FIRM MANAGEMENT

2019 Review of Client Portal Systems for Accounting Firms

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Mary Girsch-Bock • Oct. 18, 2019

The accounting profession involves a lot of paper. While that doesn't come as a surprise, what may come as a surprise is that there are numerous accounting firms

out there that are not using client portals. While firms reluctant to offer portals typically offer a variety of reasons why they're not offering them, one of the myths that have continued to perpetuate is that they are just too complicated for both staff and clients.

If you spend just a few minutes looking at the products included in this review of Web Portals, you'll see that using a portal is relatively simple, and can provide a number of benefits that accounting professionals can truly appreciate.

Another myth is that web portals are only useful for larger accounting firms. And while they are certainly useful for larger firms, they can prove to be just as useful for smaller firms that have limited resources.

Web portals can drastically reduce the time it takes to obtain documents from clients. Instead of waiting until a client faxes in or emails a document, firms can provide their clients with a list of documents required, which the client, in turn, can simply upload to the portal, where they are accessed by firm staff. In addition to providing preliminary work papers, firms can also share completed returns with clients via the portal, where they can access, electronically sign, and return the return for filing. Most portals today are compatible with mobile devices, so staff and clients can easily upload or download a document when necessary.

While increasing efficiency and productivity, web portals also reduce the mounds of paperwork that can bog down even the most efficient CPA office. Portals also eliminate the need to copy stacks of document and be sure those copies are routed to the correct staff member. While easier for accounting firms, clients also love the convenience of having access to documents at their convenience, as well the additional security that web portals offer. In office appointments and multiple visits to drop off paperwork become a thing of the past, freeing up the schedules of staff members and clients, while the possibility of lost or misplaced documents drops to near zero.

In this issue, we reviewed several client portals, with many of these portals designed specifically for the professional accounting firm. The products reviewed include:

- AccountantsWorld Cloud Cabinet Client Portals
- CCH Axcess Portal
- Citrix Share File
- ImagineShare from ImagineTime
- SmartVault

- Thomson Reuters NetClient CS

As always, a features chart is included in the review that indicates which features are found in each of the reviewed products.

Before you start looking for a portal, it can be helpful to determine which features are most important to you. Do you want your clients to have unlimited access to the portal at all times, or do you want them to only access the portal at certain times? For accounting firms that process payroll for clients, it can be important that the portal offer access to both the client and the client's employees, so they can access important documentation such as W-2s or paystubs. Fortunately, all of the products included in this review offer a free trial, so you can try them out at your leisure, which can help tremendously when trying to decide which portal would work best for your firm, your staff, and your clients.

Don't believe the myths. Try one of these web portals out and see for yourself just how useful and easy to use web portals can be.

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