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From the September 2005 Issue

In our August 2005 issue, we reviewed Service Bureau Style Payroll applications, programs built to enable accountants to handle a large payroll client base, comprehensively covering all aspects of payroll processing and compliance. This review of Boutique Work Style Payroll programs looks at systems geared more toward professional accountants who don't necessarily consider payroll a key component of their business model, but still have the need to process payrolls for a few clients, at least periodically. Such professionals are often called upon to perform after-the-fact payrolls, as well as "live" runs, and also need to assist their clients with compliance issues and third-party payments.

Despite the significant consolidation in most other parts of the accounting software industry, payroll software has not seen this phenomenon to much extent. Dozens of disparate offerings are still in the marketplace, from accounting software add-ons to stand-alone programs. These systems have a wide variety of interface designs, with some having screens that still resemble their DOS forebears. Many of the longer-lived programs have dropped in price considerably, but they may lack the features of the newer ones.

With the potential volatility of payroll taxes throughout each state and in many other jurisdictions, and the potential penalties for incorrect withholding and reporting, state support is a key element of a payroll application. While all of these programs can be used for any state and all support multiple state taxing issues, not all provide tax tables for every state, which could require

manual entry of some tables. State support is noted in each review. All of the

- **Ease-of-Use/Data Entry** addresses learning curve requirements and general navigational elements. Additionally, it looks at data-entry elements and the intuitiveness and accessibility of primary features such as client lists and processing functions.
- **Features** identifies key capabilities within the system, from support for multiple departments, job cost capabilities, how it supports direct deposit, how pay types and deductions are handled, as well as additional tools.
- **Reporting** notes MICR support and forms capabilities, as well as standard reports for earnings, liabilities, deductions and other items. It also considers the report customization capabilities.
- **Integration/Import/Export** looks at whether the program can interface with general accounting software for GL purposes, as well as the ability to import data from time clock programs. Also of note is export capability of reports into a common format such as Excel or Word for simplified sharing of the documents.
- **Training, Support & Updates.** Tax rate updates are crucial, so how does a vendor provide them? Online or on CD? Also, how much does the update or maintenance package cost in order to get the updates? What support and training options are available?

Finally, an **Executive Summary** follows the review section, providing a brief synopsis of the reviews along with a summary chart showing products and their ratings in each area.

AMS Payroll — 1099-Etc & A-T-F Payroll

Advanced Micro Solutions offers A-T-F (After-the-Fact) Payroll as an add-on to its 1099-Etc tax and information return compliance

package that focuses on 1098, 1099, W-2, W-3, 940, and associated form

types, as well as providing compliance reporting tools.

Read Full
Review

Cheque-Mate International — Insta-Pay for Windows

Insta-Pay for Windows provides a comparatively low-cost payroll program that supports an unlimited number of companies and employees per company, with benefit tracking, unlimited deduction and pay types per employee...

Read Full
Review

Cougar Mountain Software — Cougar Mountain Payroll

Cougar Mountain Software produces a range of accounting software for financial professionals, businesses and nonprofit organizations, including its self-branded Cougar Mountain Payroll.

Read Full
Review

CYMA Systems, Inc. — Accounting for Windows Payroll Module

The Payroll module for CYMA Systems' Accounting for Windows offers support for an unlimited number of client companies and employees per company, and integrates with the FMS accounting software to provide a comprehensive application.

Read Full
Review

Intuit — QuickBooks Enhanced

PayCycle offers an online automated payroll solution with an accountant focus that enables financial professionals to offer the payroll service to their small business clients. Accountants pay a discounted wholesale monthly price and can charge clients whatever price they want. The system is geared toward a paperless environment, with direct deposit included in the cost.

Read Full
Review

Phoenix Phive Software — Industrial Strength Payroll

Industrial Strength Payroll from Phoenix Phive Software Corporation offers payroll processing live or after-the-fact, geared toward public accountants with multiple clients or businesses with multiple independent divisions. It supports up to 998 companies or divisions with up to 5,000 employees each, with up to three concurrent states per company, with multi-state support for employee taxes, as well.

Read Full
Review

Red Wing Software — Red Wing Payroll

Red Wing Payroll from Red Wing Software offers live and after-the-fact payroll support for accountants representing multiple clients or can be used directly by small and mid-sized businesses. The stand-alone system can integrate with Red Wing's accounting applications, which include solutions for agricultural and small business concerns, as well as for municipalities.

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Review

Sage Software/CPASoftware Division
— Sage CPA Accounting Payroll

Sage CPA Accounting's Payroll from Sage Software's CPASoftware division, is a comprehensive payroll processing system that was intentionally developed for practitioners who manage payroll for multiple clients. The system can be used as either a stand-alone application or as an integrated component of the CPASoftware suite.

Read Full
Review

Boutique Work-Style Payroll —
Executive Summary

With the recent trend of accountants returning to payroll services, I anticipate increased acquisition activity in the payroll software market in the coming years. While in the short term this can lead to decreased competition, in the longer run it may lead to more consistent high-quality programs and moderate pricing levels as major companies vie against each other for this very lucrative market.

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