The ProSystem fx Tax system from CCH Tax and Accounting has federal, state, city and county tax modules for individuals, business and other entity compliance. CCH also offers several ancillary add-on products for tax practices such as its ProSystem fx Practice practice management suite, Tax Notebook online organizers, ClientRelate research tools, and ProSystem fx Site Builder web development service, as well as applications for trial balance, engagement and fixed asset management.

The approximate cost of software for the prototypical firm defined above would be $11,000 based on catalog pricing. This pricing does not reflect any discounts, bundling or promotional offers available. ProSystem fx Tax offers a three-tiered pricing structure for state programs based on complexity. CCH also offers a least-cost pricing option that allows firms to license federal and state software for unlimited use or on a 'Pay as you Process' basis determined by the volume of specific federal or state returns processed.

Learning Curve – 4 Stars
ProSystem fx Tax and the entire suite of programs from CCH are designed on a consistent interface that shares data between all modules, minimizing data entry. The tax program offers interview, form-based, organizer-style, and new for this year, worksheet data-entry views that can be easily switched between, which accommodates most users. While the form view allows users to enter much data directly, moving to supporting documents such as W-2s, requires right-clicking on the field and filling out the appropriate worksheet or associated form.

While the system does not guide the user through the process, data entry through the interview mode is also fairly intuitive, and users should grow accustomed to the process after a few uses. Although fields are automatically calculated through the interview mode (such as FICA withholding), calculated fields on returns are not computed 'on the fly,' and data from associated forms or worksheets are not transferred in automatically as users move down through data entry in the form

containing data, such as proforma data rolled over from the prior year.

Use/Workflow & Productivity Tools – 5 Stars
ProSystem fx Tax uses a clean interface that provides icons for most of the common functions and defaults to a split screen with the primary work area and a forms/interview sheet tree that simplifies moving between forms. It also includes a button to view only forms included in the current client's return. Although users are not necessarily guided through the process, ProSystem fx Tax makes navigation between various forms and worksheets simple and allows users to set links between interview sheets and specific form lines. Authorized users can override entries calculated by the system, and all such overrides are tracked and can be checked during the review process if desired.

Users start by creating a new client or opening an existing one via a search utility that can find a return by name or ID, or through a number of filters including type of return, status and preparer, but not SSN, although this can be set as the client ID. Upon opening the client return, the system defaults to a blank screen with the form tree. ProSystem fx Tax includes a Client Manager that lets users manage client data and create profiles, including categorizing them and customizable fields per client. Unfortunately, the system does not provide a singular client list that shows a client's return, IRS status and acknowledgements.

The program includes several features that enhance or expedite tax preparation, including a comprehensive diagnostic system that can be run from the top menu at any time. The system reviews returns for errors and omissions in state and federal forms, as well as alerts preparers to potentially missed opportunities such as additional credits and deductions. It also lets them know if another type of form would be more appropriate for the active client. Additionally, the program can handle complex depreciation calculations as well as comprehensive limitation

Mark Lobel, partner in the Washington, D.C., firm of Quinn Lobel & Associates, P.C., has been using ProSystem fx Tax since tax year 2000. 'Being able to give our clients (many who are overseas) online access to their tax organizers through Tax Notebook is a major service enhancer,' he said. Mr. Lobel noted that his five-preparer firm uses the feature to send electronic copies of returns to such clients, allowing them to review, sign and return the returns much more quickly.

Integration/Import & Export – 5 Stars
ProSystem fx Tax is part of CCH's large ProSystem fx Office suite of tax and accounting products, so it interacts with each of these products, shares data and transfers compliance information between the various components, if the user has subscribed to all of the products. Direct integration between these programs and the tax application includes importing of Schedule D data from GainsKeeper Pro, importing of K-1 information from ProSystem fx Tax's Fiduciary, S Corporation and Partnership modules, links to the Internet Tax Research Network, two-way transfer of depreciation and asset disposition data with ProSystem fx Fixed Assets, CCH's fixed asset program, and the previously mentioned integration with the paperless engagement system. Externally, ProSystem fx Tax can import and export to spreadsheet files and can import from ProSystem fx Engagement and Trial Balance. The company also offers client data conversions from most tax and accounting programs.

Support/Training & Help System – 5 Stars
CCH offers several live training options including seminars, on-site programs and an annual tax update session, as well as web conferencing training and utilities built into the program, such as the new user tutorial. The CCH Learning Center also provides CPE credit for software training and professional education. Mr. Lobel did not use formalized training through CCH, saying he was able to understand the

system fairly quickly. His sales representative demonstrated the product's navigation

Product Evolution & Vendor Vision – 5 Stars
CCH Tax and Accounting is one of the largest vendors of accounting and tax software and has been involved in tax law and compliance for more than 90 years. The company formed its Tax Group to concentrate specifically on federal, state and international tax compliance software, financial and estate planning tools and expert treatises and accounting guidance. The company continues to enhance ProSystem fx Tax's integration capabilities within the CCH product family, as well as its ability to bridge data from other software. CCH has been one of the leaders in integrating Internet capabilities including online tax organizers, preparer web sites and support utilities. In 2002, more than 13,000 professionals used the company's 1040 product, with several thousand also using the business and partnership modules.

Jerry Connor, marketing manager for CCH, said the company uses focus groups, surveys, advisory boards and other methods to find out what its users need and want to help guide development efforts. As a result of this feedback, CCH is expanding its Global fx ASP version of the tax software. 'We anticipate substantial growth in this area over the next few years as firms move to refocus IT resources and costs towards revenue generating areas.' Mr. Connor said the company is also working on a new user interface 'that will take advantage of a worksheet view and reduce the learning curve for new users by providing a more intuitive method of data input.' CCH is working with new technologies in developing ProSystem fx Tax, including XBRL and Microsoft .NET tools.

Relative Value – 4 Stars
As a stand-alone system, ProSystem fx Tax can provide value to most mid-sized and larger firms, but some of its greatest strengths come through a variety of productivity tools and integration with other CCH products. Because these features can

dramatically reduce data-entry time and incorrect data entry when serving a single

Curve; Use/Workflow & Productivity Tools; Integration/Import & Export; Support/Training & Help System; Product Evolution & Vendor Vision; and Relative Value.

Learning Curve addresses the ease with which new users are likely to grow comfortable and proficient with the program. This encompasses expected prerequisite knowledge and whether average users will likely need advanced training or support in order to use the program productively. **Use/Workflow & Productivity Tools** involves the intuitiveness of the user interface (how well a user can get around) and the way work is handled from start (interview) to finish (receipt of return). This includes tools that help professionals keep track of client and IRS status for returns, as well as additional tools such as integrated calculators and cross-form linking that streamline the entire process.

The **Integration/Import & Export** rating assesses the program's capability to import and export data to software from other vendors, and how the program retrieves existing data from the previous year. **Support/Training & Help System** looks at how the vendor has incorporated assistance features into its program (through its help utility), the quality of its support documentation (both print and built-in), and the extent of its online help component, whether it be simple FAQs, online user communities or more advanced systems. This section will also consider the availability of phone-based support and optional training programs offered by the vendor.

The **Product Evolution & Vendor Vision** score is reflective of the company's commitment to continued development of its product by looking at the technological culture of the company and its product development history. Software developers with an eye to the future are more likely to

option does not necessarily guarantee the best value, nor is the product with the lowest sticker price always the greater bargain. On this line, we will look at the value of the features and tools provided in a software suite and provide a judgment on how well its price matches its offerings. Finally, the Overall Rating will provide the reviewer's general assessment of the product.

The review section is capped off
by an **Executive Summary** that gives a brief synopsis of the review section and is accompanied by a summary chart with all products and ratings.

Advisory