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With the end of the year approaching, many accountants and clients are starting to consider other options for payroll calculation and preparation for 2011, as well as how they will retool their practice in 2011 to deal with the stagnant economic conditions in the housing sector. My column this month focuses on two topics — payroll solutions for users of Sage Peachtree and some of the new benefits and initiatives within the Sage Accountants Network.

Payroll for Sage Peachtree Users

Several payroll solutions for accounting professionals are reviewed in this issue beginning on page 6, and Sage's payroll options will not replace specialized packages aimed at payroll professionals. Although our payroll reviews discuss some packages that can be used by either professionals or small business users, we generally do not review completely do-it-yourself payroll products. There are many such programs on the market, including some designed specifically for those who wish to prepare their own payroll using Peachtree's payroll functions.

Sage offers three levels of payroll service, along with a do-it-yourself option for sophisticated users (see www.peachtree.com/productsServices/payrollSolutions for a detailed comparison of Sage offerings). Sage's three service offerings are called **Simple Payroll**, **Select Payroll** and **Managed Payroll**, and each meets the needs of different end users. The offerings have also been designed to allow data entered for other purposes (e.g. time reporting data for project billing) to be captured and used for payroll preparation, job cost reporting and other functions wherever possible.

Sage Peachtree Simple Payroll is designed for companies who would like to keep payroll in-house, and who would prefer to prepare payroll from within Peachtree.

Subscribers receive automatic online payroll tax table updates, printable payroll tax

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option for users who would like to outsource payroll calculation and tax filings. Data can be entered directly into Peachtree, and employees can be paid using direct deposit or by check. Complete tax filing services are included, and all federal, state and local tax filings are guaranteed by Sage to be penalty free. Telephone- and fax-based payroll options are also available through this program, as well as a host of other optional features, including HR reporting, employee and manager self-service options, a full report writer, labor distribution to the general ledger, and support for certified payroll and job costing data. Pricing varies depending on requirements and includes access to ongoing telephone support from CompuPay's teams of payroll specialists.

One significant advantage of Peachtree Payroll for extremely small employers with very simple payroll requirements is the ability to manually calculate payroll withholdings based on formulas in the editable payroll tax calculation tables in Peachtree. Although maintaining your own payroll tax tables is not recommended by either Sage or this columnist, organizations with extremely simple payroll calculations and high accounting sophistication may find this option attractive, as it allows the company to use the integration of other applications with the built-in payroll module in Peachtree (e.g. Job Costing, General Ledger). While intended for experts only, this feature gives sophisticated users another option for self-prepared payroll in very small businesses with numerous entities, where the cost of a payroll subscription for each EIN could be significant.

In addition to the Peachtree payroll plans provided by Sage, Peachtree is supported by most major payroll services. These additional providers may be used for special payroll needs like union contract payroll calculations, employees who have work sites in multiple states, government compliance reporting needs, and pre-packaged integration with vertical industry applications. Although most of these specialized services are available through the Sage Peachtree Managed Payroll option, this

flexibility allows Peachtree users to use payroll services from almost anyone

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- (which will read/write/cache files from or any version of Peachtree 2011),
- A one-year subscription to Sage Peachtree Simple Payroll, unlimited access to Sage's U.S.-based technical support team,
 - Complimentary software upgrades to new versions released during your membership,
 - Listing on the Sage website's "Find an Accountant" page,
 - Access to training materials and certification resources for you through Sage University,
 - Webinars to help new members get up to speed and educate members on issues affecting your practice and your clients.

While this is only a partial list of the benefits of the program, it represents an amazing value for accountants who are serious about working with the small business market. Sage is offering discounted and even complimentary first-year membership for qualifying new members who attend events. Interested parties should watch our blog, CPATechViews.com, for information about discounted membership offers for CPATA readers.

SAN excels in the depth of support provided and the breadth of products that can be accessed through the program. In addition to traditional technical support, SAN also assigns each new member to an "Accountant Advocate," and has a team of support representatives dedicated to SAN to assist members with any issue within Sage. Accountant Advocates are real accounting professionals who are specially trained to assist SAN members with the specialized needs of public accountants, bookkeepers and tax preparers. The Advocates have experience closing books, preparing financial statements, filing payroll tax returns and meeting the needs of demanding clients. This new role represents a significant commitment from Sage to making sure that its products meet the needs of the accounting profession.

SAN also offers a wide range of add-on memberships for firms who would like to

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Payroll

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