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## FIRM MANAGEMENT

# Is Your Firm Plugging In, Or Pulling Out?

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Darren Root, CPA, CITP, CGMA • Oct. 31, 2013

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While I don't want to seem overly dramatic, I believe that we are now facing a pivotal point in our industry—one where firm leaders will need to decide whether they are going to a) re-energize their firm by 'plugging in' and adopting a business model that integrates web and mobile technologies as part of a cohesive brand or b) make a conscious decision to 'pull out' of the market by not responding to the changing environment and fall seriously behind the curve.

We have been heading toward this turning point for several years, driven by the mass adoption of the Internet. However, the rapid growth of mobile technology is further accelerating the need for firms to offer clients enhanced connectivity, to communicate their unique brand attributes using helpful content, and to maximize the efficiency of their operations in order to remain competitive.

I have written and spoken many times about the importance of firms having a strong web presence, a cohesive brand, and online access for their clients, but it bears repeating: *the quality and functionality of your website and the degree to which your firm employs technology is fast becoming a critical part of a firm's brand—it's one of those intangibles that clients are coming to expect as a standard option when they shop for accounting services.*

Today, if your firm does not have a consistent brand image or a content-rich website that serves as an online extension of its high quality, helpful services operating seamlessly on a mobile-friendly platform, you may be able to get by; but in a few short years, it is unlikely that you will continue to succeed. Not only will your firm be considered old-school, but the prospects that used to find you in the phone book will pass over you as they Google local accounting firms and your firm doesn't appear in their search results. Not to mention that your existing clients are unlikely to tolerate being forced to do their accounting the old-fashioned way.

For those of you who are still skeptical about the need to develop your online presence and web and mobile client access as part of your overall firm strategy, think about it this way: the way your firm is presented online and the way you offer services is tied directly to the way your clients perceive not only the firm itself, but also you, as the firm owner. Remember, your personal brand is also tied to your firm. Are you really an “old person” who is unwilling to change and never uses technology themselves? If you are a regular reader of this publication, it is highly unlikely that you are.

Ask yourself if there is a professional disconnect between the way that you personally use technology and the way that your firm uses it. If you're like many CPAs I know, you are constantly connected to your smartphone and other mobile devices. You probably bank online and you may be more than a little familiar with the convenience of online shopping—accomplishing both using your tablet.

So why not offer this same level of access and convenience to your clients? For those firms who have not yet started down this path, the time to ‘plug in’ is now before your clients decide to ‘pull out’ and seek a firm that has already embraced a new way of doing business.

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