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ACCOUNTING

Should I Take My Practice to the Cloud?

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It seems that everywhere we turn these days we're inundated with messages of moving to the Cloud. Sometimes it feels as though the Mad Men advertising powerhouse is hard at work in the Sterling-Cooper board room, coming up with new material to keep the accounting world drinking that Cloud Kool-Aid. We *are* just talking about software though, aren't we? There can't *really* be that big of a difference. In the end, we all get to the same place, right?

We decided rather than just talking about how great life is here in the Cloud, and how Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) is the only way to go and that all your problems will magically disappear when you take that leap, we should take a different approach. Instead, we'll give you some real life examples of how smart Cloud and SaaS solutions are changing the way firms do business for the better. Take *that*, Don Draper!

One Size Doesn't Fit All

Today's accounting market is more competitive than ever. You can't sit idle very long before finding yourself on outdated technology, and let's face it – nobody wants that. As clients grow, their needs are continuously changing. Firms that provide smart, innovative technologies to help clients meet stringent compliance regulations, function at full speed on the go, or process those dreaded expense reports more efficiently are the firms that will retain those clients and share in the success of mutual growth.

If clients can't get the support they need, inevitably, they'll be forced to look elsewhere. Take WithumSmith+Brown (www.withum.com) for example. Jim Bourke, Partner at WS+B, realizes just that, and has helped his firm on-board several new Cloud & SaaS product offerings that they can provide to their client base.

"It's a no-brainer when you get right down to it. You've got a goldmine of current clients who already count on WS+B to be their trusted advisors, so why not expand into other critical areas of their business and provide that for them as well," explains Bourke. "Furthermore, you also have the ability to cast a much wider net when looking for new clients. By differentiating our firm with these smart solutions, we stand above others not just in the local area, but nationwide."

Time is Money

As road warriors ourselves, we can relate first-hand to the need for access to mission critical data anytime, from anywhere. The days of the Out of the Office Auto-Reply

email are numbered – you don't want your clients waiting on *you* to access their information, do you? Why not remove that roadblock and ensure that clients can have accurate, secure access on *their* time not yours, through the use of client portals.

Taking that one step further, implementing mobile technologies inside and out can enable accounting professionals to function at full speed regardless of their geographical coordinates. Imagine never needing to use the excuse: “Sorry it took so long to reply...I was out of the office”.

Even better, imagine not losing even a day after a laptop crashes, but picking up right where you left off from any replacement device. When you think about it that way, it's evident that Cloud, SaaS, and mobile technologies help you earn back time – now that's money!

Work Smart, not Hard

All this might sound fine & dandy, but then there's reality: do all these smart, mobile apps really do what they say they do? More importantly, even if they do, are they easy enough that you and your clients can use them effectively? It's not nearly as helpful to have numerous disparate systems working independently as it is when they can integrate and provide a single collaborative platform.

When you can start piecing together different solutions and find that they interlock perfectly like a puzzle, you'll discover an entirely new level of productivity. Smart firms that grasp this are already linking various technologies together – from document management, to workflow, to invoicing, to compliance.

So, as it turns out, many of the technology answers that both your firm and clients need are right in front of you – or slightly above – in the Cloud.

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