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it is one that increases productivity, improves collaboration, assures compliance, can be quickly onboarded by the firm, and requires reasonable training for firm members (as well as for clients) to become proficient.

Roman Kepczyk • Sep. 27, 2023

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The CPA Firm Management Association (CPAFMA.org) recently hosted an open chat

compliance, can be quickly onboarded by the firm, and requires reasonable training for firm members (as well as for clients) to become proficient.

But first, let's define "amazing" from a historical context.

Historical Foundation: The advent of spreadsheets, standalone accounting, and email applications each had significant impacts within the accounting profession over the past few decades. Spreadsheets became the accountants "hammer" being utilized to attack virtually any problem, and provided the foundation for creating CCH Engagement, arguably the most popular engagement binder application utilized by member firms. QuickBooks, Peachtree, CYMA, Great Plains, and a slew of other accounting products laid the groundwork for today's cloud accounting "tech stacks," and email moved collaboration away from archaic pink phone slips and writing on stationary to the digital age. Specific purpose applications such as Accountant's Trial Balance (ATB), Creative Solutions Depreciation Solution, and Tvalue were amongst the first "amazing" accounting apps that fit the definition in my own firm.

Below we summarize the five most highly touted applications and features identified during the forum as well as from our consulting with CPA firm clients. Please note that these solutions are highly indicative of CPAFMA's roughly 1,100 members which tend to be medium and larger firms of ten members or more.

Client Delivery: When participants were initially asked what was the most amazing app they implemented in the last few years, cPaperless SafeSend was the most touted app straight out of the gate. SafeSend has streamlined the collection and delivery of tax documents (including signatures) and has added payment reminders, K-1 distribution and fee collection. Why this product stands out is that both the firm's administrative team and the firm's clients "LOVE" it as it saves significant time

managing traditionally manual processes with the other major vendors all in catch-

has led to existing portal solutions jumping to the addition of similar features in their own products which we expect to see from the major accounting vendors in their upcoming user conferences.

Workflow: While legacy practice management applications added due date and project tracking features in the past, the advent of XCM (now CCH Axcess Workflow) enabled one of the most significant categories of amazing applications to evolve, leading to the development and adoption of tools such as Thomson FirmFlow, Doc-IT Workflow, JetPack, Canopy, Karbon, etc. Workflow tools proved their worth during the COVID years as the status of every project was available through a central dashboard coordinating the efforts of all firm individuals regardless of location. The ability to stratify and assign work, customize delivery and billing instructions, and manage status of all projects made workflow the top amazing app mentioned by attendees with CCH Axcess Workflow/XCM setting the bar with users touting that it was saving at least an hour per user per day!

Interaction: Speaking of collaboration, without a doubt, Zoom and Microsoft Teams got most firms through COVID by allowing video and data conferencing to include remote personnel. Both these tools have the ability to transcribe such interactions, but participants tended to steer towards Microsoft Teams due to its integration with MS Office contacts, calendar, email, status notifications, etc. with some saying that using Teams is becoming as important as using spreadsheets. From a security perspective we've tended to lean towards Teams as the recommendation and participants mentioned that using channels and searchable "chat" were replacing some of the traditional "intranet" capabilities.

Information Dashboards: Finally, the "amazing app" which many firms were excited about for the future was the information and reporting capabilities of Microsoft Power BI (Business Intelligence) as evidenced by Abdo Compass, which

was a dashboard tool adopted by a number of participants. Power BI is an extension

awesome so take time to review the features of these tools and see if your existing application can now do the same!

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