includes individual, business and special entity preparation capabilities (forms 1040, 1041, 1065, 1120, 1120S, 706, 709, 990), includes all states with taxes that correspond to the previous federal taxes, and files more than 45 municipal returns. Drake Software includes unlimited e-filing and can be used by any number of users at a single office location for a price of $995 to $1,395, which is down significantly from last year. Drake Software also offers a pay-per-return system.

Learning Curve – 4 Stars
Drake Software has undergone significant modifications over the years and sports a crisp entry screen with traditional icons and pull-down menus, but its data-entry screens continue to resemble a DOS program. However, the system does incorporate modern Windows features such as right-click line-specific help (also accessible using hot keys) and supports multiple methods of navigation. The program's client selection list provides
a small window that allows sorting by name and SSN, as well as searching by SSN and filtering by type of return. Additional information on this screen, such as summary return information, return status and acknowledgements would enable the screen to be a more convenient client status center for preparers. But the system allows access to this other data from other locations.

Drake Software does not offer a true forms-based method of data entry. Instead, the program offers a menu-based system, a heads-down interview-style method, and a pre-prepared system for entering returns already completed by a taxpayer. The Data Entry menu provides tabbed access to the primary areas of a return (general, income, adjustments, credits and taxes), offering section-specific menus on each of these tabs that allows jumping directly to a particular form or section. For instance, data-entry sheets for schedules C, D, E, F and K-1 are located on the Income tab menu, along with several other income-related options.

The system does not provide an in-progress summary or form-based view of a return,

users. (The company noted that it is giving the data-entry module an overhaul this year.)

Use/Workflow & Productivity Tools – 4 Stars

Drake Software simplifies some data entry by incorporating timesaving features such as a SSN validator and a ZIP code database that fills in city, state and county information automatically. The system automatically calculates some fields on data-entry sheets and allows overriding of calculations, but does not notate or color code these fields to note that they have been changed. If errors are encountered during calculations, due to missing data or for other reasons, they will likely show on the View mode's Notes or Messages sections, however. These sections combine to offer light diagnostics and notifications of data-entry errors. Drake Software supports all states with individual, corporate, partnership and fiduciary compliance requirements, as well as 706 and 990 for California.

Drake Software includes tax research with the package, offering the online version of CCH's Master Tax Guide Plus to its users via a link in the software. This includes the federal guide and Tax News Highlights. Additionally, the Drake Scheduler is included in the package, offering an appointment manager with calendaring functions similar to Outlook and support for multiple preparers. This system provides some schedule reporting functions, as well. All Drake clients are provided with a free web site through 1040.com, with templates that simplify the site creation process. New this year, Drake Software can convert tax returns and supporting documents to *.PDF format.

Integration/Import & Export – 4 Stars

Drake Software includes all primary return types and all states in one package and does well at transferring information to corresponding state and city forms. It could, however, do a better job of transferring data throughout the program, such as K-1 from 1065 to partner's 1040 or parent/child returns. The program supports

importing of data in text format, and conversions are available for ATX, Dunphy,

e-file database, a Knowledgebase that includes FAQs, training tools, a marketing kit, and its Forums section, which enables Drake Software users to discuss the software, business strategies, tax news and make suggestions.

Product Evolution & Vendor Vision – 4 Stars
Drake Software continues to improve on its core programs and has made good efforts to help practitioners modernize by including free web site hosting for its clients. In general, it has adopted the Internet well, with integration of several web-based support tools and access to CCH's research offerings included with its software, but the program is probably due for an interface overhaul. The system, while functional, looks and feels antiquated, which might decrease interest of professionals looking at software options. In the meantime, however, Drake Software has significantly reduced its package price: from $1,995 last year to $995 to $1,395 this year.

Relative Value – 4.5 Stars
Drake Software is a good value, especially for firms that need a complete tax preparation system without having to purchase additional modules. The flat-rate price, which includes unlimited e-filing, is very attractive. The data-entry screens are a little old-hat, but they are easy to move around in, easy to understand and they get the job done.

2005 Overall Rating – 4 Stars

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