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Brian Tankersley • Aug. 18, 2020

Six years ago, in 2014, I wrote a column called "Digital Plumbing Tools Work to Sync Data Across Multiple Cloud Apps," about how cloud-based apps could have data automatically synchronized. During the intervening four years, many new tools have come out to automate data flows and other business processes associated with client bookkeeping, payroll, and other processes in your firm.

In the future, we will move beyond simple data integrations between applications toward workflow automation tools and with data from many different mainstream systems consolidated in a business intelligence tool. My research shows that most mid-sized and large accounting firms have adopted some kind of client work tracking system (XCM, CCH Axcess Workstream, Thomson Reuters Firmflow, Doc-IT,

that it's not realistic to create full real time financial statements for every day or every hour. We really need operational metrics, selected financial data, and transactions outside of in real time on sales, production, customer satisfaction, collections, cash position, unpaid invoices, open service tickets, and other data from process tracking systems. Unlike paper tracking systems, workflow systems generate significant amounts of structured data on the detailed operation of processes which can be used to measure and benchmark individual and company-wide performance in real time.

The specialized engagement tracking and due-date management apps like XCM, CCH Axcess Workstream, Thomson Reuters FirmFlow, Doc-IT, or OfficeTools Practice Management are designed to address very specific issues – and they are all good at those tasks and processes – but firms and their clients need automation for many other processes not addressed by those tools. Most firms need a more general type of process tracking and reporting tool which allows line of business users to create, test, and modify the underlying process logic for a wider array of business processes (e.g. sales, A/P, A/R, payroll, and HR). These applications need to integrate with a wide array of systems (e.g. CRM, marketing, document management, e-mail, accounting, payroll) to meet the organization's needs. Some of the emerging solutions in this area for small and mid-sized businesses include Podio/ShareFile, AccountantsWorld, Zoho Apps/Zoho Flow, and Microsoft Flow.

I encourage you to try some of the tools available to firms and clients today which can help technology do the work for you. Some available solutions in this area worth considering include:

- **Automated document retrieval** – AccountantsWorld/Entryless, Receipt Bank Fetch ,FileThis Fetch, Hubdoc, GruntWorx Gather, SurePrep TaxCaddy, CCH Audit Accelerator

- **Automated data extraction** – Receipt Bank, OneTap Receipts, CCH ProSystem *fx*

ways to automate your work, and adjust the processes to take advantage of the improved tools available today. Good luck!

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