*From the April/May 2007 Review
of Professional Tax Preparation Systems*

Outside of the "Big 3" makers of tax preparation software, Drake is the largest, with almost 10 percent of tax professionals using the system. And this user base is very loyal, which resulted in Drake receiving The CPA Technology Advisor's 2006 Readers' Choice Award for federal/state tax compliance. Drake is an all-in-one system, with support for virtually all entities with year-end compliance requirements, including 1040, 1120, 1120S, 1065, 1041, 990, 706 and 709, with corresponding support for all states. The full tax suite costs $1,395, which includes the previously mentioned tax compliance, unlimited e-filing, a client write-up system, document management, a tax planner, organizers, a firm website, banking options and access to RIA's Checkpoint online tax research platform. The system is network-ready and can be used by any number of preparers within the same office. For firms renewing their Drake software, pricing drops to as low as $995 with early season discounts. The system is also available on a pay-per-return basis.

**Learning Curve — 4 Stars**
Drake's interface opens to a well-designed screen that resembles a web page, with a personalized section on the left that displays links to returns recently worked on by the preparer, as well as upcoming appointments and a Message Center. The appointments section links from and to Drake's built-in scheduler feature. The window also provides useful program hints in the work area, while pull-down menus and icons are available across the top for accessing the main functions of the program such as opening or starting new returns, calculating, printing,

support and research. Fortunately, this does not clutter up the screen by showing

Drake uses the taxpayer's SSN or EIN for naming of the account, and this number must be entered to begin entering basic client data prior to preparing a return. The system uses general data-entry screens for information entry, and these entry forms are clean and easy-to-use, with pull-down menus and automatic ZIP Code recognition of city and state, which is a useful function. Within a client return, Drake's data-entry window comes to the front, providing tabbed access to entry areas, as well as icons for system functions. Actual data entry is performed on interview-style screens that do not resemble the form but follow the same data-entry order and use the same line numbering system, so that Form 1040 line 11 is also labeled as number 11 on the datasheet. An actual replica of the form can be viewed or printed with one click, provides access to all forms, as well as access to billing, a return summary, client letters, e-file status, error messages and other client deliverables. Data cannot be entered from within the form/document view function.

The data fields provide line-by-line access to instructions and Help either by right-clicking while in a field or using the F1 key. Many other hotkey shortcuts are built into the system. Unfortunately, most of the data-entry screens do not include a "save" or "continue" function. Instead, the user must use the X to close out the window, or simply press the Escape key to save the data. Also, if the SSN is edited on the client demographic screen, it does not change in the client directory, so be careful of errors during initial client setup. That being said, the program does include an SSN validation function that should reduce the risk of errors.

## Use/Workflow & Productivity Tools — 4 Stars
The Drake system is network ready and doesn't cost anything more for several preparers in the same office to use. The system's Multi-Office Manager also

helps multi-location firms manage their clients and returns. Drake includes

The Drake tax system includes practice management features such as client data and billing, client correspondence, return tracking and appointment scheduling.
Drake's Client Write-Up system, included with the tax package, offers live and after-the-fact payroll, as well as basic bookkeeping capabilities. A document management system and an asset depreciation function are also included. Free websites are available for firms using Drake, and the company also provides its clients with marketing kits that include posters, banners and pre-produced radio and newspaper ads. RIA's Checkpoint is available to Drake users at no additional cost.

### Integration/Import & Export — 3.5 Stars
Client data flows between forms, schedules and worksheets as needed, and calculations
are made either when selecting the Calculate icon or when viewing or printing a return. The Drake system also supports K-1 pass-throughs between related 1040s, 1065s and 1120s. The tax system offers integration with Drake's write-up program and can import from QuickBooks, while the document management system enables paperless storage of client returns and documents and can print directly to PDF. The system also integrates with Outlook for e-mailing clients from within the tax program. Free data conversions are available.

### Support/Training & Help System — 5 Stars
Drake offers outstanding phone-based support and comes with a full print version of its user manual, in addition to offering in-program assistance features such as line-specific Help, tutorials, links to support, and various Help tools.
The online support center includes a knowledgebase and assistance for users in setting up a free website, as well as access to additional training aides,

business strategies, tax news and marketing tools. An online user forum also

from the Drake system, although the program is also good enough to manage the tax needs of most smaller year-round full-service accounting practices.

## 2007 Overall Rating — 4.5 Stars

Technology