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*From the December 2007 Issue*

For years, everybody's been telling professional practices that they need a website and that it is as important, if not more so, than a yellow pages listing or having business cards. If you don't have one, your existing clients will think poorly of your technological savvy, and since an accountant relies on technology for virtually every service they provide their clients, this is not a good perception to give them. Plus, how will prospective clients find you? What if they're searching and find your competitors, instead?

Well, for many small practitioners, it may not be quite this dire, even if I have personally joined in on many of the above comments in previous years. But your website is an important marketing tool, and the lack of a firm website can have implications on your practice. Likewise, a poorly designed site or one with old content can reflect negatively on the firm and does not provide your clients and visitors with much benefit. Aside from that, a website can offer you and your clients so many advantages.

The good news — make that the great news — is that getting a website up and running (and editing it now and then) doesn't have to take an extreme amount of effort or much investment. And you really don't have to know anything about how websites work, because there are many website building tools that are made specifically for accounting and tax-focused professional firms. Some of the systems are from vendors who also make tax and accounting software,

while others are professional web development companies that have specialized

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company

information. They usually include pre-written descriptions of common services (like tax preparation and write-up) that can be easily customized or tailored to match the services of the practice. Some make customization and editing of text very, very easy with Microsoft Word-like tools for formatting, selecting font size, adding pictures or other tasks.

But in addition to telling your clients and other visitors a little about your firm and the services it offers, many advanced systems also provide various financial calculators, tax calendars, tips, tax and retirement planning information, and even periodically updated articles on tax and business issues. Some of the website tools also make it easy for clients to check the status of their tax refunds or have secure client portals that allow the professional and the client to send other documents or other files. These collaboration tools enhance services by speeding up data transfer, especially for client financial files from their bookkeeping system.

A few of these website building systems from vendors who also make online accounting programs also allow the system to act as the login point for clients to access their daily, in-house accounting program, and for the professional accountant or tax preparer to access their programs and document management functions. Countless other options are available, too, from client newsletters that can be sent to recipients using an included e-mail marketing tool, online data backup and storage, refund tracking functions, specialized client support materials, and password protected, client-only access areas.

Your website is an extension of your professional practice, so it's essential that it provides information and service that your clients expect and need, and also those of the clients you wish you had more of. Providing

this content keeps your clients thinking about their financial situation and

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### [AccountantsWorld – Accountant's Practice Online](#)

AccountantsWorld offers a large suite of programs designed for professional accounting firms, with many of them available as hosted, online programs. Accountant's Practice Online, provides a customizable website for the firm's clients and Internet visitors, along with online access for client access to programs and data the firm wants them to have.

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### [Build Your Firm – Website Development & Internet Marketing](#)

As a website development option for professional accountants, Build Your Firm is unique in many ways, not the least of which is that the company's president is a CPA with an active practice. This surely keeps the needs of most practitioners in clear focus, since he encounters the same workflow processes and firm needs.

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### [CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business – ProSystem fx Site Builder](#)

CCH's ProSystem fx Site Builder is designed to give accounting practices a website development tool that simplifies creation and editing of a firm website, while also providing the firm's

clients and online visitors with a variety of tools and content, including

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pages of customized content and tools for visitors.

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### [CPASiteSolutions – CompleteWebSuite](#)

CPASiteSolutions offers several website design packages for professional accounting firms with customized content options that include articles on financial and tax issues, as well as a large collection of calculators, newsletters and other client-focused tools such as online portals for secure collaboration.

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### [Drake Software – 1040.com Preparer](#)

#### [Websites](#)

Drake Software offers 1040.com as a public tax news and information portal for anyone looking for forms, instructions, tax calendars and other materials. In conjunction with this information site, tax professionals using the Drake Tax system can get a free subdomain website ([www.1040.com/yourfirmname](http://www.1040.com/yourfirmname)).

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### [Tenenz – Accounting & Financial](#)

#### [Site Builder](#)

The Tenenz Accounting & Financial Site Builder (AFSB) is a website creation and management tool specifically designed for accounting and tax practices, providing a professional site design

with multiple visitor tools, including financial and tax calculators and

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options and client collaboration functions.

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