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Innovation in hardware and software never ceases to amaze me. The most difficult task is keeping track of all of the worthwhile products to recommend to clients. When you are practicing accounting day to day, and particularly in busy times, it is difficult to keep track of new product announcements and upgrades that can directly benefit small businesses. It is even more difficult to separate hype from fact. Interaction with peer firms or others within your firm may help, but you need a proactive way to identify the opportunities for your clients. Hopefully, this column is one source you can trust. There are dozens of products I have written about in the past, but for this column, I'm going to focus on products that I have not covered before or ones that have recently received a major upgrade.

Big Time by Edison's Attic — This project accounting product has support for DCAA (Defense Contract Audit Agency) as well as time and billing with an elegant integration into QuickBooks. The product competes against Deltek and other government and construction products, but is simple enough and inexpensive enough to use that any small business that needs help with managing projects should consider this as an alternative. The product can be used stand-alone, over the web as a hosted product, and the cost per user is very low. www.edisonsattic.com

SmartVault — The innovations in user interface, ease of document capture and integration into QuickBooks makes this hosted product a "must have" product for QuickBooks. The product captures files of any type and provides a simple link from inside QuickBooks. Additionally, there is a web interface that lets non-QuickBooks users retrieve documents. From a tax and accounting professional's perspective, there is controlled

access to multiple clients' documents, and a firm can use the product

systems. The system is flexible enough to be set up in just a few hours or days. www.results-software.com

Intacct — If you or your clients have outgrown QuickBooks, then Intacct is certainly a candidate for you. This hosted, or Software as a Service (SaaS), product has very strong accounting similar to mid-market products, but with the ease of use of an entry-level product. The product runs entirely through a web browser, making installation very easy. Sophisticated features like integration into SpringCM for document management, SalesForce.com for CRM and dozens of other products solve business issues in many industries. Management information is easily accessible with dashboards of key measures, and the dashboards can be configured easily and published outside the Intacct system. If you are looking for a more sophisticated accounting system that has good accountant access, this system may be for you. www.intacct.com

SageSpark and Billing Boss — Not all systems have to be expensive to be useful, and SageSpark and Billing Boss certainly fall in that category. Both are free services developed by the well-known mid market vendor Sage. Billing Boss provides free invoicing to small businesses and has accessibility to this information by the firm's accountant. For small businesses that provide services such as lawn care, pool services or janitorial services, Billing Boss eliminates the pain of getting an invoice out. With so many people currently starting small businesses, the SageSpark website can provide interaction and business advice that is not readily available through other sources. Finally, to support the mobile lifestyle of small business owners, the products will run from mobile device web browsers such as those on the iPhone or the Google Android G1 phone. www.sagespark.com — www.billingboss.com

ShareFile — If businesses need to transfer files, particularly

Abacus Backups — As long as we have a copy of your data, we can recover your operations. That has been my business continuity mantra for decades. Of course, we still need the applications and computer hardware, but the fact remains that the data is the key element for recovery. There are many online backup systems, but Abacus is particularly high-speed, secure and has the advantage of being outside the U.S. borders, which gives the data more protection in litigation. Further, the data is encrypted before it leaves your facility and is encrypted at the backup site, rendering all data inaccessible except to the person and firm that created it. www.abacusbackups.com

NetRescue — This appliance-based backup can copy any or all data in an organization every 15 minutes, retaining the copy for up to 72 hours. If needed, an entire server such as an Exchange server can be run virtually on the appliance in the event of a catastrophic failure. If you choose to have a copy of the data off-site, this can be done nightly for a small fee, and you can run the virtual machines from data centers around the country. www.nmgi.com/netrescue

Agility Recovery Solutions — What happens if everything is gone in your small business? That's where Agility comes into play. Agility can deliver any or all of four key recovery elements within 48 hours of any interruption: Power, Technology (Computers and phones), Space and Connectivity.
The monthly fee for this service is relatively low for the peace of mind with knowing you have the basic operational needs covered. Even without a formal Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan, the Agility methodology in conjunction
with its MyAgility portal give you access for business-critical operation recovery. www.agilityrecovery.com

As you can see, these products all have the potential of helping your small

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