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industry. ADP has been in the business for over 50 years. In addition to the comprehensive set of payroll service offerings, ADP also offers a complete human resource management system.

ADP is an accountant-friendly solution, not an accountant-centric service like some of the others reviewed here. They market directly to end-user business organizations and accountants. The company has just recently decided to offer EasyPayNet as a 'wholesale' service that accountants can bundle with their other services to offer a complete client payroll service and utilize ADP for all of the back office functions. Accountants can also refer clients directly to ADP or ADP will entertain opportunities to purchase a payroll practice from an accountant on a request basis.

For five eligible employees, EasyPayNet would have the following approximate costs: \$33 for weekly payrolls, \$38 for biweekly/semi-monthly payrolls or \$51 for monthly payrolls. For 49 eligible employees, the approximate costs would be \$93 for weekly payrolls, \$102 for biweekly/ semi-monthly payrolls or \$117 for monthly payrolls. Estimates include payroll, tax compliance and direct deposit.

#### **LEARNING CURVE – 5 Stars**

My first impression of the user interface was that it is a fairly simple procedure to work through a payroll process. The system uses numbered menus for each of the major components and then, within each of these menu items, presents a series of tabbed screens to flow through the process in an organized fashion. It would be helpful if the system provided a little more in the way of on-screen prompts to help guide you to the next step in the process, although this becomes much less important once you have processed a payroll or two.

#### **BREADTH & DEPTH OF FEATURES & SERVICES – 5 Stars**

This system is a bit deceiving at first in terms of the depth of functionality provided. Once you go through the process of setting up an employee and processing a payroll,

you realize that all of the pertinent features of payroll have been addressed. The

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Up to 14 separate payroll deductions are available per employee. This includes tracking a running balance of a loan or prepayment.

Direct deposit transfer for up to three bank accounts per employee.

Payroll data can be entered directly online, one employee at a time or through a spreadsheet-like entry form for easy entry. Hours or earnings can also be pre-filled with regular pay data to save on data entry.

Option to pre-calculate a paycheck to review the pay, deductions and net pay amounts prior to sending the payroll off to ADP for processing.

Accommodates third-party payments for sick pay.

### **REPORTING CAPABILITIES – 5 Stars**

The system provides the accountant with the ability to view electronic reports online from the ADP web site. All reports can be saved by the accountant on their local system for future printing, viewing, exporting, etc. These reports can be exported for further analysis in programs such as Excel.

### **INTEGRATION / IMPORT & EXPORT – 5 Stars**

A QuickBooks interface will soon be available (date not provided by vendor) to convert payroll data into QuickBooks for posting the payroll activity to a client's general ledger. As far as other applications and services that ADP provides, suffice it to say that they offer a solution for nearly every aspect of the payroll and human resource function with which a small business has to deal. This includes a service to sign, stuff and mail the payroll checks. As an alternative, you can choose to print your clients' checks through the service.

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ADP enjoys the benefit of a well-known name and is obviously focused and experienced in payroll processing. Their size and resources might be a potential detriment in terms of finding your way around the ADP system electronically because of the breadth and depth of resources they offer. With the wholesale service, ADP deals directly with the accountant.

### 2004 OVERALL RATING: 5

#### Review Attributes

In order to maintain as much consistency in our reviews as practical, the payroll software solutions were rated on the following five areas:

**Learning Curve; Breadth & Depth of Features & Services; Reporting Capabilities; Integration/Import & Export; and Customer Service & Support.**

We also looked at the vendor's history and vision in terms of the company's experience, resources (personnel and financial) and reputation in the profession and the extent to which they are focused on payroll services. We also considered how the vendor approaches the accountant's role in the payroll service delivery model.

The user interface is the primary attribute evaluated to rate the

system's Learning Curve. If

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is a key factor to evaluate because of the intensive interaction of the system that is required by your staff and, in some cases, your clients.

The functionality of a payroll system is a key characteristic to evaluate because it will directly influence the range of clients to which you will be able to provide payroll services, as well as the scope of the services you will be able to offer. Functionality is measured in large part by the Depth & Breadth of Features & Services. How many options does the package offer? Does it provide features that meet the needs of a growing company such as EFTPS (Electronic Federal Tax Payment System)? MICR (Magnetic Character Ink Recording) and Direct Deposit? An extended set of these types of features resulted in a very high ranking in this category.

The following questions all relate to the rating of the software's Reporting capability. What types of reports does the system produce? What is the content? How are they

designed? What flexibility is offered

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to minimize data entry and optimize the potential to leverage the information flow into and out of the payroll system.

The true measure of a software's value is not limited to the program itself, it is heavily influenced by the vendor's ability to help you use and apply it. All it takes is one frustrating afternoon of system problems on a day when multiple client payrolls need to get out the door and you can't get the help you need from the vendor to leave you with a long-lasting distaste for the entire system.

We have done our best to rate the vendor's ability to deliver Customer Service & Support, but at the end of the day you need to conduct your own due diligence on this attribute and talk to a few client references about their experience with the vendor in this area. It is one thing for a vendor to say what kind of support they offer, it is quite another to deliver it. We have included the vendor's

direct support of the accountant

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