TECHNOLOGY

Improve Your Practice With SaaS

Randy Johnston • Sep. 05, 2014

There are ample articles trying to convince you of the value of Cloud Computing. There are three primary application approaches for the cloud: 1) Backup, which we have reviewed in prior columns covering products like NetRescue, Gillware and eFolder, 2) Hosting, including companies like CPAASP InsynQ, Awensa, Cloud 9 and Real Time Data Services, Thomson Reuters, or CCH, and 3) Software as a Service (SaaS) applications that are multi-tenanted and run through a browser. The focus of

this column is on specific SaaS applications that can help you and your clients. Areas of interest include Accounting, Budgeting, Forecasting & Business Intelligence, Sales & Use Tax products, and Confirmations that minimize fraud on both cash as well as on AR and AP. SaaS tools often eliminate implementation complexity and reduce deployment time.

Today, technology can solve business problems in multiple ways. Historically, we used service bureaus, but most applications for the last 20 to 25 years have been run on-premise with local area networks. SaaS applications "in the cloud" have appeared over the last 10 years or so, and the variety and quality of applications are improving all the time. Combining on-premise with cloud applications or "hybrid" is the approach that should be the most effective for the foreseeable future. You may want the security of keeping everything on-premise, or you may want the convenience, minimal technical issues and possible economic benefit of placing everything in the cloud. If you are looking to solve your business needs or to solve your client's needs in the best way possible, we expect a hybrid blend of on-premise or SaaS for some time to come.

Confirmations

One of our favorite SaaS applications is available from Confirmation.com, who has developed tools for audit confirmations that not only include cash confirmations, but have added a feature for AP response. There is no charge for small businesses to register as a responder, and we strongly urge you to encourage your clients to register. Confirmation will verify the business credentials, and then the client can respond to inquiries electronically and in a secure fashion. If your client has an employee that provides false information in response to an auditor's confirmation request, that individual can put that company at risk of being associated with financial fraud. The traditional paper-based process auditors use to confirm their client's payable and/or receivable balances doesn't control where confirmation letters are sent or prevent a rogue employee from sending a false response. An electronic confirmation saves time, centralizes responses, archives responses electronically, increases accuracy and increases response rates.

Sales Tax

In many U.S. jurisdictions, it is difficult to calculate Sales Tax accurately, particularly as the number of jurisdictions approaches 20,000. With SaaS offerings, the tax rates can reflect the current law and accurately calculate for a given location. Products like Avalara AvaTax, SpeedTax, Sabrix, and TaxWare provide tax calculations that comply

with the multiple levels of tax, including state, local, school district, transportation and other special taxes. Free sales tax calculators are available on the Avalara site. Avalara also has a CPA firm program to support processing sales tax for clients. Beyond the calculations, the company can also complete Sales Tax returns, Use Tax returns, efile as allowed and make the sales tax payments electronically.

The installation process for most of these competitive products is straightforward. The sales tax calculation field simply calls the SaaS product as if it was looking up tax from a manually created table. The items, amounts, delivery points and other information needed for accurate calculation are passed to the cloud data center, and calculations are completed and returned, usually in just a fraction of a second. With governmental units quite cognizant of their need for revenue, sales and use tax enforcement is at an all-time high. The Streamlined Sales Tax Governing Board, Inc. certification organization certifies products for compliance. If a product is used that is SSTP compliant, the clients are exempt from audits. The time savings of audit avoidance may be worth the money by itself. See page ?? or visit www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/XXXXXXXX for a review sales & use tax products.

Budgeting, Forecasting & Other Business Intelligence

A painful process for many organizations is the creation and maintenance of budgets. This is often done in Excel, because it is a simple, available tool, but rarely is using Excel the best approach. Vendors like Adaptive Planning and Alight have tools that are completely SaaS based and integrate into accounting products to provide comparative information.

More software providers are looking at the SaaS model as a way to provide complex information with minimal effort of implementation. Practice management applications from CCH, Thomson, Staff Trak, Biznet Software and Biz Tools are examples of powerful reporting tools that can be deployed using SaaS methodologies.

Last, But Not Least

It has been a clear initiative of the AICPA's CPA2Biz unit for the last 10 years to locate and endorse SaaS products that help accountants. XCM, Copanion, Confirmation, Paychex, Bill.com, Intacct, and Apptix are in this mix today. AICPA members can get discounts on these products.

Accounting software companies continue to expand their offerings. Available today are Sage BillingBoss, FreshBooks, QuickBooks Online, SAP Business by Design, Force.com, and NetSuite ... to name a few. AccountantsWorld has been the market leader in firm interactive accounting for over a decade. A new entry to the U.S. market that is worthy of your review is an entry-level accounting product called Xero that is designed to be completely SaaS and interactive with banks, accountants and the end user. It seems that SaaS and the cloud is gaining momentum and getting stronger every day.

Possible PQs:

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