Like it or not, the world is changing. For those of you who have a few (more) grey hairs … or perhaps not grey but just less of it, you've been through this before. Remember DOS? The coming months and years will be filled with questions about when (not if) to upgrade. There is a new desktop operating system out — heard of Windows Vista? There is a new version of Exchange — 2007. Later this year, there will be a new version of the server operating system, code named Longhorn. And of course, the new versions of the Microsoft Office 2007 suite are out. The sheer volume of new software releases in our world is mind boggling. I remember practitioners telling me that they just hoped they could get another year or two out of their existing versions so they could make it to retirement.

We have all come to rely heavily on the productivity applications we know as the Microsoft Office Suite. Since the new versions of Office run on both XP and Vista (although arguably slightly better on Vista), you may be like many practitioners I've spoken with who are moving to the new versions of Office before moving to the new operating system. If you're one of those who hopes to get another busy season or two out of the XP operating system and 'spread' the transition and learning discomfort of upgrading, opting to only transition to the new Office this year, this column is for you!

Here are (hopefully) some tips on easing the discomfort of transition:

Get familiar with the concept of the Microsoft Office 2007 Compatibility Pack.
I've written about this before, but to re-emphasize the point, the file format for document versions created in the Office 2007 System is different than that of the prior versions. When you save a document from the 2007 Office

System, it will have an 'x' appended to familiar file extensions

to serve his client. There will be many similar examples as the world slowly moves to the new file format. The Microsoft Office Compatibility Pack installs a small file format converter for users of prior versions of Microsoft Office, allowing them to open, edit and save files originally created in Office 2007. Be prepared to help your clients and others by keeping the link to the Compatibility pack handy. The download link is: www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?familyid=941B3470-3AE9-4AEE-8F43-C6BB74CD1466&displaylang=en#AffinityDownloads. Alternatively, you can put the search term Microsoft Office 2007 Compatibility Pack in your favorite search engine and get right there.

Download, install and link to the Microsoft Office 2003 to 2007 Interactive Guides.
These are handy little flash programs that graphically demonstrate how to accomplish
a task in the new versions of Excel, Word and PowerPoint after you interactively show the guide how you accomplished the same task in Office 2003. These are extremely useful as you begin to understand the new, significantly different Office 2007 user interface. What was a myriad of drop-down menus and toolbars is now tabs and a 'ribbon.' Each tab in Office 2007 logically combines a set of common tasks. For example, in Word 2007, the tabs are Home, Insert, Page Layout, References, Mailings, Review and View. Selecting one of these tabs reveals a 'ribbon' or large (about 1-inch) area at the top of the screen with buttons (some large) exposing the functions linked to the tab. Overall, I have personally found this easier to find and then use features in the Office productivity programs.

Microsoft has indicated that a large percentage of requests they received for new features in the Office programs were already included. End users were clearly

finding it a difficult task to locate the features they were looking for (now

2006 to 2007 interactive Guides. Here's the Tech2Go link: www.CPATechAdvisor.com/tech2go.
The fourth interactive guide (not included in the Tech2Go show notes) is for Outlook and can be found here: www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=cc37cc1e-028d-4d30-9093-96cc6513eca1&DisplayLang=en.

Finally, use the much expanded and useful online Help at http://office.microsoft.com.
There, you'll find a number of helpful tools including multimedia tours of the new versions along with extensive interactive Help and the option to download a 60-day trial of the software. Keeping with the new tab and ribbon interface, the site is constructed with tabs and ribbons. The tabs you'll find there are Home, Products, Help and How-to, Downloads, Clip Art, Templates and Microsoft Office Live.