CPA Practice Advisor

EDITION

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

Going, Going, Gone ...
MOBILE

One forward-thinking firm's mobile rollout — websites, QR codes, and methodical planning

IN THIS ISSUE

CYGNUS
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BPA WORLDWIDE
SOY INK

5 Tips for Building a Professional Web Presence ... and Why You Should Do it Now

All of us seem to be exceptionally busy this summer — attending classes, conferences and online sessions in the ongoing pursuit of complying with CPE requirements. Personally, I enjoy each and every event because it offers the opportunity to meet with practitioners and stay apprised of concerns, trends and triumphs.

In my travels, one key statistic that I've heard is that just over 50% of today's firms have a website. As I talk to firm leaders about their web presence, I ask them if they are proud of their online brand and how they are using their site. Most tell me that they do little to nothing with their website. Most also tell me that they were simply tired of being told that a website was a necessity. So they built one ... and there it sits with no real strategy for marketing or branding.

While I think it's great that more and more firms are developing a website, it does little good if there is no strategy in place. What accounting professionals need to understand is that their website is the new *front door* to their firm. It is where people go to learn about you, your staff, your services and your history. If your website is friendly, easy to navigate and professional, then people will want to "come in" and further discuss their accounting needs. Just ask yourself a few simple questions:

- Do you keep a big thick phone book in your top desk drawer anymore?
- Where do you look up a business number if it's not in your cell phone?
- How often do you check out a website before purchasing a product or service?
- Would you use a bank or financial management group that did not offer online services — allowing you to review accounts, statements, and other docs and data whenever needed?

I'd venture to say that most of your answers lean toward using the web. The fact is that old-school marketing tools like the Yellow Pages no longer reign supreme. Google is the first place prospects go to find just about any product or service ... and that includes an accounting firm. The time has come to start thinking differently about your website and the importance it plays in firm strategy, marketing and business operations.

Your site not only needs to look professional and aesthetically appealing, but it should also support online services. Don't fool yourself. The majority of clients and prospects have come to expect advanced web-based services, like secure portals for document review and exchange. Again I ask you, would you use a bank that did not offer online services? Give the people what they want — convenient, helpful and efficient online access. This should be part of your web strategy as much as format and design.

GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT — CONVENIENT, HELPFUL AND EFFICIENT ONLINE ACCESS. THIS SHOULD BE PART OF YOUR WEB STRATEGY AS MUCH AS FORMAT AND DESIGN.

This is a lot to take in, so here are a few tips that will help you develop a web presence for today's prospects and clients.

1 Develop a website that reflects the personality of your firm. Be sure to incorporate firm colors, a professional logo, partner and staff photos, welcome videos, etc.

2 Keep your site clean. Create a site that is simple and easy to navigate. Don't go crazy with menu items. Straightforward and simple is best.

3 Write your story in clear, concise prose. In other words, don't bog your site down with volumes of text. Tell your story succinctly. You have to get their attention right away, so tell an engaging, but short story.

4 Offer advanced online services, where clients have 24/7 access to their financial information (personalized and secure client portals, online payroll, etc.). Online services bring clients back to your site over and over again ... and that is what you want.

5 Don't be boring. In other words, don't be like everyone else. Write a unique tale and create a custom presence.

It's already mid-summer, so if you don't feel that your web presence is where it should be, it's time to do something about it. If you want to see what my team and I have done to enhance my firm's web presence, feel free to review my site at root.com. ●

M. Darren Root, CPA.CITP
Executive Editor

Darren is the Executive Editor of CPA Practice Advisor. He remains in public practice as the principal of Root & Associates, LLC, in Bloomington, Indiana, and is president of his consulting practice, RootWorks. He formerly served on the Board of the AICPA's CITP Credentials Committee and is a former member of the Board of Directors for the Indiana CPA Society. He speaks at dozens of professional organizations each year and frequently serves as a guest lecturer at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business.

CPA Practice Advisor
VOLUME 21, NUMBER 4
Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

ANNUAL DIRECTORY

19

In Search of Technology for Your Firm or Your Clients?

17

The 2011 Accountant's Technology & Services Guide Can Help

By Melody Steelman, Associate Publisher/Managing Editor

52

CONTENTS

COVER STORY

FEATURES

PRODUCT REVIEWS

COLUMNS

EASY AS 1 - 2 - 3!!

1 ON YOUR MARK
Download a free QR Code Reader app (such as i-nigma QR Code or Qrafter).

2 GET SET
Open the QR Code Reader and look for the tags in this issue (pages 2, 39, 47 & 56). Here's a sample that will let you connect with us on Facebook.

3 SCAN A TAG
Hold your smartphone's camera over a tag and – voila! – you'll be on your way!

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Register for Upcoming Webinars
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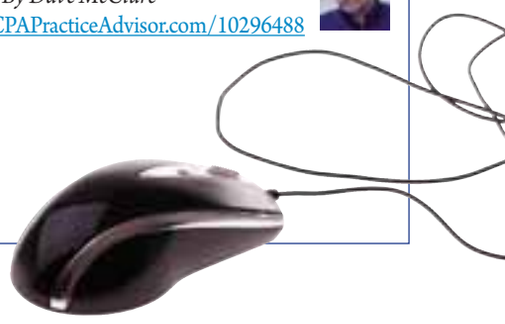
Check out our Online Buyer's Guide
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/buyersguide

Share Your Thoughts on our Blog
www.CPATechViews.com

Why Firms Must Advance Women
By Monika P. Miles, CPA, ASWA National President
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296443

MarketingWorks: How to Supersize a Happy Meal Firm Bio
By Scott H. Cytron, ABC
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296483

The Bleeding Edge: The Technology Audit *By Dave McClure*
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296488



Going, Going, Gone … Mobile

One fantastically forward-thinking firm's mobile rollout — websites, QR codes, and a healthy dose of methodical planning

Eric Majchrzak, Director of Marketing, Freed Maxick & Battaglia, PC

Staying Cautiously Ahead of Change

Freed Maxick & Battaglia (FMB) didn't become a Top 100 firm by avoiding change. In fact, the firm can best be described as the most rapid of rapid adopters — just all in good time. This is not meant to confuse anyone, but is testament to FMB's stance on staying ahead of change by first thoroughly researching and testing new innovations.

> "WE HAVE TO GET A FEEL FOR IT FIRST AND KNOW THAT IT WILL PROVIDE VALUE. OTHERWISE, IT'S JUST ADOPTION FOR THE SAKE OF ADOPTION."

"We never jump right in," explained Eric Majchrzak, director of marketing at Freed Maxick & Battaglia. "When a new technology emerges, we participate first, educate ourselves and get comfortable with the platform before launching in the firm. There is certainly an element of risk being an early adopter. With proper planning, we are willing to take risks."

Over the past few years, there has been a notable trend in the profession. Too often, firms adopt a new technology or platform, like Twitter or Facebook, simply because everyone else is doing it.

"We don't operate that way," Majchrzak stated. "We have to get a feel for it first and know that it will provide value. Otherwise, it's just adoption for the sake of adoption."

True to form, FMB invested significant time researching the latest phase of their advanced marketing program — QR codes and mobile websites. Majchrzak and his team studied the new technology in order to determine how it *fit* into their current marketing plan.

Majchrzak explained, "There are many pieces of the puzzle when it comes to a successful marketing program. You can't just force fit in a new piece. You have to first understand where it fits in and how it will enhance what you are currently doing."

QR Codes & Mobile Websites 101

QR codes and mobile websites are a new concept in the profession, and not yet fully understood. There is no doubt that these exceptionally cool initiatives will prove to be valuable to firms, but that can't happen until firms really "get it." To help, here are few fast definitions:

QR Codes — In simplest terms, QR (Quick Response) codes are barcodes that are readable using a smartphone barcode reader app. QR codes aren't a new technology. In fact, UPS (United Parcel Service) has used the technology for years. Codes are found on package labels and allow data to be decoded at high speed. In relation to mobile websites, users can scan QR codes and immediately access the site without having to launch a browser or type a long URL.

Mobile Websites — Mobile sites are exactly what they sound like. They are websites that are built to be viewed on mobile devices like a smartphone or iPad. Sites are formatted to display on a smaller screen, which mitigates scrolling to view contents.

Getting into the Mobile Space

Entering the mobile space was a necessity for FMB. With the proliferation of mobile devices, the firm focused on deepening its presence by delivering relevant, current content to financial and business clients that are typically on the go.

The firm's first QR code-enabled website was launched within the last few months. The mobile site is dedicated to the New York State Excelsior Jobs Program and offers up-to-date information on program criteria and available tax credits. It's meaningful, timely information that's easily accessible. And how it works is easy. Users scan the QR code and are immediately directed to the mobile-friendly site.

"The Excelsior site was our first QR code and mobile website initiative," stated Majchrzak. "Our goal was to put useful information in the hands of our clients through the mobile channel. It's another powerful touch point."

The firm also recently sponsored an iPhone application. Partnering with local print and radio media, FMB was able to align its name with the mobile app without having to actually develop it.

"This is another example of how we first educate ourselves on the technology," said Majchrzak. "We have no experience developing an application, so we left that to the experts. Through a sponsorship, our name is tied to the technology while the onus of development and maintenance is with our partner. This allows us time to get comfortable with the platform until we are ready to develop our own."

Without Proper Planning, You are Sure to Get Lost

There's a lot to know about building a successful marketing program. And every day it seems like a new technology

STATS AT A GLANCE

Year founded: 1958

Total employees: 250 F/T

Offices: Offices in Buffalo, Batavia and Rochester, N.Y.

Firm description: Service-minded firm with local, national and international reach

Accounting applications of choice: CCH's SaaS suite, and other select solutions such as Copanion's GruntWorx, Superform STF and Sharepoint

Firm website: www.freedmaxick.com

Freed Maxick & Battaglia's Marketing Team

trend emerges. It can be overwhelming if you don't have a structured plan in place. Consider just a few pieces of the puzzle: social media platforms, blogs, email campaigns, direct mail, website, radio and print media … and now QR codes and mobile sites.

"IT'S ABOUT GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH THE PLATFORM FIRST AND UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE. ONCE THAT HAPPENS, IMPLEMENTATION IS FAR MORE LIKELY TO BE SUCCESSFUL."

"We are always evaluating how we can integrate multiple marketing efforts to maximize investment," explained Majchrzak. "When we plan a campaign, like the Excelsior mobile site, our goal is to engage the community where we know they reside. So depending on the community that we are trying to reach, the platforms used may vary from campaign to campaign. For example, when the mobile Exclesior site launched, we knew that our financial and business audience could also be reached via radio spots, trade events, targeted print pubs, email blasts and inbound marketing, and select social media platforms."

Planning is a big part of FMB's marketing success. In fact, Majchrzak explained the firm's multi-year rollout for social media. In early 2008, the firm launched its LinkedIn profile, in the fall of 2008 a Facebook page, in 2009 Twitter, and in 2010 YouTube.

"Again, it's about getting comfortable with the platform first and understanding the value. Once that happens, implementation is far more likely to be successful," Majchrzak reiterated.

FMB applied the same phased approach to rolling out its mobile program. Majchrzak explained the five-step plan:

1 Research and Intelligence — Identify where the audience is in the mobile space, and explore the right technologies to reach that audience.

2 Set Goals and Objectives — Pinpoint expected outcomes and specific calls-to-action. Goals provide benchmarks by which the success of the campaign can be measured.

3 Develop the Written Plan — Record all action items and tactics required to launch the program. This provides a clear roadmap and keeps the campaign on course.

4 Platform and Architecture — Research what other platforms are needed to launch the campaign successfully (e.g., Twitter, billboards, etc.) and develop a flow (or path) of information that ensures that viewers are always directed back to the firm's website or blog.

5 Engagement and Measurement — Measure results to keep up with participation in the program. Review response rates, click-thrus, and other response mechanisms to identify areas in need of improvement.

A Final Word

It's an exciting time in the profession. There are so many channels available to reach prospects and clients and provide them with meaningful information. The firm of Freed Maxick & Battaglia understands this and has steadily progressed into social media, blogging, smartphone apps, mobile sites, and QR codes to effectively reach defined audiences.

The firm's core philosophy of "plan first, launch later" has proven effective. Through education and testing, firm leaders have been able to leverage new technology to significantly expand presence. Roll out of social media and the firm's current venture into mobile apps and QR codes have conformed to a phased approach, proving it's well worth the time and effort up front to ensure a successful launch.

What's next for FMB is anybody's guess. But rest assured that whatever the new initiative, it won't be launched without proper planning.

Kristy Short, Ed.D

Kristy Short, Ed.D, is partner and Chief Marketing Officer in RootWorks LLC (RootWorks.com) and president of SAS Communications 360 (SAScommunications360.com)—firms dedicated to providing practice management education, branding, marketing, and public relations services to the accounting profession. She is also a professor of English and marketing. She can be reached at kristy.short@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.

Improve Your Practice With SaaS

Ample articles try to convince you of the value of Cloud Computing, and there are three primary application approaches for the cloud: 1) Backup, which we have reviewed in prior columns covering products like NetRescue, Gillware and eFolder, 2) Hosting, including companies like CPAASP InsynQ, Awensa, Cloud 9 and Real Time Data Services, Thomson Reuters, or CCH, and 3) Software as a Service (SaaS) applications that are multi-tenanted and run through a browser. The focus of this column is on specific SaaS applications that can help you and your clients. Areas of interest include Accounting, Budgeting, Forecasting & Business Intelligence, Sales & Use Tax products, and Confirmations that minimize fraud on both cash as well as on AR and AP. SaaS tools often eliminate implementation complexity and reduce deployment time.

Today, technology can solve business problems in multiple ways. Historically, we used service bureaus, but most applications for the last 20 to 25 years have been run on-premise with local area networks. SaaS applications "in the cloud" have appeared over the last 10 years or so, and the variety and quality of applications are improving all the time. Combining on-premise with cloud applications or "hybrid" is the approach that should be the most effective for the foreseeable future. You may want the security of keeping everything on-premise, or you may want the convenience, minimal technical issues and possible economic benefit of placing everything in the cloud. If you are looking to solve your business needs or to solve your clients' needs in the best way possible, we expect a hybrid blend of on-premise or SaaS for some time to come.

Randy Johnston

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He is a nationally recognized educator, consultant and writer with over 30 years' experience. He can be contacted at randy.johnston@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.

Confirmations

One of our favorite SaaS applications is available from Confirmation.com, who has developed tools for audit confirmations that not only include cash confirmations, but have added a feature for AP response. There is no charge for small businesses to register as a responder, and we strongly urge you to encourage your clients to register. Confirmation will verify the business credentials, and then the client can respond to inquiries electronically and in a secure fashion. If your client has an employee that provides false information in response to an auditor's confirmation request, that individual can put that company at risk of being associated with financial fraud. The traditional paper-based process auditors use to confirm their client's payable and/or receivable balances doesn't control where confirmation letters are sent or prevent a rogue employee from sending a false response. An electronic confirmation saves time, centralizes responses, archives responses electronically, increases accuracy and increases response rates.

Sales Tax

In many U.S. jurisdictions, it is difficult to calculate Sales Tax accurately, particularly as the number of jurisdictions approaches 20,000. With SaaS offerings, the tax rates can reflect the current law and accurately calculate for a given location. Products like Avalara AvaTax, SpeedTax, Sabrix, and TaxWare provide tax calculations that comply with the multiple levels of tax, including state, local, school district, transportation and other special taxes. Free sales tax calculators are available on the Avalara site. Avalara also has a CPA firm program to support processing sales tax for clients. Beyond the calculations, the company can also complete Sales Tax returns, Use Tax returns, efile as allowed and make the sales tax payments electronically.

The installation process for most of these competitive products is straightforward. The sales tax calculation field simply calls the SaaS product as if it was looking up tax from a manually created table. The items, amounts, delivery points and other information needed for accurate calculation are passed to the cloud data center, and calculations are completed and returned, usually in just a fraction of a second. With governmental units quite cognizant of their need for revenue, sales and use tax enforcement is at an all-time high. The Streamlined Sales Tax Governing Board, Inc. certification organization certifies products for compliance. If a product used is SSTP compliant, the clients are exempt from audits. The time savings of audit avoidance may be worth the money by itself. See page 42 or visit www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10290542 for a review of sales & use tax products.

IF YOU ARE LOOKING TO SOLVE YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS OR TO SOLVE YOUR CLIENTS' NEEDS IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE, WE EXPECT A HYBRID BLEND OF ON-PREMISE OR SAAS FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

SAAS TOOLS OFTEN ELIMINATE IMPLEMENTATION COMPLEXITY AND REDUCE DEPLOYMENT TIME.

Budgeting, Forecasting & Other Business Intelligence

A painful process for many organizations is the creation and maintenance of budgets. This is often done in Excel, because it is a simple, available tool, but rarely is using Excel the best approach. Vendors like Adaptive Planning and Alight have tools that are completely SaaS based and integrate into accounting products to provide comparative information.

More software providers are looking at the SaaS model as a way to provide complex information with minimal effort of implementation. Practice management applications from CCH, Thomson, Staff Trak, Biznet Software and Biz Tools are examples of powerful reporting tools that can be deployed using SaaS methodologies.

Last, But Not Least

It has been a clear initiative of the AICPA's CPA2Biz unit for the last 10 years to locate and endorse SaaS products that help accountants. XCM, Copanion, Confirmation, Paychex, Bill.com, Intacct, and Apptix are in this mix today. AICPA members can get discounts on these products.

Accounting software companies continue to expand their offerings. Available today are Sage BillingBoss, FreshBooks, QuickBooks Online, SAP Business by Design, Force.com, and NetSuite ... to name a few. AccountantsWorld has been the market leader in firm interactive accounting for over a decade. A new entry to the U.S. market that is worthy of your review is an entry-level accounting product called Xero that is designed to be completely SaaS and interactive with banks, accountants and the end user. It seems that SaaS and the cloud is gaining momentum and getting stronger every day. ●

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
- General navigation/ease-of-use
- Designed for accounting professionals
- Scalability

TIME MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES
- Timesheets, timers, multi-staff views
- Project management
- Contact management & marketing
- Approvals/sign-off process
- HR tracking (PTO, sick, benefits)

INVOICING FUNCTIONS
- Expense tracking options
- WIPs, budget-from-estimate
- AR management
- PO management
- Customization

MANAGEMENT FEATURES
- Dashboard overviews (AKA Snapshots)
- Managerial reporting analysis
- Security features/user roles

INTEGRATION & DATA MANAGEMENT
- Data output options
- Integration w/payroll & professional accounting systems
- e-Functions: invoicing, payment, remote access

HELP/SUPPORT
- Built-in support features
- System updates
- Support website/documentation
- Live support

SUMMARY & PRICING

Practice Management Products Play Part in Promising Future

Practice management software has evolved over the years from programs that did little more than time and billing to completely integrated technologies providing firm partners and managers with real-time data related to productivity and financial performance. As comprehensive systems, they give firm owners tools to perform a detailed analysis in their practices in terms of project, client and staff management.

The majority of leading practice management software vendors now offer advanced features that include the following:

- **Interactive dashboards,** providing key information for effective practice management in a graphical, summarized and easy-to-understand manner.
- **Workflow and project management,** so that not only billable hours and expenses for an engagement are tracked, but due dates, project progression, and the staff responsible also become an integral part of the software's functions.
- **Contact management,** which eliminates repetitive data entry and inconsistencies through integration with Microsoft Outlook and tax software.
- **Client interaction,** including scheduling and calendar sharing, tracking the details of phone calls, and generation of personalized client letters and e-mails.
- **Complete invoice customization,** with the ability to create templates, easily switch between different levels of detail that appear on invoices, and alter text with built-in word processors.
- **Electronic invoice distribution,** either by automatically creating a PDF file and attaching it to an e-mail or saving it to a client's portal.

Advanced practice management software doesn't just provide a means to enter data; it automates and integrates it. For example, the tedious task of timekeeping is greatly alleviated with the use of timers integrated with the client and project data. What if, during the middle of working on a tax return, another client calls? No problem. The timer for the client whose tax return was being working on can be paused and another started for the client on the phone. At the end of the day, the information from the timers is aggregated into a spreadsheet-like view for the user to review and submit.

> ADVANCED PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE DOESN'T JUST PROVIDE A MEANS TO ENTER DATA; IT AUTOMATES AND INTEGRATES IT.

With some firms billing on a value-based system, some charging strictly by the hour, and others doing both depending on the client and engagement, many practice management systems offer the flexibility of handling a variety of billing methods. No matter a firm's revenue strategy, measuring client, engagement and overall firm profitability is important. And this information can be placed front and center for firms' management in dashboards for the easiest and quickest communication of this data.

As many accounting practices have become paperless, more mobile and are moving to the cloud, companies providing practice management software have kept up, adopting the latest technologies and introducing SaaS models of their software. With the ability to print to PDF and with either built-in or integrated document management capabilities, practice management can now be more digitalized than ever before. Mobile apps or web pages designed to fit mobile web browsers have made it possible to enter time and access practice management data when users don't have access to a computer with an Internet connection. With exciting new technologies coming into play, the future of the accounting profession is bright ... and easier, more effective practice management is part of that promising future. ●

Dustin Wheeler
Dustin Wheeler is a Las Vegas-based accountant and QuickBooks ProAdvisor who provides tax, audit, accounting, and technology consulting services. He blogs about technology and accounting at www.dustinwheelercpa.com, and can be reached at dustin.wheeler@cpapracticeadvisor.com.

CaseWare International Inc — CaseWare Time 2011

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★☆

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms currently using CaseWare Working Papers.

STRENGTHS

- Integration with CaseWare Working Papers
- Scalable & works well for multi-partner and multi-location firms
- Layout & Windows Explorer-like Document Manager will be familiar to CaseWare Working Papers users

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Does not track accruable employee benefits
- No SaaS product available
- Limited resources on the product's support website

SUMMARY & PRICING

CaseWare Time is a comprehensive practice management system able to handle multi-departmental and multi-location firms. The system is best suited to large professional practices, particularly those using other CaseWare products such as Working Papers because of the similar interface and integration. The cost is $1,000 for a five timekeeper license, which is annually renewable at 50% of the license value.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

CASEWARE
BEYOND THE BALANCE

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	TIME MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES
★★★★½	INVOICING FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★	INTEGRATION & DATA MANAGEMENT
★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10293687

800-267-1317 **www.caseware.com**

Thomson Reuters — Practice CS

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms wanting strong dashboards and Outlook integration, particularly those using other Thomson Reuters CS Professional Suite applications.

STRENGTHS

- SaaS version available
- Powerful integration with the rest of the CS Professional Suite
- Useful dashboards with drill-down capability
- Can internally process credit card payments & ACH transactions
- Strongest web support & resources of products reviewed

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Users accustomed to a workflow-based interface may experience a learning curve to the dashboard-based interface of Practice CS

SUMMARY & PRICING

Practice CS is a powerful time-keeping, billing and firm management tool that multiplies its effectiveness when integrated with the other accounting, tax and client service programs in the CS Professional Suite. Because of its dashboards, user-friendly interface, and integration with Outlook, it also merits consideration as a standalone product. Pricing starts at $1,800 for a five-user license, with the project, client and staff management modules available as add-on features.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★½	TIME MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES
★★★★½	INVOICING FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & DATA MANAGEMENT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10294049

800-968-8900 **CS.ThomsonReuters.com**

TaskTracker Keeps an Eye on Due Dates

ACI TaskTracker

ACI TaskTracker is a simple due-date tracking program developed for accounting and tax firms, offering tools for monitoring federal and state compliance due dates. While the system is primarily focused on income and franchise tax returns, and includes more than 150 predefined reports for those items, it also has features for tracking payroll and other annual information returns, including 940, 941, W-2, W-3 and 1099.

TaskTracker also offers customization options that enable users to track deadlines for accounting purposes, such as write-up, bookkeeping, financial statement generation, year-end planning functions and keeping up with IRS notices.

Installation is simple, with the ability to import client data from spreadsheet and CSV formats, and smart-entry fields that can automatically enter due dates and extension dates. TaskTracker's interface opens into a traditional workscreen centered on the client selection and overview screen, which uses a spreadsheet view to display summary information and dates, with the ability to filter by client, task, workflow functions, staff or other criteria. System features are accessed via an intuitive icon toolbar across the top of the screen.

Job tracking options allow automatic roll-forward of projects, and simplified job status updates, while additional features enable management of workflow, budgets, staff assignments, WIPs, job notes, engagement letters and other tasks, and an audit trail logs all client job history. Data and reports can be exported to Excel. Overall, TaskTracker is an easy-to-use tax-focused due-date monitoring system, with pre-set deadlines for most common federal and state dates. It is available in U.S. and Canadian versions and can be used as a standalone system or networked for multiple users.

800-749-3554 **http://acisystems.net**

Office Tools Professional — Practice Management Software

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIRM FIT

Small to mid-sized firms not currently using a completely integrated suite of tax and accounting products.

STRENGTHS

- Integration with Lacerte, QuickBooks & Outlook
- Interface is easy to navigate & is focused on the client
- Strong contact management capabilities, including social media
- The only practice management software reviewed with its own built-in document management features

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- May not have sufficient reporting capabilities for very large firms
- No ability to enter time remotely (except for remotely accessing computer with program and data)
- Does not track accruable employee benefits

SUMMARY & PRICING

Office Tools Professional is ideal for smaller practices that could benefit from data synchronization with Lacerte Tax and QuickBooks. The strong project management and workflow tools, combined with social media and CRM functionality make this tool an excellent choice for small to mid-sized firms who want to make it easier for junior team members to effectively communicate with clients.

The annual cost of a single-user license is $500; additional users may be added for $300 each. Package discounts are available for five, 10, 15 and 20 users. Client portals, credit card processing, and productivity tools such as syncing with other software can be added for additional fees.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS (client portal product)
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor (currently hosted by Right Networks, Cloud9 & CPAASP)

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★½	TIME MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES
★★★★½	INVOICING FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & DATA MANAGEMENT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10294040

661-951-9200 **www.officetoolspro.com**

Commercial Logic, Inc. Offers Comprehensive Practice Management Solution

commercialogic
The Practice Management People

APS Advance Practice Management, offered in the U.S. by Commercial Logic, Inc., is a widely used practice management system, and is part of the broader APS Suite, which includes document management, CRM, resource planning, online business intelligence and business process automation.

The system is designed to integrate and share data with professional tax compliance programs, financial management and accounting systems, and payroll applications, and offers total integration with Microsoft Office and SQL Server databases. This allows client data from across all areas of firm services into the APS system, which offers dashboard views and extensive drill-down functionality for effectively managing the processes of one or multiple professional practices or other organizations.

The system includes features for managing timesheets and expenses, including web-based timesheets, Outlook calendar integration, expense approval/sign-off processes and workflow and resource planning. APS' engagement/project management functions offer WIP tracking, support for multi-currency/multi-entity needs, milestone budgeting and assignment, and status and statistical reporting.

Other system modules include billing and invoicing, budgeting and planning capabilities, integrated tools for document and email management, and a flexible, extendable database that is the key to its ability to integrate with other business and compliance programs and databases. APS programs have been used in accounting practices across Europe, Australia and New Zealand for more than 20 years, and have been honored by the British accounting publication *Accountancy Age*.

603-643-1900 **www.cli-usa.com**

CCH, A Wolters Kluwer business — ProSystem *fx* Practice Management

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms wanting powerful time, project, marketing and client management features, particularly those using other components of the ProSystem *fx* Suite.

STRENGTHS

- Strong integration with ProSystem *fx* Suite, Sage Abra Payroll, and Sage MAS 90, 200 &500
- Great features for tracking marketing & prospect information
- SaaS version available
- Business Intelligence module available

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Users have to update the program manually

SUMMARY & PRICING

Because of its strong integration capabilities, ProSystem *fx* Practice Management is a solid choice for firms using other components of the ProSystem *fx* Suite. Several firms not using the suite purchase the practice management portion as a standalone product because of its powerful time, project, marketing and client management features. The price of a 10-user

basic system that does not include contact management is $2,260. The version that includes all components is $4,325.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	TIME MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES
★★★★☆	INVOICING FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & DATA MANAGEMENT
★★★★☆	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10294034

800-739-9998 opt. 1 **www.cchgroup.com**

Don't miss these Online Exclusive articles from *CPA Practice Advisor*

Why Firms Must Advance Women

By Monika P. Miles, CPA, ASWA National President

The next generation of top accounting professionals will bear little resemblance to the male-dominated leadership ranks currently occupying corner offices, according to the recently released *2011 Accounting MOVE Project Executive Report ("2011 Executive Report")*, which is available at www.ASWA.org. Since over half of today's accounting grads are women, public accounting firms must rapidly realign professional development programs. If they do not, firms simply cannot remain competitive and will not have enough partners for an orderly transition when baby boomers are ready to retire.

The American Society of Women Accountants (ASWA) partnered with strategic communication firm Wilson-Taylor Associates, Inc., the American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants (AWSCPA), Moss Adams, and Rothstein Kass to produce *The 2011 Accounting MOVE Project Executive Report*. The MOVE methodology pivots on four factors — money, opportunity, vital supports for work/life balance, and entrepreneurship — proven to advance women in the workplace.

The report provides new and compelling reasons why career advancement for women of all ages must be actively cultivated in order for accounting firms to stay competitive. The report then provides useful recommendations and best practices to recruit, retain and promote women in accounting.

Read more about the focus of, research behind and highlights of this report at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296443.

MARKETINGWORKS
How to Supersize a Happy Meal Firm Bio

By Scott H. Cytron, ABC

How do you make a silk purse out of a sow's ear? Said another way, how can you transform the tried-and-true firm bio into something more than a ho-hum template piece of writing that resonates with clients and prospects?

A recent experience with a firm wanting me to rewrite bios for its partners got me thinking about all the creative ways to take a bio that is a Happy Meal, at best, and make it supersized. No matter what size firm you are … or what each person may do beyond the firm's physical borders, here are a few tips:

- Apply themes to our bios
- Write bios as Q&As or complete the sentence
- Get the managing partner's buy-in
- Don't forget the goal

Read more about these four tips at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296483.

THE BLEEDING EDGE
The Technology Audit

By Dave McClure

As technology is increasingly woven into the fabric of business management and operations, it becomes more necessary to evaluate technology utilization and prepare for management an assessment of the threats and opportunities available.

In the area of threats, there is the risk involved in an inadequate backup and document archiving system. Weak policies regarding employee use of company computers can leave the network vulnerable to viruses. Unauthorized use of software — especially unauthorized software installed by employees — could subject the company to thousands or even millions of dollars in fines for copyright infringement. And these are just the obvious threats.

Opportunities also abound, in reducing software licensing costs. In replacing expensive laptops with tablets or netbook computers. In consolidating printing operations. In productivity gains through additional training.

So what comprises a technology audit? There are seven basic steps:

- Conduct a security sweep of the network and every device attached to it.
- Audit the software in use by the company.
- Audit the hardware in use by the company.
- Audit the backup systems.
- Audit the document management system.
- Conduct a printer audit.
- Ensure the company has a strategic technology plan.

Read more about these seven steps at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296488.

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
- Installation Ease
- General Navigation & Ease of Use
- Industry-Specific Templates
- Industry-Specific Features
- Platform Support

CORE ACCOUNTING CAPABILITES
- GL/AP/AR Functionality
- Sales Tax Functionality
- Payroll Functionality
- Audit Trail
- Multi-Currency
- Multiple Language Support
- Multi-Location Support
- Multiple Users

DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS
- Sales/Point of Sale/Shipping
- Customer/Vendor/Employee Management
- Inventory/Purchasing
- e-Features
- Remote Access

MANAGEMENT FEATURES
- Dashboard Overviews
- Reporting
- Security Features
- Integration/Import/Export
- Data Transfer
- External Integration
- Online Accountant Transfer Tool

HELP/SUPPORT
- Built-in Support Features
- System Updates
- Support Website/Documentation
- U.S.-Based Support

SUMMARY & PRICING

To read the full text of the engagement reviews as well as brief write ups on the following trial balance products, visit www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296054 or scan this QR code with your smartphone:

- **CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business — ProSystem *fx* Trial Balance**
- **Pendock Mallorn — Accounting for Practitioners**
- **Thomson Reuters — Trial Balance CS**

Engagement Products Bring Workflow Improvement to Firms

Every firm, no matter the size, should be using either an engagement (audits, review, compilations, etc.) or trial balance (write-up work) system. In the past, engagement and trial balance software packages were "islands" of information that did not communicate very well with other systems. The first integrations were with other tax preparation systems. Now that improving workflow is a major focus of firms, the vendors have worked to integrate their offerings with other products within their own suite as well as other third-party applications. This development has greatly improved workflow over the past few years.

Now that the accounting profession is starting to understand the pros and cons of SaaS, vendors are starting to adopt portions of their offerings to include SaaS offerings. While there are currently only a few vendors that are offering true SaaS products in this genre, it is inevitable that more will do so in the future.

This review discusses some of the major engagement and trial balance packages on the market today, as well as a handful of audit and engagement tools. All of these systems are great, but they are not a right fit for every firm. Each firm is unique based on the type of engagements, number of staff, type of clients, number of offices, etc. These reviews are designed to be the first step in helping you choose the right package for your firm's needs. After you have read these reviews and are ready to select one of these products, the "fun" has just begun. Many hours of testing and logistics should be involved before you make your final decision.

The areas addressed in these reviews are as follows:

Basic System Functions – What are the primary functions of the product? Does the product perform all of the basic tasks that your firm requires?

Engagement Management – How does the product allow your firm to manage engagements and the risks associated with each engagement? Each firm has its own risk management and operational procedures. Does the product fit your firm?

Workflow & Collaboration – What type of workflow features does the product have? Will the product increase your firm's workflow enough to justify the cost of purchase, set up, integration and training?

Integration – Does the product integrate with your current software? If your firm purchases a particular product, will you need to replace other products to realize the full potential?

Help & Support – What type of support and training is available? Are there different options and platforms? As most practitioners know, this can be the biggest obstacle in getting a return on your investment when purchasing a new software product.

All of the applications reviewed allow some type of engagement "templates" to be configured, although the scope of these templates and integration varies between the applications. Using templates can save time setting up workpaper files, and can automate many of the manual tasks associated with creating a new file.

Good luck, and if you are planning on making a switch to one of these products this year or have made the switch in the past year, we'd love to hear about it. Send your comments to editor@cpapracticeadvisor.com.

NOW THAT IMPROVING WORKFLOW IS A MAJOR FOCUS OF FIRMS, THE VENDORS HAVE WORKED TO INTEGRATE THEIR OFFERINGS WITH OTHER PRODUCTS WITHIN THEIR OWN SUITE AS WELL AS OTHER THIRD-PARTY APPLICATIONS. THIS DEVELOPMENT HAS GREATLY IMPROVED WORKFLOW OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS.

Marty McCutchen, CPA.CITP
Marty spent 11 years as an auditor at PricewaterhouseCoopers and other regional CPA firms. In 2006, he founded CPA Service Group, which develops SaaS applications for CPA firms. In 2008, he started Highterrace, developers of custom web-based software applications for all types of commercial business (franchises, manufacturing, energy, learning, accounting, etc.). In addition to his software development efforts, Marty continues to provide accounting and finance consulting services to select clients.

Thomson Reuters — Engagement CS

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★☆

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms that utilize PPC Practice Aids should consider this product. The seamless integration with the PPC Practice Aids will allow for increased productivity and quality during the execution of engagement tasks.

STRENGTHS

- Integration with PPC Practice Aids
- Integration with other Thomson Reuters products, including document management and tax applications
- Web hosted version available

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- User interface & workflow may have a longer learning curve than some other applications

SUMMARY & PRICING

Engagement CS is a full-featured product that offers some robust workflow/integration tools. If your firm is interested in integrating its engagement product with other products in the firm, Engagement CS needs to be researched. The distinguishing feature of this product is the integration with PPC Practice Aids. For firms using PPC Practice Aids, I recommend a close look at this product.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

THOMSON REUTERS

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT
★★★★☆	WORKFLOW & COLLABORATION
★★★★★	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10290921

800-968-8900 CS.ThomsonReuters.com

Specialized Tools Aid in Audit Engagements

Audits are not the realm of only the Big 4 and other very large practices. Many small and mid-sized firms also offer A&A services to their clients. But audits can certainly be complex and labor intensive, not to mention the considerable regulatory obligations that accompany them. With the right tools and services, such as those in this section, even small firms and sole practitioners have found audit services to be a valuable and highly sought after offering.

Audit Confirmations

www.AuditConfirmations.com

AuditConfirmations provides a web-based utility for directly verifying an entity's account balances by contacting the institutions, lenders and other organizations that hold the business' assets and liabilities. Because the system uses electronic communication, verification and authentication tools instead of relying on paper-based processes and mailed forms, the program greatly streamlines these tasks, helps increase accuracy, and speeds them up dramatically.

AuditConfirmations is designed to give audit teams these productivity benefits, while also providing security features that ensure sign-offs come from appropriate authorities at the third-party banks and institutions. Instead of relying upon name and contact information provided by the organization/client being audited, the officials are identified, prequalified and verified by AuditConfirmations, and must register and authenticate their own account with the online system. This helps to reduce unofficial sign-offs, one of the most frequent methods of confirmation fraud. The system includes collaboration tools and functions for tracking the status of confirmations.

Capital Confirmation

www.Confirmation.com

Capital Confirmation was the first to develop a secure electronic confirmation service, is used by most financial institutions in the United States and is endorsed by the American Bankers Association. The system provides an alternative to the formerly labor- and paper-intensive process of account balance confirmation that increases the accuracy and efficiency of audit teams.

Prior to electronic confirmations, the methods used during audits were more at risk for fraud, and resulted in notable cases of fraud such as those at Parmalat, CF Foods, HealthSouth and others, where unauthorized persons within financial institutions used by those companies were able to certify bogus accounts and balances. With services such as Confirmation.com from Capital Confirmation, however, only authenticated officials at banks are able to respond to confirmation requests, and Capital Confirmation guarantees that these officials are authorized to represent, report and make such confirmations.

In addition to the security and assurance offered by Confirmation.com, the electronic confirmation process also reduces the average time that auditors wait for a confirmation request from more than a week to about two days, which significantly improves the productivity of audit engagements and also provides the benefits of a paperless engagement. Confirmation.com was a recipient of a 2009 Tax & Accounting Technology Innovation Award from *CPA Practice Advisor*.

CaseWare IDEA

www.CaseWare.com

CaseWare is a well-known developer of technologies that enhance the management processes involved in auditing, financial compliance, risk assessment, and time and project management. Designed by auditors for auditors, the vendor's IDEA system offers advanced financial data analysis features that help mitigate fraud and ensure data integrity.

CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business — ProSystem *fx* Engagement

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★☆

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms that are trying to maximize overall engagement efficiency with integration with other CCH and third-party applications.

STRENGTHS

- Most intuitive user interface of products reviewed
- Integration with other CCH & third-party firm management & workflow applications
- Web hosting available through third-party partnership
- Integration with CCH practice aids & reference materials

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Users of PPC Practice Aids will have to manually update checklists stored in ProSystem *fx* Engagement.

SUMMARY & PRICING

ProSystem *fx* Engagement is a full-featured product that offers some robust workflow/integration tools. For firms who are interested in integrating their engagement application with other CCH products, this product should definitely be investigated. This application has particularly strong integration with the CCH Knowledge Based Audits practice aids and ProSystem *fx* Knowledge Coach, and firms using these tools will find that the integration with these tools is excellent. Initial purchase of ProSystem *fx* Engagement and Trial Balance for a single user is $1,520; additional licenses cost $640 each.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

CCH a Wolters Kluwer business

★★★★½	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆	ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT
★★★★☆	WORKFLOW & COLLABORATION
★★★★½	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10290918

800-739-9998 **CCHGroup.com**

IDEA includes features similar to an audit trail, with tools that automatically track and record the nature of changes made within a database, from transactional information to user IDs. The system allows data to be imported and exported into all common business formats, enabling it to be used with most ERP and accounting systems. It offers free-form search that can look across millions of records in seconds, and then allows comparison and consolidation of data from files from various sources to help find anomalies, and eliminate gaps and duplicates.

The system's reporting features provide deep data analysis, continuous auditing, travel and expense auditing, systematic software selection tools, and a proposal ranking matrix. It includes pre-built tests and reports for business financials, including GL, AR, AP, inventory and fixed assets, as well as functions for managing SAS 99 requirements.

ReInvent Data

www.topcaats.com

The TopCAATs system from ReInvent Data is an Excel add-on that includes more than 130 audit and accounting focused tools and features that help streamline and automate processes and testing functions.

The system's features are available in a toolbar ribbon that integrates into the Excel interface, and includes functions for formatting by number, date or currency, as well as for manipulating text, merging, inserting borders, adding ticks or crosses, and various sampling options. Data analysis capabilities include the ability to easily join and append sheets, re-age listings, produce quick and advanced summaries, perform ledger splits, identify gaps and duplicates, and process analytical reviews.

TopCAATs has dozens of pre-built tools, guides and reports, including testing of all data, as opposed to sampling. Tests that can be performed within the system include Benford's testing, Gap/Duplicate detection and Monetary Unit testing. These tools and the program's additional features can be customized to the workflow processes of audit teams and firms, thereby helping to standardize audit engagements.

THOMSON REUTERS PPC

Thomson Reuters — PPC SMART Audit Suite

PPC.ThomsonReuters.com

The PPC brand has long been a familiar name to auditors, with a suite of products and associated guides and tools for A&A engagements. In addition to integration with the various PPC tools for Checkpoint, practice management, workpapers, interactive disclosure libraries and an engagement letter generator, the PPC SMART Practice Aids modules include the Guide to Audit Risk Assessment, Internal Control, Disclosure, Field Work and Single Audit.

The Field Work utility is the newest addition to the suite, giving users the ability to plan and execute an entire audit, with greater control over processes, efficiency and workflow. This tool brings PPC's SMART "decision support" capabilities to all audit functions, enabling data sharing between all of the practice aids, the ability to add integrated and linked workpaper references to any document, a Navigator feature that guides staff through engagement processes, and an Engagement Dashboard that gives an overview of the entire audit and for each area of the audit.

The other tools in the SMART Audit Suite include Risk Assessment, which helps audit management identify risks and complete planning forms, while providing a suggested audit program; the Internal Control system guides users through the steps required for evaluating internal control over financial reporting; the Disclosure and IFRS Disclosure Modules, which offer structure and guidance for preparing disclosure checklists and reporting; and the Single Audit system, a tool that automates complex and highly scrutinized single audit engagements.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

CaseWare International Inc — CaseWare Working Papers 2011

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★

BEST FIRM FIT:
Firms that are looking to gain significant efficiencies in their financial reporting (no matter the size of the firm).

STRENGTHS
- User interface & intuitive workflow
- Strong financial reporting module
- SmartSync's fast "real-time" collaboration

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:
- No web hosted version currently available

SUMMARY & PRICING
CaseWare Working Papers is a full-featured product with a great financial reporting package. The system is best suited to a firm that is interested in streamlining their engagement processes, especially the financial reporting process. Most firms will say they want to save time, but to realize the potential of this product, firms must be willing to invest time in the less busy times of the year to set up the product to their reporting specifications or license the GAAP or IFRS Financials Templates, which gets users up and running in a far shorter time while allowing them to set firm-wide standards. License pricing for accounting firms for CaseWare Working Papers is $500 for a single-user license. A license for up to five users is $1,500. Additional users can be added to the five-user license for $290 per user. CaseView is included with Working Papers. Connector is an optional add-on to Working Papers, and is available for an extra $60 per user. This license pricing reflects the accounting firm discount. Licenses renew annually at 50% of license value.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:
- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

WORKING PAPERS

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT
★★★½	WORKFLOW & COLLABORATION
★★★★☆	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10290914

800-267-1317 www.caseware.com

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Technical Financial Solutions

www.tfsus.com

IT-related controls testing can be one of the most challenging aspects of audit engagements, especially for smaller practices without extensive IT support. That's where Technical Financial Solutions comes in, offering various services that aid professional firms during audits.

The company's primary focus is on testing of general controls, application controls and key reports, and it has developed a proprietary audit program that covers all four ITGC categories based on COBIT control objectives, as well as testing of A133 related controls. Through TFS' High Tech Act Audit Services, the vendor also offers security frameworks that comply with HIPAA and the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act, including gap analysis and audit control testing, vulnerability assessment and management, and management reporting.

TFS acts as a consulting partner on audits, providing expert financial IT staff that work with the firm. Additional services offered by TFS include SAS 70 and SSAE16 audit assistance, process documentation, data analysis services and IT audit training options.

AverQ

www.averq.com

Increasing regulatory oversight of audits has led to a greater demand for collaboration during audit processes, in order to ensure more comprehensive access to data by the audit firm. With the right technologies assisting in this collaboration, firms can reduce many redundancies, increase efficiency, and decrease deficiencies and restatements.

The on-demand, web-based audit tools from AverQ provide an integrated financial audit management solution designed to allow auditors and their clients to work together more effectively using a secure, subscription-based service. Since the program is online, it allows for quick deployment and remote access to always-live data by both the audit firm and company, which aren't available via traditional workpaper programs or the use of email and client portals.

Additional benefits of AverQ include the ability to streamline knowledge transfer and training, and a more effective internal quality control process. As a result, AverQ allows firms to work more quickly, effectively and accurately, while maintaining compliance with audit standards such as the PCAOB's Audit Standard 5.

Amelio

http://amelio.hkmpt.com

The Amelio system from HKMP Technologies provides an automated, web-based solution for creating dynamically linked compliance forms and checklists, including forms created in-house or obtained from other content providers.

With these enhanced checklists and forms, the system helps ensure reliable processes that are consistent and efficient, and since it is an online application, its digital environment acts as a centralized storage and management location for all documents and data, thereby supporting a paperless engagement and allowing for simplified reporting and data mining.

Amelio's management functions also offer automatic population of redundant data across all related forms, and provides multi-level and even form-specific user access security. The system allows grouping of related forms using a unique, logic-based form design that allows forms to become adaptable to firm and client needs. Client collaboration features enable external users to fill out forms via a portal or via a secure email delivery and import utility.

Rule #1: Cash is King

I first heard this phrase growing up around a couple of entrepreneurs/accountants — my parents and grandparents. My grandparents always had their own company. Granddad was the salesmen and grandma was the accountant. My parents were the same except Dad was more product visionary than sales and mom was the back office, including accounting. They all understood how to manage cash.

In fact, you don't start multiple businesses during your life unless you understand how to manage cash. This was the root of success for both my grandparents and parents. Stretching out payables and pulling in receivables is not something they were taught. It was something they experienced. I think this is true for everyone. Think about it: How well did you understand managing cash before you needed to worry about making payments next week? What about your clients? And they probably don't even have an accounting degree or any training in accounting.

Even though I heard this adage over and over as a kid, and received a quantitative economics degree and worked for PriceWaterhouse as an accountant, I didn't understand how to do this well until I experienced it firsthand, when I started PayCycle. That's when the conversations from the dinner table came to be front of mind. Reviewing the weekly check run always involved more complexity than I imagined. Questions such as whom do I pay this week? Who got paid recently? What does the contract say? Does my team want me to pay this vendor? What money is coming in next week? Why hasn't that customer paid me? How confident am I that the money will come in? I could go on and on, but you get the drift. I had to experience it to understand all the idiosyncrasies.

So as you think about budgeting and forecasting, I would encourage you to think more about the tools you use to manage cash. When I talk with accountants, I often hear about the piecing together of multiple systems — using spreadsheets, online banking, accounting software and sticky notes, to name a few. And yet, if the most important thing is cash, shouldn't the business use a sophisticated approach to managing it?

This may sound sacrilegious, but I never log in to our accounting software. That's the job of my controller. Granted, our business is a bit more complicated than most and warrants a full-time controller, but when I talked to my dad about running his business it was the same. As I talk to more and more small businesses, it's clear that business owners look at the P&L and balance sheet infrequently. But we look at cash daily. What tools are you giving them to help them manage cash?

When I think back to the conversations at the dinner table, managing cash was a team effort. It included my parents and grandparents, staff in the office, remote accountants, vendors, and customers. It was something that was done on Saturdays or after hours. Interestingly enough, I have noticed that most of the email invoices we receive are coming in after hours or on the weekend. Some things don't change.

Small business owners are busy *building* their business during the work day/week, but they are busy *managing* their business at night and on weekends. As their accountant, anything you can do to help them be more efficient will improve their results, let alone their loyalty to you. As I said, I believe managing cash is a team effort, and you the accountant are an integral part of the team.

> I BELIEVE MANAGING CASH IS A TEAM EFFORT, AND YOU THE ACCOUNTANT ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TEAM.

So think about the tools you are using to manage your cash. Would these same tools help your customers better manage their cash? Are you satisfied with the tools you use? If not, take a look on the Internet and see what tools are available. Check out your bank, and look at the app store for your accounting application. These tools exist.

Good luck building your own kingdom, where you can be crowned as the King/Queen of Cash!

Rene Lacerte

Mr. Lacerte is CEO and Founder of Bill.com and the former CEO and co-founder of PayCycle. As a third-generation entrepreneur building solutions for accountants, he is uniquely qualified to bring insights from an entrepreneur's and accountant's perspective. He can be contacted at rene.lacerte@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.

5 Reasons Not to Block Social Media at Work

Isaac M. O'Bannon,
Technology Editor

Isaac is the Technology Editor for CPA Practice Advisor, having joined the publication in June 2002. Through his experience in the areas of consumer and professional-level software and peripherals, as well as knowledge of the public accounting field, he provides reviews of technologies used by accountants and their business clients as well as contributing a regular column that provides helpful information that ranges from improving search techniques, when to upgrade a computer and computing security issues. He can be reached at isaac.obannon@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.

FOR MORE SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS FOR YOUR PRACTICE, SEE:

6 Pointers for Your Firm's Social Media Strategy
www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/10243408

Leveraging Social Media to Build Your Business
www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/10268415

The dilemma regarding Internet usage by employees during work hours has long been one of discussion by business owners, human resources professionals, IT professionals and staff. During the late 1990s, the concern was largely that of distrust over the new technology and countless dramatized stories about employers using their computers to access pornography, gambling and other inappropriate content.

By the middle of the first decade of the 21st Century (did we ever come up with a term for it, or are we going to call it the "Aughts" again?), with the widespread adoption of high-speed internet access at most businesses, this concern had narrowed more specifically on productivity issues, such as will employees waste all of their time on shopping, gaming and other useless websites? And, well, porn and gambling were still a lingering concern.

So now here we are in 2011, and the issue of internet usage in the workplace is still a topic of managerial discussion. Now, however, it is squarely focused on social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter. As with earlier years and concerns, some managers are looking at curtailing their employees' use of the internet, hoping to prevent their staff from falling off of that proverbial productivity cliff.

Here are a few reasons I believe that blocking or limiting such sites may be counterproductive for your practice and many other businesses:

1 Social media can be good for your business and your employee's morale. This depends on the nature of the business, but for professional services firms like tax and accounting offices, it's likely that every member (or almost every member) of your staff is a professional or paraprofessional. As such, they have specialties that can be touted on your firm's Facebook page or tweeted about. And since social media is something that some people "get" more inherently than others, allowing staff to post business-appropriate messages is a good way to find your firm's social media "champion."

2 Blocking websites can foster a feeling of distrust. Most businesses, particularly accounting and financial services firms, hire people they believe they can trust. With client security such an important issue, this is imperative. And while there is inevitably the occasional employee who turns into something less-than-hoped-for or worse, the perception that an employee is trusted by their boss is one of the most powerful loyalty-building traits in a manager.

3 Blocking websites may not be effective anyway. Facebook users can now reply by email to messages, and savvy users may be able to find a way around your blocking strategies.

4 Everybody's got a smartphone these days. According to an April report by Millennial Media (www.millennialmedia.com/2011/05), the top 20 selling mobile phones are now smartphones. So with full internet connectivity and access to social media and other apps, disabling use on the desktop may not have much of an effect anyway. And for younger users (under 25), mobile devices are often the preferred method of social media interaction.

5 The bottom line. You are running a business, of course, not a feel-good-about-your-manager morale or self-worth-building nonprofit, so the bottom line is the bottom line. Will blocking social media make your employees more productive? Will allowing them access to it make them more productive?

As with studies that looked into other forms of internet usage in the past 15 years, the deciding factor is usually with the individual staff members and their tendencies to addictive behavior. And as in years past, many business management gurus recommend setting semi-formal, yet flexible, internet policies for staff, including reminding them to limit non-business related internet and social media activities. But the occasional Facebook post, tweet or text is no more productivity draining than grabbing a morning coffee or chatting with fellow employees for a few minutes.

Not to mention, smartphones and the increase in remote access, is likely resulting in your staff checking on work email and other issues during their personal time. It's a minor trade-off that results in a little of their private life reaching into their workday, and vice versa. As the manager, owner or partner, you are the one who sets productivity goals and expectations for your staff, so you are the one who will know if someone is lagging, for whatever reason. If they are performing as expected or better, then they are successfully balancing this trade-off. ●

SECURITY TIP: BE SKEPTICAL OF SHORTENED URLS

They are everywhere, especially on social networking sites, blog posts and other online news sources. But what you can't see can hurt you and your computer. There are many versions of web-address shortening tools out there (TinyURL, Bit.ly, Ow.ly, etc.), and they are definitely useful resources, since some websites have monstrously long URLs. For the most part, the tools are offered by legitimate companies. Some are even built into apps like TweetDeck and HootSuite.

The potential problem is this: There's no way of really knowing where that link is going to take you. While the full browser version of Facebook at least offers the headline from the original article and the real source, it's not foolproof, and tweets offer pretty much zero ability to scrutinize where the link will take you. It could be to the site mentioned in the post, or it could be to a spam site or worse. I do occasionally include shortened URLs, but my policy on clicking on them is entirely based on whether I actually know the person who posted it. That's not foolproof either, since emails and Facebook posts often get scammed, but it's better than nothing.

For your information, you can shorten the URLs for many websites, including ours, by removing all but the main site name and an ID number at the end of the address. For instance, the long web address for this article can be shortened to www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/10278893. It's not as short as a TinyURL, but it at least keeps the name of the website obvious to potential clickers.

2011 ACCOUNTANT'S TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES GUIDE

In Search of Technology for Your Firm or Your Clients?

The 2011 Accountant's Technology & Services Guide Can Help

By Melody Steelman, Associate Publisher/Managing Editor

It's no secret that technology is a critical component of our lives, both professionally and personally. It's everywhere we turn. For small businesses (and even for most of us in our personal lives), keeping up with ever-changing trends and identifying the tools and products that will actually help us become more efficient and effective can be a major challenge. Most small businesses don't have a dedicated IT staff to advise them on their use of technology (although, some may have kids who try to steer them in the right direction on the technology they use in their personal lives).

As most of you know, these small businesses will often turn to their most trusted business advisor for help — you, their professional accountant. And this makes sense, especially in areas that relate to the technology used for managing the business and its financial processes. Keeping up with the technology you use in your own firm can present its own share of struggles and efforts. Add to that the task of keeping up with the technological needs of clients in diverse industries, and you may start to feel a little overwhelmed.

This advisory role does have its advantages, though, especially since you have a vested interest in the success of your small business clients. If you can point them in the right direction and help them properly implement the systems and technology they use on a daily basis, you and your clients will both realize the benefits. This equates to better accuracy with financials and bookkeeping, less time with write-up and reconciliation work, and more streamlined processes and efficiencies.

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(see also Time & Billing)

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(see also Practice Management)

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The Key to E-Mail Marketing for Small Organizations

One of the ways successful firms are continuing to grow during the current economic downturn is by finding new and existing clients with targeted, personalized service. Large firms have used customer relationship management (CRM) and contact management systems for years to manage sales activities, track correspondence, and log contact with current and prospective customers, but these systems are frequently not used by small firms that don't have dedicated marketing departments. Although practitioners have a significant amount of content clients want (e.g. new IRS mileage rates, tax law changes, etc.), they don't always communicate it to all of their clients in a timely manner. And when they do send targeted messages to clients, they often don't have a systematic way of knowing the clients' interest level in a topic. So they simply wait for the phone to ring.

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Brian Tankersley, CPA.CITP, Technology Editor

Brian Tankersley is a Knoxville, Tennessee CPA and consultant whose practice is focused on technology consulting and training for accountants. Brian is a nationally recognized speaker with K2 Enterprises (k2e.com), and blogs on accounting technology at CPATechBlog.com. Comments, suggestions, and errata are always welcome, and should be e-mailed to brian.tankersley@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.

One of the challenges of traditional e-mail marketing is the lack of basic information about the success or failure of these efforts, including the following:

- **How many recipients opened the message?**
- **Was the message readable in the recipient's e-mail application?**
- **Which recipients clicked on one of the links in the message?**

Sage ACT! e-Marketing for Peachtree uses analytical tools to track each recipient's activities associated with an e-mail message. By using unique links and codes in a message, a firm can know (both individually and in the aggregate) who opened a message, what they clicked on and how that compares to past messages. This feedback makes it possible for firms to know what clients are actually reading from the message, and can be used to make adjustments to the types of information included in future newsletters.

Another challenge for small organizations is making the content appear on the wide range of hardware and software used to read e-mail. A solution should ensure that the message is legible across numerous devices, including mobile phones, tablets, personal computers and laptops. While some users will read the message in Microsoft Outlook, others will use applications such as Outlook Express, Gmail, Yahoo! Mail or Mozilla Thunderbird. Given the large number of tools people use to consume the message, most firms should partner with a company that is an expert in delivering messages across multiple platforms and devices.

A final hurdle for e-marketers is compliance with the ever-changing laws and regulations governing online activity, including laws such as the CAN SPAM Act of 2003, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), and many others. These laws restrict the types of messages that can be sent out, and create new penalties (which could include fines and imprisonment) for failure to comply with their mandates, which include a requirement that a recipient be able to click on a link to "unsubscribe" from future mailings. Sage ACT! e-Marketing for Peachtree is powered by Swiftpage, a leading e-mail marketing company, and is designed to help businesses comply with relevant laws and regulations.

While many accountants are tempted to simply e-mail a PDF of a printed newsletter to clients, this approach can give younger clients a poor impression of your firm. Given the value the tax and accounting profession places on maintaining the proper image, the information available on who is opening a message and viewing links, the complexities of creating a message that can be read across multiple platforms, and the risks of not complying with relevant laws and regulations, this is not something you will want to do internally. Firms should increase the effectiveness of campaigns and decrease the risks of not complying with relevant laws and regulations by using a comprehensive e-Marketing service such as Sage ACT! e-Marketing for Peachtree for their bulk e-mail communications.

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
- Installation Ease
- General Navigation & Ease of Use
- Industry-Specific Templates
- Industry-Specific Features
- Platform Support

CORE ACCOUNTING CAPABILITES
- GL/AP/AR Functionality
- Sales Tax Functionality
- Payroll Functionality
- Audit Trail
- Multi-Currency
- Multiple Language Support
- Multi-Location Support
- Multiple Users

DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS
- Sales/Point of Sale/Shipping
- Customer/Vendor Employee Management
- Inventory/Purchasing
- e-Features
- Remote Access

MANAGEMENT FEATURES
- Dashboard Overviews
- Reporting
- Security Features
- Integration/Import/Export
- Data Transfer
- External Integration
- Online Accountant Transfer Tool

HELP/SUPPORT
- Built-in Support Features
- System Updates
- Support Website/Documentation
- U.S.-Based Support

SUMMARY & PRICING

12 Products to Help Your Retail Clients

It's no secret that the retail industry has struggled in this difficult economy. Yet *Advance Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services*, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, show an increase in total sales in May 2011, up 7.7% from May 2010. While numbers were down from the previous month (April 2011), indicating that recovery still has a long way to go, adventurous entrepreneurs continue to start new businesses. And as the number of jobs continues to shrink in the United States, more and more people are turning to self-employment to make ends meet. As they turn to tax and accounting professionals to help them run their business, they'll also likely need help with something else: finding a good retail/POS system.

As every business is different, each business' needs are different, as well. A smaller gift shop will have much different needs than a high-volume convenience store. A beauty salon will need different features than a liquor store. A grocery store will require a different interface than a computer store. The end result is that the needs of retailers vary just about as much as the POS software products reviewed here.

While all of these products can easily handle basic sales transactions and much more, the similarities end there. Many products contain touch-screen technology for quicker transaction processing, and can handle e-commerce functionality — a necessity for those offering online shopping. Some products work only with a single store, which is perfect for those with no desire to expand. But retailers with multiple locations will need a more powerful system that offers integrated technology between locations.

The good news is that there's something for everyone in this review, from products for single-location retailers to those with 25 locations. We've consolidated many of the POS features into a logical sequence to help identify the products that most closely meet the needs of your retail clients.

Basic System Functions covers areas such as system navigation and relative ease of use. It also looks at how scalable the product is: If the business grows, can the software grow with it? Module selection is also noted in this section. User roles and security are vital areas, particularly for retailers with numerous employees. We also look at features such as multi-store support, multiple transaction entry options, and other advanced retail features such as warehouse management, e-commerce and remote sales.

Specialized Features & Services takes a look at areas such as touch-screen support, multiple tender options, customer data management, layaway and other special services, marketing tools, and loyalty and rewards programs.

Tracking & Reporting considers the variety of reports available, if reports are available in real time, and the availability of inventory tracking reports. It also notes whether the product can identify best- and worst-selling items, in addition to evaluating management analysis options.

Integration/Import/Export covers how well the product integrates with the vendor's own add-on modules as well as any external applications. We also look at basic import/export options, what type of POS hardware peripherals are supported and whether or not time clock support is available.

Help & Support identifies the Help options available with the product, as well as any built-in support options such as tutorials, videos or wizards. This section also considers how easy it is to get system updates, and how useful the company website is in supplying information to users. Product support options and availability is also noted here.

AS THE NUMBER OF JOBS CONTINUES TO SHRINK IN THE UNITED STATES, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE TURNING TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

Mary Girsch-Bock

Mary began her career as an accountant in the property management industry, later moving into the healthcare industry. She is now a freelance writer specializing in business and technology issues and is the author of her first book, several HR handbooks, training manuals, and other in-house publications. She can be reached at mary.girschbock@cpapracticeadvisor.com.

Wasp Barcode Technologies — QuickStore POS

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

★★★★½ BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆ SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★½ TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★★ INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★☆ HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295894

BEST FIT

QuickStore is available in three editions and works with retail businesses of all types and sizes, but is not suitable for grocery stores or restaurants. The company offers a complete line of POS-related hardware and bundled products.

STRENGTHS

- Scalable, with 3 versions available
- Easy to setup & navigate
- Offers touch-screen technology
- Contains solid customer tracking capability
- Comes pre-bundled, with all necessary software & hardware

POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES

- No e-Commerce integration available
- Does not offer loyalty/rewards tracking
- Contains limited analysis tools

SUMMARY & PRICING

QuickStore from Wasp Barcode Technologies is available in a conveniently bundled package that includes the software, a cash drawer, barcode scanner, thermal receipt printer, power supply, magnetic card reader and a one-year maintenance agreement for the price of $999. The Professional version is available for $1,995, and the Enterprise edition costs $2,995. Several other bundled packages are available that include a variety of software/hardware combinations, with one sure to suit the needs of just about any small to mid-sized retailer.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

866-547-9277 **www.waspbarcode.com**

Cougar Mountain Software — DENALI Retail/POS

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

★★★★★ BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆ SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★★ TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★½ INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★ HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295370

BEST FIT

DENALI opens up the market sector considerably for Cougar Mountain Software. While still an excellent selection for small to midsized retail businesses, Denali is also powerful enough to appeal to larger, multi-location stores with more complex needs.

STRENGTHS

- Modular design allows users to choose the modules they need
- Intuitive user interface & color-coded modules simplify system navigation
- Excellent reporting options built using Crystal Reports
- Supports e-Commerce functionality
- Excellent customer tracking

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Does not offer touch-screen technology
- Does not offer or support customer loyalty programs
- Does not offer dedicated shipping integration

SUMMARY & PRICING

DENALI's POS module is an excellent addition to its strong selection of modules. Suitable for just about any size retailer, DENALI modules start at $599 with a $295 user license attached.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

800-388-3038 **www.cougarmtn.com**

Solid Innovation — Solid Sales Pro

Solid Sales Pro from Solid Innovation offers retailers a mobile POS system designed for remote sales transaction processing including field sales, showroom sales and tradeshow ordering. Solid Sales Pro easily handles both customer ordering tasks and contains inventory management capabilities. The system is available in a QuickBooks Pro Edition for QuickBooks (QB) integration and a Microsoft Dynamics GP Edition, which is designed to integrate with Microsoft Dynamics GP. The Enterprise Edition is available for integration with the Solid Route Accounting Business System, and the Integration Edition is for providing integration with other accounting products.

Some of the key features found in Solid Sales Pro include the ability to handle all types of customer transactions such as sales orders, invoices, delivery confirmation, back orders and payments on account. Credits and returns can also be processed. A signature capture device can be utilized, and transactions and receipts can be easily printed using a variety of printers. The Enterprise and Integration Edition users can maintain sales history, product levels and return history for each customer for up to the last six visits.

Transaction reports detail all transactions that have been entered into the system and contain a cash-out report for end-of-route cash reconciliation. Appropriate notes can be entered into Solid Sales Pro for each product that is sold, and a search option is available to locate products by barcode, description or product code.

Pricing levels are easily tracked and maintained, including a list of suggested retail prices, along with wholesale and quantity discount pricing. Users can

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40

AccuPOS Point of Sale

AccuPOS Point of Sale is a stand-alone POS product designed for use in the retail and restaurant industry. AccuPOS is designed to flawlessly integrate with a variety of popular accounting programs including all QuickBooks financial products, Peachtree products, Sage Business-Works and Simply Accounting.

Available in five different versions (Basic, Pro, Gold, Platinum and Elite), AccuPOS is a scalable product that can easily grow along with a retail establishment. An easy-to-use interface simplifies system navigation, even for those new to the product. Fully customizable, AccuPOS provides the option to create an interface that suits a user's needs. New terminals, users and even locations can be added at any time.

AccuPOS was designed to utilize touch-screen technology, and the flexibility of the product makes it easy to customize a system to particular business types. A running total of all transactions entered into the system are displayed on the POS interface screen, and tools like a calculator are available if needed. Custom menu pages can be easily created, and a series of user keys can be customized. All menu pages are fully customized as well, with the option to change the size, color and even the function of all buttons displayed in the POS user interface. Customized buttons can also be set up on the payment screen, where up to 15 different tender types can be chosen. Cashiers can easily split tender types, and both debit and credit cards can be easily swiped for quick processing.

AccuPOS also contains excellent customer management and tracking capability that will easily store customer information after the sale has been tendered. Cashiers can quickly lookup customer information during a sale, and AccuPOS tracks customer purchases for loyalty programs. Cash sales are easily processed by simply choosing the generic or cash sales option.

The Restaurant/Bar version of AccuPOS is pre-designed for the restaurant industry and offers industry-specific buttons and tabs. The interface, like the retail version, is completely customizable, with the ability to pre-set buttons for frequently ordered items. Restaurant managers can also create a custom layout of their restaurant, making it easy for servers to automate the order process.

A remote transfer module is available for businesses with more than one

location. Other products include the AccuCOUNT inventory management program and the AccuSHIFT time clock system.

AccuPOS offers a series of bundled systems that include the POS software suitable for either retail or restaurant establishments, along with all of the essential hardware, including a touch-screen monitor, cash drawer, thermal receipt printer and barcode scanners. Users can also opt to purchase just the software. All software/hardware bundles includes one year of unlimited support. Visit the vendor's website for more information or to view system videos or try out a demo.

877-888-0880 **www.accupos.com**

CAM Commerce — Retail STAR/Retail STAR Lite

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

Retail STAR is well suited for larger retail businesses that offer both brick and mortar and e-commerce sales. The partner product, Retail STAR Lite is a great starter product for small, single-location retailers looking to utilize many of the features found in larger POS products.

STRENGTHS

- Scalable, with the ability to add modules as needed
- Available as a single-location product for the cost of shipping
- Easily customized with an excellent selection of add-on modules
- Solid inventory/warehouse management capability
- E-commerce capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Product setup can be time-consuming
- Extended product training may be needed
- Pricing levels vary by user licenses & add-on modules

SUMMARY & PRICING

Retail Star is a robust POS product that also offers excellent back office capability. Ideal for larger retailers with multiple locations, Retail STAR also offers the less powerful Retail STAR Lite for single-location retailers to get a feel for the product and is available through subscription plan agreements that start at $59 per month. This is a bargain when the true power of this product is realized.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★★	TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295074

800-726-3282 **www.camcommerce.com**

ECR Software Corp. — Catapult

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

Touch-screen technology comes standard with Catapult, and the add-on modules designed for specialty retailers like drug stores, grocery stores, convenience stores and other specialty stores make this a good fit for high-volume retailers that require a high level of customization.

STRENGTHS

- Default touch-screen monitor functionality
- High level of customization capability
- Excellent reporting capability
- Offers a wide selection of plug-in applications designed for specific high-volume retailers
- Extremely easy system navigation

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No integrated shipping capability
- Does not contain mail order/catalog order processing

SUMMARY & PRICING

Catapult pricing starts at $1,500 for a single software license, with most plug-in or add-on features costing extra. Designed specifically for the high-volume transaction retailer, Catapult provides businesses with excellent customization capabilities as well as an easily navigated product that requires limited training time.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★★	TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★☆	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295520

800-211-1172 **www.ecrs.com**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

easily override list pricing, and credit limits for each customer can be validated to establish appropriate credit limits. Inventory and warehouse management is also available, with users able to check warehouse quantities of all products. Users can create approved product lists, as well as multi-vendor lists.

Solid Innovation offers several other products that work with the Solid Sales Pro module, including Business Central, which integrates with Solid Sales Pro for complete business management. Journey Plan schedules route customers so users will not miss important customers. Mobile Central manages all data between mobile computers and the host accounting system, and Warehouse Pro unifies all warehouse data for complete inventory management capability.

For more information, or to view online demos, be sure to visit Solid Innovation's website at www.solid-innovation.com or give them a call at 888-667-3769.

888-667-3769 **www.Solid-Innovation.com**

NetSuite — OnSite POS

Users of NetSuite in the market for an integrated POS product may want to take a look at OnSite POS. Designed specifically for NetSuite, OnSite POS provides small to mid-sized retailers a point-of-sale product that completely integrates with all NetSuite modules, eliminating the need for data exporting or time-consuming data entry. Multi-location retailers may consider NetSuite's Multi-Channel Retail Management Suite, which contains OnSite POS.

OnSite POS is a complete POS solution and offers an extensive list of features such as the ability to accept multiple tender types including foreign currency, as well as both kit and package pricing. OnSite POS can easily process standard transactions such as traditional sales, customer credits and returns, and allows cashiers to apply product discounts during checkout. Cashiers can also accept split tenders on a sales transaction, and savvy sales people can easily upsell merchandise when processing sales transactions. OnSite POS is highly customizable, allowing users to design a customized interface. Both function- and task-level security is available, and managers can implement the control levels desired. Employees can process non-merchandise transactions, as well. So if a furniture store charges for delivery, the delivery charge can be processed directly from the POS user interface. OnSite POS also offers advanced reporting and cash drawer management functions, making it much easier to balance cash drawers at the end of a shift.

The Retail Management Suite offers a higher level of functionality and is designed for enterprise-level businesses that require more flexibility, such as the inclusion of a central store terminal that stores all POS data including transactions and inventory levels so employees can easily see inventory levels and available products at each location.

OnSite POS is designed to be used in just about any retail environment, which includes brick-and-mortar stores as well as those selling online, or any combination of the two. Remote functionality means that sales can be processed from any location, making it a great option for sidewalk sales, tradeshows, and festivals and fairs.

Hot keys can be assigned to best-selling items, making sales quick and easy. Customer data is easily stored, with customers assigned to each sale. Or users can choose to utilize the anonymous customer option, which processes transactions quickly without the need to identify or enter customer information.

OnSite POS also integrates with all the necessary hardware peripherals, including POS terminals, receipt printers, barcode scanners and electronic signature capture devices.

OnSite POS for NetSuite is a must for retailers currently using NetSuite products. Designed for retailers of all sizes, OnSite POS provides the flexibility to responsibly manage employees while also allowing them to do their job properly. Special reports, dashboards and an active audit trail make OnSite POS a terrific solution to retailers using NetSuite software.

877-NETSUITE **www.netsuite.com**

Sage North America — DacEasy

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★☆

BEST FIT

Well-suited to smaller businesses that also require POS capability, DacEasy is a good front/back office solution to businesses that offer products for sale but do not handle hundreds or thousands of transactions daily.

STRENGTHS

- Easy setup & little training time required
- Great dashboards provide immediate sales & customer detail
- Customizable interface
- Solid system security & strong audit trail
- Good reporting options, including Crystal Reports

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Not designed for high-volume transaction processing
- Does not support touch-screen technology (planned for next release)
- Does not support customer loyalty programs

SUMMARY & PRICING

The DacEasy Retail Edition includes Point of Sale and Accounting modules as well as the Sage Business Care Gold Support and is currently available for $1,499 for a single user, with a network version available for $2,399.99, making it affordable for smaller retail businesses that desire solid front office/back office functionality.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

Sage DacEasy

★★★★½	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★☆	TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★☆	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295883

800-322-3279 **www.daceasy.com**

InfoTouch Corporation — Store Keeper POS

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★☆

BEST FIT

Store Keeper is a good fit for smaller retail establishments with only one location, but who still desire a custom user interface for use with touch-screen monitors. The vendor also offers Store Manager for multi-location shops.

STRENGTHS

- Highly customizable touch-screen technology
- Easy to setup & use
- Good customer tracking capability
- Flexible pricing levels
- Solid employee module tracks time & salary/bonus/commissions

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Does not offer e-commerce support
- No integrated shipping options
- Single store use only; must upgrade for multi-store capability

SUMMARY & PRICING

Priced at $499 to $799 per register, Store Keeper POS from InfoTouch is suitable for single-location retailers. The ability to upgrade to Store Manager makes this an ideal product for retailers with possible future expansion.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

InfoTouch Corporation

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★½	SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★½	TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★☆	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★☆	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295623

800-678-8682 **www.infotouch.com**

PDG Software Inc.

PDG Software, the makers of shopping cart and e-commerce software, offers simple real-time integration with QuickBooks (QB) products. It is fully scalable, offering four versions: PDG Lite, which can be used for up to 100 products; PDG Pro, which is designed for up to 1,000 products; PDG Gold, which can handle up to 5,000 products; and PDG Platinum, which is designed for an unlimited number of products. When purchasing either the Gold or Platinum versions of PDG, users can also get up to an hour of consulting time for assistance in linking the system to QB.

PDG Software contains a long list of useful features, including the ability to import and export product data into an Excel spreadsheet and display an unlimited number of images for each product. PDG also allows users to specify colors, sizes or versions for each product sold. Because the system if fully synced with QB, all data such as inventory is updated whenever a product is sold, ensuring that customers will receive the most up-to-the-minute data when accessing their software or running reports.

PDG also offers a host of marketing tools designed to increase business, including the ability to attractively display new products and best sellers on the website. Business owners can also offer customers a variety of special offers including discount coupons, gift certificates and even reduced pricing for bulk purchases. Loyalty and rewards tracking is available, as well, so users can track customer purchasing habits and produce targeted marketing efforts based on historical purchases.

PDG is user friendly for web shoppers, offering an easily navigated inter-

Celerant Technology Corp. — Celerant Command Retail

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

Both brick-and-mortar and online stores will appreciate Command Retail's extensive options, all designed to make retail management more efficient. While retailers of all sizes can utilize Command Retail, its long list of features and multi-location capability make it a great fit for larger retail businesses with multiple locations.

STRENGTHS

- Full E-Commerce capability including marketing options
- A comprehensive CRM function that tracks multiple levels of customer detail
- Works with multiple operating systems
- Supports buying clubs & private-label credit cards
- Contains an excellent warehouse/distribution function

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Pricing levels place it out of reach of smaller retailers
- System setup requires a good deal of time

SUMMARY & PRICING

A complete system generally starts at about $12,000, making this comprehensive retail management/POS product an ideal fit for larger retailers with multiple locations.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

CELERANT TECHNOLOGY CORP
Real-time Retail

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★★	TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295221

718-605-7733 **www.celerant.com**

Intuit — QuickBooks Point of Sale Pro

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

QuickBooks offers smaller retailers a solid, affordable POS product, in two editions, that contains several top-notch features normally found in more sophisticated products. Smaller retailers will appreciate the level of features found in QuickBooks POS.

STRENGTHS

- Quick installation & quick setup
- Little training time required
- Offers excellent customer tracking & rewards program
- New user interface makes navigation even easier
- Solid dashboard reporting

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Does not offer integrated shipping with a variety of vendors
- Limited modules unless integrating with QuickBooks financial products
- Limited growth potential

SUMMARY & PRICING

QuickBooks POS Basic is $999.99, with the Pro version available for $1,499.95. While fully functional as a standalone product, when integrated with QuickBooks financial products users will have tight front/back office controls as well as a POS product that is one of the easiest to set up and use.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★½	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★½	SPECIALIZED FEATURES/SERVICES
★★★★★	TRACKING/REPORTING
★★★★½	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10295866

866-379-6636 **www.quickbooks.com**

866-433-4PDG (4734) **www.pdgsoft.com**

PDG SOFTWARE

face where shoppers can choose to set up an account for easy future ordering. All visitors and customers are offered a safe, secure shopping experience. The system accepts checks and credit cards, as well as integration with PayPal and Google Checkout payments. A complete database of customers allows managers to monitor ordering data for all registered customers.

Those purchasing PDG have the option to create a custom storefront or use one of the templates provided. PDG also contains a direct link to UPS WorldShip for easy product shipping and tracking. Shipping rates are also available for USPS, FedEx and DHL.

PDG helps QB maintain its audit trail functionality by posting each transaction using the specified transaction type, which includes sales orders and receipts. This method makes it easy for users to track each transaction entered into the system.

PDG's one-time license fee is designed to save users money by eliminating the monthly fees and commissions that are typically charged by shopping cart hosts. Payments can be processed using QB merchant services account or a compatible merchant services vendor.

PDG offers a lot of choices and is suitable for retail businesses of all sizes that currently utilize QB. PDG Lite starts at $599 for up to 100 products, with PDG Platinum available for $1,799. This is an excellent product for current QB users who are looking to begin or increase their web presence without a lot of time or money.

INTEGRATED SALES TAX MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
- General navigation/ease-of-use
- Installation process
- Multi-company management
- Multi locations
- Remote Access Capabilities

COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
- Multi-Jurisdictions
- Automated compliance tools
- Electronic Filing & Payment
- Rate Updates

INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
- Data output options
- Reporting
- Integration with accounting system

HELP/SUPPORT
- Built-In Support Features
- Support Website/Documentation
- Live Support

TRADITIONAL SALES TAX COMPLIANCE SYSTEMS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
- General navigation/ease-of-use
- Installation process
- Multi-company management

COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
- Multi-Jurisdictions
- Forms preparation
- Electronic Filing & Payment
- Rate Updates

INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
- Data output options – pdf copy
- Reporting
- Integration with accounting system – summary report

HELP/SUPPORT
- Built-In Support Features
- Support Website/Documentation
- Live Support

Isaac M. O'Bannon, Technology Editor

Conquering the Challenges of Sales & Use Tax

Sales and use tax compliance is an area of widely varying complexity. For many of the smallest entities that conduct taxable transactions, particularly physical retail businesses with only one or two locations, the process of applying the appropriate tax rate and reporting it to their states is often quite simple. And almost all states that have sales taxes have added online reporting and remittance systems, making it even easier for these small businesses to dutifully collect, report and pay.

Even in this simplest of sales tax scenarios, there are other processes that occur, of course, such as determining the taxability of an item, dealing with purchasers who may be exempt from such taxes, the collection of the funds, and proper bookkeeping to segregate them into appropriate liabilities accounts. There are also special taxation rules, such as tax holidays, tax districts and caps or maximums. And different states tax some things differently: Some tax services and rentals, while others don't. Likewise, some tax certain foods and medications, while others exempt them all. For very small businesses, these functions can be handled fairly easily, albeit with an eye for detail and deadlines, and hopefully with the occasional bit of guidance from their public accountant.

As businesses grow, however, the complexity and labor involved in compliance can grow dramatically. Whether the growth is in transaction volume, new storefront locations, the addition of online sales, distribution, and delivery channels or a combination thereof, multi-hat-wearing managers and business owners can quickly find themselves overwhelmed.

Suddenly, nexus issues come into play, as well as keeping up with frequently changing tax rates and reporting requirements and frequencies across more and more jurisdictions, potentially even hundreds or thousands for even small ecommerce entities. Variables in the taxability of products also grows, as does reporting the sales from separate locations. These challenges are compounded even further for businesses diverging into different types of activities, particularly manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors.

As in any area of compliance, significant penalties can result from failing to file correctly, whether due to fatigue or misunderstanding. And while self-file state websites offer the basics for the simplest filers, they often lack the features necessary for those with more complex concerns. Finding a solution that meets the needs of the small business therefore becomes critical. There are many programs and online tools for sales and use tax compliance management, both for small and mid-sized entities, as well as for much larger businesses.

45 STATES AND WASHINGTON, DC HAVE SALES TAXES.

THE 5 U.S. STATES WITH NO SALES TAX:
- **Alaska**
- **Delaware**
- **Montana**
- **Oregon**
- **New Hampshire**

The market is essentially divided into two types of programs and, as we did last year, this year's review of Sales and Use Tax Compliance systems is divided into these two types of programs.

First, there are **Traditional Sales Tax Compliance Systems**, where the system is used at the end of a reporting period to calculate, prepare and sometimes e-file forms and payments to taxing agencies. This is the more familiar model of sales and use tax reporting for businesses with one or a handful of locations. The systems may support only a few states or offer compliance forms for all, they often include tax rate tables that are updated periodically or, in the case of web-based systems, are automatically maintained and updated by the program's vendor.

For entities with more dynamic taxation needs, especially those with multiple locations or online sales that expose them to compliance needs in hundreds or more frequently changing jurisdictions, the traditional after-the-fact model can work for reporting, but that becomes only half of the battle. The challenges these businesses face simply keeping up with changing tax rates and rules across the thousands of taxing jurisdictions in the United States and Canada become impossible to manage manually, and the potential risk of errors and penalties on this side of the equation are just as significant, if not compounded by the sheer number of taxing agencies and reporting requirements.

This is where **Integrated Sales Tax Management Systems** can play a vital role. Such programs have databases that can include every tax rate and all of the taxability rules for every state, city, county and special district in North America, and use secure servers to feed that information into a business' sales, e-commerce and other financial systems. This allows the system to automatically determine and verify tax in real-time as a transaction, estimate or e-shopping cart function is accessed, based on either the location of the retail establishment or their customer's address. Each of the three "integrated" systems reviewed here also offer outsourced compliance options, through which a business can have the vendor handle all reporting requirements to all necessary jurisdictions, including printing, filing and payment.

How does a business know when it's time to start looking for a sales and use tax program? If there are penalties for non-compliance, that's a pretty good clue, but also if managing the processes is becoming tedious and increasingly time-consuming. The first step in selection is determining the needs of the small business in terms of their complexity. Some accounting practices are also finding sales and use tax compliance to be a valued client service. As such, some of the programs in each segment offer consoles for managing multiple entities.

CFS Tax Software, Inc. — CA and NY Sales Tax Preparer

{TRADITIONAL SALES TAX COMPLIANCE SYSTEM}

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★

BEST FIT:

Small and mid-sized businesses with multiple locations and reporting requirements in CA or NY, or firms managing multiple businesses with such requirements.

STRENGTHS:

- Easy to use
- Gross summary reports
- E-filing to CA
- PDF output
- Good client communication templates
- Multi-client management tools
- Automation of system updates

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Only handles CA and NY returns
- Little e-filing to NY because of state law changes
- No integration with accounting systems

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PRICING

CA Sales Tax Preparer costs $119, with annual renewal priced at $99 and multi-user network version available for $169 ($149 renewal). NY Sales Tax Preparer costs $169, with annual renewal priced at $149 and a multi-user network version available for $219 ($199 renewal). For CA, this pricing includes unlimited preparation, e-filing and electronic payment of returns for any number of business entities. For the NY version, however, changes to New York law have complicated the e-filing procedure, so users are more likely to use the system for preparation only. The systems are simple to use, whether managing one business or several, have great forms libraries and can handle entities with multiple locations within either state.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★½	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10293037

800-343-1157 www.taxtools.com

Avalara — AvaTax

{INTEGRATED SALES TAX MANAGEMENT SYSTEM}

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

Businesses with sales across dozens, hundreds or even more taxing jurisdictions across the United States and Canada, with the need to automate tax rate lookup into their sales and ecommerce systems.

STRENGTHS

- Seamless integration into accounting system
- Rates are maintained by Avalara, no updates required
- Generous reporting & oversight
- Rates & rules for 14,000+ jurisdictions
- Streamlined Sales Tax Compliance

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No direct self e-file or e-pay for business
- Primarily for client-side use, but with some multi-client functions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PRICING

For businesses with sales across dozens or even hundreds or more unpredictable jurisdictions, integration of AvaTax into an accounting system takes almost all of the routine and often tedious work out of sales tax management. The rates are maintained and updated by Avalara, and then automatically feed into the accounting system during a transaction, with liability reports and forms preparation generated by the program. The addition of the managed returns service can take even more of the headache out of compliance. Pricing for AvaTax depends on the accounting/ERP program into which it will be integrated, and the number of transactions that will be processed (rate lookups). For the QuickBooks version, pricing starts at $350 per year for low-volume entities (up to 700 transactions). For higher volume businesses with up to 7,000 transactions annually, the cost is about $0.35 per transaction.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☐ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296222

877-780-4848 www.Avalara.com

SpeedTax — SpeedTax Core, Plus & Pro

{INTEGRATED SALES TAX MANAGEMENT SYSTEM}

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT:
Businesses with increasingly complex sales tax management and reporting needs across multiple jurisdictions that are looking to integrate real-time sales tax rates and calculations into the business' sales platforms.

STRENGTHS:
- Integrated, real-time rates & calculations
- Multi-user review/sign-off processes
- E-mail due date & workflow reminders
- Multi-entity management with Pro version
- Comprehensive jurisdictions for United States & Canada

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:
- Only offers integrated e-file/payments to Arkansas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PRICING:
SpeedTax is best suited for businesses with increasingly complex sales taxation compliance requirements, providing an integrated tax calculation system that automatically finds and routes appropriate rate calculations into the business entity's sales and e-commerce systems. Through an optional compliance service, businesses can also have SpeedTax generate and submit all jurisdictional returns and payments. The Pro version offers additional features for accounting professionals managing the compliance needs of multiple business entities. Pricing for the Core tax calculation engine is based on the volume of transactions, with 1,200 annual transactions costing about $800 per year. The addition of the Plus forms preparation and due date monitoring system starts at $600 for a dozen annual returns. Plus can also be used as a stand-alone return preparation system, with the ability to import data from outside accounting applications.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:
- ☐ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★☆	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10292825

888-349-2441 www.SpeedTax.com

BNA Software – BNA Sales & Use Tax Rates and Forms

{TRADITIONAL SALES TAX COMPLIANCE SYSTEM}

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT:
Mid-sized and larger businesses with growing SALT compliance complexity, and firms managing compliance for multiple entities. Also businesses wanting comprehensive tax tables for export into their live sales and accounting systems.

STRENGTHS:
- Very easy-to-use
- Comprehensive: All U.S. jurisdictions
- PDF, Excel, XML, CSV, Text output
- Multi-client management tools
- Schedulable rate table export feature
- Web-based delivery means easy access and no updating

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:
- Rate lookup and form preparation not integrated
- No e-filing or electronic payment options

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PRICING
The two components of BNA Sales & Use Tax Rates and Forms Online (the forms preparation and rate lookup utility) are easy to learn and use, and provide comprehensive compliance support that includes all taxing jurisdictions in the United States. The program does not offer e-filing or electronic payment of sales and use tax returns, but can be used in preparation of forms that are then submitted online via a state website. The system is best designed for mid-sized and larger businesses with multiple locations or varying nexus definitions that require compliance with multiple jurisdictions. Its ability to manage any number of business entities also makes it a good selection for firms managing these compliance processes for multiple entities. Pricing is $925 per year for unlimited access and use of both the forms preparation and rate lookup systems.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:
- ☐ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★½	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10293035

800-424-2938 www.BNAsoftware.com

TrustFile, an Avalara Company — TrustFile Sales & Use Tax

{TRADITIONAL SALES TAX COMPLIANCE SYSTEM}

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★

BEST FIT:
Businesses wishing to e-file their sales and use tax reports for multiple location businesses in one or more of the 12 supported states, and those who wish to electronically pay these liabilities.

STRENGTHS:
- Simple navigation & function
- E-filing to each of the supported states
- PDF output
- Available forms library for other states
- Data import from CSV

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:
- No integration between state program versions
- Limited output formats (only PDF)
- No client communication/billing templates
- No integration with accounting systems

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PRICING:
TrustFile is best suited for small to mid-sized businesses with multiple locations within one or more of the states supported by the program. The e-file focused system is simple to use, though lacks some advanced features and report output options. Each state edition is priced at $159 per year, which supports filing for up to five entities in that state. Additional user licenses are available for $99 each.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:
- ☑ On-Premises
- ☐ SaaS
- ☐ Hosted by Vendor

TrustFile™ an Avalara Company

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
★★★☆	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10292826

877-222-0187 www.TrustFile.com

Imaging Science & Services, Inc. — TEAMS & LineLink

With thousands of jurisdictions across the country that have varying sales and use tax rates, the various filing requirements and frequencies of the 45 states that have sales taxes, and the potential penalties that can result from errors or missed deadlines, sales tax compliance can be complicated enough. But another significant challenge for many businesses lies in keeping track of the customers and transactions for which no tax is applied.

Most state and local laws require sellers to keep valid exemption certificates for all of their customers who claim exemption from sales tax, otherwise they are obligated to collect, report and remit those taxes. Managing these certificates can be just as tedious as other parts of the compliance process, especially since the documents expire and must be updated periodically. Two solutions from Imaging Science & Services, Inc. (ISSI) offer relief for these processes.

The Tax Exemption Administrative Management System (TEAMS) provides a web-enabled utility that streamlines the functions of collecting, storing and retrieving exemption certificates, and offers special features that help to identify those that have expired or are nearing expiration, then alerts users and management to these records. The system also notes missing and invalid certificates, and includes advanced search features.

The LineLink system is a database or spreadsheet-based tool that functions as a desktop document organizer, helping to simplify tasks involving multiple documents. The system can be used for sales and use tax audit defense, reverse audits, due diligence reviews and other related tasks.

Both systems allow business financial managers to be more proactive in exemption management and audit defense preparation, resulting in greater compliance assurance.

866-723-7409 www.issimage.com

Electronic Sales & Use Tax, Inc. — eFileSalesTax.com

{TRADITIONAL SALES TAX COMPLIANCE SYSTEM}

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★☆

BEST FIT:

Generally small and mid-sized businesses, or accounting firms managing multiple such businesses, with filing requirements in CA, CO, FL or IL. However, some very large national retail outlets also use the system, particularly for CA and CO.

STRENGTHS:

- Very easy-to-use
- E-filing of returns to each of the supported states
- Bilingual forms & instructions
- Gross sales summary reports
- PDF output
- Pay-per-use system
- Multi-client management tools
- Email/text filing date reminder feature
- Web-based system can be accessed anywhere
- No tax table updates required

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Only four states & some limits on forms
- State modules don't integrate
- Limited client communication templates

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PRICING

eFileSalesTax.com is an easy-to-use compliance system for entities with sales and use tax reporting requirements in the states it supports. It provides multi-business management utilities and an integrated and very useful alerts tool that reminds users of pending filing deadlines. The system can be used as a pay-per-file program for the California and Illinois versions, at a cost of $7.95 per filing. For users managing multiple entities, an annual price of $229 allows filing of unlimited returns for any number of businesses. For Florida, the cost is $39 per year for all filings for one company, or $129 per year for up to the first five different entities and $39 per year for each additional five. Pricing for Colorado is dependent upon the nature of the business, and users should contact the vendor for more information.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☐ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★½	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆	COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10293036

877-584-2309 www.eFileSalesTax.com

Thomson Reuters — ONESource Indirect Tax, Sales & Use Managed Services

{INTEGRATED SALES TAX MANAGEMENT SYSTEM}

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

Mid-sized and larger enterprises with significant sales tax liability exposure across a large number of jurisdictions who want to automate rate management and outsource compliance functions.

STRENGTHS

- Complete tax lifecycle management from tax determination to returns preparation & remittance
- Automated rate lookup & application
- Hands-free/hassle-free compliance
- Full integration into accounting system
- Strong reporting & management tools
- All U.S. & Canada jurisdictions

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Designed for single business entity
- Designed for mid-sized to large enterprise; higher price point

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PRICING

ONESource Indirect Tax, Sales & Use Managed Services is designed for small to mid-sized and larger enterprises with significant sales tax liability exposure across a large number of jurisdictions. By integrating with the business' accounting systems to automate lookup and application of appropriate taxes and rules, the system provides greater accuracy than manual application. Likewise, the outsourcing of compliance functions, including filing and payment to all jurisdictions, reduces tedious and penalty prone processes for the business. System pricing depends on annual transaction volume, number of returns per month and number of legal entities, and generally starts around $10,000. ONESOURCE Indirect Tax also offers a Managed Services Tax Pack where clients get tax determination, compliance and returns, and expert consulting services all for one bundled price.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

- ☑ On-Premises
- ☑ SaaS
- ☑ Hosted by Vendor

★★★★½	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	COMPLIANCE CAPABILITIES
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10296185

888-885-0206 http://onesource.thomsonreuters.com/indirect-tax/

The Insecurities of Email

What you need to know about maintaining the privacy and security of your clients' data

Email has been around a long time and has evolved into a mission-critical resource to deliver documents and communicate with clients. It's the default for most businesses — convenient, easy and mature — and has all but replaced time-consuming faxing and manual delivery of documents. However, while email has been a trusted delivery tool for years, you should ask yourself, "Is it safe?"

Security v. Privacy

Security and *Privacy* have significant importance in the accounting profession. Unlike the recent trending topics, such as *paperless* and *workflow*, the measure in which firms assure data security and privacy has been a focus for accountants for decades. And now with new state and federal mandates hitting the profession at warp speed, ensuring the security of data and the privacy of client information has a renewed significance and has elevated to Job 1.

First, it's important to understand the difference between security and privacy if firms are to comply with mandates geared toward client data protection. Consider each separately:

Security is comprised of three primary elements: authentication, authorization and audit.

Authentication refers to the ability to authenticate the person signing on. In other words, making sure an individual is who she says she is, typically via a unique user name and password.

Authorization determines a user's access to various resources, based on the user's identity. This has to do with setting permissions — what an individual can and cannot access. In a document management system, a user would be granted 'rights' to access certain documents.

Audit refers to the mechanism for tracking access and activity of a system or service — in short, who did what and when. In a document management system, an audit log would allow you to generate security and compliance reports of which users uploaded, accessed or changed the properties of a document, and when.

Privacy is really a subset of Authorization. It centers on ensuring that an individual's privacy is protected during the course of sharing data with others, whether that data is shared online or stored in file cabinets in the office (who has access to those files?). When we are talking about sharing and collaborating over the Internet, it's easiest to think of security as the padlock — no one gets in without the right combination. Privacy is the shield that protects a person's identity while actively sharing information via the Web.

Second, it's critical that firms understand why they should care about security and privacy.

The Internet is the foundation of communication in most businesses, including accounting firms. Accountants send hundreds of emails every week. Without worry, financial statements, tax returns, and other common reports and forms are attached and sent. A few may send email links to documents, which are secure, but don't require the user to have an email and password to access the document. And without user authentication, there is no way to verify that the person accessing the document is the intended recipient.

PORTAL TECHNOLOGY IS DEFINED BY BUILT-IN SECURITY AND OFFERS ONE OF THE SAFEST AND MOST INTUITIVE PLATFORMS FOR EXCHANGING DATA AND DOCUMENTS WITH CLIENTS.

Some firms have advanced to using encryption as a means to protect documents, which can add a lot of complexity to managing hundreds of passwords for the documents encrypted. You also have to think about how you are getting the password to the recipient. If you are emailing it, that could be a security risk. And if the password is lost or expires, the document is effectively "dead" and unable to be opened by the sender or the recipient. The result is that you end up duplicating your efforts in order to recreate and send the information again.

The bottom line: Most firms are riding on the hope that email is safe.

But what if it's not? It only takes one time, one breach of a client's data, and your firm's reputation is at stake. In fact, consider all that you are risking — your clients' business privacy, your firm's privacy, and civil and criminal penalties. Also consider that as the topic of data privacy continues to garner attention, clients may look to you as an expert, seeking education on how they can protect themselves against potential data breach. These are all good reasons to care and give security and privacy their due attention.

The Journey of the Standard Email

Now for the big question: Is email safe for sending sensitive documents? The truth is that if most people were aware of the multiple stops an email makes en route to its final destination, they might think twice about sending private information.

Email doesn't simply move from your inbox to the recipient's. It is transported across multiple servers, and at each stop point 'sits' unprotected. IT experts refer to this as "data in the clear." While in the clear, emails are open game and at the mercy of the server administrator, who can alter or even delete a message. Below is a simplified illustration of the typical email journey.

Email will most certainly continue to be a primary delivery tool for firms. But as new data privacy mandates continue to emerge, firm leaders may want to look at alternatives for delivering sensitive financial data.

A Resolution to Email Insecurities — the Cloud (Portals)

A better solution for exchanging documents that contain private client data is through secure portals. No one is saying email should be abandoned completely. Email will continue to be a firm's primary communication source. It's only when sensitive information like tax returns, social security numbers or financial statements are attached within an email that firms should consider a better alternative like portals. The best portal solution also offers the ability to use email as the core communication tool. However, via portals, sending a link to a document is secure because the document is stored online, not attached in the email.

Exchanging and delivering documents

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 49

using portals eliminates the need to send complete documents as attachments in emails. It also alleviates several other pain points associated with emailing client information, such as encrypting files and creating, managing and communicating hundreds of passwords. Portals allow firms to store sensitive documents within a secure, personalized online space. Firms can then simply provide a link to a secure location where clients can log in and access current versions of their financial documents at any time and from anywhere with an Internet connection.

Email + Portals = Easy + Safe

A key reason why portals are fast becoming a popular document delivery tool is their ease of use for clients. The newest document portals offer the best of both worlds: You can use your own email system to send emails to your clients, but send them a link to a document in a secure portal, rather than attach the document itself to the email. This can be as easy as sending a friend a link to an interesting article on the Web, but it is secure, auditable and compliant.

Portals are also exceptionally secure, offering advanced, built-in security features. They require recipients to log in using a unique user ID and password to access documents. This ensures authentication and authorization in one fell swoop. Most portals also automatically provide an audit trail that enables administrators to view and set user permissions, track usage, and support automatic back up of data. Even better, portals teach your clients a safer way to communicate, as well — no more sending your firm sensitive information, like SSNs, via email. Everything can be exchanged in the portal. It's a win-win.

For sensitive documents, it's important that you do this with a secure portal, which requires your clients have a username and password. While some portals let you share documents using "anonymous" links, whereby users are not required to have a username/password, those links are not secure and are vulnerable to discovery over the Internet. That's why such products put these documents in a temporary folder that is deleted after a short period of time, usually 30 days or less. You can password protect these documents for safety, but communicating the password over email is not safe, and access to these documents is not auditable.

Keeping Up

Firms have a lot to keep up with these days, and privacy and security of client data should be at the forefront. The good news is that technology can make securing clients' data easy. Portals provide a secure platform for exchanging sensitive information and files, alleviating firms of having to deal with time-consuming document encryption, password creation and general management of a complex delivery process.

Sending links to documents via email offers clients a familiar communication channel, while leveraging secure portal technology. Portal technology is defined by built-in security and offers one of the safest and most intuitive platforms for exchanging data and documents with clients. Why take the risk of breaching client privacy by sending documents via email when portals offer a solution with all the security and privacy functionality built in? The insecurities of email are complex. However, with advancements in cloud technologies like portals, the answer to this very real and very difficult issue has gotten much simpler.

You might also be interested in "6 Steps to an Effective Client Portal Strategy" at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10248304.

Eric Pulaski, CEO and Founder of SmartVault Corporation

With over 20 years of experience in network security systems and a focus on cloud computing, Eric founded SmartVault Corporation in November of 2007, and currently serves as the company's Chief Executive Officer. Eric has made it his mission to deliver a simple, low-cost document management solution that uses cloud-based technology (low cost) but is centered around integration with applications customers already use, such as QuickBooks® (simple). Eric can be contacted at eric@smartvault.com.

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PRACTICAL RESOURCES

BY ISAAC M. O'BANNON, *TECHNOLOGY EDITOR*

The Human Touch: Using Technology to Maintain Real Client Relationships

Accountants have long had a reputation as being somewhat reclusive, perhaps even seen as professional hermits, because of the nature of many of the traditional services they provided.

Even with the advent of modern technologies and computers, the old stereotype of a number-crunching, bean counter wearing a tinted visor, with 10-key at hand, while poring over reams of spreadsheets persisted. And perhaps even grew as remote access technologies have enabled some professionals to remove many aspects of client interaction.

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PRACTICE SPECIALTIES: Individual & Business Taxation; Wealth Advisory, Technology Consulting
EDUCATION: BBA, Loyola; MBA, Loyola
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS: AICPA, Maryland Society of Accountants Scholarship Foundation Trustee; MSA Technology Committee; Columnist for MSA Newsletter
MOST RECENT CONFERENCE: AICPA PS TECH+, Las Vegas
SOCIAL NETWORKING:
A full list at www.AdrianGSimmons.com

For Adrian Simmons, a CPA in Laurel, Maryland, this is counterintuitive to the way he wants to run his practice. "People and relationships are the most important part of our business," he said. "And even though technology helps us improve our work product, we shouldn't let it allow us to become complacent in the human elements of our business."

Despite his boyish looks, the 32 year-old has been credentialed for nearly 10 years, including working for a Big 4 firm in Baltimore. For the past nine years, Adrian has worked with his father at the practice his father started more than 30 years ago. The firm, David G. Simmons, CPA (www.simmons-cpa.com), is currently focused mostly on individual taxation and planning, wealth advisory services, investment management, and small business consulting.

Since joining his father's practice, which he will likely take over in a few years, Adrian has assumed supervision of most of the technologies used in the practice and has moved them toward greater productivity internally, as well as helping their business clients better manage their business processes. The firm has adopted a more efficient paperless management system and is now using remote access, project management and online scheduling tools. The firm is also guiding clients toward web-based payroll and accounting systems, as well as online collaboration tools.

"My goal isn't to find a way to do more, but to do better," Adrian says of his technology and business focus for the practice. "I am always keeping an eye on what our clients want, what our most compelling value proposition can be. To do this, we don't need to be on the 'bleeding edge' of technology, since that can lead to errors. But we certainly stay in the early adopter range."

The firm, which Adrian is planning to rebrand in the near future, scored a 279 on the *CPA Practice Advisor*'s Productivity Survey, a free web-based tool (www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/productivity-survey) that helps firms assess their workflow and technology usage, and provides benchmarking against similarly sized practices.

"MY GOAL ISN'T TO FIND A WAY TO DO MORE, BUT TO DO BETTER."

One of his key areas of focus has been adding remote bookkeeping management services, which he says can take a lot off of client's minds, as well as helping to ensure data integrity, since unqualified and unskilled users won't be creating problems in the business' bookkeeping system. As a result of better data, the firm is also able to provide better insight into a client's fiscal position, and more valuable consulting services, including benchmarking and planning.

As a young professional, Adrian is also an avid user of various social media, and has turned to these and other technologies to keep the human interaction component of client relationships strong. In addition to Twitter, he also blogs frequently on small business and accounting topics, and manages a YouTube channel that includes videos with advice and tips for small businesses and individuals. (You can see the videos at www.youtube.com/SimmonsCPAFirm). He's even recorded a video commercial for the firm. He sees these tools as technology offering a human touch that otherwise can get lost during purely electronic engagements.

"We don't want to be just a faceless 'mail-away' service that a business sends files to and gets them fixed. We want to be the people they trust for advice when it comes to their financial and business management needs. And to get this level of trust, most people want to meet you and see you, whether in person with a handshake or a video call."

As the uber-connected technophile that Adrian is, he's never really "away" from work, since he has access to most of his work programs and data from anywhere using LogMeIn remote access on his iPad or laptop. This makes it easier to get out and actually have these face-to-face meetings with clients and see how they are using their bookkeeping and other systems in their businesses.

While his interest in technology has been largely self-inspired and self-taught, his business savvy is most certainly a family trait, since not only is he following in the footsteps of his father, but one of his brothers is also a CPA, although in the government sector. Adrian graduated with a degree in business administration from Loyola in 1999, and then completed an MBA in 2000.

His adaptation of various mobile tools also allows him to get out of the office more often for recreation, including ski trips to Vermont and Pennsylvania, as well as scuba diving with friends in Florida. While most of his recreational dives are less than 60 feet, he has had the opportunity to go as deep as 90 to 100 feet with some instructor friends.

David G. Simmons, principle, Adrian G. Simmons, manager & Kimberly E. Shelko, administrative assistant.

At other times, Adrian can be found hiking and pursuing a photographic hobby or reading and enjoying the history of the town of Laurel. He enjoys philosophy and theology, and is a Sunday school teacher at St. Mary of the Mills Catholic Church.

"PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF OUR BUSINESS...AND EVEN THOUGH TECHNOLOGY HELPS US IMPROVE OUR WORK PRODUCT, WE SHOULDN'T LET IT ALLOW US TO BECOME COMPLACENT IN THE HUMAN ELEMENTS OF OUR BUSINESS."

Adrian is certainly a new breed of professional, with one foot firmly planted in the advances of technology and the other on the bedrock of forming real relationships with his clients. While it's a shame that the "human touch" is somewhat of a novelty in the modern age, it's refreshing that at least one young tax and accounting professional is focused on bringing it back. ●

What We've Learned

(an interesting stat)

PRODUCTIVITY SCORE AVERAGES

Regarding wireless in the office: Over one-third of firms indicate that they provide wireless access in their offices. Unfortunately, 10% don't seem to encrypt and/or hide the SSID.

Staying on the Good Side of Growth

Proactive Beats Reactive Every Time

Here's the reality. Most accounting professionals, when it comes to marketing, are highly reactive. They've developed some good content, have a few pieces of collateral on hand, and are sending out communications here and there. The reactive environment can be deceptive because things consistently appear to be *moving along*. And if things are moving, that's good, right? Not necessarily, and here's why.

Activity doesn't always mean *progress*. Even a haphazard marketing plan can keep a firm active. However, the absence of a structured marketing program means that there is no way to quantify progress or ensure that marketing initiatives are being accomplished. The bottom line is that working reactively is just not efficient and generally means that a firm is putting in far more time than if an organized plan were in place.

The FIRST big issue: Launching any marketing campaigns outside of a well-defined plan leaves you at high risk of some serious ball dropping. Compiling and organizing the elements that make up your broad marketing program provides a clear roadmap — complete with required deadlines and an assigned lead. As projects are completed, the plan is updated and items are checked off. This keeps everyone current on project progress through to completion. Ball dropping avoided.

The SECOND big issue: When sending out communications outside of a plan, you lose the ability to properly track campaigns and measure their success. That is: Did the campaign reach the right audience? Are follow-up communications required and being sent? Are you getting prospects into your database? What is the rate of response? All these items are crucial to a marketing program because they provide insight on where you are successful as well as where you need to fill holes, improve your message, and step up efforts.

The proactive approach enables a firm to identify initiatives and activity over a longer period of time. And this opens up a world of value, allowing firms to do the following:

- Prepare an annual marketing budget, which helps keep costs in line.
- Identify campaigns based on defined seasonal activity (e.g., an after-tax season survey to clients, an after-tax season lead generation campaign to prospects, a pre-audit season initiative, etc.).
- Stay on task with each and every campaign and initiative (e.g., client newsletters, email blasts, invitations, holiday cards, networking events, etc.).
- Identify appropriate staff as lead on individual projects — allows the opportunity to assign the right staff member to projects and makes staff accountable for follow through.
- Use a single comprehensive document for easy review of progress, complete with production deadlines.
- Measure marketing goals and keep track of all activity.

Again, *activity* should not be confused with *progress*. Marketing is not random. You don't just throw out communications as issues or ideas come across your plate. Marketing is, to a large degree, a science. It requires calculated attention to schedule initiatives, determine audiences, build lists, create messages, and measure and track results.

It's important to note that proactive planning does not rule out flexibility. In fact, the best of plans need to be constantly updated, tweaked and refined. Most certainly, a plan will require changes over the course of a year. For example, you may find that your client newsletter is gaining popularity, so you up the frequency from quarterly to monthly. Or you may identify campaigns that are yielding exceptionally low response rates and decide to "can" them. Change will happen, but with a structured plan in place, it's actually easier to maneuver change as it comes because you always know "where you are."

MARKETING IS, TO A LARGE DEGREE, A SCIENCE. IT REQUIRES CALCULATED ATTENTION TO SCHEDULE INITIATIVES, DETERMINE AUDIENCES, BUILD LISTS, CREATE MESSAGES, AND MEASURE AND TRACK RESULTS.

MOST ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONALS PROBABLY FALL INTO THE REACTIVE CATEGORY WHEN IT COMES TO MARKETING. AND THAT'S CERTAINLY NOT DUE TO AN ADVERSITY TO STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION.

Give Yourself Time to Make the Switch

Truth be told, most accounting professionals probably fall into the reactive category when it comes to marketing. And that's certainly not due to an adversity to structure and organization. After all, this is a profession of structure. And while being proactive is ideal, you can't simply flip a switch and go from a primarily reactive existence to one of proactive thought.

It's recommended to start slow. Begin by investing some time in developing a broad marketing plan. Whether that's making a list on paper of everything you want to accomplish or starting a comprehensive spreadsheet complete with action items, deadlines, and staff leads — you just need to start writing things down.

The reactive mode is counterproductive. Random efforts only leave you spinning your wheels, derailed from any sound marketing course. In a proactive environment, you always know what you are trying to achieve, and that brings about accountability and follow through. With some effort, you can have a strong, productive and proactive marketing program in your firm. ●

Kristy Short, Ed.D

Kristy is a partner in RootWorks Communications (RootWorks.com) and president of SAS Communications 360 (SAScommunications360.com) — firms dedicated to providing practice management education, branding, marketing, and public relations services to the accounting profession. She is also a professor of English and marketing at University of Phoenix and Cleary University. You can reach her at kristy.short@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.