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to the productivity of a firm, and the small businesses that rely on it.

Isaac M. O'Bannon • Feb. 15, 2017



The accounting and tax profession relies on technology as much as almost any other (aside from rocket science, perhaps), which makes finding the right tech imperative to the productivity of a firm, and the small businesses that rely on it.

The Readers' Choice Awards, now in their 14th year, is your chance to to give a shout-out to the technologies and vendors that help you be more productive, responsive to client needs, and profitable in your firm. This year more than 6,000 professionals voted in the awards, with categories ranging from tax prep to document management, and client accounting to mobile productivity.

# IN-FIRM TECHNOLOGIES

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## Runners Up:

- Intuit Lacerte, ProSeries, TaxOnline (21%)
- Thomson Reuters UltraTax or GoSystem RS (10%)
- Wolters Kluwer CCH Small Firm Services ATX or TaxWise (9%)
- Wolters Kluwer CCH Axcess or ProSystem fx (7%)
- TaxAct Preparers' Editions (3%)
- RCS TaxSlayer Pro (2%)
- Other (2%)

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## Specialty Systems & Tax Prep Tools

**Insight:** The professional tax suites on the market offer “almost” everything a tax pro needs but, depending on their client base or a particular specialty, many professionals need specialty tax systems that streamline tax workflow, cover areas their main tax system doesn't, or goes into greater depth and gives them more control.

## WINNER: GruntWorx (31%)

### Runners Up:

- QuickBooks Self-Employed (15%)
- Thomson Reuters UltraTax CS Source Document (14%)
- Wolters Kluwer CCH Axcess (13.7%)
- Wolters Kluwer CCH ProSystem fx Scan with AutoFlow Technology (10%)
- Bloomberg BNA 709 & 706 Preparer (5%)
- SurePrep 1040SCAN (3%)
- Xero Tax Touch (3%)
- Sageworks Electronic Tax Return Reader (2%)
- DynaTax (1.3%)

Other (2%)

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on current and projected tax law, phase-ins and outs, and life event changes such as variations in income, college and other family matters. Nearly 60 percent of this year's 6,000 voters participated in this question. As with the "Tax Preparation" category, Drake Software again won handily because of their active user base.

**WINNER: Drake Tax Planner (58%)**

Runners Up:

- Intuit Lacerte Tax Planner (15%)
- Thomson Reuters Planner CS (8%)
- Wolters Kluwer CCH ProSystem fx Planning and fx for Small Firms (7.5%)
- Thomson Reuters Checkpoint Individual Business 6%
- Bloomberg BNA Income Tax Planner (5.5%)

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## **Tax & Accounting Research Systems**

**Insight:** Taxes are complex enough, and with the uncertainty of the Affordable Care Act, or whatever may replace it, professionals need a reliable tool for finding the information they need. This includes primary source material such as the federal tax code and state tax laws, as well as tax court rulings and expert analysis of these materials. Some of the available tax research systems integrate with tax preparation programs, while others are used separately, and can be used alongside any system. Nearly 90 percent of this year's voters selected a preference in this category, with users of TheTaxBook actively driving overall voting.

**WINNER: TheTaxBook – Tax Materials Inc. (49%)**

Runners Up:

- QuickFinder Tax Handbooks (14%)
- Thomson Reuters Checkpoint (RIA) (12%)

- CCH IntelliConnect (Wolters Kluwer) (7%)

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**Insight:** Many businesses have to prepare hundreds of W-2 and 1099 forms every year, some have even more than that, which causes headaches and potential fines for missing the compliance dates. Not to mention the changing compliance dates this year, which left many payroll and AP departments scrambling at the end of the year. While most payroll systems are adept at handling W-2 preparation, few offer the multi-client management tools that professionals need to manage all of their employer clients, and 1099s are often just a mess. Specialty W-2 and 1099 preparation systems help relieve much of this burden and streamline the entire process, including mailing of copies to recipients and federal and state agencies. Drake's Client Write-Up won this year's voting, with its integrated W-2 and 1099 compliance functions.

### **WINNER: Drake Client Write-Up (37%)**

#### **Runners Up:**

- AMS 1099-ETC (20%)
- W2/1099 (Wolters Kluwer ATX and TaxWise) (11%)
- Thomson Reuters Accounting CS Payroll Compliance (9%)
- Greatland/Yearli (5%)
- Tenenz Laser Link/EagleView (6%)
- 1099 Pro (4%)
- AccountantsWorld ATF Payroll (3%)
- Avalara AvaTax 1099 (2.5%)
- Real Business Solutoins W2-Mate (1.5%)
- Others (1%)

**Insight:** For brick and mortar businesses with a very limited (and defined) sales area,

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process manually. Most voters in this category said they use state tax agency websites or use the sales tax functions built into their (or their clients') accounting systems. Among the votes for specific sales tax software, the results were:

**WINNER: CFS Tax Software (28%)**

Runners Up:

- Avalara AvaTax or Trustfile (16%)
  - eFileSalesTax.com (15%)
  - CCH Wolters Kluwer (SureTax/SalesTaxOffice/SalesTaxSaaS/STRO) 14%
  - Thomson Reuters ONESource Indirect Tax (11%)
  - BNA Sales Tax Rates (5%)
  - Vertex Indirect Tax (3%)
  - Other (8%)
- 

## **Sales & Use Tax Exemption Certificate Management**

**Insight:** Another specialty area, managing exemption certificates is a critical function for many retailers and especially for wholesalers, since poor management can open them up to sales tax compliance failures, and substantial penalties.

**WINNER: Thomson Reuters ONESource Exemption Certificate Mgmt. (49%)**

Runners Up:

- Avalara AvaTax CertCapture (35%)
- Vertex Inc. Exemption Certificate Manager (11%)
- Sovos (formerly Imaging Science Services) TaxWare Certificate Management (5%)

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performance that generate more revenue and cause lower overhead (cost), cloud-based small business accounting systems are in a separate category below.)

**WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Accountant (56%)**

Runners Up:

- Drake Client Write-Up (23.5%)
- Thomson Reuters Accounting CS (7%)
- Sage One/Sage 50/Peachtree (5%)
- PC Software Accounting Inc. (3%)
- Xero (2%)
- AccountantsWorld Accounting Power (2%)
- Client Accounting Suite (Wolters Kluwer) (1%)
- CYMA After-the-Fact Module (0.5%)

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## Audit Engagement Tools

**Insight:** Audit and attestation services are not only for large businesses, or large firms. Many small businesses and especially nonprofits must undergo periodic audits, and they naturally turn to their local accounting firms. Managing these engagements can be cumbersome if not using the right tools, which streamline these functions and provide greater controls on the processes. About 10 percent of this year's voters selected a preference in this category:

**WINNER: Thomson Reuters PPC SMART Audit Suite & WorkPapers CS (39%)**

Runners Up:

- Wolters Kluwer CCH ProSystem fx Systems (37%)
- Audit Confirmations (8%)
- CaseWare IDEA (5%)

- AuditFile (3.5%)

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as well as in our reviews of payroll systems. In fact, there are so many systems on the market that are designed for accounting firms or for small businesses to use directly, that we often can't fit them all into a single issue of CPA Practice Advisor. This is testament to the importance of payroll to modern businesses and the need for firms to provide this service to their clients. Now that most of these systems are cloud-based and automatically update rates and other factors, they take much of the pain out of payroll, making it much easier to keep employees happy, and the state and federal agencies satisfied with reporting and remission of payroll taxes.

### **WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Payroll, Enhanced Payroll & Full Service Payroll (40%)**

Runners Up:

- Drake Client Write-Up/Payroll (16%)
- AMS 1099-Etc Payroll (10%)
- Run, Powered by ADP Payroll (9%)
- Paychex (8%)
- Thomson Reuters Accounting CS Payroll or myPay (6%)
- AccountantsWorld Payroll Relief (3%)
- PC Software Accounting Inc. (2%)
- Gusto (formerly ZenPayroll) (2%)
- Wolters Kluwer Payroll Compliance Reporting (1%)
- Other (3%)

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### **Business Valuation**

**Insight:** The life of a business may see occasional need for official valuations, whether for estate tax purposes, sales, divorces, litigation or other changes of ownership. Accounting professionals offer the most expertise when it comes to assessing the value of an entity, taking into account more than just the assets and



liabilities of that business. While still a specialty niche, valuation services, and the

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## **Practice Management/Time & Billing Systems**

**Insight:** What is practice management? It's everything that your clients don't see, but that your firm wouldn't run without. From tracking engagements and firm staff, to identifying bottlenecks and streamlining workflow, to billing and time management ... running your practice efficiently is the key to maintaining profitability. The systems in this two-part category range from simple tools for functions like time tracking, to extensive systems that offer deep analysis of firm productivity and include advanced workflow management.

### **Practice Management:**

**WINNER: Thomson Reuters Practice CS (33%)**

**Runners Up:**

- Wolters Kluwer CCH Axcess or CCH ProSystem fx Practice Mgmt. (29%)
- Sage Timeslips (15%)
- Office Tools WorkSpace (13%)
- AccountantsWorld Practice Relief (5%)
- TaxWorkFlow (3%)
- Commercial Logic (1%)
- Deltek Maconomy (0.5%)
- Other (0.5%)



## Time & Billing:

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- ClockShark 2.5%)
  - Commercial Logic (2.5%)
  - Abak Time & Billing (1.5%)
  - Other (5%)
- 

## Online Invoicing/Bill Payment Solutions

**Insight:** More and more small businesses, accounting firms, and even individuals are moving toward cloud financial management systems, and that includes paying their bills online. From the AR side, this makes even more sense, since these tools offer a streamlined way of keeping up with, and keeping track of, client invoices.

Automation is making big ground here, as well.

## WINNER: Intuit Payments (36%)

### Runners Up:

- PayPal (27%)
  - Bill.com (18%)
  - Xero (6%)
  - Sage Payments (4%)
  - Bill&Pay (3%)
  - FreshBooks (2.5%)
  - ReceiptBank (2%)
  - Zoho Books (1%)
  - CollBox (0.5%)
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## Client Portals

**Insight:** Remember those shoeboxes of receipts? How about floppy disks? Even CD-

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#### Runners Up:

- Citrix ShareFile (13%)
- eFileCabinet – SecureDrawer (10%)
- Thomson Reuters NetClient CS Portals or Onvio (9.5%)
- Wolters Kluwer CCH Axcess Portal/ProSystem fx /iFirm (7%)
- SmartVault (6%)
- AccountantsWorld Cloud Cabinet (2%)
- OfficeToolsPro (2%)
- ClientWhys/TaxBuzz.com (1%)
- Other: 1.5%

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## Document Management & Document Storage

**Insight:** The products in this category range from basic electronic file cabinets, to advanced programs that include client collaboration tools, automatic archiving, retention functions and multi-worker productivity features.

### **WINNER: Drake Document Manager (54%)**

#### Runners Up:

- Thomson Reuters FileCabinet CS/GoFileRoom (12%)
- Intuit ProSeries & Lacerte DMS (9%)
- eFileCabinet (9%)
- CCH Axcess or ProSystem fx Document (5.5%)
- SmartVault Document Storage (4%)
- Office Tools Practice Management Workspace (2%)

- AccountantsWorld Cloud Cabinet (1%)

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## **WINNER: Fujitsu (40%)**

Runners Up:

- HP (26%)
- Canon (13.5%)
- Nuance (7.5%)
- cPaperless Tic-Tie-Calculatate (7%)
- ABBYY (4%)
- Kofax (2%)
- Other (2%)

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## **Tax Document Automation**

**Insight:** Automating the tax preparation process is allowing tax professionals to manage hundreds of returns each, without relying on untrained seasonal workers or “outsourcing” confidential client information to foreign countries. Technology has made it possible, therefore, for tax pros to take on either more work during tax season and generate considerably more revenue- or to work reasonable hours even during tax season, without losing revenue. Key to the technology is optical character recognition and smart systems that recognize the forms when they are scanned in. This year's voting was exceptionally close, with only 10 votes separating first and second place.

## **WINNER: GruntWorx Populate (32.63%)**

Runners Up:

- Intuit Tax Import for Lacerte & ProSeries (31.86%)
- Thomson Reuters Source Document Processing & Workpapers CS (14%)
- CCH iFirm and ProSystem fx Scan with AutoFlow Technology (13%)

- SurePrep 1040Scan Pro, 1040Scan Organize (4%)

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processes, leading to greater productivity and profitability. This category is divided into two groups: Comprehensive Workflow, and Other Workflow Tools, which are designed for aiding in specific tasks and engagements and for smaller firms.

### **Comprehensive Workflow**

**WINNER: Thomson Reuters Practice CS Project Management (30%)**

Runners Up:

Office Tools WorkSpace (27%)

XCM Workflow (10%)

Wolters Kluwer CCH Axxess Workstream (8%)

Wolters Kluwer CCH iFirm Practice Manager (7.5%)

TaxWorkFlow (7%)

Thomson Reuters FirmFlow (7%)

Pascal Workflow (2%)

Autonomy iManage Workflow Manager (1.5%)

### **Other Workflow Tools:**

**WINNER: GruntWorx (16%)**

Runners Up:

- Wolters Kluwer CCH ProSystem fx Systems (12%)
- Intuit Tax Import for Lacerte and ProSeries (11%)
- eFileCabinet (10%)
- Bill.com (9%)
- Thomson Reuters GoFileRoom/Practice CS (6.5%)
- ATX and TaxWise (Wolters Kluwer) (6%)

- Intuit Lacerte DMS and ProSeries DMS (5.5%)

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## **Expense and Travel Management Solutions**

**Insight:** A new category in the awards voting this year, expense management is a hot topic, as firm and business managers look for tools that can help them keep better control of employee spending while on the road. With a new generation of cloud-based systems, managers can set spending limits and other preferences, while keeping up with receipts is made easier for road-weary travelers, since the online systems can automate many of the receipt management functions.

### **WINNER: Expensify (31%)**

#### **Runners Up:**

- ReceiptBank (20%)
- Concur Expense (15%)
- Certify (10%)
- ExpenseWatch (9%)
- Tallie (6%)
- ZohoExpense (5%)
- SpringAhead (4%)

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## **Website Builders & Services for Accounting Firms**

**Insight:** Repeat after me: A Facebook page is not a website. Your firm is a professional entity, and your website presence should be too, providing not only basic contact information, but also information about the services you provide and the expertise you offer. You also need to integrate it with your social media. These are necessary

marketing steps in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, so don't ignore them. There are many tools out

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- Wolters Kluwer CCH ProSystem fx SiteBuilder (7%)
- AccountantsWorld Website Relief (6%)
- Tenenz AFSB (5%)
- Build Your Firm (3%)
- CPASites.com (3%)
- Rootworks (2.5%)
- NMGI WebCare (1%)
- Other: 1.5%

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## SMALL BUSINESS ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS

**Insight:** The cloud gets all the news, but many small businesses still want their accounting on their own computers or servers. There are still several products available for installed accounting, as well as for web-based systems, and for many specialty business types, providing financial management, bookkeeping, inventory, AR, AP and checkwriting, along with other functions. There are several sub-categories in this group: Below are the top vote-getters in each category.

Small Business Accounting – Installed Programs

**WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Desktop (86%)**

Runners Up:

- Sage One, Sage 50 or Sage ERP (9%)
- PC Software Accounting Inc. (4%)
- Other (1%)

## Small Business Accounting – Web-Based

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- NetSuite (1%)
- Other (1%)

### Retail Accounting/Point-of-Sale

**WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Point-of-Sale (87%)**

Runners Up:

- NetSuite OnSite POS (4%)
- Vend POS (2%)
- AccuPOS Retail POS (2%)
- Cougar Mountain (1.5%)
- Wasp Barcode (1%)
- CAM Commerce (1%)
- Other (1.5%)

### Not-for-Profit Accounting

**WINNER: Intuit QuickBooks Premier Nonprofit (88%)**

Runners Up:

- Blackbaud Financial Edge or Fundware (2%)
- Cougar Mountain FUND (2%)
- CYMA (1.5%)
- Abila (1.5%)
- Aplos (1%)
- Fund E-Z (1%)



- OneNFP for Nonprofits (1%)

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- ~~Wolters Kluwer CCH ProSystem fx Fixed Assets & Fixed Asset Manager (10%)~~
- Drake Tax Fixed Assets (7%)
- Sage FAS Asset Accounting (6.5%)
- Pro-Ware Asset Keeper (4.5%)
- BNA Fixed Assets (3%)
- Open Systems TRAVERSE (1%)
- Real Asset Management (0.5%)
- WASP Barcode (0.5%)
- Other 1%)

## GENERAL BUSINESS TECHNOLOGIES

### ASP/Hosted Solution Providers

**Insight:** Some programs still aren't available in the cloud, or are only available as lighter versions, with different feature sets. For businesses that want the full version of their traditionally installed program available online, with the benefits of not having to maintain and update it, ASPs provide a good solution.

### WINNER: Drake Hosted (45%)

#### Runners Up:

- Thomson Reuters Virtual Office CS/SaaS 16%
- Cloud9 Real Time (12%)
- Right Networks (11%)
- Xcentric (7%)
- Cetrom CPA Cloud (4.5%)

- Network Alliance Inc (3%)

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## **WINNER: Cloud9 Real Time (27.5%)**

### **Runners Up:**

- Right Networks (25%)
- Xcentric (17%)
- Network Management Group Inc. (7%)
- CPA2Biz Email Solutions (7%)
- AppRiver (6.5%)
- Cetrom (6%)
- InsynQ/CPAASP (4%)

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## **Laptop and Desktop Computers**

**Insight:** You're a professional, which means you still have a "real" computer (as opposed to those young'uns who are now getting by with just a phone. Egad.) When it comes to your laptop or desktop computers, though, which brands do you prefer? Have you stayed faithful over the years, or do you concentrate on price over brand? In our annual voting, the readers chose:

## **WINNER: Dell (32%)**

### **Runners Up:**

- IBM (25%)
- Lenovo (10%)
- Apple (6.5%)
- Toshiba (6%)
- Acer (5.5%)

- Others: 15%

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- Apple (43%)
- Microsoft (2.5%)
- Blackberry (1%)
- Other (0.5%)

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### Tablet Computers/Devices

- Apple iPad 41%
- Samsung 16%
- Kindle 10%
- Microsoft Surface 8%
- Dell 6%
- HP 5.5%
- Google 3.5%
- Others 10%

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### Printers & Scanners

**Insight:** Printers are needed even in the “paperless” office.

- HP 38%
- Brother 18%
- Canon 11%
- Fujitsu 10%
- Epson 6%
- Dell 4%
- Xerox 3%
- Samsung 2%
- IBM 1%
- Sharp 1%

- Others 6%

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- Best Buy 8%
  - Quill 7%
  - FedEx Office 1%
  - Others 1.5%
- 

## OUT-OF-OFFICE

### **Favorite Form of Physical Exercise During Tax Season**

**WINNER: "Who has time to exercise?" (41%)**

- Jogging/Running (10%)
  - Weightlifting (9%)
  - Jumping to Conclusions (8%)
  - Walking (8%)
  - Bicycling (7.5%)
  - Aerobics (7%)
  - Team Sports (2.5%)
  - Racket Sports (2%)
  - Other (5%)
- 

### **New Technologies for Professional Firms**

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

- Yes 19%
- No 81%

**How “remote” are you? How many hours per week do you work on client**

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**How “social” are you? Which social media tools do you use in conjunction with your work? (Check all that apply.)**

- LinkedIn 40.5%
- Facebook 40%
- Twitter 14%
- Google+ 13.5%
- YouTube 10%
- Instagram 7%
- Yelp 5.5%
  
- Pinterest 5%
- Other 2%
- No Social Media (43%)

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