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Randy Johnston • Oct. 30, 2015

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This year we've had the pleasure of recommending software programs for accounting, payroll and other critical areas of your practice. Now is the time to consider your paperless or Document Management Solution (DMS) needs. You'll find that our advice is similar to selecting an appropriate accounting software for your firm and clients. If you are a smaller organization, you might be able to survive with

a Do It Yourself (DIY) approach to document management if careful naming of

Management Integration, Secure Portal/ Local, Secure Portal/ Web, Portability on a Laptop, OCR, Search vs. Folder Browse, sharing and collaboration plus many more features are the keys to what makes a DMS help us be more productive.

Products in paperless run from the very simple, which I refer to as Tier 5 or File Cabinets, to the very complex, which I refer to as Tier 1 or Enterprise Content Management (ECM), just like accounting software products. Usually at Tier 4 we see OCR added, at Tier 3 we see versioning and check in/out features, and workflow begins appearing in Tier 3 and 2. Simpler products sometimes add more advanced features and complex products are sometimes missing features included in a lower end offering.

Generally, you would expect easier integration and success by purchasing your DMS from the same vendor that makes your other practice products. For example, both CCH and Thomson offer paperless systems that integrate into their overall suite. CCH Document and GoFileRoom are very solid products with good feature sets. Competitors have to look for something to offer to make themselves unique. For example, eFileCabinet has a cloud backup service for their premise based DMS system and a very innovative mobile application. Doc-It has a suite of products that include workflow, a binder system, OCR, annotation tools, PDF creation and a simple 1040 workpaper product. By purchasing the Doc-It suite, you get a collection of tools that you may have to purchase separately with other systems. AccountantsWorld Cloud Cabinet is a browser based product that serves as paperless storage for both the accounting firm and for clients using a file cabinet approach. This allows collaboration between accountant and client in a single system, a long-term strength of the AccountantsWorld product.

Just like accounting software, there are around 300 DMS, Filing Cabinet, and Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems sold in the United States Market.

Around 15 or so integrate well in accounting firms, although many paperless systems

resources and money?

For example, in the areas of Document Management Systems, there are a broad number of offerings. Offerings that should be included for CPA Firms are:

- 1040 Bridge
- AccountantsWorld Cloud Cabinet
- Acct1st
- CCH Axcess Document
- CCH ProSystem fx Document
- Conarc iChannel Document Management
- Doc.IT
- Drake Software Drake Document Manager
- eFileCabinet
- Lacerte/ProSeries DMS (caution: near end of life)
- OfficeTools Professional
- Reckon Virtual Cabinet
- SmartVault
- Thomson Reuters FileCabinet CS
- Thomson Reuters GoFileRoom

Likewise these vendors have made significant inroads into the accounting market. Examples here include:

- Alfresco One
- Cabinet SAFE
- Citrix ShareFile
- Contentverse
- DocStar Document Management
- DocuXplorer

- EMC Documentum

number of interesting additional tools for portals, eSignature, workflow, 1040 workpapers and more. Many of these can be integrated with other products or as stand-alone applications. Examples here include:

- CCH Scan
- Citrix ShareFile
- Copanion GruntWorx
- LeapFILE
- Right Signature
- SurePrep
- Thomson Reuters 1040 Source Document Processing
- Thomson Reuters FirmFlow
- XCM

If you note the first list above, vendors are trying to make document management integrated and to more effectively control engagements. If you note the second list, you'll see a number of applications that are attempting to provide DMS in a more general fashion. The third list adds capabilities that many accountants and firm owners value and need. These products usually work standalone or with one or more other systems. For example, ShareFile is one of the easiest to implement, branded portal and file transfer products available. Selecting the right tool(s) from this list can round out your offerings.

Why Does This Make a Difference to Our Firms?

Our management programs and client offerings have to match our strategies. During your annual retreat, you should consider the business you are in today, the business you'd like to be in in the future, and who your clients are. How can you serve your clients better, improve your firm, increase the value of your practice, and work a reasonable amount of time to get this done?

We know we can't believe vendor claims that by using a particular product, you will

the best client experience possible.

Better Results for Team Members and Clients Alike

The right programs can provide better value for your clients and the firm alike. However, in your selection process, you should spend enough time at the beginning of the process to understand your needs, what you have today, and the expected improvement. We have discussed these processes in prior columns. If you can't see a notable change for the good, why make any change at all?

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