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Much of the buzz of the past few years has been over the continuing paperless practice movement and the phenomenon of "cloud computing." Pretty much everyone knows the meaning of paperless; it's basically self-explanatory. The term cloud computing, on the other hand, may seem somewhat mysterious.

This article isn't a primer on that concept; a few of our writers have already addressed it (see www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2259 and www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/1967).
But I will give my two cents of explanation on the term: It's essentially the next phase of web-based computing. Much as Web 2.0 expanded that definition, cloud computing aims to put virtually everything we do online, including specialty tax and accounting systems, general office programs (like Word and Excel), data storage, collaboration tools, and pretty much everything else.

There is no doubt that the software side of things, including "cloud-based" programs, is turning out some exciting and innovative new concepts that will greatly affect tax and accounting practices and businesses in general. But hardware continues to play an equal role to software, providing the actual tools with which they interface. Quite obviously, without a physical device and keyboard, the software would do little good. There are those who argue the converse point, of course (re: Chicken vs. Egg).

But I'm a gadget man. I like to feel a keyboard and hear it click. I like my smartphone that lets me run errands or hit golf balls while still being connected to my work email and applications. I love

sleek monitors. I like digging into my desktop PC once a year; not to figure

more productive in the office or out. Here are a few that I think deserve some attention in this regard.

AT YOUR DESK

MULTI-SCREEN MONITORS
People have been promoting the use of multiple monitors for years, especially in a few key professions (especially financial and accounting). The benefits include a dramatic increase in productivity, and that's not just taking the word of the companies that make these multi-monitor displays.

Research shows efficiency boosts of up to 40 percent, plus I've talked to several real-life accountants who love the systems in their practice, especially during tax season and for write-up. With two monitors, you can have your tax prep system on one screen and source documents on another, aiding data entry and review. With three monitors, you can also view tax research or a spreadsheet. I recently spoke with a professional who uses four-screen displays at his 10-person practice, which he says greatly streamlines virtually everything he does.

> **DoubleSight**
> **Displays — $550-$750**
> DoubleSight (www.DoubleSightDisplays.com)
> offers dual-screen monitors in 17-inch and 19-inch sizes (approx. $550 and $750, respectively) that come mounted on a stand that takes up only the desktop
> space of a single monitor. The stands are also available separately, which allows people to use the monitors they already have. DoubleSight uses Sony LCD monitors, and its products are also available at Dell, Staples and other online tech retailers.

Digital

priced at $1,389. Each of these uses a single reinforced monitor stand to preserve desktop space.

SCANNERS/PRINTERS & MULTI-FUNCTION DEVICES
While small, mid-sized and large practices obviously have varying workflows and some differences in technology needs, many find the same products to be useful. A practice with fewer than five professional staff, for instance, may not need a high-end dedicated printer and scanner and will find the use of multi-function machines on their desktops to be useful. Many large practices, even though they have those high-volume devices, find it more productive to also keep a scanner/printer/copier at individual desks in order to reduce time spent away from the workstation.

Fujitsu
— ScanSnap S300 Color Mobile Scanner – $295
The ScanSnap S300 (www.scansnap.com) is the smallest double-sided scanner with an automatic document feeder. The company actually promotes it as a "mobile scanner," since it is very compact and uses a simple USB 2.0 interface. But the small device packs a few excellent features, including one-click scan-to-PDF, bookmarking, search and other document management functions.

Samsung
— CLX-3175FW – $399
Samsung's (www.Samsung.com) wireless 3175 multi-purpose device offers great convenience (no need for

network

— 2135cn Multifunction Color Laser Printer – $439
Dell's 2135 (www.Dell.com)
provides a great full-color laser option for desktop multifunction devices. The device has high monthly duty cycle capabilities (40,000 pages print), and also offers scan, copy and fax functions. It also has a web-based remote configuration tool and a toner management function that notifies the user to reorder.

DYMO
— LabelWriter Twin Turbo – $139
Whether a one-person shop or a larger practice, somebody has to print mailing
labels, and it can be a headache trying to print them on an inkjet or regular printer. But DYMO's (www.dymo.com) line of specialized label printers makes the job much easier and efficient. The Twin Turbo even allows two sizes
of labels to be loaded at the same time in the device, with 55 page-per-minute
speed, high resolution laser output, and direct integration with Word, Outlook,
QuickBooks and ACT!.

FOR THE WHOLE OFFICE/WORK GROUP

HIGH VOLUME SCANNERS
With the continuing focus on digital processes (the paperless movement), scanners have become a central hub of this effort. Digitizing client documents makes them much easier to store, search, filter and use (especially on a multi-screen monitor). And since most tax preparation vendors are also adding some form of

auto-populate or at least auto-organize/workpaper compilation functions, scanners

in one pass. A 75-page document feeder aids with tasks, and a daily capability
of 1,800 sheets means the machine can handle the full workload of most small
practices or be used as a desktop device for high-volume individuals at larger
practices.

Fujitsu
— FI-6130 Sheet-Fed Scanner – approx. $950
In addition to its desktop/mobile ScanSnap, Fujitsu (www.Fujitsu.com)
offers several workgroup and heavy production scanners, including the new
FI-6130 Sheet-Fed model. The 6130 scans up to 40 pages per minute with 600
DPI resolution, and includes a 50-sheet feeder tray, duplex capabilities and
Adobe Acrobat Standard.

KODAK
— i210 Scanner – $799
KODAK (www.kodak.com) has
transitioned well from a photo-oriented company to a digital imaging technology
vendor, and its document scanners offer good features and capabilities. The
sheet-fed i210 moves at 30 pages per minute and can scan virtually any size
image, from ID cards to documents up to 34" long. The Smart Touch feature
makes scanning directly to email, file or other programs quick and easy, with
output available into multiple file types, including searchable PDF.

In addition to Fujitsu's ScanSnap S300 noted previously, there are a few other micro peripherals out there that can help you input or output information while on the road, with some not even needing to plug in since they get their power from the cable attached to your laptop or phone.

Ambir Technology — TravelScan Pro 600 – $150
Barely wider than a sheet of paper and less than two inches in height and depth, Ambir's (www.Ambir.com)
11.6 ounce TravelScan 600 can quickly scan business cards and documents up
to 8.5 x 14 inches. The lightweight tool uses a regular USB cable for both data transfer and to get its power, and can save straight to PDF format.

Planon — PrintStik and DocuPen – Starting at $199
Planon (www.Planon.com)
has taken portable scanning and printing to the extreme, providing pocket-sized
options that can work with a PC, Mac or even mobile phones. The DocuPen can
scan a full page in about four seconds, with full color resolution. And it has built-in flash storage that can hold hundreds of documents. The PrintStik
brings printing convenience to those on the go; can print from laptops, computers
or smartphones; and doesn't need its own power supply. This is a handy tool for those air and road trips.

ONE MORE USEFUL TOOL

setting.
The folding keyboard offers full-sized keys and number pad, while the iRizer
laptop stand can be set to various angles to ease viewing. Matias' products
are PC and Mac compatible and are available at Staples, Office Depot and dozens
of online retailers.

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