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Thomson Fast-Tax — zCalc Tool Box Suite

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Comprehensiveness, Reliability & Ease of Use – 5 Stars

zCalc opens to an easy-to-use Windows interface that provides icons across the top for accessing the primary features of the program, including selecting from more than a dozen commonly used estate planning strategies, maintaining client data through multiple strategies and scenarios, creating reports, running calculations, exporting data and reports to Excel and generating PowerPoint presentations to help explain these strategies to clients. The program interface is well-designed, which makes it easy to access the many tools included in the program.

Data entry is simple and straightforward, using crisp forms that calculate in real-time, allowing the user to go directly to reports with one click that show the results of data input. Forward and back browser-style buttons also assist in navigating the

program's data-entry areas, and users can easily move back to input sheets with one click.

Calculations – 4.5 Stars

After clicking zCalc's Tool Box icon, a three-tabbed window opens, with options for Planning, Calculations and Presentations. The Planning tab includes options for Estate Plan Scenarios, Gift Tax, Grantor Retained Annuity Trust, Installment Sale, Minimum Distributions, Private Annuity, Qualified Personal Residence Trust, Self-Canceling Installment Note, Charitable Gift Annuity, Charitable Lead Annuity Trust, Charitable Lead Unitrust and Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust. All calculations are made in real-time, and users can quickly access reports as noted earlier. The Calculations tab offers a quick way to make calculations and see the results on one screen, with data entry, calculations, charts and graphs appearing in one window.

Customization, Flexibility & Features – 4 Stars

zCalc makes it easy to save different versions of a planner within the same client file using different case scenarios and allows saving as a client planner or case. While it doesn't really offer customization options, the system is exceptionally easy-to-use, and the access to quick calculators and the ease with which users can plan and save multiple scenarios is notable.

Client Presentation Skills – 4.5 Stars

Users can access reports with one click from the data-entry part of a planner, or through the reports pull-down menu, which filters and shows reports only related to the planning strategy that is being worked in. For instance, with Grantor Retained Annuity Trusts, reports include a general analysis, taxable gift, annual cash flow and payments, term comparisons and growth rate comparisons. Reports provide numbers charts and graphs designed to make the information informative and understandable for clients. The reporting function allows selection of specific reports or sections of a client plan, as well the order in which the items should be printed. All reports are viewable on-screen prior to printing.

The system's Presentations feature, accessible via the tab on the Tool Box window or via an icon on the computer desktop, provides an array of PowerPoint presentations that have been pre-prepared to help educate clients on a variety of topics related to estate planning. Within a planner, a shortcut also allows the user to immediately jump to the presentation associated with that planner.

The system also contains an Export to Excel option that is on the icon toolbar and opens into a window similar to the print function, allowing export of specific client files or their entire planner. The resulting Excel file can be easily customized or modified and e-mailed to clients.

Company History, Support & Help – 5 Stars

zCalc was acquired in 2003 by Thomson Fast-Tax, but the zCalc product has been around since 1996, and is currently used by thousands of financial and estate planning professionals.

Relative Value – 5 Stars

A one-user license for zCalc costs \$395; two to four users costs \$695. The system offers a good value, with an exceptionally easy-to-use application that can quickly perform calculations and create professional, client-ready reports and PowerPoint presentations.

2005 Overall Rating: 4.5 Stars

Article

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