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26,103

We don't wade into politics at this publication, but the upcoming change in control of the U.S. House of Representatives will certainly bring changes to business law and taxation. Regardless of your perspective on these changes, they will directly affect your clients and practice, which means that keeping up with the changes is imperative to providing optimal service to your clients. Likewise, it's important to keep up with new technologies that can help you and your clients be more efficient and productive, which are increasingly important as we continue through this tough economy.

Each year, the Readers' Choice Awards give our readers the opportunity to help shine a spotlight on the technologies, services and vendors they use and trust — the ones that help them succeed in their profession, and those that they find valuable for their clients. While voting for the awards is not scientific and can sometimes resemble a popularity contest, that's absolutely fine with us. We believe that technologies and vendors who've earned a positive reputation and have users who are eager to praise them are probably deserving of recognition by the accounting profession.

If you'd like to see how your practice is doing in terms of technology and workflow, take our free online Productivity Survey at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/productivity. Your Productivity Score gives comparisons with other firms of your size and nature, as well as comparison to those in your geographic area. The results also offer advice tailored to your firm for how you can achieve greater productivity.

Voting for the awards was open during October to all professionals through our website, www.CPATechAdvisor.com. Thank you to all of the readers of *The CPA & NSA Technology Advisor* who took the time to vote in this year's Readers' Choice Awards. Here's wishing you a wonderful holiday season and a successful tax season.

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Vendor's customer service, as well as the all-in-one, single-price system, which also offers tools for practice management, write-up, website development and marketing aides. Of the more than 88 percent of all voters that selected a preferred tax system, Drake received 40 percent of the votes, which is up from about 27 percent last year. Coming in second this year is TaxSlayerPro, another professional tax prep system geared toward generally smaller practices, and which has been around since 1992. Following these are systems from the "big guys" — Intuit, CCH and Thomson Reuters.

Pie Chart

See our 2010 review of Professional Tax Compliance Systems at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2736 and www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2737.

Specialty Systems & Tax Prep Tools

Insight: Sometimes the full tax suites either don't offer some specialty tools and forms, or users have found that separate programs can better tackle those jobs. Topping the favorites list in this category is BNA for its estate and gift tax compliance systems, DynaTax for its quarterly estimated tax calculators for the self-employed, and FT William.com for its pension compliance reporting system.

Bar Chart:

Read more about Specialty Tech Tools at: www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2950.

Tax Planning Systems

Insight: Tax professionals know that proactive planning can have positive effects; in

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Check out our review of Tax Planning systems at:

www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3078.

Tax & Accounting Research Systems

Insight: For most professionals, tax research hasn't involved "books" for many years now, but it's progressed much further than simple CD or web-based reference guides. The advanced tax research tools on the market can now integrate with tax and accounting programs, offer customizable alerts for key subject areas, and even automatically notify a professional when new taxation issues may affect certain clients. Leading this year's balloting are the Checkpoint and QuickFinder research systems from Thomson Reuters, followed by The Tax Book from Tax Materials, Inc.

Pie Chart:

See our 2010 review of Tax Research systems on page XX of this issue and at

www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3119.

Estate Planning Systems

Insight: As with tax planning, the art and science of estate planning can be critical in developing generational wealth transfer strategies that minimize punitive taxation. More well-known in the legal and financial planning fields, the Zelman Wealth Protection system overwhelmingly took first place as the most preferred among those who selected a program in the estate planning category. Next up were systems from CCH and BNA.

Chart:

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row, the compliance system from AMS has come out on top, with its user base deeply loyal and eager to show their support. Systems from CFS, CCH's Small Firm Services, 1099 Express, Greatland, AccountantsWorld and EG Systems round out the top seven in this year's voting.

Chart:

See our 2010 review of W-2/1099 Compliance Programs at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3024.

Sales & Use Tax

Insight: State and local sales taxes are about as American as ... well, let's not demean the apple pie. But it is a significant concern for small businesses, especially those with collection and remittance responsibilities in multiple taxing jurisdictions. While most accounting firms may not directly provide this form of compliance as a service (and only 17 percent of this year's Awards voters had a preference), the tax professionals, accountants and other financial advisors who assist small businesses should be aware of the potential risks their clients can face for non-compliance, especially as nexus laws continue to change and states get more aggressive in enforcement. This year's most popular sales and use tax system was again the eFileSalesTax.com online program, followed by systems from CFS, Thomson Reuters, CCH, FileYourTaxes.com and SuperForm.

Chart:

See our 2010 review of Sales & Use Tax compliance systems at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2909.

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small business clients, who overwhelmingly use the ubiquitous small business bookkeeping software. But there are still some strong independent write-up programs on the market that offer advanced, accountant-focused capabilities. Following QuickBooks in voting this year are systems from PC Software Accounting, Thomson Reuters, CCH Small Firm Services, AccountantsWorld, Financial MicroSystems and CCH.

Chart:

See our 2010 review of Client Write-Up systems at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3077.

Trial Balance

Insight: As one of the final steps in preparing a business return, trial balance is more than just a summary view of the GL account balance, but is a vital link between financials and compliance. Of the 25 percent of this year's voters who use a dedicated trial balance system, the CS system from Thomson Reuters took first, with nearly half of all votes. It was followed by the trial balance systems in CCH Small Firm Services' ATX & TaxWise, the CCH ProSystem *fx* program, and Pendock Mallorn.

Chart:

Engagement Management

Insight: When productivity is increasingly focused on streamlining workflow, engagement management systems are essential to providing guided and organized procedures for audit engagements. About one-fifth of this year's voters had a

preference in such systems, with Thomson Reuters' Engagement CS leading the pack,

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Audit/Engagement Tools

Insight: Alongside engagement management systems, many audit firms also rely on specialty tools. This year's top vote recipients were the Smart e-Practice Aids from Thomson Reuters, followed by Reinvent Data and Capital Confirmation. Systems from Audit Confirmations, CaseWare and Technical Financial Solutions were also popular among voters. About 15 percent of our survey respondents are engaged in audits.

Chart: (Bar chart- no numbers since it is a multi-choice allowed question)

Payroll

Insight: With nearly 50 products listed, payroll is always the largest category in the Readers' Choice Awards, a sign that the market is booming and that small business owners are eager for systems that can help them perform these processes, and that many would rather have their accounting professional manage it for them. AMS, which won the W-2/1099 category, also won again this year for its A-T-F Payroll program, which is geared for direct use by small businesses. Following AMS was Intuit's QuickBooks Enhanced Payroll for Accountants, Mangrove Software, and two other payroll systems from Intuit. Nearly 80 percent of all voters this year claimed use of one of these systems, but even though we listed 49 programs, more than 28 percent of voters selected "other," meaning there are even more programs on the market.

Chart:

See our 2010 review of Professional Payroll Processing systems at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2953.

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rounding out the top five.

Chart:

Business Valuation

Insight: Whether planning for a sale, generational ownership transfer or in support of litigation, business valuation is a specialty in which many professionals find success. There are several programs designed specifically for assessing business value, and this year's winner is again the PPC Business Valuation Specialist from Thomson Reuters. Other programs receiving notable vote counts include products from ValuSource, NACVA and MoneySoft.

Chart:

Practice Management/Time & Billing Systems

Insight: Are the trains running on time in your office? When workflow processes get hampered, hit snags or don't follow best practice steps, efficiency and productivity goes down. And with them, follows profitability. Whether billing by flat rate or by the hour, managing time, staff and other resources is critical in the modern practice, and management software can help maximize your output. The vote getting leader this year is CCH ProSystem *fx* Practice Management, followed by programs from Thomson Reuters, Sage and BQE Software.

Chart:

See our 2010 reviews of Practice Management and Time & Billing systems at

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Winners were Courtview and Chroneta.

Chart:

Client Portals

Insight: Professional firms continue to adopt client portals as an important and secure way to collaborate and communicate with clients. No more sending things by email, no more mailing, no more couriers ... portals are a natural extension of the paperless office. Leading in votes this year was XCM, followed by portal offerings from Intuit, CCH, AccountantsWorld and Thomson Reuters. Of note is that more than 50 percent of this year's voters claimed use of client portals.

Chart:

Read more about Client Portals at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2775.

Document Management & Document Storage

Insight: This is the second largest category in this year's Awards voting, with more than 40 products on the market designed to help accountants and businesses better manage their documents through digital file cabinet and management systems. More than 60 percent of this year's voters cited use of document management or storage system, with Drake's Document Manager, which is included with their tax package, receiving the most votes by far. Once again, their customers are loyal and eager to spread the news.

Chart:

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document management and storage. The difference being that these systems are designed to work with document management systems and strategies by providing hardware or software to help scan, store and organize digital files. Scanners from HP and Fujitsu led the pack, with Nuance, ABBYY, Kofax and cPaperless rounding out the top six.

Chart:

Tax Document Automation

Insight: Part of the new workflow paradigm for many tax practices is automating the scanning of client source documents and data-entry functions associated with 1040 returns. These systems are often designed to either produce entry/review-ready digital client work folders and have the ability to recognize what forms are being scanned in. Some can even automatically populate a client's return with data from the scanned documents. This year's leading vote-getter was SurePrep for its 1040 SCAN, which was first to market in this field about five years ago. Following was the Scan & Fill utility for the ATX and TaxWise compliance systems from CCH Small Firm Services, and systems from Thomson Reuters, Copanion and CCH.

Chart:

Read more about Tax Document Automation at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2840.

Workflow Comprehensive End-to-End

Insight: What is workflow? It varies in every practice, which is why this year we've

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Workflow – Other Tools

Insight: There are also many technology tools on the market that are geared toward enhancing specific areas of a practice. The top vote receivers in this category were Drake, for the Document Manager it includes with its tax program, followed by SurePrep, Intuit and CCH.

Chart:

Website Builders for Accounting Firms

Insight: You need a website. Really. Most of you know this, but there are still more than 40 percent of firms that don't bother. It doesn't have to be hard or expensive to at least have a basic one, which is why for the third year in a row, the free websites and easy-to-use tools that Drake Software gives to users of its tax and accounting system are the overwhelming favorite. Well, that and because Drake's users love the vendor so much that they always vote en masse. Following them were other website development tools designed specifically for tax and accounting practices, with CPASiteSolutions, AccountantsWorld and CCH taking the next three spots.

Chart:

Read more about Website Building Tools for Tax & Accounting Firms at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3026.

CLIENT SIDE ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS

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the same program. It made it easier to get data, made it easier to work with that data, and made it easier to find qualified bookkeepers.

Eventually, what would have been unthinkable in 1998 happened: Accounting firms started adopting the professional version of QuickBooks for their own practices, because of all of the above. It just made things simpler to deal with only one program. And many professionals have even joined the ProAdvisor network, which gets them advanced training and discounted software. In every year of our Readers' Choice Awards so far, Intuit's line of QuickBooks programs has overwhelmingly led almost every category of small business client-side accounting systems, with various programs from Sage generally a solid second. In this year's voting, that was once again the case, but with Foundation Software taking second in the construction/contractor accounting category. Cougar Mountain Software fared well in the small and mid-range categories, coming in fifth and third, respectively, while AccountantsWorld came in fourth in the small business category.

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[Note Rhonda C. – These all go into one separate section - perhaps boxed out (see last year's online and print versions).]

Small Business Accounting

Chart:

See our 2010 reviews of Small Business Accounting programs at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2738 and www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2784.

Mid-Range Accounting

Chart:

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See our 2010 review of Retail Point-of-Sale systems at
www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/2954.

Not-for-Profit Accounting

Chart:

See our 2010 review of Not-for-Profit Accounting systems at
www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3079.

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QuickBooks Paperless Add-Ons

Insight: Going paperless is a continuing evolution, even for practices that may have been early adapters of document management systems. One of the next big hurdles in this ongoing quest is to get your clients to join the movement, because as long as they are burdened with paper-based processes, they won't be as efficient as possible, and that will affect your relationship with them. The main focus in this market, thus far, has been on systems that help businesses using QuickBooks, by letting them attach documents to transactions, paperlessly process payables and perform other digital-focused functions. This year's leading vote receiver was again SmartVault, followed by Bill.com, PaperSave and Cabinet NG.

Chart:

Read more about some of the most "Awesome QuickBooks Add-ons" at
www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3083.

Fixed Asset Management

Insight: Fixed Asset Management is directly related to client taxation, but is often

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See our 2010 review of Fixed Asset Management systems on page XX of this issue and at www.CPATechAdvisor.com/go/3118.

GENERAL BUSINESS TECHNOLOGIES

Outsourced Technology Services

Insight: Sometimes, it makes sense to hire a specialist for certain tasks with which they may be more experienced efficient. This is true of some tax and accounting functions, as well as many other business processes, and it doesn't mean outsourcing it to another country. Just as accountants and estate lawyers often work together, so too do businesses often find value in using an external resource or technology for specialized functions. This year's winner in this category is Xcentric, which offers cloud computing consulting and services to accounting firms, followed by Earth Class Mail, Network Management Group, eFax and Postini.

Chart:

Laptop & Desktop Computers

Insight: Many professionals have a preference, if not loyalty, to specific technologies ... even the brand of computer they use. While this is very noticeable among Mac users, it's also true of those who prefer PCs. Over the past few years, the Apple brand has been on fire even in the professional accounting market, and this has been reflected year-after-year in the Readers' Choice Awards. Once again, Dell came in first this year, with HP, Toshiba, Compaq and Apple rounding out the top five.

Chart: (any kind of chart)

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video, games and, yes, even a phone. At this time last year, almost no one even knew what an Android was, and it didn't even appear in our polling. Which makes it notable that the new smartphone platform has jumped immediately to third, behind still-in-first BlackBerry and the second place iPhone.

Chart:

Printers & Scanners

Insight: Scanners are quickly becoming as important, if not more so, than printers ... especially in the modern “paperless” office. Of course, even in these practices, there is a need for printing, but scanners are gaining because of their role in other productivity-enhancing changes, such as workflow optimization and tax document automation. Readers were able to select multiple choices from a list of scanners and printers, with HP soundly leading the pack, followed by Brother, Cannon, Fujitsu, Dell and several other brands.

Chart:

Office Supply Store

Just like almost every other kind of business, your practice uses toner, binders, staplers, paper, pens and many other supplies, some that you plan purchases of, but others for which you rely on a local store. Of our voters who selected from a list of nationally known office supply retailers, Staples just edged out Office Depot for the second year in a row.

Chart:

_____ —

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Chart: Any kind of chart.

_____ —

[Rhonda C. – last year this was a sidebar/boxout or something)

New Technologies for Professional Firms

Do you offer client portals that allow clients to log in and share documents with you and vice versa?

Chart:

No 78%

Yes 22%

_____ —

Are you familiar with web-based/SaaS programs for professional tax compliance, write-up, document management, etc?

Chart:

No 71%

Yes 29%

_____ —

Technology will always continue its evolution, and in this progress lies the promise of tools and applications that can give tax and accounting professionals ways to be more productive and efficient in their practice. The Reader's Choice Awards serve to

highlight the technologies, technology companies and service providers that those

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Technology

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