with unlimited e-filing, including multiple state returns. Firms also have access to a variety of practice resources, such as document management, tax planning, and …

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From the **2016 Reviews of Professional Tax Preparation** Systems.

Best Firm Fit: Drake is best-suited to small and mid-sized practices with primarily 1040 clients, but also serving the business and tax needs of small businesses.

Strengths

- System provides an all-inclusive tax compliance system for all entities and states, plus tools for tax planning, analysis, write-up and document management
- Optional tax document automation utilities can digitize and organize scanned client source documents, and even populate tax returns with data
- Drake now offers online access to its full system via as hosted solution, and also offers two fully web-based 1040 solutions, giving firms the benefits of anywhere access and no system maintenance
- Drake support consistently rated as best by users, with live, U.S.-based customer service

Potential Limitations

- Is not as adept at complex organizational returns requiring multi-preparer review

The traditional Drake Tax program is installed on workstations or firm servers with support for any number of users, while the company also offers a hosted desktop solution and two web-based versions for tax preparation offices and locations with only 1040 needs. The full Drake system and the hosted solution support all entities with year-end tax reporting, including individuals, corporations, partnerships, trusts and nonprofit reporting. It can also prepare gift and estate taxes, and supports all states with similar reporting requirements.

The system features user customizable data fields, fast data entry screens and shortcuts and macros, with data flowing automatically from input screens into returns and associated schedules and worksheets. Drake's interface uses a tab-based screen that divides the return into categories for income, credits and adjustments, and guides the user through data entry tasks. Data that has been auto-calculated, rolled forward from prior years, or overridden is easily identifiable.

User interfaces across all return types and modules remains the same, providing an intuitive user experience. The Drake Practice Management module, which is included in system pricing, includes return tracking features that show status and acknowledgements along with client information, while customization options offer flexible settings, allow field flagging for important data, and offers prepare security functions. A Client Write-Up application is included with the unlimited version of Drake Software, and includes modules for small business bookkeeping, AP, AR, payroll and various forms.

Additional simple productivity tools within Drake offer real time savings, such as an EIN lookup feature that remembers prior use and automatically populates employer data. A similar tools is available for ZIP Code entry auto-populating state and city. Unlimited e-filing is included, and Drake Software also offers easy data backups and automatic program updates.

Integration Options: 4.25 Stars

trial balance data can be imported from common small business accounting systems, and Sch. D information can be imported from Excel or text file formats.

Paperless Workflow: 4.5 Stars

Drake offers several utilities to minimize paper-based processes, including add-on integration with the GruntWorx system, which offers firms options for automating and digitizing client tax documents. Firms simply scan client documents then, depending on the service selected, they are provided with a digitized and bookmarked PDF copy of their client's workpapers, which can even be automatically populated into a client return in Drake.

Paperless features included in the Drake system include unlimited e-filing for federal returns and any number of state returns associated with it, as well as the ability to create PDFs of returns that can be securely emailed and stored in the Drake Document Manager. The tax system integrates with digital signature pads for e-signatures and bank applications.

Remote Capabilities: 4.75 Stars

Drake offers a fully hosted version of its tax, document management and write-up system, which gives firms the advantages of anywhere access to the program, automatic data backups, and relieving the firm of all system updates and maintenance. Drake's web-based solutions include Drake Zero, designed for small firms and sole practitioners, and the Web1040 system, which is geared toward firms with 20 or more physical tax preparation locations (think kiosks and retail locations). Both web-based options offer only 1040 preparation, with support for all states, e-filing and bank products. No mobile device apps are available for the programs.

Drake Software also offers a separate cloud-based client collaboration system for

available 8am to 10pm M-F and Saturdays from 8am to 6pm. A live support representative answered after one ring on April 4 at 7:05 pm. Online resources include a knowledgebase, videos, webinars, self-paced training options and live classroom training at the Drake offices.

Summary & Pricing

Drake Software is an excellent tax preparation and management system that includes practice management, document management and write-up tools, making the affordable system a good match for smaller firms or larger, 1040-focused practices that also want preparation capabilities for business entities. The Unlimited version of Drake costs about $1,500 for any number of preparers in an office, and includes all tax capabilities, practice management, document management and client write-up modules. The hosted version of Drake is as low as $50 per month for the first user, and $40 per month for additional users. Drake also offers hosted versions of Microsoft Office.

2016 Overall Rating: 4.75 Stars

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