consider the best integratable options for bookkeeping, inventory, payables and other functions. Below are the top vote-getters in each category.

Small Business Accounting – Installed Programs

WINNER: Red Wing Software CenterPoint Accounting

Runners Up:

- Intuit QuickBooks Desktop (all versions)
- Sage One, Sage 50 or Sage ERP
- RealEasyBooks ezREB
- PC Software Accounting Inc.

Small Business Accounting – Web-Based

WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Online/Online Accountant

Runners Up:

- Thomson Reuters Client CS
- SageOne

Retail Accounting/Point-of-Sale

WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Point-of-Sale

Runners Up:

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- Fund E-Z Accounting Software
- Intuit QuickBooks Premier: Nonprofit Edition

Fixed Asset Management

WINNER: Intuit ProSeries Fixed Asset Manager

Runners Up:

- Thomson Reuters Fixed Assets CS
- Sage FAS Asset Accounting

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GENERAL BUSINESS TECHNOLOGIES

ASP/Hosted Solution Providers

Insight: Most traditionally-installed software programs can be turned into a web-based system by having it hosted by an Application Service Provider (ASP). This lets users continue to work in the program they are used to, while also relieving them of the headaches of IT functions and program updates and, more importantly, giving them anywhere, anytime access to the program. The below companies help users host the programs, with this year's top votes going to:

WINNER: Cloud9 Real Time

Runners Up:

- Right Networks
- Xcentric
- CPAASP/InsynQ

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WINNER: Cloud9 Real Time

Runners Up:

- Xcentric
- Right Networks

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Laptop and Desktop Computers

Insight: What brand of computer do our readers prefer? There are so many brands on the market, but a few hardware providers routine gain the most trust among accounting professionals. The most popular:

WINNER: Dell

Runners Up:

- HP
- Lenovo
- Toshiba
- Apple

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Smart Phone

Insight: The mobile wars continue, but it's now a battle of two, with Blackberry almost totally disappearing from this year's voting. In fact, more of our voters said they don't use a mobile phone, than said they use a Blackberry. Apple takes the lead over Android again this year, but it's still close:

- Apple 50.2%

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- Apple iPad 49%
- Samsung 22%
- Kindle 16%
- Others 13

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Printers & Scanners

Insight: Is there a truly 100% paperless office? Not according to our readers, who voted that these devices are still key components to modern digital workflow.

- HP 40%
- Brother 18.5%
- Fujitsu 11.5%
- Canon 11%
- Epson 7%
- Dell 4%
- Others 8%

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Office Supply Store

Insight: Everybody needs office supplies so, where do you get yours? At a big box retailer, at a business-focused retail chain, or online?

- Staples 28.4%
- Office Max/Depot 28.3%
- Costco 13%
- Sam's 10%

- Wal-Mart 8%

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other aspects. During the 12+ hour days of tax season, though, how do professionals find the time? The top responses:

WINNER: Who has time to exercise?

- Jogging/Running
- Weightlifting
- Aerobics
- Jumping to Conclusions

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New Technologies for Professional Firms

Do you use smartphone or tablet apps designed specifically for tax and accounting professionals?

- Yes 19% (Up from apx 17% last year)
- No 81%

How "remote" are you? How many hours per week do you work on client engagements or firm business while away from the office (at a client, at home or anywhere else)?

1. Less than 1 hour: 37%
2. Between 1-4 hours: 28%
3. Between 5-9 hours: 15%
4. Between 10-16 hours: 9%
5. More than 17 hours: 11%

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