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Every so often, I upgrade my WinZip license. Two weeks ago, I went from version 9 to version 11, and, when I upgraded, WinZip was offering a bundle that sounded appealing — WinZip Professional plus Companion for Outlook 1.0. I wasn't sure about the 1.0 version of a product, but the price was right, and I figured I would give it a try. WinZip has always been a breeze to install, and this was no different. The licensing changed a bit but still was not a problem, and the new Companion for Outlook product installed just as easily. Now, you are probably wondering why a columnist writing about Security is talking about WinZip, a technology that has:

- been around for years,
- passed through various corporate owners,
- returned as an independent company once again trying to make it in the world of technology with a single product, and
- is a product that has been distributed and available for free for so many years that most people think it is freeware?

It Just Makes Security Sense!

The Companion for Outlook is one of those add-ons that just makes sense, and, when you use it, you wonder why no one thought of it years earlier. WinZip's Companion for Outlook

basically takes an attachment or attachments and, when sending, asks you whether you want to compress the attachments into a WinZip file and IF YOU WANT TO ENCRYPT THE CONTENTS right there from within the dialog box. That means there's no going out to create the Zip file, no trying to figure out how to secure it and no trying to figure out the encryption process; it's all right there in a single window

prompt coming up on-screen when you click the send button to your e-mail. Now

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one-step process that WinZip's Companion for Outlook brings to the accounting world is huge. Your employees do not have to spend time learning how to use another application.

Why is this Important to Our Clients?

This is especially important to our clients because it secures the communication between us and them. It provides another level of security for our clients' information and ensures that someone on the Internet with nefarious intent does not utilize our clients' data for inappropriate purposes. The issue has always been that it takes a large amount of time to use a piece of software outside of the e-mail application to prepare a file for secure communication. It was not easy to create a secure file for our clients and send it via e-mail.

In many cases, our clients are not familiar with the various security technologies to secure communications, and our efforts to create secure communications have run into large roadblocks. With WinZip Companion for Outlook, I think this will change. It is easy to create the encrypted e-mails that are secured and sent over the Internet. The option box is so easy to use that any client, irrespective of their level of technical knowledge, can securely send their accounting information to us. It provides our clients with a better sense that we, as their accountants, take their data security seriously and work hard to protect their financial information. By making this process easy and simple, WinZip has provided accountants and, more importantly, our clients with the means to secure data communication without a large and lengthy learning curve.

Oh, the Simplicity!

The screen shots below show just how simple and easy this is to use. You create an e-mail with the attachment, and, when you click send, you receive the Zip attachments

dialog box.

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The biggest negative to this application and using the encryption tools is that the recipient of the message needs to have some basic understanding of how to use WinZip to access, decompress, de-encrypt and save the file to their computer for use. The un-encryption process, unfortunately, is a bit more complicated than the encryption process. With a little work and experimentation, a client who has never used WinZip before should be able, perhaps with some coaching from you, to open the attachment.

You can purchase WinZip Companion for Outlook for \$19.95 from WinZip's website at www.winzip.com. If you have already purchased or are using an evaluation of WinZip 11, give this add-on tool a try. I believe you will find it as helpful as I have in solving our compliance problem of securely sending client data.

Technology

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