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Search is the New OS

By
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Executive Editor

From the January 2005 Issue&

In the '90s it was all about operating systems (OS). Microsoft led us through a dizzying parade of "new and better" OS, from all the flavors of DOS into Windows 3.1, 95, 98, SE, ME, NT, 2000 and finally XP. Each meant billions to the vendor and the bloat and scope creep had the Intel's of the world happily selling us more and more horsepower to take advantage of new features and functionality. As a profession, we didn't mind because we were experiencing the initial euphoria of rapid increases in productivity. Everybody played; everybody won! New software genres

were invented, and the competition

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high, we have practitioners debating the wisdom of applying a major service pack to the XP operating system. Now it appears the “OS juggernaut” is about to end. Microsoft has all but formally announced that Longhorn, the much-awaited replacement for the XP operating system, won't be released until probably 2007. But fear not, we have a replacement to confound and confuse us! “Search” is the new OS!

Accounting firms have been quietly bumping into the “search” problem for the past few years. A rapid expansion of services, clients, internal and external programs, and, mostly, the drive toward paperless engagements and paperless firms, has elevated the concept of search to the rank of “Most Important” in many mid-sized firms. Smaller firms are also beginning to notice and are preparing to actively attack the problem. The problem is an explosive growth in data and no clear-cut method to account for it. In a presentation at the ITA's Fall Collaborative,

Sue Torgeson, product manager for

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most each of these sources, there are unstructured, raw desktop search engines emerging that many feel may provide, while not the entire STARSSS, at least the "S"earch.

I've been hearing the term petabyte lately. I was just getting used to firms having to manage hundreds of gigabytes and now some, admittedly forward-thinking, thought leaders are talking about the management of data stores that are orders of magnitude larger. The problem is growing inexorably larger and is simply begging for a solution. When we started managing electronic files, we all seemed to gravitate toward a tree structure that rather mimicked our file room. Folders and a series of sub-folders, etc., such as Clients | A – C | {Client Name} | Year | Service | ..., etc. Note that computers never actually NEEDED all that structure, but rather WE did. We wanted to organize in a familiar fashion, and the technology so allowed.

The

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over 20 years of practice, I have seen that paper documents can be and occasionally are misfiled. Thus, it's a management and training issue, not a technology issue.

Now, suddenly, SEARCH is the new OS! Unless you've been living under a rock, you've undoubtedly heard about Google and its (perceived) full attack on Microsoft. It seems the world's latest golden boys, Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, think they may have an answer. If an onboard search engine can search EVERYWHERE, and do so INSTANTLY, do we really NEED to organize files? Please be aware that I'm not (yet) advocating a "junk drawer" approach to electronic documents, and I'm fully aware that "search" is only ONE of seven very important functions so succinctly described in the STARSSS model. But if you're a wise planner, you'll want to be very aware of the looming "search wars."

In point, a few months ago, Microsoft

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in their products absolutely impressive.

Early next summer, we'll be offering a webinar to examine these and other emerging solutions to the "problems and opportunities of search" for practicing accountants. Until then, you may want to experiment with one or more of these new tools

www.lookoutsoft.com/Lookout

<http://desktop.google.com>

<http://emailorganizer.com>

www.copernic.com/en/products/desktop-search/index.html

www.x1.com

Who knows, you may even find that long-lost misfiled document!

P.S. — I confess to being an incurable gadget junkie. I simply could NOT resist the e-mail that announced the new Treo 650. Even though my Treo 600 is less than a month old (I've actually had it for nearly a year, but Sprint

recently replaced it because of

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