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Service Bureau-Style Payroll Review — 2005

Payroll Services Strengthen Client Relationship, Provide Added Value

Dec. 01, 2008

From the August 2005 Issue

Payroll is a lucrative business, and the recent return of accounting professionals into offering payroll services is evidence that this is no longer a secret. There are many options on the market for professional accountants who are considering providing payroll services to their clients. The question is how to find one that meets the needs of the client, while also meeting the workflow needs of the accounting firm.

Some payroll programs are geared primarily for use by small businesses. These systems, often included in small business accounting programs or offered as an add-on by the same vendors are not accountant-centric, generally supporting only one company. The next level includes programs that assist public accountants in handling a few payrolls, but not as a primary offering of their firm. These are often referred to as “Boutique Work Style” payroll programs, and this magazine will review such offerings in the next issue (September 2005).

This review section looks at the next level — Service Bureau Style programs and systems through which accountants can act like the national payroll service bureaus did only a few years ago. With such systems, practitioners can offer complete payroll, compliance and human resources management services to tens or even hundreds of clients with varying staff sizes.

While in the same general category, the systems reviewed here vary greatly in their approach and their delivery. Some offer a very hands-on approach, providing the accounting firm with the tools to do everything in-house. Others in this review section, such as systems from the traditional service bureaus, let the accountant rebrand a service that is actually almost entirely outsourced. In this case, the accountant acts as a value-added middleman, passing on the costs of the service, which is provided by a true service bureau, and adding whatever additional fees the market will allow. With these latter types of systems, accountants can even allow client access to a firm-branded online portal for entering payroll information and thereby further reducing labor required from the accounting firm.

Another major differentiating factor within this group of applications is their delivery method. Several, particularly the outsourced models, are online offerings, enabling users to log in from any location to access or enter payroll data for clients. This can also reduce the IT requirements of the firm, since no program maintenance is required, such as updating tax tables.

In order to provide approximate pricing for the products in this review, we have developed prototype needs for a professional accounting firm that is offering payroll services to several clients. This hypothetical firm handles the following:

- 50 payrolls for various clients; weekly, biweekly and semi-monthly
- Approximately 2,000 to 2,500 checks per month
- Direct Deposit capability
- Employees in multiple states

Each of the products in this review section was evaluated on the following points: **Learning Curve; Features & Services; Reporting Capabilities; Integration/Import & Export; and Training & Support.** A summary section within each review provides an overall view of each application, and an Executive summary on page 38 provides a wrap-up of this review section.

Stellar Software — Payroll Café

The Payroll Café Service Bureau version from Stellar Software is designed to meet the needs of firms acting as payroll service bureaus, with support for payroll processing for an unlimited number of companies. The program supports all states and includes MICR encoding, magnetic media, ICESCA and Direct Deposit and creates customizable NACHA files that can work with any direct deposit program.

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[ADP Small Business Services — EasyPayNet](#)

ADP Small Business Services offers its EasyPayNet as a wholesale service to accountants, allowing professionals to sell their payroll service as a part of their overall client service, but with ADP performing the actual payroll processing, deposits and compliance.

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[Execupay — Execupay Payroll Suite](#)

Execupay Payroll Suite (EPS) was designed by a company that started out in the payroll service business and still provides those services today. The program is comprised of a set of modules geared toward the primary tasks associated with providing payroll services, from tracking time, printing checks, human resource management, reporting, tax and FICA compliance, to sales and service, as well as an online component to the program.

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[UBCC — Payroll Service Bureau](#)

Universal Business Computing Company (UBCC) offers its Payroll Service Bureau as part of its overall suite of professional accounting and payroll solutions that feature integrated, customizable modules.

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[Intuit — Complete Payroll](#)

Intuit's Payroll Service offers several solutions, most of which are products that add-on to QuickBooks. Complete Payroll, however, is a fully outsourced product that can work without QuickBooks, providing complete payroll and compliance, along with HR management.

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[AccountantsWorld — Payroll Relief AC](#)

Payroll Relief AC is an online payroll system designed specifically for professional accountants that provide payroll services to their clients. The

system can be accessed by users through AccountantsWorld's secure servers from virtually any location, enabling ...

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PenSoft — Payroll Plus

PenSoft produces several versions of its Payroll Plus, including the Accounting Edition reviewed here. Other versions of the software are geared toward particular vertical markets, including hospitality, distribution, healthcare and manufacturing. The Accounting Edition supports multiple companies and includes invoicing, enhanced reporting, human resources, data entry, calculation and checkwriting functionality.

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Thomson Creative Solutions — Payroll CS

Payroll CS (formerly Payroll Solution) is a professional payroll application that includes full-featured calculating payroll and add-on modules for Direct Deposit and the vendor's Payroll Reporter. Thomson Creative Solutions also produces a wide range of software and online applications for professional accountants, including write-up, tax planning and compliance, asset management, practice management and web site building for accounting firms.

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PayMaxx — Power Payroll

PowerPayroll is an online payroll processing system from PayMaxx that supports all 50 states and offers options for tax compliance to all payroll tax entities. The system is primarily geared toward use by small business management, but PayMaxx does offer an accountant-focused interface for those professionals that offer PowerPayroll to their clients as a service of their firm.

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SurePayroll — SurePayroll

SurePayroll offers its self-branded service both directly to small businesses and as an outsourced payroll option for accountants wishing to provide payroll services to their clients. For professional accountants, SurePayroll offers a wholesale option through which the service is discounted and can be branded

with the accounting firm's name, helping to maintain the client-accountant relationship.

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[AdaptaSoft — CyberPay](#)

With the release of CyberPay version 6.2, Adapta-Soft continues to add to its service bureau-style payroll application. The Microsoft Access-based program is designed for public accountants and other providers of payroll services, supporting an unlimited number of client companies and departments and their employees. It also provides customization features and client-ready deliverable reporting.

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[Service Bureau-Style Payroll — Executive Summary](#)

Getting into the payroll business can be a major change to the business plan of an accounting firm, but it is also one that can provide great dividends. In addition to the added revenue stream, payroll services can strengthen relationships with clients, making them always aware of the presence and importance of their professional accountant, as well as providing them with more personalized service than they might receive through a traditional national service bureau.

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