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offering, offered through an ASP (Application Service Provider) model. This gives you the benefits of anytime, anywhere access and the ability to outsource the IT infrastructure and system administration responsibilities as a part of the solution.

The charges for the sample firm defined on page 26 for Payroll Relief AC would be \$2,500 to \$3,000 per month and would include the following: direct deposit of payroll, printing MICR checks at the firm, tax deposits, quarterly and yearly compliance forms, all reports, and W-2s.

AccountantsWorld is a web portal that was designed to provide an online community for accountants. It has evolved to be a comprehensive resource of information and software applications for accountants, including Payroll Relief AC. One of the characteristics of the AccountantsWorld model is that the applications are designed to be offered exclusively 'through' accountants and are not sold directly to end-user business organizations. In fact, the AC initials represent 'Accountant Centric,' to imply that the service is designed around the needs of the accountant providing a client payroll service.

You have the option to privately label the system for your firm. This provides a significant advantage to accounting firms that are looking to develop a comprehensive payroll service offering for their clients because you can control the packaging and pricing to accommodate your service delivery model and not have to worry about competing with a direct sales effort from the vendor. The AccountantsWorld model appears to be that of a true partnership relationship with participating accountants.

LEARNING CURVE – 5 Stars

The user interface is very intuitive and simplifies navigation. The system has a good balance between providing information to help you navigate the screens and not

being too crowded with information. The use of multiple screens organized by folder

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Payroll Center dashboard screen lets you quickly assess the status of all aspects of the current payroll cycle.

Employer Activity Center gives your client a snapshot of their current tasks, including the ability to post messages to them.

E-mail reminders for payday and tax deposits.

Directly e-mail reports from within the application.

Ability to calculate taxes for all 50 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico.

Supports third-party sick pay, dependent care benefits, health insurance for 2 percent shareholders and manually prepared checks.

REPORTING CAPABILITIES – 5 Stars

Payroll Relief AC provides a comprehensive set of reports that are organized into three tabs: Payroll, Compliance and Employment. All reports display a sample of the report format on the selection screen so you can quickly see what the report will look like and the content of the information provided. All reports are printed and displayed in Adobe Acrobat as a *.PDF file with the option to be e-mailed directly. Payroll tax compliance forms are produced in signature-ready format for Federal and 30 states. For all other states, a complete report is produced for completing the state tax forms off-line.

INTEGRATION / IMPORT & EXPORT – 4 Stars

Payroll Relief AC integrates with AccountantsWorld's innovative web-based client accounting application, but I was unable to determine the extent of that integration. The vendor also offers a comprehensive set of accounting firm centric applications to help you manage your practice and deliver client services by leveraging technology,

including CyberCabinet to store and retrieve documents via the Web and Tax

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SUMMARY

The overall focus of AccountantsWorld on helping the accountant be at the center of the clients' business applications is impressive. The web-based model is also a real plus. The payroll package itself seems pretty complete in terms of features and functions. The primary reason for the overall rating being less than five is that it is competing with some really powerful payroll service providers in this review that are deeper in all aspects of the payroll processing, service and support industry.

2004 OVERALL RATING: 4.5

Review Attributes

In order to maintain as much consistency in our reviews as practical, the payroll software solutions were rated on the following five areas:

Learning Curve; Breadth & Depth of Features & Services; Reporting Capabilities; Integration/Import & Export; and Customer Service & Support.

We also looked at the vendor's history and vision in terms of the company's experience, resources (personnel and financial) and reputation in the profession and the extent to which they are focused on payroll services. We also considered how the vendor approaches the accountant's role in the payroll service delivery model.

The user interface is the primary

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the feature set may be complete, we assessed a lower rating. This is a key factor to evaluate because of the intensive interaction of the system that is required by your staff and, in some cases, your clients.

The functionality of a payroll system is a key characteristic to evaluate because it will directly influence the range of clients to which you will be able to provide payroll services, as well as the scope of the services you will be able to offer. Functionality is measured in large part by the Depth & Breadth of Features & Services. How many options does the package offer? Does it provide features that meet the needs of a growing company such as EFTPS (Electronic Federal Tax Payment System)? MICR (Magnetic Character Ink Recording) and Direct Deposit? An extended set of these types of features resulted in a very high ranking in this category.

The following questions all relate to the rating of the software's Reporting capability. What types

of reports does the system produce?

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accounting system, HRIS (Human Resource Information Systems) and other applications to minimize data entry and optimize the potential to leverage the information flow into and out of the payroll system.

The true measure of a software's value is not limited to the program itself, it is heavily influenced by the vendor's ability to help you use and apply it. All it takes is one frustrating afternoon of system problems on a day when multiple client payrolls need to get out the door and you can't get the help you need from the vendor to leave you with a long-lasting distaste for the entire system.

We have done our best to rate the vendor's ability to deliver Customer Service & Support, but at the end of the day you need to conduct your own due diligence on this attribute and talk to a few client references about their experience with the vendor in this area. It is one thing for a vendor to say what kind of support they

offer, it is quite another to deliver

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