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From the April/May 2006 Issue

Fifteen years ago, the idea of changing tax preparation software could bring a tax professional to his or her knees in fear for several reasons: The IT headaches involved in switching systems; retraining preparer staff on the new program; and the lengthy and often inaccurate process of converting data files from the old system. Ten years ago, it was still frightful for the same reasons and, to some extent, remained as such until only a few years ago. As a result, most tax professionals choose their compliance packages not after a periodic review of what system would be best suited to meeting their firm's needs, but because they perceive that it is easier to stay with the same system. In short, they let SALY choose their tax package (SALY = Same As Last Year). Considering their past experiences with changing preparation software, this may appear to be logical on the surface, but there are several problems with the argument.

First and foremost, since tax preparation is a primary revenue generator for many firms, it follows that their tax preparation software is among the most important. It is essential, therefore, that firms occasionally assess their actual needs, how they use their software, and how their client base may have evolved over the past few years. It may be that the practitioner is buying more tax power than his 1040 base needs, or perhaps not enough power for the complex, multi-subsidary corporations or partnerships. Do you need upward and downward integration of K-1 data? Are you moving to a paperless office? Do you need integrated tax research, analysis and planning capabilities?

Second, most of the pains that professionals foresee from a software change are, today, imaginary. All of the major tax programs migrated to the Windows

platform several years ago (or to an online system), which means that they are

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change will require some effort, but personnel training and research on software should already be part of a firm's in-house training program.

That brings us to data conversion. SALY wants you to use the same program because it will "take forever" or "be too expensive" or "too risky" to migrate proforma data. While this concern is important and can still pose some challenges, most of the major tax software vendors provide free data conversion from the other major tax software vendors. These conversion systems vary from good to excellent, depending largely upon what software the data is being switched from. Data conversion is a key factor when evaluating a prospective replacement tax package.

Although most of the technical difficulties are now minor in comparison to years past, the selection of a tax package is still a vital element to a firm's productivity. This means that, while changing systems should not be done without serious consideration, it is also important not to just keep using the same package year after year without the same amount of consideration.

Each of the programs in this review of Tax Preparation Suites provides compliance for forms 1040, 1041, 1065, 1120C, 1120S, 990, 706, 709, 5500 and corresponding state support. There are several programs on the market that specialize in individual, corporate or estate compliance, or provide support for most but not all of the above listed forms. These programs will be reviewed in the June/July issue of this magazine, along with specialty compliance tax tools.

For this review, each of the programs that follows was scored in the following areas: **Learning Curve, Use/Workflow & Productivity Tools, Integration/Import & Export, Support/Training & Help System, Product Evolution & Vendor Vision,** and **Relative Value** (which provides a subjective assessment of the dollar-value ratio of the software in terms of how it addresses the needs

of its intended users). Finally, an **Overall Rating** gives the

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home state (25 with an additional state), and 25 being out-of-state.

- 50-1120S forms,
- 25-1120C,
- 20-1065,
- 10-1041,
- 10-990,
- 10-5500
- and five form 706/709.



ATX/Kleinrock — Total Tax Office

ATX has rapidly developed a solid user base of its tax preparation programs, offering a variety of bundled packages based on practice specialty, as well as several accounting and engagement applications.

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CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business— ProSystem fx Tax

CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business, offers a full suite of accounting and tax applications through its ProSystem fx Office line, including ProSystem fx Tax, which provides professionals with a comprehensive preparation and research system ...

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accounting and tax preparation applications, and now offers tax compliance support for all entities, as well as trial balance, fixed assets and write-up.

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TaxWorks — TaxWorks

The TaxWorks system is a complete suite of tax preparation tools, offering compliance for all entities required to submit returns to state and federal agencies, including 1040, 1041, 1065, 1120, 1120S, 706, 709, 990 and 5500, as well as the state counterparts to those forms.

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Thomson Creative Solutions — UltraTax CS

Thomson Creative Solutions offers what is arguably the most comprehensive line of applications for public accountants that includes its UltraTax CS professional tax compliance suite, as well as tax planning, fixed asset management, write-up, trial balance, practice management engagement, financial analysis, paperless document management and client accounting.

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Thomson RIA — GoSystem RS

RIA's GoSystem Tax RS is at the pinnacle of tax preparation systems, providing a comprehensive online solution that spans the compliance spectrum and provides exceptional integration

with RIA's renowned research products. The program continues to

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for next season? "Same As Last Year" will work fine if you are satisfied with your current package. But if you have found that it doesn't fully satisfy your needs and you're not fully content, then explore the other options.

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[Related Article — Where are the Updates? Delays with Tax Forms is Common](#)

If you were irritated at some point during the tax season because some forms were not yet approved and included with your tax software, you're not alone. All of the major professional tax software vendors experienced delays this year, and many received comments from their users.

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