Oct. 04, 2010

From the October 2010 Issue

Those of us in the northern hemisphere are noticing some gradual changes in the sunrise and sunset times ... and in where the shadows are beginning to shift. If you are not enjoying the changing of seasons, maybe you need to get out of your office more!

But before you head out the door ... or maybe after you get back from enjoying some time outside ... take a few minutes to evaluate your to-do list. You know, that list of prioritized items where certain entries may have been neglected or pushed to the bottom, not because they don't need to be done but because the Important/Urgent items seem to land in your inbox daily, slowly easing other tasks down the list. Busy season is just around the corner and will start making its way to your doorstep at lightning speed once the holidays start. You want to make sure you invest some time now in those items that may have fallen into your Important/Not Urgent list. And one of the items that should be somewhere on that list is: "Update my website!"

Most likely, you've had some staff changes (adds, deletes, promotions), and maybe you've changed the focus of your practice. Don't hide your light under a bushel basket, as the old saying goes; let the world know who you are, what you do, and why you are the best at it. This special feature highlights a number of offerings that specialize in helping tax and accounting professionals build and maintain a website. As noted throughout this issue, building your brand is essential to the success of your firm, and one of the first places your clients and potential clients will look is online. There is no better time to start building or re-evaluating your firm's online presence, and these tools can help. We looked at several factors that you'll want

to consider as you determine the route to take for building or updating your

service, you will likely have a larger gallery of images and templates from which to choose. You'll want to look at their reference sites to get a feel for what is available. Some design and hosting providers will handle all changes themselves, which may be the best option for those who don't have experienced or dedicated staff for website design and maintenance. This level of service means you can communicate your updates and get back to what you do best.

TECHNOLOGY FEATURES
With a few exceptions, the design and hosting providers covered here allow or require a unique domain name for your firm's website, and can handle all the technical details of registering new domains or moving your site to their hosting service. You'll also want to think about email options and support, particularly if your firm maintains its own email Exchange server and wants to continue down that path. For state-of-the-art web features, you may want to use Flash animations, so check to see if this is supported.

CONTENT
Websites for tax and accounting firms should have several goals. You want to make it easy for prospective clients to contact you. You want to define your image and brand, and invite inquiries for new engagements. You want to encourage visitors to come back for more and even bookmark your site because of the valuable resources you provide, such as financial calculators, guides, reference material, tracking tools, etc. Some firms will also want to provide online collaboration with current clients through portals, allowing for secure transfer and exchange of documents.

 WEBSITE MARKETING
Your website will begin to appear in search engine results not long after going

online, and you'll want to know where your pages rank. One approach is

CLIENT INTERACTIVE FEATURES

With the right investment in time and tools, you should expect that your website will be easy for your clients to navigate. If your website does not yet have client portals for secure file transfer, you'll want to get this set up and tested long before busy season, and you'll want to get your clients comfortable with the process now. Many of them probably already use online portals.

The bottom line with developing and establishing your online presence is to make sure your website is up to date, interesting, useful and ranked high in the search engines. The website building tools featured here are a great place to start your search. They can help you get a professional website up and running and updated quickly without compromising on quality. After all, your firm's branding and marketing often starts with your website.

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AccountantsWorld — Website Relief

> Website Relief by AccountantsWorld is a website building solution that integrates into the AccountantsWorld Power Practice suite of web-based applications. The service has been online since 2002 and currently boasts about 2,400 websites for accountants and tax preparers. Typical sites have about 20 pages, and can consist of a maximum of 40 pages, including a home page, About Us, Partners' Profile, Services, Useful Resources & Links, FAQs, Testimonials, and an interactive Contact Us page. Website Relief has a focus on web marketing for accounting firms and collaboration with existing clients.

their own web pages, with a robust WYSIWYG editor for interactive creation and changes by end users. A good selection of site templates is included to help end users create an effective website quickly.

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Review

Build Your Firm — Website Development and Internet Marketing

Build Your Firm is a marketing and practice development consulting firm focused on accounting and tax practitioners. The company's website building product can be used on a stand-alone basis, or as part of a firm's system for marketing and selling professional services to new clients. Their Website Development and Internet Marketing product is used by more than 300 firms, and includes advanced features such as Flash-enabled pages and integration with the firm's social media presence on sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

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CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business — CCH Site Builder

CCH and its parent company Wolters Kluwer are well-established organizations that have provided software, authoritative guides, and content to accounting and tax professionals worldwide for many years through its ProSystem fx, TaxWise, and ATX professional software application suites. CCH offers firms customizable websites using stock or user-submitted content, and currently hosts more than 4,800 websites for accounting and tax professionals.

ProSystem fx Site Builder provides a good mix of do-it-yourself webpage

creation through an easy-to-use interface, with the option of support

While most hosting plans include monthly or quarterly site updates by CPASites.com, an included website management application makes it possible for sophisticated firms to modify and maintain their own websites. Typical sites will have about 10 pages of content unique to the firm, and about 100 pages of stock content provided by CPASites.com, although there is no set maximum number of pages. The customization provided by the vendor's web designer helps the website convey the firm's individualized messaging, as well as a look and feel consistent with the firm's existing marketing plan.

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CPASiteSolutions — CompleteWebSuite

Accounting and tax firms that want to have a professionally designed website done by experienced and dedicated professionals should take a close look at CPASiteSolutions. CPASiteSolutions has been serving accountants since 1999, and currently manages the websites for over 4,000 accounting firms. A typical site will contain almost 300 pages, mostly consisting of syndicated content provided by CPASiteSolutions. Although the client firm can make changes using the powerful WYSIWYG editor, in practice most major design changes are handled by CPASiteSolutions' professional staff.

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Drake Software — 1040.com
Preparer Websites

Drake's Preparer Websites at 1040.com are one of the many applications and services included with a subscription

to its value-priced tax compliance software. The complete online presence

E. Mochila, Inc. — Websites for Accountants

E. Mochila is dedicated to providing website design and hosting for accounting and tax preparation firms. It has a professional and experienced staff to take the basic information and preferences to create a great looking website. E. Mochila does all of the website setup and maintenance, and the client firm will get an effective website design with very strong features at a reasonable cost. E. Mochila has been building websites for accounting professionals since 2002, and is currently hosting over 2,250 websites for accountants. Its basic packages include a wide array of tools; hundreds of pieces of syndicated content; and advanced collaboration features.

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Thomson Reuters — Web Builder CS

Thomson Reuters offers a suite of software products and services for tax and accounting professionals, including the Web Builder CS website building service. Thomson Reuters has offered website building services designed specifically for tax and accounting professionals for over 10 years. With more than 2,500 firms currently using Web Builder CS, Thomson Reuters has a solid presence in the accounting market, offers a steady flow of new features, and is adding new firm sites at a steady pace.

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