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From the January-March 2007 Issue & 2007 Tax Season Survival Guide

As each year passes and technology processes become more advanced, paperless (or less paper) solutions are increasingly popular throughout businesses of all kinds. Based on his or her position, experience and knowledge, the tax and accounting practitioner can play a pivotal role in helping an organization or firm standardize its paperless initiatives. Here is a set of time-tested tips and tricks to initiate and maintain a paperless office:

PROJECT ASSIGNMENT
Select one person to be "in-charge" of the paperless office project.
This person needs to have a good working knowledge of your current business processes and have a love for technology. Since this project requires acceptance from your decision makers, a partner- or manager-level person may be your best choice. In addition, you will need to have a key IT person to assist with the technology decisions.

Considerations For Initiating & Maintaining A Paperless Office

- Project Assignment
- Implementation Planning
- Software Selection
- Hardware Considerations
- Record Retention
- File & Folder Naming Convention

paperless document management software is a huge advantage. Check with your tax or trial balance/engagement software vendor for software options. Sending documents (e.g., tax returns) directly into your document management software is much easier if integrated by the same vendor. Have key people sit through Web demos.

HARDWARE CONSIDERATIONS

- **Space** — Get some estimates of needed hard drive space from the software vendor and then double that. You just can't have too much available space. The first year of going paperless will cause the biggest jump in required space, which will continue to grow until data is eventually archived off the system.
- **Speed** — The need for speed increases dramatically on your network because the new paperless software and data files will be demanding on the system. Consider moving from 100MB to 1GB network speed by reviewing your current wiring, switch speed and Network Interface Cards (NICs) in the computers.
- **Memory** — RAM, RAM, RAM! Having 1GB of memory or more on the users' PCs is probably the single most productive hardware consideration. This will play a big part in the speed experienced by each user.
- **Backup** — With increased hard drive usage, the ability to back up your servers with existing tape drives or other means may be in jeopardy. Consider not only the size of the needed backup, but also the amount of time needed to make the backup. Going paperless also means a greater reliance on nightly backups. If it is time for a new backup system, consider using a hard drive backup system. These systems are generally more reliable than tape, and restoring files is a simple process.

- **Scanners** — Depending on the size of your company

Resources

  - 2003 Guide to Paperless CPA Firm Administration — www.cpaadmin.org (member section only)
  - Creative Solutions by Thomson (Engagement CS and FileCabinet CS) — www.creativesolutions.thomson.com
  - Lacerte by Intuit (Document Management System) — www.lacertesoftware.com
  - ProSystem *fx* by CCH (Engagement and Document software) — http://tax.cchgroup.com

RECORD RETENTION

Review and update your record retention policy, considering the impact a paperless office will have on that policy. Decide when you will archive records off the network and how you will store them. Review the archive capabilities of your software so you can make the retention policy and your software capabilities co-exist.

FILE & FOLDER NAMING CONVENTION

Now is a good time to review the file naming rules for your firm. Consider using a format that includes the date, description and client number, for example, "YYYY Description of Document 1234.doc." This lets the document stand on its own and can enhance your ability to search. When setting up client folders for paperless storage, keep in mind the need for future archiving.

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