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Randy Johnston • Mar. 19, 2012



2012 promises to be a big year from a computer hardware perspective with new

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along this sea change...perhaps it should be called a rip tide.

Since 2012 is a year of radical technology change, we have to plan our strategies. During my attendance at the Top 25 Thought Leaders in Accounting Symposium, sponsored by this publication in February, I surmised the key success items for accounting firms are:

1. Strategic vision,
2. Client focus,
3. Working with your team,
4. Managing compliance standards, and
5. Technology.

Choosing the right strategy and tools to service your market and clients the best way you can is a winning approach.

The Big Shifts

The vision is simple: 1) **hardware** is changing, 2) the operating systems that support these systems are changing into **platforms**, 3) the **applications** have to change to support mobility, web and ease of use, and 4) the backbone and **infrastructure** that supports all of our computing is changing, including virtualization, backup, private and public clouds, SaaS, and hosting.

First, let's consider some background issues. We believe that brand name computers will generally have a lower cost of ownership over the life of owning the product. White box clones may be cheaper to purchase initially, but operational and compatibility issues can eat up any potential savings rather quickly.

Second, there is a notable revolution in progress for the size and speed of end-user computer hardware and phablets (=phones/tablets) in the market leading to the

“bring your own device” (BYOD) revolution.

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this approach as the public cloud. We can very effectively run our entire firm in-house with today's remote support tools, and build our own private cloud. The support approach used for in-house systems, often called managed services, allows a trusted and knowledgeable technician to maintain your system, often to the level of installing updates to applications such as tax or your operating systems from anywhere. Because of these factors, you should pick an end-user computer hardware strategy that fits your needs. However, it is pretty clear that computer hardware platforms matter less today than they did five years ago.

In our last article, we covered the impact of Ultrabooks and phablets. Consider the end-user computing hardware today:

	Desktop	Notebook	Ultrabook	Netbook	Tablet
Speed	Fastest	Can be close to desktop speed	Light, yet close to Notebook	Low cost, slow	Slowest
Size	Largest	Heaviest and largest portable	Close to tablet	Heavier than Ultrabook	Smallest
Portability	None	Heaviest	Close to tablet	Between Notebook and Ultrabook	Lightest
Cost	\$300-1100	\$600-3500	\$700-1100	\$300-600	\$200-1000

All of these computing tools can be used to run in the cloud. The netbook, tablet and smartphone do the worst job of running applications at high speed today, but they

are very portable. The backbone is getting stronger and the applications are getting

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Ice Cream Sandwich on phablets and computers. These three platforms are being designed so the same operating system, or one that looks and operates in a similar fashion, runs on your phone, tablet or computer. When you buy into a platform from a vendor, the way applications integrate and work together is largely controlled by the vendor.

As you can guess, this is a fight between Microsoft, Apple and Google right now. Some of the fight is controlled by intellectual property, patents and lawsuits, some is controlled by innovation and ease of use and some is controlled by application availability. A future that allows applications to seamlessly run between a phone, tablet and computer could be very attractive as long as the application behaves appropriately on the different devices. Even more attractive would be a future that allowed applications to run on any platform and seamlessly work together.

Platform limits choice while enabling ease of use. If we choose a particular vendor, we get the most benefits and the most restrictions by adhering to the vendor's rules. Think of iCloud and iTunes as enabling your ability to shop easily and restricting your choice to what is in the Apple Store. Microsoft and Google are trying to mimic this model. Is a single supplier in your firm's best interest? Some say yes, while others say best of breed supports their strategy most effectively.

Some of our greatest frustrations come from hardware failures, inconsistent results or confusing design. Platform will minimize the differences between hardware run within the family. Each device will work in a similar fashion. Most of us could care less what the hardware or software is or whose brand is on it as long as it runs reliably 100% of the time and helps us get our job done. Platform will help us build our ideal future. Consider your platform choice carefully.

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