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## REVIEWS

# 2009 Review of Engagement & Trial Balance Programs

Engagement & Trial Balance Systems Focus on Workflow

Aug. 01, 2009

*From the August 2009 Issue*

Engagement and Trial Balance applications have been in existence for the last 10 years or so. When initially introduced to the marketplace, these applications were fairly basic products that provided limited features and workflow. These early products were very useful, but most of them had various shortcomings that accountants just had to live with (but wished they would fix). Many of these shortcomings were not addressed for several years until the vendors and marketplace started to gain a better understanding of what this new breed of products was capable of and what it should do for us.

Initially, there were quite a few products on the market fighting for market share, but over the last few years three vendors have emerged as the leaders in the product category. These market leaders did not create revolutionary processes; they just implemented project management workflow they saw being used by industries other than public accounting.

These vendors then took workflow processes and strategies that are used in many other professions and industries and tailored their products to fit the needs and desires of the public accounting market. Once practicing accountants were offered

public accounting-specific engagement tools, and not a project management product used in other industries like software development and construction, the paperless office concept finally took off. Our profession is now reaping the rewards of the paperless office.

This review is focused on giving you the knowledge you need to pick the correct engagement/trial balance product, pad your ego for the choice you made in selecting your current engagement/trial balance product or help you move to a product that best fits your practice.

All of the products reviewed in this article are terrific products; it really just comes down to a decision of which one fits your practice the best. I decided to look at the following five areas for each product:

### **SET UP & IMPLEMENTATION**

It is easy to determine the software license cost of a product, but what about the other costs associated with the product? I wanted to know how much time (expense) it takes to install the software, and get trained by the vendor, and how much effort it takes to get the product “live.”

### **INTEGRATION WITH OTHER TAX & ACCOUNTING PRODUCTS**

Since the engagement/trial balance product is normally the centerpiece of each engagement, I wanted to know how well each product integrates with other tax and accounting products in the engagement workflow process.

### **INTEGRATION WITH OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY APPLICATIONS**

All of us use MS Office products such as Word, Excel and Outlook. I wanted to know how each of these engagement/trial balance products integrates with these office productivity applications.

### **WORKFLOW & ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT**

As I stated earlier, the products help us manage the workflow of engagements and help us do our jobs easier and faster than ever before. How does each product stack up on workflow?

### **RELATIVE VALUE**

A firm can't go wrong with any of these engagement applications. I suggest that you spend time documenting and understanding all of your firm's processes. Once this step has been completed, talk to each of the engagement/trial balance vendors reviewed here. Each firm has a different culture, policies and procedures so one

product won't fit every firm. Take your time to examine your firm and each product and you'll discover the one that best fits your firm.

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#### ENGAGEMENT SYSTEMS

##### [CaseWare International, Inc. – CaseWare Working Papers](#)

CaseWare Working Papers is one of the many product offerings from CaseWare International Inc. Working Papers can be used as a standalone product or integrated with other CaseWare products.

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##### [CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business – ProSystem \*fx\* Engagement](#)

ProSystem *fx* Engagement is one of the many product offerings in CCH's ProSystem *fx* suite of products. Engagement can be used as a standalone product or integrated with other ProSystem *fx* systems.

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##### [Thomson Reuters – Engagement CS](#)

Engagement CS is one of many product offerings in Thomson Reuters' suite of products. It can be used as a standalone product or integrated with other applications in the CS Professional Suite.

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#### TRIAL BALANCE SYSTEMS

##### [CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business – ProSystem \*fx\* Trial Balance](#)

The primary function of ProSystem *fx* Trial Balance is to control the trial balance function of an engagement. Thus, this system has fewer workflow features than its sister product, ProSystem *fx* Engagement.

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##### [Thomson Reuters – Trial Balance CS](#)

This product offering from Thomson Reuters is a component of its sister product, Engagement CS, but is also offered as a standalone product. The primary function of Trial Balance CS is to control the trial balance function of an engagement.

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[Related Article: Tax Systems Offer Trial Balance Options](#)

In this section, we have reviewed several products that are stand-alone engagement/trial balance products that are very useful for firms, but you may be saying “I don’t need a stand-alone product to meet my trial balance needs.” Your firm may concentrate primarily on tax returns, and you don’t want to learn a different software package. Well this article is just for you.

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## 2009 Review of Engagement & Trial Balance Systems — Comparison Chart

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### ADDITIONAL AUDIT/ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

[AuditConfirmations LLC](#)

[Capital Confirmation, Inc.](#)

[CaseWare – IDEA](#)

[CPA Service Group – Disclosure & Reporting Manager](#)

[Reinvent Data – TopCAATs](#)

[Thomson Reuters – SMART Practice Aids](#)

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