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A standard consulting practice rule is that switching software is expensive. Disruptions to procedures occur, retraining is required, and without careful analysis you may force your organization into a product that has less capability or is more difficult to use. We expect clients to switch software as frequently as they switch physicians or religions. The benefits of switching software products can be extraordinary when you understand your business needs and pick a good solution.

The disruption can be monumental when a poor solution fit is selected.

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Safety

We respect and have recommended for some time the strategy of choosing your core products from a single vendor. For some firms, that typically means large software publishers that have all of the products that are needed for efficiently and effectively running a practice: tax, audit, practice management, document management, portals, and so on. In the United States, companies like CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business, Thomson Reuters and Intuit have been building or acquiring products in order to offer a full portfolio. You may want to use solutions from a single publisher with a full portfolio or you may prefer to follow a best of breed approach, choosing solutions from many different suppliers. The advantages of dealing with large publishers include integration, support services, training, best practices, planning, innovation and vision. But the greatest advantage may be the safety of dealing with a known entity.

In other sections of this issue, you will see reviews and coverage on payroll and client write-up. CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business, Thomson Reuters, Intuit, Sage, AccountantsWorld, CYMA, Open Systems and other publishers offer products in these categories. And as you look at the products reviewed, your comfort level may drop as you see smaller or less well known publishers, even though they may have a superior product or sufficient financial strength. I know and trust all of the publishers named above.

Risk

When you stay on an existing solution, you have known costs, limitations, capabilities and comfort. When you switch software, you have to manage through product claims, facts, selection, change management, different costs, dismissing prior suppliers, culture change, retraining and a myriad of other factors. The smaller

your organization, the easier this can be. Conversely, the larger the organization, the

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marketing, profitability, and client acquisition and retention improve by offering this new service in-house. Since firms have outsourced payroll for so many years, most practitioners believe they don't want to deal with the hassle or responsibility of payroll. Others have thought again about recurring revenue and increased profitability by client that includes services beyond compliance.

Accounting Software, Payroll & Write-up Are a Start

The AICPA is projecting that the amount of simple tax preparation work will decrease over the next five to 10 years because of more automation, and that audit work will be done by fewer firms. Since small firms often have 80% or more of their revenue from tax, and larger firms frequently have splits of 40% tax and 40% audit, these compliance services need to be augmented by new offerings. When you assist business owners with making money and helping them run their businesses more effectively, the conversations change from the "must dos" of compliance, to the "wouldn't it be great if..." of business advisory services.

For most accounting firms, offering services that involve accounting software, payroll and write-up is the start of becoming a stronger business advisor. These products allow you to build a monthly recurring revenue business that your clients are excited about, and that you can be excited about, too. Large publishers like CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business, Thomson Reuters, Intuit and Sage can help you get there. So can smaller publishers like AccountantsWorld, Intacct, Open Systems, CYMA or Xero ... if they fit your client's needs. You will be able to expand the offerings with more capabilities in business analytics, niche specialty advice, wealth management and other specialty offerings.

Managing Change

One of the biggest challenges you have as an owner or a manager, or perhaps just as

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