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From the Sept. 2008 Issue

The closest I've ever come to being compared with Charles Dickens was being called "Scrooge" during the holiday season. That said, I'm going to borrow (and paraphrase) his greatest opening line: "It was the best of ~~times~~ applications, it was the worst of ~~times~~ applications."

Citrix has almost become a totally generalized term, interchangeable with remote access. [I realize they are (now) more than that, but this column will deal only with the remote access aspects.] Back in the early '90s, ex-IBM developer Ed Iacobucci had a vision, namely, to build multi-user support for OS/2. After stumbling around for more than five years, his company, Citrix, was completely on the ropes and reportedly days from failing when Microsoft invested \$1 million and agreed to utilize Citrix technology in its new Windows Terminal Services Edition.

This was certainly good news for Citrix (the original name Citrus — remember, they're headquartered in Fort Lauderdale — was changed after a trademark dispute), and the new technology most definitely helped thousands of companies extend their technological "reach" by presenting applications to both local and remote workers. That's the good news.

The bad news is that the technology allowed software developers to delay development of true web-based applications. Why write for a whole new platform when Citrix (using the proper noun to include all the variants of "remote access") will let us deploy our existing application to users anywhere they might be? That was good logic in 1998 ... and even in 2000. And perhaps in 2002.

But it's now 2008, and the profession is just beginning to see a few

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for the practice of public accounting. Let's take a look at some of them:

Information Sharing. We've long had imports, exports, data sharing and even data synchronization. True Web 2.0 applications provide for seamless sharing in an "always on" mode. Example: Intuit's QuickBooks Online. While I fully realize it doesn't have all the functionality of its desktop cousin, it DOES have much that simply can't be done in a LAN-based system, even with Citrix! Multi-user is a core concept, not an add-on. My QBOL instance automatically performs an automatic query of my checking account and credit cards every night. It grabs any new transactions and automatically places them in the appropriate registers. The result: an always up-to-date system with zero key-punch!

Continuous updating. While Citrix farms can quickly update their applications, they are limited to the release cycle of the underlying software. True Web 2.0 software is continuously updated! This model ends the traditional software adoption cycle and breaks the back of the "backwards compatibility" problem.

Collaboration. Here is the real homerun. Consider a payroll application like Payroll Relief or PayCycle. Because both are true Web 2.0 applications, they run inside a browser, from any machine, anywhere. Both utilize an "administrator" concept (that would be you, the accountant!) who can delegate various tasks to various people (think staff, individual

clients, etc.) on a client-by-client basis. Each person sees everything they

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and PayCycle, was written from the ground up as a Web application. As such, it takes advantage of all the security and accountability offered by the Web and, at the same time, is free of the limitations of traditional LAN-based software.

Simplicity.

Want to use a product? With Web 2.0, you visit a website, and in moments you're up and running. No ordering, installations, downloads, configuration, etc. SaaS pricing models allow publishers to "slice and dice" their offerings in almost limitless combinations. Need it for a single project? Okay. How about for a month? No problem. What about 10 clients? Sure. Six staff members? You got it! Get the picture?

Status.

In addition to the products mentioned above, you can find a Web 2.0 income tax compliance product from Orange Door, Inc. at www.orangedoorinc.com. Thomson Reuters' GoSystemTax RS, while not technically a Web 2.0 product, comes very close, and the GoFileRoom document management system is clearly Web 2.0. Sageworks' ProfitCents was designed from the beginning as a web product.

On the accounting side, we have www.NetBooks.com, SAP Business One (www.SAP.com), NolaPro (www.nolapro.com), NetSuite (www.NetSuite.com) and Intacct (www.intacct.com).

And time and billing provider BQE Software last week announced the upcoming release of a completely new Web 2.0 version of its very popular BillQuick product. Finally, two of our Award winners in the 5th Annual Tax & Accounting Technology Innovation Awards are true Web 2.0 products — workflow provider XCM

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products! Its Global fx Tax product (www.tax.cchgroup.com/Globalfx), like Thomson's Virtual Office product, utilizes Citrix and simply repackages the existing LAN-based products.

Why?

I submit that it's a combination of the availability of and familiarity with Citrix and lack of user demand. We can't do anything about the former, but we can certainly do something about the latter! A whole new world of productivity awaits our profession, and if our vendors won't lead the way then we as users should. Ask your vendor WHY they don't have true Web 2.0 applications available. And don't let them tell you it's because you don't want them!!! Ten years of Citrix is enough!

We want progress and leadership!! Vendors?

Technology

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