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company's tax preparation software. The program is geared primarily toward accountants and tax preparers, but the company is also targeting other prospective estate and tax planning professionals, such as attorneys. The program supports creation and comparison of up to five tax scenarios, and reflects phase-in tax code changes. The current version of the program supports federal 1040 planning, along with state income tax planning using a customizable worksheet. The system costs \$195.

## **PROGRAM**

### **USE/DATA ENTRY – 4 Stars**

TaxPlanner's primary screen opens to a subwindow that provides pull-down and icon menus across the top of the window, with the work area below. This work area provides columns for up to five planning years, with financial data below. To the left, a column with text-based titles provides the row subjects of the spreadsheet-style screen. These listings include a summary of the basic components of a 1040, including Filing Status, Ordinary Income, Schedule D, Adjustments, AGI, Exemptions and others, allowing users to quickly see items that are affected by changing variables.

Most data entry is performed by

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your comments, and other information.

Some of these entries, such as interest and dividends and passive loss adjustments, provide a further detailed data-entry worksheet. TaxPlanner then calculates the total of these entries and transfers the sum to the appropriate field in the primary planner window. All affected fields, including taxable income and tax due/refund, are automatically adjusted to reflect any changes made. The system allows copying of column (year) data to expedite planning, and program icons provide quick access to the state worksheet, the data bridge, and accessing general firm and client information.

In general, movement within TaxPlanner is intuitive, with the ability to use a mouse, keyboard arrows or the tab key as well as several “hot keys,” and a simplified screen that provide text links to more detailed data-entry worksheets. The program automatically opens to a new planning project/client, but existing clients can be opened via the icon or pull-down menus.

The windows used by the system are

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up to five years of planning in a side-by-side format that makes it very readable. On a positive note, the system makes it easy to print just a current screen, main worksheet or all worksheets associated with the client, and also offers the ability to print to \*.PDF. Unfortunately, the report is not customizable, nor does the program offer any graphical reporting tools.

## **IMPORT/EXPORT CAPABILITIES**

### **– 4 Stars**

TaxWorks TaxPlanner can draw current-year client information from the TaxWorks tax preparation program using a bridge. The program does not import, export or interface with any outside programs.

## **HELP,**

### **TRAINING & SUPPORT – 3 Stars**

TaxPlanner includes a useful help utility that is task-focused, providing useful assistance to new and infrequent users. The program provides limited right-click menu functions, such as cutting and pasting data entries,

but there are no tutorials or direct

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### **RELATIVE VALUE – 4.5 Stars**

The TaxWorks TaxPlanner provides a good basic planning system in a package that is very easy to use. It handles most computations quite well, but is limited in many of its functions, including the lack of customizable reports or graphical client presentation tools. That said, professionals looking to experiment with tax planning or who have limited need to offer planning services would be most likely to benefit from the program. With direct integration with the company's tax preparation software and costing only \$195, every professional already using TaxWorks should also get TaxPlanner; it provides solid basic planning capabilities.

### **2004 OVERALL RATING: 4**

For the products in this review section, we looked at five key areas that users and vendors stated were of primary concern:

#### **Program Use/Data Entry**

As with any software, the ease with which the program's functions can be operated and the amount of time it takes to grow accustomed to a tax planning program affect

its value in a professional setting. This section looks at general navigation and data

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well as client-deliverables such as graphs, \*.PDFs and client letters. The customizability of these reports and communications also adds value to a program by enabling a user to brand and personalize client contact.

### **Import/Export Capabilities**

As a starting point, almost all data needed for the base year of a plan has already been entered into a tax preparation program ' there's no need to enter it twice, especially with complex clients. Thus, the ability of a program to pull client financial data from at least its sibling tax preparation program, if not competing programs, is essential. Further integration with outside programs such as Excel and Word further aid in the usefulness of the tax planning application.

### **Help, Training & Support**

While not needing technical support is always preferred, its availability is important. This section looks at how the program provides assistance to users through built-in help utilities, tutorials, online support centers and general functionality, in addition to optional training programs offered by the vendor.

### **Relative Value**

This is the 'Bang for your Buck' section ' the reviewer's subjective opinion of how closely the software's value to a practitioner matches its cost. Because every practice is different, this section generally identifies what kind or size of firm would benefit the most from it, in recognition that large and small firms often see things very differently when it comes to their IT expenses.

### **Overall Rating**

Finally, the overall rating gives an overview of how a product scored in each of the identified categories, and is the average of those scores rounded to the nearest half-star.

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