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## BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

# Is It Time To Dump Tech Consulting?

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**Dave McClure** • Sep. 27, 2012

As you know if you have read this column for any of its 20 years, I am not an accountant. I am a writer, which was enough to get me through the core accounting courses for my MBA. And I am a geek, which enabled me to ride the wave of technology in the eighties and after into the accounting industry.

I say that so that you know I have the utmost respect for the role of technology consulting in many accounting firms. We were the ones who brought computers into the enterprise, and into small businesses. We set them up, configured the hardware and software, analyzed the best solutions, and ultimately brought accountants to the Cloud. And so that you will know that I am deadly serious when I wonder if it is time for the industry to give up technology consulting as a major line of accounting services.

This is hardly news to many firms, which long since gave up computer and technology consulting in favor of ERP, or CRM, or even payroll services. This magazine, by way of illustration, changed its name to *CPA Practice Advisor*. And ditched the more time worn moniker, the *CPA Technology Advisor*. Or *The CPA Software News*, which is what it was called when I first started writing this column for them. Nor are they alone. The former competing publication known as *Accounting Technology* has simply disappeared.

Most accounting software has long since moved to the Cloud, giving up the every-other-year upgrade cycle and the quarterly updates that used to be the mainstay of the industry. Sure, there are still innovations in technology that impact the accounting industry. But chances are you will hear about these just as well from CNet, Gizmodo or Wired as you will from the mainstream accounting magazines.

As for computers themselves, we really don't trouble-shoot them anymore. If the Geek Squad can't get to them within 24 hours, we just replace the computer and initialize its hard drive from a virtual server in the Cloud.

So the question remains. Is it time to dump tech consulting, in favor of other, perhaps more lucrative practice areas?

No it is not. But it is time to change how we manage that area of the practice.

Hardware is still at the core of what accountants do each day, even if that hardware leans more toward tablets and touchscreens than PCs and printers. Software is still the heart of the industry, even if it is not installed locally and we have to (joyously) give up archiving old copies of tax software just in case you need it in the year 2525.

The old days of technology consulting have gone the way of the green eyeshade and the abacus, and the technology practices of accounting firms need to scramble to keep pace. After all, had accounting professionals been on their toes, millions of companies would not have gotten sucked into wasting precious marketing dollars on unproductive social media. If accounting technology departments had done their jobs, our clients would have been securely in the Cloud years before it became popular with Amazon customers.

The technology practices of the major accounting firms need to change. They need to pick up the mantle of beta testers for their clients. They need to push the bleeding edge of technology, and help their clients – especially those too small to have their own IT departments – extract greater productivity from technology.

For the past few years, we have let our clients lead us in new technologies, and that has to change. They look to us as trusted partners, and keepers of knowledge. We need to rise to that challenge, and become better at what we do in technology.

And not coincidentally, this magazine is a place to start. It is one of the few with blogs dedicated to technology news. It is the magazine that has led the renaissance of McIntosh products within accounting. It is the place to find the best information

about Microsoft product, from SharePoint and Windows to Office and Communications Server.

We are not alone. AICPA maintains a robust technology section. Other magazine devote time and effort to technology subjects, from annual reviews of software to the mechanics of document management. And throughout the industry, integration and customization specialists are tailoring accounting solutions to the specific needs of clients.

No, it is not time to ditch technology consulting. But it is time to evolve that practice to the needs of clients in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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## Reality Check

A compendium of ideas, products, rants and raves from the viewpoint of the author. Not that the author has no financial interests in any of the products mentioned. Feel free to disagree, or to share your ideas by sending them to [davemcclure@cpata.com](mailto:davemcclure@cpata.com).

Internet Site of the Month. **Windows 8 Preview**

(<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-8/release-preview>). The Windows 8 Preview is out, ramping up for release of the new operating system in November. I don't know of anyone who has a spare computer sitting around to run this on, and no one in their right mind would put a preview version on a machine used for work. But the site itself is worth viewing, if just for the learning experience.

[Thumbs Up] – **Curiosity**. For those of us who grew up with the space race – and saw the benefits of NASA research, from personal computers to microwave ovens – the nation's decision to abandon space to other countries was nothing short of tragic. Now a small Mars rover has again fired up our imagination, and may lead us back into the exploration of our own final frontier.

[Thumbs Down] – **HDMI Connections**. Turns out that the reason so many of the big screen television sets carry such a low price tag is that they use generic, low-quality sub-systems. Like the circuit boards that control the sound. Or, more commonly, the ones that control the HDMI connections for better pictures and sound. Companies are now low-balling these simple components, so that the least little power surge fried the board and turns your television into 60 inches of useless junk. Caveat emptor.

[Thumbs Sideways] – **The User Interface Formerly Known As Metro.** Yep, Microsoft is already distancing itself...well, fleeing, actually, from the “Metro” name. And trying to find some way to distance itself from the growing chorus of naysayers. Is it really that bad? No, it is mostly just new and unfamiliar. But corporate IT managers are already flinching at what it will cost to train business users on how to work without a “Start” button...

[Thumbs Down] – **FaceBook.** It’s value is now less than half of what it was when the company went public, and there are calls for Mark Zuckerberg to step down as chairman. Can things get any worse? Yes, absolutely. Will the company crash and burn? Remains to be seen, but I would not be surprised. After all, the company still doesn’t have much of a business model beyond stealing your personal data to sell to advertisers. Can’t wait to see what it looks like a year after its IPO.

[Thumbs Up] – **National Weather Service.** I’ve used one weather site after another in the endless quest to learn about tornadoes sometime before 30 minutes after they pass. Same with snowstorms. Until now, getting up to the minute weather information (especially on weekends, when no one seems to be working) has been impossible. Now the US Weather Service has put its own site online at [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov). It’s an excellent site, and one I recommend. Hands down.

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