CPA
Practice Advisor

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CCH ViewPlan Advanced is a comprehensive, capable estate planning engine that puts many tools and presentation features at your fingertips. The latest version (4.7) introduces a number of new enhancements, including the Charitable Gift Annuity Advanced Transfer Calculator, American Council on Gift Annuities (ACGA) rates, support for the HotDocs answer file (*.ANS) format, and the ability to export to *.PDF and *.RTF file formats.

Comprehensiveness, Reliability & Ease of Use — 5 Stars
The main window has a vertical navigation toolbar docked at the left side of the screen with icons for Clients, Estate Details, Plans, Comparisons and Presentations.
Clicking on any of the icons leads to detailed data-entry screens for each area. Once you've added basic client information, you can begin entering the client's estate details. These details include information about beneficiaries and distributions, client preferences, assets and liabilities, general gifts, property transfers, expenses, losses, prior gifts, generation skipping tax (GST), cash needs and liquidity costs. You can select either Detailed View or Quick Plan View, which determines the level of detail entered for each of the data-entry areas. As you click on each item in the list, a multi-tab input screen opens for that item type. For example, clicking on Assets and Liabilities opens a window that shows a list of detailed assets and liabilities that have been entered.

You simply click the Add button to begin entering information about that specific item. The information you supply on the input screens depends on what type of item you add. For example, a Cash item allows you to enter the description, asset value, ownership (client, spouse, joint or community property), growth

The screens described above are a combination of current data (assets, liabilities, etc.) and planning techniques (gifts, transfers, etc.). Within the General Gifts section, you enter one-time gifts as well as gifting program details. For each gift entered, the screen displays a grid list of assets, which is used to specify the funding source(s) of each gift. You can specify the year to start, year to stop and the recipient details. The Advanced Transfers section includes a broad range of trusts and other transfer mechanisms that can be used by the estate planner. Trust and other transfer types supported include CRAT, CRUT, Pooled Income Fund, CLAT, CLUT, GRAT, GRUT, QPRT, GRIT, Private Annuity, SCIN, and Installment Sale.

Customization, Flexibility & Features — 4.5 Stars
ViewPlan automatically generates sample plans for your client based on the information
you have entered. For married clients, the sample plans generated include All to Spouse, Optimum Marital and No Marital. Other plan types (also called scenarios) available include Variable Marital, Variable Bypass Before Taxes, Variable Bypass After Taxes, and After Tax. You can add a new plan or copy and modify an existing plan. Initially, plans are based on the same set of information entered in the Estate Details screens. However, you can enter overrides to modify certain aspects of the general information that has been entered. Each plan also allows you to select specific options, such as the timing of deaths, asset growth rates, state law assumptions for client and spouse, display options, and generation skipping tax (GST). Selecting "View" from this screen opens a screen with graphical and text details of the information entered and the calculations used to arrive at the specific plan's result. The flowchart view provides a powerful tool that will certainly help clients visually understand the complexities of the proposed plan.

To help illustrate the benefit of one plan over another, you can create a

Cash Needs, Liquidity Costs, Probate/Living Trust, Bypass Allocation, Beneficiary Allocation, Section 6166, Section 303, Glossary, Generation Skipping (Basic and Multiskip), Advanced Transfers (Primary, Charitable Deduction/Actuarial Calculations, Income Tax, Gift Tax, and Annual Results), plus numerous data input reports. A flowchart visually details the flow of assets from client(s) to heirs. A Scenario Explanation provides a nice plain-English client presentation that explains key items from the estate plan. You can combine multiple estate plan reports to build a customized presentation for your clients.

Company History, Support & Help — 5 Stars
CCH is a large provider of tax and business law information and software. With numerous accounting and legal publications, the company uses its authoritative research expertise to bring a solid foundation to its software products. The company employs a team of accountants and attorneys who are responsible for the ViewPlan product.
ViewPlan’s Help screens are easy to read and have many links to related topics and program areas. Topics covered include program navigation and operation, as well as detailed information about various estate planning techniques supported by the program.

Relative Value — 4 Stars
ViewPlan is priced at $1,565 for the first year; renewals are $860 per year. LAN pricing is also available. This is a powerful tool that has a very user-friendly interface. You can enter information in any order and at whatever level of detail you wish. This lets the attorney or financial planner spend as much or as little time working with the client as they wish, yet allows them to provide valuable information immediately, even if it is somewhat of a broad estimate. The graphs and presentation material are professionally done, and the online Help covers both theory and usage topics.

2006 Overall Rating: 5 Stars