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Column: From the Trenches

From the December 2009 Issue

It's hard for me to believe that the first decade of this century is almost behind us. So many things have changed since the furor of Y2K in 1999 just 10 short years ago when

we were all running QuickBooks 99 on Windows 98. One thing that we see changing

You are probably a better judge of what your small business clients need than I am, but one thing is for sure: Successful small businesses are acting differently. First, many small businesses want the ability to be more mobile, yet still stay on top of the business. With the "we've got an app for that" attitude of the iPhone and Google Android phone users, many can run a product like Sage BillingBoss from their phone, complete with invoicing, and managing their appointment calendar. I like to picture a small lawn care, swimming pool maintenance or snow removal business as an example of a service business that could act like this. The owner/manager could conduct business via cell phone while working at jobs with other employees or solo. Restaurant owners, physicians and other prime accounting clients are all busy people that want to look at their business while they are on the go, too.

Millions of businesses, reportedly three million plus, have had success automating their operations with QuickBooks, and we are excited about the new features in QuickBooks 2010. We expect continued success for Intuit on desktop QuickBooks, but they have much more up their sleeve with their new marketplace for connecting suppliers together. We expect many third-party vendors to solve direct business problems while QuickBooks continues to perform the back-end accounting. If the marketplace is successful, this could put Intuit in a position to update QuickBooks Online and provide even greater functionality to the 100,000+ users already on this product. Many small businesses work with these products and count on their accountant to take care of cleaning up the transactions, producing month-end financials and handling their tax returns.

To make this collaboration easier, companies have created good businesses by hosting QuickBooks. Insync, Right Networks, Real Time Bookkeeping, Personable and Real Time Data Services are examples of companies that have learned how to host QuickBooks so businesses can use their accounting data remotely or collaboratively with their accountant. There is safety in having the data off-site and

backed up for business continuity and disaster recovery purposes, but the most

the system to make available to the end-user. If the end-user should only enter checks and cash deposits, so be it. If the end-user can do more sophisticated accounting, this can also be allowed. Accountanting Relief is designed to keep the accountant in charge and in control of the client's accounting. They even have an integrated Payroll system that can be far less expensive for the firm, providing even greater, recurring profitability.

IS IT TIME TO MAKE SOME NEW YEAR'S BUSINESS RESOLUTIONS?
After considering your client accounting, it might be time to reflect on your firm's strategy and technology. Do your technology tools fit your practice? If you haven't looked at practice management, paperless, research, tax and audit tools in a while, you may be surprised how much progress publishers have made. You may find that you only need training on how to better use new versions of the products you already have. Or you may discover a whole new way of doing business.

Other technologies you will want to implement in the coming year or two include the following: Windows 7, Office 2010, Office Web Applications, Exchange 2010, SharePoint 2010, Windows Server 2008 R2 or a new version of Windows Small Business Server, the arrival of 802.11n wireless, as well as a new generation of high-speed cellular. We'll get the opportunity to look at most of these in the year ahead. Instead of rebuilding your entire internal network, you may opt to use hosting or SaaS applications.

WHAT CHOICE MAKES SENSE FOR YOUR BUSINESS?
One of the easiest things to do in business is to do the same thing. This may or may not be the best thing for the firm, your clients or you. Consider the products you are using, and determine if they are accomplishing what you'd like to have done. Are you able to complete work easily and quickly? Are you able to retrieve and see client data easily? Can you answer clients' questions about their financials easily because

everything you need is at your fingertips? If not, then you should take a look at some

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