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THE ART OF THE QUICK CHANGE

Andrea Abel's move to the Cloud was quick and painless — and key to her firm's rapid growth

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New Skills Required for Taking Your Firm Digital

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CYGNUS BUSINESS MEDIA
BPA WORLDWIDE
SOY INK

New Skills Required for Taking Your Firm Digital

It never ceases to amaze me how quickly things change in my office. And as you know, it requires a steady vigilance to stay in front of change. I spend a great deal of time evaluating the efficiency of my staff and the consistency of strategies implemented across my firm. Both of these areas must be continually analyzed in order to apply necessary improvements to keep a firm and staff operating at peak productivity and effectiveness. I want to stress that it takes more than technology or process implementation to accomplish this. It requires a different type of skill — the ability to develop and implement sound strategies. To provide you with a sound example, this article focuses on my firm's paperless strategy, as well as our strategy for portal implementation and adoption — both required to truly go digital.

Allow me to take a moment to differentiate *strategy* from *process*. A strategy is very different than the processes employed to support the strategy. They are closely connected, yet very different. Strategy, in my mind, is defined at a higher level — it is the overall plan required to effectively implement individual processes. I want to emphasize the critical need for strategy — a skill worth its weight in gold! To do that, let's look closely at the strategies for going paperless and portal adoption.

As a profession, we have been hearing about a paperless strategy for the last decade or more, and it has continued to evolve. Initially, I viewed my paperless strategy in very simple terms — we'll stop using paper. My firm's strategy has since matured and includes the following:

- Reducing or eliminating paper files altogether.
- Collecting documents digitally from the source, instead of receiving paper and then "digitizing" documents later.
- Implementing smart technology that enables paper entering the firm to be transformed to digital immediately and effortlessly.
- Adopting a standardized file structure and naming convention for documents.
- Implementing a system to route electronic documents through the office.
- Implementing powerful tools to annotate and collate digital files.
- Adopting a system to purge documents quickly based on the firm's document retention policy.
- Adopting an online system (portals) that supports a convenient and highly secure client document delivery platform.

You can see the evolution of my firm's paperless strategy, moving from simply eliminating paper to sophisticated systems to create a true digital environment. This leads me to the next strategy — portals.

Realistically, you can't talk about a paperless strategy without, almost in the same breath, talking about a strategy for presenting and collaborating with clients online. With that said, let's take a look at what a sound portal strategy requires:

- Offering a secure, personalized portal for each existing and newly added client.
- Implementing a method for educating clients about the functionality and capabilities of the firm's portal solution.
- Adopting a portal solution that makes it easy for the firm to manage multiple users, and allows users to self-manage (to a degree) their portals.
- Implementing a system that allows the firm to present information in a way that makes sense to clients, and allows the firm to easily manage the way documents are delivered to portals.

I could add tremendous detail to both strategies, but you get the point. These examples are meant to help you understand the necessity of a sound strategy, and give you a starting point for developing your own. I hope this also helps you realize that without a proper strategy in place, you may be simply creating more chaos and upsetting staff. You must think through all the needed pieces and parts and build a strategy to ensure success.

Now I come back to the title of this column — *New Skills Required for Taking Your Firm Digital* — to hit home the idea of the critical need for a new set of skills when going digital. I believe that firms should consider identifying a Digital Manager. You can't expect every staff member to agree on how documents should be named and filed, how to manage portals, or maintain the integrity of digital documents entering your system. Firms should consider training a staff person to oversee all of these areas. One of the most important roles of the Digital Manager would be to continually train staff on best practices and procedures while maintaining the overall system. This person is likely someone on your staff who really "gets" this stuff, can make sense of it and enjoys doing it.

My goal here is to make you aware of what I see as a need in my firm. I'm guessing that after some thought, you'll probably discover you have this same need. ●

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 7
Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm


6

18

8


32

CONTENTS

COVER STORY

COLUMNS

FEATURES

PRODUCT REVIEWS

EASY AS 1 - 2 - 3!!

1 ON YOUR MARK
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Open the QR Code Reader and look for the tags in this issue (pages 2 & 36). Here's a sample that will let you connect with us on Facebook.

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

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By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Technology Editor
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MARKETINGWORKS: Valuable Lessons Learned from Building a New Website *By Scott H. Cytron, ABC*
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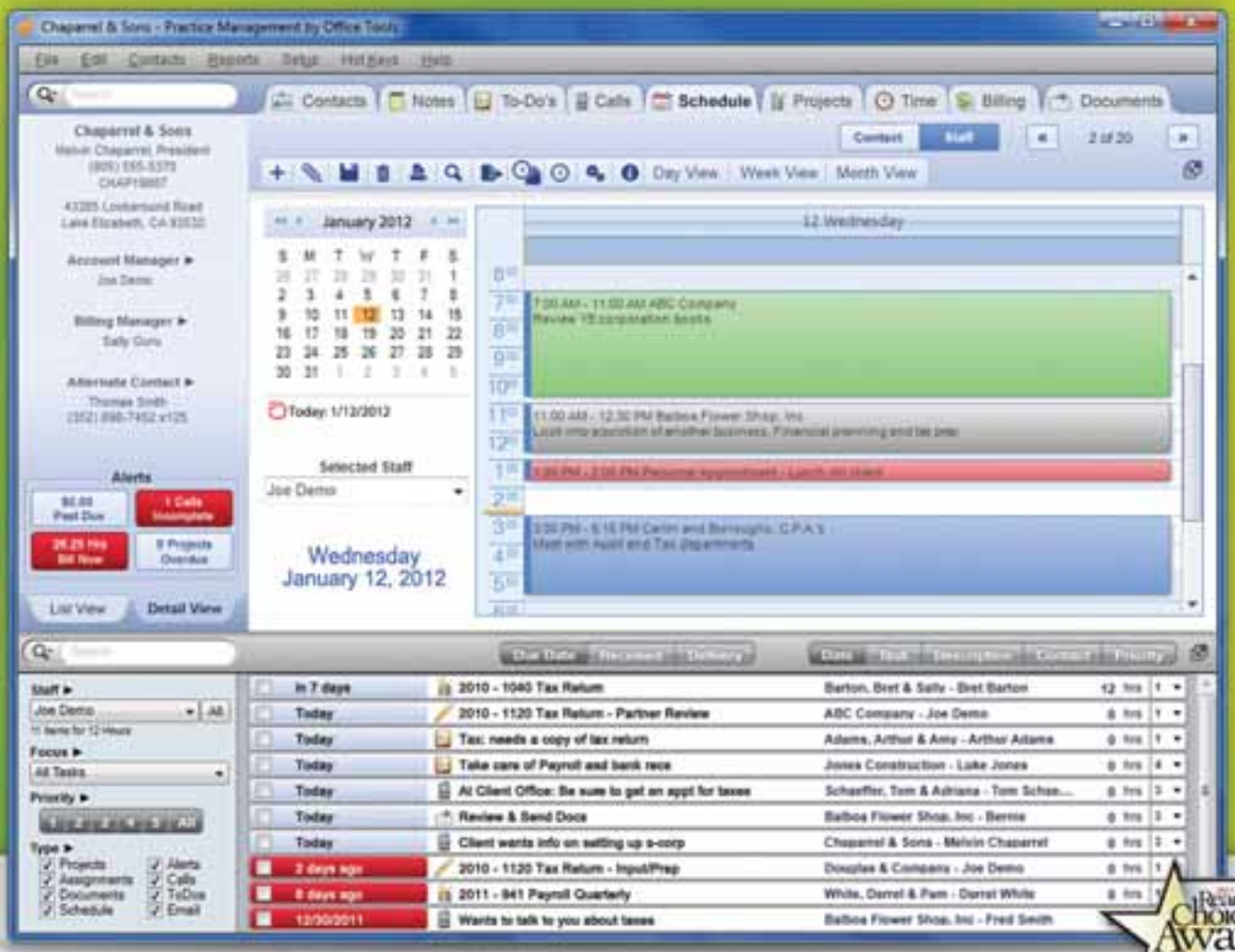

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The Art of the Quick Change: From Filing Cabinets to the Cloud

Andrea Abel's move to the Cloud was quick and painless — and key to her firm's rapid growth

Like many others, before launching her own practice — Lime & Company — Andrea Abel worked for other firms. During this time, she enhanced her practitioner skills while also gaining valuable insight into what it takes to run a successful business.

"When I worked in public practice, there was usually a full-time dedicated IT person to maintain the firm's technology, including software and servers," Abel recalled. "So, when I thought about starting my own practice, I immediately thought: *How could I ever do it*?"

Concerned with the high cost of technology and IT support, Abel wasn't sure how she would ever be able to operate her own firm. She had heard of Cloud-based applications, but didn't really know what that meant or how these advanced technologies would ultimately solve the IT issue.

"At the time, I was not up-to-date on Cloud solutions. So in my mind, high-end applications and costly IT support was the reality. It was what I experienced working for other firms," said Abel.

A Quick Change Artist in Action — From Paper-Heavy to Paper-Free

In 2004, Abel took a break from public accounting to start a family. In 2005, as a stay-at-home mom, she began helping a few friends with business consulting support. A few friends quickly turned into a few clients ... and then a few more.

"It happened so fast. First, I'm helping friends get their businesses going, and then suddenly I have a list of clients."

Before she knew it, Abel was well on her way to running a full-service accounting firm. However, technology was still an issue. Convinced that growing her home-based business into a full-service firm meant tackling complex technology issues and investing in an IT expert, she concluded that growth was not in her future.

"The technology aspect of running a firm was intimidating," Abel admitted. "So I continued to work with desktop software and paper files. I knew there had to be a more efficient way to work; I just didn't know what that was."

A few years later, Abel attended The Sleeter Group's Accounting Software Consulting Conference and was blown away by presentations on Cloud computing and the ease of use that web-based applications offered.

"I talked to a few Cloud technology vendors and asked questions about how their applications could help me," Abel stated. "The SmartVault folks told me that Cloud-based apps take IT out of the equation … that I could easily implement and operate these solutions on my own. That was the turning point for me. My old beliefs about technology were extinguished."

From that point, Abel adopted a "to the Cloud" attitude, moving full force ahead in her transition to a virtual environment. Within a few short weeks, she had built a paperless system, accelerating firm efficiency beyond anything she imagined.

"After seeing a few product demos at the Sleeter show, I jumped in and invested in an all-Cloud system. Within a few weeks, I set up my clients on Hosted QuickBooks using InsynQ

STATS AT A GLANCE

Firm website: limeandcompany.com

Year founded: 2005

Total employees: 1 full-time; 2 part-time

Home base: Sarasota, Florida

Firm description: Full-service accounting practice for small businesses

Technology of Choice: SmartVault, InsynQ, Hosted QuickBooks, Fujitsu ScanSnap

and SmartVault for storing and exchanging files," Abel said. "My transition was quick because all the technologies were incredibly intuitive — for both me and my clients."

For many of Abel's clients, one training session on the solution was all that was needed. Some didn't require training at all and were able to get up and running by following a concise instruction guide supplied by Abel.

A few months later, Abel enhanced her firm's workflow by adding Fujitsu's ScanSnap.

"There is no reason to have paper at all," Abel said. "Because ScanSnap fully integrates with my document management system, I can scan docs, and with just a few mouse clicks, data is filed electronically within the proper client folder. It's all there, at my fingertips, accessible in seconds."

Abel admitted to having a few "paper hold-outs" among her clients. She honored these clients' requests to be left out of the Cloud, but was also direct on what they were missing.

"I explained that online services offer unlimited access to me. At any time a client can request a file and have it sent immediately," Abel said.

Abel's paper-based clients are also restricted to a set number of hours per month. Under her fee scale, clients receive four hours of onsite time for review and consulting. If more time is required, they pay extra. For her web-based clients, the lines of communication are open 24/7.

"I was direct with clients when it came to my time," Abel explained. "If they were online, they had all of me. If not, they didn't."

With a highly efficient workflow in place, Abel was also able to implement value pricing and ditch her hourly billing model.

"My clients have never so much as questioned my fixed fee. Knowing that under this fee there is no restriction on my time, they are *in* immediately," Abel explained.

Still Growing Strong

"I'm up to 45 clients and predict continued growth," Abel said. "It's just so easy to service clients in the virtual environment. I can now accomplish tasks in minutes."

Because her firm is established in the Cloud, she was also able to hire two part-time contract employees without leasing office space.

"I have one employee in Michigan and one here in Sarasota. Both work from their homes like I do and have full access to the technology and data," Abel explained.

Overall, Abel's outlook on the future of Lime & Company is bright. Cloud computing completely changed the way she operates her firm and serves her clients. By eliminating the boundaries of time and distance, growth potential is unlimited.

"Technology is what initially held me back," Abel said. "But in the end, it's what allowed me to launch my firm and grow very quickly. I would tell anyone thinking about starting a firm, but intimidated by technology, to look into Cloud applications. These advanced technologies really do take IT out of the equation."

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.

If you'd like us to consider sharing your firm's story of innovation in a future issue, go to www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/great-practices and complete the short form. *We want to hear from you.*

The Artistic Side of Tax Compliance: PLANNING

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
- General navigation/ease-of-use
- Multiple concurrent users
- Multi-client management/setup
- System customization

CORE TAX PLANNING FEATURES
- Years of projections/planning/ prior year
- Scenario comparisons
- Special: MFS-MFJ, Estimates, Lump Sum, AMT, ACG
- State planning support (resident & non-resident)

REPORTING
- Customizable reporting
- Client-ready communication/ reporting
- Report output options
- Portal/DMS/email integration

IMPORT/EXPORT/ INTEGRATION
- Data import capabilities
- Integration w/tax applications
- Tax law research options
- Export to common file formats

HELP/SUPPORT
- Built-in support features
- OS compatibility
- Support website/documentation
- Live Support

SUMMARY & PRICING

The U.S. tax code is complex. That's obviously not a secret. And in the nearly 100 years since the permanent institution of the national individual income tax, it has grown ever more so, with seemingly endless add-ons and patches, credits and deductions. As for many of our tax and accounting professional readers, whether you are personally a proponent of a major rewriting of the code, a flat tax or some other variation, the truth, for better or worse, is that it is currently still a confusing process for most individuals.

For professionals trained in the rules, logic and math of taxation, however, it is a skilled exercise that investigates facts and arrives at a generally solid conclusion, hopefully backed by reliable data and founded in the principles and precedent-based interpretations of IRC. Tax experts can also be artists, however, since the creative and questioning mind is an integral part of the tax planning process.

Perhaps tax planning is better described as two parts science, with one part art/creativity. The base is still in a solid understanding of the current tax code, as well as what that will look like in the future. Add variables that can be controlled over time, and that's the key to the final part: the question, "What if?" Different clients will have different potential "what ifs" from which to build plans, but the point is to identify the best possible outcome. And this is usually to lower tax liability and/or avoid underpayment penalties, based on the known components.

Common variables include anticipating future changes in income, filing status, capital gains realizations, and fund distributions. How will taking certain actions *now* affect an individual's tax situation this tax year and in future tax years, as compared to making those actions in future years, or when possible, spreading income over multiple years.

With the frequency of significant changes to the tax code (which lately seems to occur every year), it's critical for taxpayers, particularly those with moderate or greater investment activity or complex income, to seek professional guidance in return preparation as well as in a proactive plan that anticipates possible taxation issues.

Keeping up with the constantly evolving code is also a challenge for professionals, but one for which there are solutions. Tax research systems are one of the core resources, but the addition of a specialized tax planning system is the most effective way to offer clients a service from which they can realize tangible value. "See Bob, this is how you're going to save $X,XXX over the next Y years."

Most of the major tax programs offer planning modules, and stand-alone planning systems offer integration with multiple tax systems. These solutions vary in capabilities, with some designed to meet the needs of the most complex taxpayers and others best suited to producing quick basic plans. All allow for multi-year scenario testing and incorporate the latest tax laws, limitations and pending changes.

This allows the professional and their clients to determine best- and worst-case effects, and helps them to take steps to avoid potential dangers or optimize deductions and credits. As with weather forecasting, tax planning isn't going to be perfectly accurate every time due to the likely changes in the tax code, particularly for longer-range, multi-year plans. A well-trained professional, however, armed with the science of tax knowledge and a creative, scenario-driven mind, can offer clients better predictions than meteorologists. For clients, that's more money in their bank instead of the IRS' coffers, and for the firm, it's a strengthened client relationship. And that's a Win-Win!.●

Isaac M. O'Bannon, Technology Editor

RedGear Technologies — TaxWorks Tax Planner

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★

BEST FIT
Firms using TaxWorks who want to expand into tax planning as a client service offering, or want a simple add-on tool for performing quick projections.

STRENGTHS
- Easy to use
- Adjustable inflation projection
- Inexpensive
- Integration with TaxWorks

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS
- Generally basic planning capabilities
- Limited report customization
- Little external integration

SUMMARY & PRICING
The TaxWorks Tax Planner is a simple tool for quickly creating client scenarios for a few years, and is best suited to users of the TaxWorks preparation system. The Tax Planner system costs $295 for a site license that allows use by all staff in the same office.

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

TAXWORKS

★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★	CORE TAX PLANNING FEATURES
★★★★	REPORTING
★★★★	IMPORT/EXPORT/INTEGRATION
★★★★½	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10415063

800-230-2322 www.taxworks.com

Intuit Lacerte Tax Planner

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT
Lacerte Tax Planner can be used as a stand-alone program, but it's best suited for firms using the Lacerte tax preparation system, providing simple data transfer and a familiar interface.

STRENGTHS
- Familiar tabbed interface & navigation
- Full integration with Lacerte 1040
- Integration with Document Management System
- Customizable reporting with charts

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS
- Only PDF & text-file output

SUMMARY & PRICING
Intuit's Lacerte Tax Planner is a great fit for practices currently using the Lacerte preparation system, providing strong planning capabilities for up to 10 years and supporting simple to moderately complex scenarios. The system is bundled with the Lacerte Tax Analyzer and Document Management Systems for $249 per year.

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

intuit.

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★½	CORE TAX PLANNING FEATURES
★★★★½	REPORTING
★★★★☆	IMPORT/EXPORT/INTEGRATION
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10415553

800-765-7777 www.lacertesoftware.com

Thomson Reuters — Planner CS

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT
With tight integration among the tax preparation, research, document management, portals and other solutions from Thomson Reuters, Planner CS is best suited to users of the vendor's CS Professional Suite, but can also be valuable as a stand-alone system.

STRENGTHS
- Includes tax code for federal & all income taxing states
- Special Watch Window & Results Finder Tools
- Seamless integration with tax, document management, portals
- Comprehensive calculations & analysis features
- Unlimited years of projections
- Excellent customizable reporting

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS
- Limited data output formats

SUMMARY & PRICING
Planner CS is an exceptional scenario-based tax planning solution, with features and tools that are capable of handling the most complex high income clients. The system is built upon a solid base of federal tax law, as well as code for all income-taxing states. With tight integration among the tax preparation, research, document management, portals and other solutions from Thomson Reuters, Planner CS is best suited to those users, but can also be a valuable addition as a stand-alone planning program. Pricing starts at $655 for the federal-only system, with states addable as needed.

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

THOMSON REUTERS

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE TAX PLANNING FEATURES
★★★★★	REPORTING
★★★★½	IMPORT/EXPORT/INTEGRATION
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10145520

800-968-8900 www.cs.thomsonreuters.com

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BNA Software — BNA Income Tax Planner

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

Practices offering individual income tax planning services to clients with varying needs, up to and including high net worth individuals with significantly complex income channels and assets.

STRENGTHS

- Intuitive interface & navigation
- Comprehensive tax calculations & analyses
- Up to 20 side-by-side comparisons
- Excellent reporting & graphical customization
- Data integration with top tax compliance systems

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Doesn't offer 1040 compliance but integrates with top tax compliance systems

SUMMARY & PRICING

BNA Income Tax Planner provides an easy-to-use, yet comprehensive planning system that can handle most any individual taxation scenario. The program also offers support for all income taxing states, and has useful client communication features. It is exceptionally suited to firms with complex and high net worth clients. Pricing for the base federal system starts at about $600.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

BNA Software®

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE TAX PLANNING FEATURES
★★★★★	REPORTING
★★★★★	IMPORT/EXPORT/INTEGRATION
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10415491

800-424-2938 **www.bnasoftware.com**

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

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★☆

BEST FIT

Full-service accounting professionals using the integrated ProSystem *fx* Suite to serve broad client bases.

STRENGTHS

- Excellent integration with ProSystem *fx* Tax & Engagement
- Up to 30 side-by-side cases
- Ease-of-use

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Aside from exporting into other CCH programs, output is limited to PDF
- Plans limited to four years of projections

SUMMARY & PRICING

As either a stand-alone program or as a part of the broader CCH ProSystem *fx* suite, ProSystem *fx* Planning provides comprehensive planning options for professional firms, but lacks graphical elements on reports and is limited to PDF output. Those who use other elements of the ProSystem *fx* Suite would realize the greatest value, with simple data integration between the planning and preparation systems. The program costs $585 for a single-user license.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

CCH a Wolters Kluwer business

★★★★☆	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE TAX PLANNING FEATURES
★★★★	REPORTING
★★★★	IMPORT/EXPORT/INTEGRATION
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10415466

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

Tax Planner Included with All-Inclusive Drake Tax Suite

While most other tax software developers offer tax planning for an additional annual fee, Drake Software has gone with an all-inclusive approach to its entire professional tax compliance suite. The suite provides 1040, 1040NR, 1041, 1065, 1120, 1120S, 706, 709, 990 and 990PF preparation, support for all states with income taxes, and unlimited e-filing. It also includes document management, write-up and the Drake Tax Planner.

Drake Tax Planner automatically pulls prior-year client data from returns, and then helps develop multi-year scenario-based tax planning that can identify the effects of variables on a client's tax liabilities, including capital gains taxes and AMT. It also offers calculations and tools based on current tax law, income limitations and phase-outs that can give professionals better insight for the guidance they give their clients with regard to the best way to implement lump-sum distributions, retirement income, asset sales and retirement savings.

Drake Tax Planner can be opened from within a client's tax files, or separately, with an interface built on Excel. It provides planning for up to seven years for all filing statuses. Easy-to-use data-entry screens allow users to quickly build scenarios with variations in income, deductions, dependents, retirement information and other factors. Data can be entered on summary or detailed sheets, with the program then calculating projections for regular tax, AMT, credits, other taxes and estimated payments, with the option to print estimated payment vouchers.

Drake Software

The Entire Drake Software professional tax suite, which includes the planner, preparation for all entities, document management, write-up and many other features, costs $1,495 for new users, with discounted renewals. Drake also provides free website hosting to firms using the vendor's software.

800-230-2322 **www.DrakeSoftware.com**

See page 16 for more information on Accountant Network & Partner Programs.

Accountant Programs That Can Help You Plan

Now that extensions are behind us, and we are helping clients with tax planning, some of you are beginning to look ahead to the coming year and your own personal and business plans. Although a single article won't necessarily help you build an entire business plan, a few ideas that are incorporated and well executed could make a world of difference for your firm and your clients.

Forecasts show outsourced CFO and controllership growing quite profitably and that, over the coming years, tax and audit processing will change because of technology changes. The big wild card of the future is the retirement rate of practitioners with much experience and the smaller number of practitioners that will be available. While this transition is happening, we need to be thinking about how to prepare for and manage it. What is the right strategy for you personally, and what is the right plan for your firm? What is your personal plan? If your plan includes client advisory services that can reduce internal costs at your own firm while helping your clients with their business issues, accountant and community programs that have been developed by software publishers could be a great help to you.

Randy Johnston

Mr. Johnston is executive vice president and partner of K2 Enterprises and Network Management Group, Inc.
He is a nationally recognized educator, consultant and writer with over 30 years' experience. He can be contacted at randy.johnston@cpapracticeadvisor.com.

What do these programs offer?

Common elements of all of these programs include the following:

- focusing on how to help the accountant deliver better services to their client base
- reduced costs to the firm itself
- training that is often in the form of free CPE
- exclusive content for program members
- more advanced technical support (frequently included)

Many of your competitors will not take the time to train partners, managers and staff on the products offered in these programs. You can craft recurring revenue programs to your firm that are not based on compliance, but rather on services for which businesses really want help. You can add a great deal of value by bringing your accounting expertise to bear and leveraging a number of the offerings.

What types of programs are available?

Areas covered by such programs include sales and use tax, accounts payable processing, expense reporting, invoicing, accounting, document management, and customer relationship management (CRM). Most of the key issues for small to medium businesses are directly addressed by the offerings in the programs. As a side benefit, many of the products are "cloud" SaaS offerings, so the products run through a web browser, have no local software to install and allow you as the accountant to look at the same information as your client, usually without any licensing fees. Most of the programs have an "eat your own caviar" approach, where you can run the same application in your firm that clients are using in their own businesses. Further, if you need the data from a client, you can have access without cumbersome file transfer.

What programs should you consider?

Our K2 Enterprises teaching team maintains a list of Accountant Network and Community programs at http://cpafirmsoftware.com/cpaprograms.html, which includes all of the programs we are aware of and that we believe deliver high value.

- Avalara Accountant Advantage Program
- Bill.com Accountant Program
- Concur Advisor Program
- FreshBooks BeanCounters United Program
- Intacct Partner Program
- QuickBooks ProAdvisor Program
- Results Partner Program
- Sage Accountants Network
- SmartVault Affiliate Program

We know that other publishers are developing programs that you should consider when they are introduced, and urge you to keep an eye out for these high-value additions to your practice. This website reference list is updated on a regular basis, removing programs we no longer believe are effective and adding new programs that have merit. We expect a number of new offerings in the coming year based on what we see being developed, but that information is not yet public.

What do your clients want & need?

Beyond these well thought out offerings, consider what your client base is requesting from you for new services. There are opportunities all around IF you will take advantage of them. You may be comfortable in tax or audit, and those services are needed, too. However, it is becoming clear to me that businesses are getting the advice they need whether it is from someone they can trust like their accounting firm or from consultants or sales teams that may not always have your clients' best interests in mind.

Looking to drive client services to a new level?

Further, some of you are looking for a change of pace. You have done the same thing for so long, that it is neither interesting nor challenging. Wouldn't you like to have a new interest that drives your client to want you around and pay you for more services? If you are comfortable or think you are completely serving your market, I'm very happy for you. If you'd like to do more for your clients, take the time to review these programs and determine which ones should fit into your plan. You'll be pleased you did. ●

WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO HAVE A NEW INTEREST THAT DRIVES YOUR CLIENT TO WANT YOU AROUND AND PAY YOU FOR MORE SERVICES?

What You Need to Know About Accountant Networks & Partner Programs

Many of the vendors who provide services or products to accountants offer network, reseller, community or partner programs. These programs are designed to make it easier for accountants to recommend and support the vendor's products and services. Many offer benefits such as CPE, product-based designations, and prospective client referrals. Usually, there is a benefit to the accountant for participation, and membership is either free or represents a significant discount against the normal price of the included software and services.

These programs provide various benefits to accountants who join, including free software, reseller commission, training and other types of benefits. However, at the core, each of these programs provides something to the accountant for joining.

What types of programs exist?

Accounting firms can take advantage of many different programs from vendors and suppliers. Some have very well developed partner programs that provide training, support resources, internal use software, CPE credits, educational programs, marketing materials, and a few even have national and regional user conferences. Other partner programs are not as well developed and offer very limited benefits or incentives.

Research is an important key to choosing whether or not to sign up for a partner program. You need to determine what is expected of the firm if it signs up for the program. Some programs require a certain sales level or referral level in order to qualify for the program. In other words, they expect you to convert your clients to the system(s). Other programs have no such requirements. Some programs even expect you to pay to participate with limited prospects of revenue to offset the fee. Doing your due diligence in researching the wide range of accountant programs available will help you determine whether or not the firm is willing, ready and able to participate per the requirements.

Who should join?

Depending on the program and the requirements, the firm representative who joins the program may vary. Programs like Intuit's QuickBooks ProAdvisor Program and the Sage Accountants Network register individuals as opposed to firms so the employees who are going to be part of the program have to join. This allows the individual to promote their certification and competency in the product. And if the employee changes jobs, the membership follows the employee and does not stay with the firm. In such cases, the firm loses the benefits of the program. Other programs allow the firm to join the program irrespective of the number of employees who may participate from the firm.

When determining if the firm or an employee should join a particular partner program, the decision comes down to evaluating the benefits of participating in the program versus the time requirements. In some cases, individual membership for accounting professionals is the only option available. However, in situations where an employee or the entire firm can participate, the decision is less clear cut. In these situations, it will come down to whether or not the firm wants to maintain the relationships or they want to allow an employee to maintain the relationship. Either option will need to be driven by an agreement so that both parties have an understanding about what happens in the event an employee leaves the firm before the expiration of the membership.

What are the benefits?

In addition to the benefits provided by the partner program, there are other benefits to the firm in the form of enhanced reputation, increased specialized knowledge and the ability to

See page 14 for more information on Accountant Network & Partner Programs.

Program(s)	Website	Program Membership Fee	Internal Use Software	Technical Support Available	Educational Program	Referral Discounts or Commissions	User Conference or Forum
Sage	www.sageaccountantsnetwork.com	Yes	Yes	Yes	CPE Available	Yes	Yes
Intuit	www.qbproadvisor.com	Yes	Yes	Limited (1)	CPE Available	Yes	Enterprise Ed.
Concur	www.concur.com/en-us/concur-advisor	No	Yes (2 users)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Avalara	www.avalara.com/Accounting-Partners	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Bill.com	www.bill.com/accountants	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Paychex	www.paychex.com/partners	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	?	No
ADP	www.adp.com/accountant.aspx	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	No
NetSuite	www.netsuite.com/portal/partners/accountant-program/main.shtml	No	Client Access	N/A	CPE Available	Yes 1st Year	No
Acclivity	acclivitysoftware.com/partners	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Connected Partner Program	www.accountek.com/partners/become-a-connected-partner	No	N/A	N/A	No	Yes	No
FreshBooks	www.freshbooks.com/jointhemovement	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Xero	www.xero.com/partners	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
MyPay Solutions	www.mypaysolutions.com	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes
Awensa	http://www.awensa.com/#slide-4	No	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	No

(1) QuickBooks ProAdvisors receive unlimited support if they become certified, otherwise, 90 days free support

provide a service other accountants in your area may not be providing. Participating in these programs brings a level of credibility to a firm. It shows that the firm is knowledgeable with a particular product or service, and members of the community can rely on this firm to service their needs. It displays a dedication to learning about new tools and techniques, which in turn helps to enhance the firm's reputation in the community it serves. These benefits are soft skills that can translate to enhanced service offerings for the firm at higher rates than the typical accounting, compliance and tax services provided by most accountants. Partner programs can be important tools for building specialties and client loyalty.

How does this impact the firm's revenue?

There are a couple of ways this impacts a firm's revenue. If the partner program offers a commission, discount or rebate, this *adds to your bottom line by the amount of the commission*. However, this is not the only way it adds to the bottom line. The most common impact is revenue from helping clients purchase, setup, use and manage the software or service purchased through the partner program. Many programs list member and firm profiles on a referral website, which offers preferred placements to members based on criteria such as product certifications and client ratings. These programs help firms translate their investment in product training into new client consulting opportunities However, some programs are more exclusive, and you might be the only provider within a certain geographical area. In such cases, the firm rates will be higher because of the exclusivity of the program and the ability to charge higher rates.

Closing Thoughts

Partner programs can become very lucrative based on the program and how much effort the firm puts into it.

FIRMS THAT DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN A PARTNER PROGRAM WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN INCREASING FIRM REVENUES, FIRM REPUTATION, AND FIRM SERVICE OFFERINGS TO CLIENTS AND POTENTIAL CLIENTS.

Careful evaluation and proper planning are important keys to ensure success. The firm must commit to the program to make the investment pay off in increased revenue. Without commitment to the program, marketing the service offering and building a service base, the revenue will be disappointing and the firm will probably abandon the effort after a short period of time. Firms that dedicate themselves to active participation in a partner program will be successful in increasing firm revenues, firm reputation, and firm service offerings to clients and potential clients.

By John D. Anderson, CPA.CITP

John Anderson is the founder and CEO of Anderson Strategies, LLC. Anderson Strategies focuses on developing technology plans for firms who provide accounting services to the public. John has over 14 years of experience helping practitioners in public accounting manage their technology needs. He can be reached at JAnderson@jdaranderson.com.

Awesome Add-ons for 2012

At The Sleeter Group, we believe that success in small business relies heavily on developing efficient business processes. Successful business owners are constantly seeking better accounting software, more efficient sales and customer tracking systems, better product fulfillment systems, and better vendor management systems. And accountants are always striving to keep up with the latest solutions in the marketplace so they can make the best recommendations. Each year, we research the marketplace of accounting software and hardware solutions to identify and recognize the companies and products that deliver "awesome" value.

This year, our seven-member committee of judges participated in evaluations of nearly 30 products in the market. This panel of experts is comprised of the most experienced accounting professionals in the world who bring a broad set of skills to software and hardware product evaluations. The committee includes Bonnie Nagayama, CPA, Mario Nowogrodzki, CPA.CITP, Jennifer Katrulya, CPA, Greg LaFollette, CPA.CITP, Randy Johnston, Charlie Russell, and Doug Sleeter, founder of The Sleeter Group.

In order to qualify for an Awesome Add-on award, the product and/or service must be developed and sold by a solid company with a reputation for outstanding customer support, and the product must have the following attributes:

- Must be fully released and shipping in the United States by August 1, 2011.
- Although it is not a requirement that the product integrates directly with accounting data, if it does integrate it must use the best practices for integration in addition to using the latest integration technologies as appropriate in the view of the evaluation committee.
- Must conform to good accounting principles and operating standards.
- Should use appropriate transaction types and field population for recording data into QuickBooks and/or other accounting software packages so as to preserve and/or enhance the standard reporting features.

The Sleeter Group
AWESOME ADD-ON

Awesome Add-ons for 2012

Doug Sleeter

*Mr. Sleeter is the founder of The Sleeter Group, a national group of accounting software consultants who serve small and medium-sized businesses. He is the host of the Accounting Solutions Conference and the author of several books including the QuickBooks Consultant's Reference Guide, and the leading market college textbooks "*QuickBooks Fundamentals *and* QuickBooks Complete*." For more information , call 888-484-5484 or visit www.sleeter.com. Doug can also be reached at Doug.Sleeter@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.*

Bill.com Receivables

Bill.com

www.bill.com

Bill.com™ Chase dreams, not paper.

Pricing: Bill.com Receivables is a $5/month upgrade on top of a Bill.com Payable account. ePayments received are $0.49/payment. No charge for accepting credit card payments; however, credit card merchant fees may apply.

Target Customers: Bill.com Receivables is for any business that sends invoices to customers and wants to offer their customers the option to pay electronically, via an online portal. It is also the perfect solution for small and mid-sized accounting firms both for their own use as well as for performing client bookkeeping services.

This SaaS product is a perfect example of how the web is revolutionizing small business. By allowing businesses to manage the entire accounts receivable process in the cloud, Bill.com has taken a giant step forward. In addition to sending electronic invoices and e-reminders, you can receive payments via ACH or credit card, and your customers can access their own portal (for free) to see their invoicing and payment history. And of course, it integrates seamlessly with QuickBooks, Sage Peachtree, Intacct and NetSuite.

ScanSnap

Fujitsu Computer Products of America, Inc.

http://us.fujitsu.com/scansnap

ScanSnap

Pricing: S1100: $199; S1300: $295; S1500(M): $495

Target Customers: Consultants, CPAs and accounting professionals looking for a way to reduce paper and easily digitize documents.

Our committee was very impressed with the overall function and ease of use of the ScanSnap line of scanners. The pricing is great, the push-to-scan button is effortless, and the integration with software products such as SmartVault makes this a very

well-targeted solution for the accounting profession.

The ScanSnap one-button document scanners are a fast and easy way for accountants to digitize any type of paper, including client documents, tax forms, expense report receipts and more. Models include both mobile and desktop devices. The S1500 scans up to 20 pages per minute in color, grayscale, or black and white at an uncompromising 300 dpi resolution. With 50- and 10-page automatic document feeders (ADF), the S1500 and S1300 capture both sides of each page in a single pass. ScanSnap scanners automatically recognize the size of each document, detect and correct for skew, and show images in their proper orientation with blank pages removed. With an easy mouse click, documents can be saved, emailed or e-faxed to clients as well as directly uploaded to client portals or Cloud-based document repositories … not to mention converted to Word or Excel files, enabling content to be edited.

ShareFile for Accountants

ShareFile

www.sharefile.com

Pricing: Starts at $29.95/month (2 users, 5GB storage, 5GB bandwidth)

Target Customers: Accounting firms of any size that need to securely transfer files that are either too large or too confidential to send by e-mail. Whether you are dealing with large QuickBooks files, sensitive Excel spreadsheets or tax estimate vouchers that contain social security numbers, ShareFile can help you communicate with your clients securely, professionally and easily.

Our committee simply loves ShareFile. By specifically targeting the file transfer and secure data sharing needs of accountants and their clients, ShareFile has developed a winning, easy-to-use tool for the profession. This product is a must-have in your client support toolkit.

ShareFile for Accountants was specifically designed for tax and accounting professionals to securely exchange confidential documents and large business files. Accounting firms can make documents available to clients through ShareFile's encrypted, password-protected, custom-branded client portal or securely through email with ShareFile's Microsoft Outlook Plug-in. ShareFile's client portal allows you to create online folders that allow clients to see only those folders where specific access is granted.

Bill & Pay

Skyhill Software, Inc.

www.billandpay.com

Pricing: $16.95 per month, $0.55 per payment transaction

Target Customers: All businesses that want to streamline their Accounts Receivable processes and who are looking for a robust online payment solution.

This SaaS product really helps businesses reduce costs and increase cash flow by automating the A/R collections process. Bill & Pay automatically uploads invoices from QuickBooks, Sage Peachtree, Great Plains and other accounting software into a Web portal where they can be tracked and managed. An "Easy Invoice" feature allows you to create your own invoices without using any accounting software. You can send e-reminders for open or late invoices, accept online payments by credit card or via ACH, and it integrates with several merchant accounts (including Intuit Merchant Solutions). So it doesn't require extra steps for batching deposits into the bank account. This is a great product at a very low price.

QQube™

CLEARIFY℠

www.clearify.com

Pricing: $425 single-user version, $895 multi-user version (2-users), $195 per additional user

Target Customers: Small businesses that need to develop complex reports and/or "dashboards" that cannot be created with QuickBooks alone. Helps companies develop data analytics, and helps multi-company operations or franchises develop cross-entity reporting. When we looked at QQube for the first time, it opened our minds to the possibilities for mining QuickBooks data like never before. This is a VERY powerful tool for accountants. What impressed us the most was that QQube is so deeply "aware" of how data is stored in QuickBooks, what the relationships are between different data types, and how it can free us to create pretty much any report imaginable. There is a learning curve, but once you get the hang of it you'll be amazed at how much you can do with this tool. And think of the new revenue you can generate by providing analytics and mentoring services with QQube. This is a game changer.

QQube is a data extraction technology tool that allows you to drag and drop information into Excel, SAP Crystal Reports, or any desktop/Cloud business intelligence tool of your choice. QQube enables you to create reports or analysis in minutes because it eliminates the need to know tables and relationships, deal with ODBC drivers, wrestle with unrecognized field names, or endure hours of reverse engineering and trial by error.

Honorable Mentions

In addition to this year's winners, we were very impressed with two other products and will be looking closely at them in the months and years to come.

AvaTax Certs

Avalara

www.avalara.com

Pricing: Starts at $375 for 50 certificates, plus $249/year

Target Customers: Any size business with customers qualified for exemption from paying sales tax. Typical industries include manufacturing, technology, education, wholesalers and retailers, although hospitality customers are growing. The target customer can be an e-commerce, wholesale, distribution or retail company using any accounting, ERP, retail POS or e-commerce software.

When we saw this product, several members of the committee immediately said, "Wow, where has this been all my life?" It's a great idea, and Avalara has done a fabulous job of building it. There are still several features to build and more integration with accounting systems to come, but we thought this product definitely warranted a mention.

AvaTax Certs limits your audit exposure on non-taxed transactions with end-to-end certificate lifecycle management. It integrates with ERP, e-commerce and POS systems to digitally create, process and store customer exemption certificates for easy access, renewal and reporting. An online, rule-based wizard automates the paperless collection of certificates and ensures you only collect valid certificates. All collected certificates are stored digitally in a central database to speed tax-exempt transaction processing and to simplify audit preparation and defense.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Websites for Accountants

Emochila, Inc.
www.emochila.com
Pricing: $70/month
Target Customers: Accounting Firms

If you don't already have a website, or even if you do and you're frustrated with the cost and hassles of building, updating and improving its look, then you should really look at eMochila. It's inexpensive with very powerful tools to help you quickly build a professional-looking, full-featured website in just a few hours — less if you know what you want, but more if you want to really get creative. The key is that this is a very powerful online tool that doesn't require any programming or technical skill.

These are full-featured websites for accounting firms, complete with client portals, monthly newsletters, financial calculators, search engine optimization, company blog with social media integration, and more. Month-to-month contracts allow accounting firms of all sizes the luxury of having a website that would normally cost tens of thousands of dollars to develop independently.

Previous winners of the Awesome Add-on award include:

- Acctivate! (www.acctivate.com)
- AccuPOS - Attitude Positive (www.accupos.com)
- Adagio FX (www.softrak.com)
- AutoReporter (www.bqe.com)
- AvaTax Connect (www.avalara.com)
- Autofy (www.propelware.com)
- bMobile Route Software
- BDTS (www.bdts.us)
- BigTime Time and Billing (www.Edisonsattic.com)
- BillQuick (www.bqe.com)
- Bill.com (www.bill.com)
- CNG-Books and CNG-SAFE (www.cabinetng.com)
- Corecon 4.0 (www.corecon.com)
- Corrigo Worktrack Service Management (www.corrigo.com)
- Count Me In (www.countmeinllc.com)
- Data Flow Manager (www.atandra.com)
- DataMover (www.personable.com)
- Data Transfer Utility by Karl Irvin (www.q2q.us)
- DepositNow! (www.depositnow.com)
- Expensewatch (www.expensewatch.com)
- Fishbowl Inventory (www.fishbowlinventory.com)
- GiftWorks (www.missionresearch.com)
- InsynQ (e-Accounting) CPAASP (www.cpaasp.com)
- Intuit Statement Writer
- Legrand CRM (www.legrandcrm.com)
- Method Integration (www.methodintegration.com)
- MISys SBM (www.misysinc.com)
- MISys SBM – Shop Floor Control (www.misysinc.com)
- Netfira Connect (www.netfira.com)
- PayCycle (www.paycycle.com) – Now Intuit Online Payroll
- PDG Commerce (www.pdgsoft.com)
- ProfitCents (www.profitcents.com)
- QODBC Driver (www.qodbc.com)
- QuickBooks Point of Sale (www.intuit.com)
- Qvinci Financial Dashboard (www.qvinci.com)
- ReportWiz from DGR software (www.dgrsoftware.com)
- Results CRM (www.results-software.com)
- Right Networks ASP (www.rightnetworks.com)
- ShareFile (www.sharefile.com)
- ShipGear (www.v-technologies.com/shipgear_home.htm)
- SmartVault (www.smartvault.com)
- SourceLink (www.personable.com)
- Sunburst Certified Payroll Solution (www.sunburstsoftwaresolutions.com)
- TrueCommerce Transaction Manager (www.truecommerce.com)
- UniResMan (www.uniresman.com)
- ViewMyPaycheck (www.viewmypaycheck.com)
- Virtual Time+Expense (www.virtualsoftware.net)
- WebKPI (www.webkpi.com)
- WorkTrack Service Management by Corrigo (www.corrigo.com)
- XpandedReports (www.xpandedreports.com)

How Creative Service Begets Proper Pricing

Last month, we dove into Daniel Pink's book, "A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future." We learned how six new senses he identified in his book are changing how the Western world does its work. As a refresher, these six new senses are Design, Story, Symphony, Empathy, Play and Meaning. Employing our new knowledge of these senses can truly transform our firms and blow our customers' freakin' minds! You can be happier, your team can be happier and your customers can be happier, too.

This month's article is focused on creative services, pricing and timesheets. Being able to offer creative services requires you to change your thinking on pricing, which will require you to be creative with your timesheets. This is how I see it:

CREATIVE SERVICES ➜ BEGETS PROPER PRICING ➜ BEGETS TRASHING TIMESHEETS

Creative Services

Steve Jobs said it best when he noted that customers iterate, but companies innovate. He meant that customers are not walking around our marketplace seeking the next greatest innovation that they can use to make their lives better. Customers don't know they need whitening toothpaste until someone creates it and sells it to them. And if the brand and its marketing are good enough, customers will iterate or move up one level from their current toothpaste. The burden is on companies to create the next thing that is "needed" by our marketplace. Companies must innovate. And so it applies to tax and accounting firms, too. We must innovate and offer new services that our customers are ready to buy, but are unable to because we haven't created it yet. When creatively innovating, remember **the three Blumer truths about professional services**:

1. Customers will pay more than they say they will pay.
2. Customers do not know what they want or need.
3. Customers now consider your technical abilities as simply a table stake.

Now, take the three Blumer truths and start creating. Take a core product that you offer, throw in a scanner and an Apple gift card, take them through a "Business Strategy Session" as part of the deal, and send them a bag of "Welcome Coffee." Give it all a cool new name (use acronyms; everyone knows acronyms are really cool), and you've got a new innovation! Here is one I just pulled out of my hat:

C.O.R.E. – Each service you offer in the **C.O.R.E.** service product is a different value-added offering you can bring to your customers. This service could include a **C**.orporate Tax Return (basic corporate return), an **O**.pportunity Business Review (a session where you ask them 10 hard questions about the future of their business), a **R**.eporting Package (a compilation for their bank), and an **E**.mployment Review (ask them what each employee does and if everyone is performing the right job function). If it sucks, scrap it and try it all over again. You'll find the right formula.

So how do you offer all of this new stuff at the rates you currently charge? Well, that leads me to my next point.

Pricing

At a recent conference, I talked about *The Strategic Firm* — a talk that is all about increasing tax and accounting professionals' awareness about working intention into everything we do. Being strategic means being intentional — doing things on purpose instead of doing things because you've grown too much and you need to throw people at your problems (which is one common example). To offer new creative services, we have to also be creative about our pricing. First, we must price our services based on the value of those services to the customer. Everyone is different, and their perception of value is also different. So begin pricing the customer, not the service. And you definitely have to stop pricing your services based upon the flawed Marxian Labor theory. The labor theory says things have value simply because of the objective value of the commodity used to make that thing. But that is simply not true. Value is subjective to each person in this world. Things and products do not have value just because we used stuff to make them. Frankly, customers don't care what we used to make them or how much time went into creating a service. Customers only care about the outcome and how it makes their lives wonderful. Are you making your customers' lives wonderful? And if you are, are you getting paid properly to do it? This leads me to the third related issue: timesheets.

Timesheets

As professionals, we clock time, add it up and create a price out of it. That is one of the most non-strategic things I've ever heard of! Our profession has priced our services based upon the labor used to make that tax return for so many years that we think any other way is simply impossible. Well, it's not only possible, but it is also freeing … to you, your team and your customers!

Using the new C.O.R.E. service example earlier, you simply cannot create such a cool service the customer finds such huge value in and then bill the customer by adding up the number of hours it takes to make it. What if your work generated an additional $150,000 in profit for the customer? Shouldn't you share in that? A service like this could be two, three or four times what it took to make it. Better yet, it should be a value that you and the customer agree to up front before you start the work. But if you add up the hours, you may only charge $3,000 to $4,000 for the whole package.

"But Jason," you say, "my clients would never pay more than what it costs to make the service!" I have to refer to Blumer Truth #1: Customers will pay more than they say they will pay. They even surprise themselves, and pay more than they ever thought they could or would! Why not do them a favor and relieve them of their money if they agree to let you have it? It's your duty! Ha!

So based upon our Daniel Pink enlightenments, you must be creative by making new services and properly pricing for them based upon the value to the customer, not your timesheet. As usual, I hope I've made you mad enough or challenged you to question and rethink what you are currently doing so you can identify areas in your firm to make changes.

Jason Blumer, CPA.CITP

Jason M. Blumer, CPA.CITP, CFE, is managing shareholder of Blumer & Associates, CPAs, PC. He wears flip flops and jeans, says "dude" a lot, and often works in coffee shops with headphones blaring the latest Bloomberg podcasts (though he doesn't understand most of it). Jason loves new game-changing cloud technology and plays rock and roll too loud. His daily duties include consulting, process design, blogging, marketing and business development, innovative thinking, coaching, practice management, and acting as a change agent. Jason founded the THRIVEal +CPA Network to enhance and change the tax and accounting profession based on the foundational tenets of Community, Collaboration, Technology and Innovation.

Sage Nonprofit and Hosted Solutions for Sage Accountants Network Members

The Sage Accountants Network has a wide range of products, which gives it more breadth than almost any other competing program. While some competing programs have strong solutions for a small business, and others cater to large, global organizations, the Sage Accountants Network allows accounting professionals to access discounted software for small, midsized and large businesses, along with support plans, and product training for their internal use. Sage Accountants Network options are available for accountants who would like to work with Sage Peachtree, Sage Simply Accounting, Sage BusinessWorks, Sage ERP MAS 90, Sage ERP Accpac, Sage Timberline Office, Sage Master Builder, Sage ACT!, Sage Timeslips, and Sage FAS Fixed Assets.

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.

Sage recently added a new Sage Accountants Network (SAN) offering for accountants to learn about and become more familiar with Sage Nonprofit Solutions, allowing them to gain more confidence in recommending it to their nonprofit clients. For the first time, Sage will be hosting all of the Sage Nonprofit Solutions for SAN members on the company's virtual server platform, with remote access from anywhere at any time. This offering allows accounting professionals to work with their own version of these popular applications without having to operate and administer their own server to host the data and applications.

THE SAGE ACCOUNTANTS NETWORK ALLOWS ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONALS TO ACCESS DISCOUNTED SOFTWARE FOR SMALL, MIDSIZED AND LARGE BUSINESSES, ALONG WITH SUPPORT PLANS, AND PRODUCT TRAINING FOR THEIR INTERNAL USE.

The new package includes the following resources and benefits:

- **Sage Fund Accounting:** An award-winning financial management solution preferred by nonprofits and government agencies for planning and managing budgets, maximizing grants, and producing accurate reports. The following modules are included: general ledger, accounts payable, accounts receivable, bank reconciliation, budgeting, payroll, data import and export, grant administration, human resources management, GASB reporting, and encumbrances.
- **Sage Fundraising Online:** A flexible and powerful fundraising and event management tool for nonprofits and other organizations. It enables organizations to reach and engage their constituency via the web with web forms that are easy to manage and deploy.
- **Sage Fundraising 50:** Provides nonprofits of all sizes with an integrated fundraising, development and donor management solution that includes contact relationship management, volunteer management, event management and payment processing. A single concurrent user license for the Donate Now website integrations offered by Sage Payment Solutions is also included.
- **Sage Grant Management:** Helps nonprofit and government organizations maximize funding potential and provide transparency at the organization, program and grant levels. Includes one regular account, one administrative account and one executive view account.
- **Human Resources Management**, which includes integrated benefit accrual and calculations, scheduling, employee data, and payroll preparation.
- Members also receive access to the Sage Fund Accounting online knowledgebase, automatic program updates, and credits for 12 customer support incidents. The program is priced at $599 per year.

The Sage Grant Management tool is available for nonprofit organizations in versions for both hosted and on-premises deployments, and has been endorsed by the Grant Professionals Association (GPA), a leading nonprofit membership organization focused on the advancement of grantsmanship as a profession and the support of its practitioners. The organization offers training, professional certification, and networking to its more than 2,000 members. GPA was founded in 1998, and can be found online at www.grantprofessionals.org or as @GPANational on Twitter.

The hosted offerings in the SAN package for Sage Nonprofit Solutions are the first mid-market hosted solutions included as part of a Sage Accountants Network package. Although details have not been finalized, Sage North America CEO Pascal Houillon announced earlier this year that Sage will be offering hosted versions of many of its other popular accounting, enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM), and human resource management solutions. When implemented, these hosted offerings will allow organizations and their leaders to access their licensed Sage products from anywhere at any time without having to maintain the hardware and software infrastructure. The hosted offerings also make it possible for organizations to scale up to add additional users for volunteers and temporary workers during major seasonal fundraising campaigns. Since the hosting provider maintains all data and applications in a secure, audited public data center, these temporary workers can work in temporary or remote locations, and do not have to be located in the same offices as the organization's full-time staff.

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
- Installation
- General Navigation/Ease-of-Use
- Modules
- Scalability

CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
- Account Structure/Types
- Multiple Transaction Types
- Budget Management/Tracking
- Multiple Budget Types
- Donor Management/Tracking
- Grant Tracking
- Automatic Fund Balancing
- Multiple Year-End Closings
- Audit Trail
- E-Features

MANAGEMENT FEATURES
- Dashboards (snapshots)
- What-If Analysis & Budgeting Scenarios
- Security Features/User Roles
- Spending Control Functions
- Collections
- Fundraising
- Document Management Capabilities

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
- Customization Capabilities
- Financial Statements
- FASB/GASB Reporting
- Endowment/Grant Reporting
- Reporting Export Options

INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
- Data Transfer/Import
- Integration w/vendor's other products
- External Program Integration
- Remote Accountant Access or On-line Accountant Data Transfer Tool

HELP/SUPPORT
- Built-in Support Features
- System Updates
- Support website/documentation
- Training Options
- Live Support

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.

12 Products That Can Help Your Nonprofit Clients

As with most organizations, nonprofits vary in size and scope, and their software needs vary, as well. As an accounting professional, you know that the software needs of the local animal shelter will vary widely from the needs of the United Way. While this may be a drastic comparison, it really highlights the wide range of organizations served by nonprofit software vendors. Entry-level, off-the-shelf systems are intended for different types of nonprofits than the top-line, robust solutions. This is not a one-size-fits-all market. That's why it's important to ask and answer a few questions before helping your clients in their search for a nonprofit software product. Here are just some of the questions your clients will need to answer:

- How is the organization primarily funded; through donations or grants?
- Does the organization typically do bi-annual or annual appeals?
- Are products sold to benefit the organization?
- What is the annual budget of the organization?
- Does the organization have one primary location or are there numerous locations that require access to the system?

Having answers to these questions will go a long way toward finding the correct nonprofit software for your client. For instance, if an organization is not primarily funded by grants, a grants management module will be irrelevant, but a fundraising module may be a necessity.

This review breaks down some of the most important aspects of nonprofit software systems:

Basic System Functions covers installation, system navigation, available product modules, add-ons and scalability. This is particularly important to growing organizations.

Core Nonprofit/Fund Accounting Capabilities includes standard nonprofit-specific functions such as account structure, multiple budget options, grant and donor management, fund-balancing, and e-features such as remote access, EFT payment and email invoicing.

Management Features highlights areas such as the availability of dashboards, budget options and "what if" scenarios that allow users to look at several different options when preparing or revising budgets. Spending control functions, collections and fundraising capability are also noted.

Financial Statements & Reporting looks at report customization options, the ability to create new reports and process nonprofit-specific reports such as FASB/GASB. This section also covers grant and endowment reporting capability and report exporting options.

Integration & Import/Export examines how well the product integrates with other system modules, as well as add-ons and third-party applications. Also noted is whether or not the product offers accountant access and data transfer capability.

Help/Support covers the availability of system updates, website documentation and training options available, etc.

These sections won't cover everything, but they will provide a solid overview to help determine if a system is suitable for your client. ●

CYMA Systems Inc. — CYMA Not-For-Profit Fund Accounting Software

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT
CYMA would fit well in small to mid-sized nonprofit organizations that require flexibility, scalability, and customization capabilities not often found in basic, off-the-shelf products.

STRENGTHS
- Excellent report customization
- Solid grant tracking
- Easy system navigation
- Solid import/export capability
- 3 separate data-entry modes

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS
- No fundraising module available

SUMMARY & PRICING
CYMA Not-For-Profit-Accounting 2011 is a terrific fund accounting product, ideal for mid-size organizations with multiple grant sources. However, its modular structure would make it suitable for nonprofits of just about any size. CYMA pricing starts at $645 per module, with pricing typically starting at $1,945 for three modules. Grant Tracking is an additional $395.

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

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★½	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★☆	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416292

800-292-296 www.cyma.com

FUND E-Z Nonprofit Accounting and Fund Raising Software

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

FUND E-Z is an excellent fit for small to mid-sized nonprofit organizations that need an easily navigated fund accounting product that is available in Basic and Pro editions.

STRENGTHS

- Scalable, with two editions available
- Outstanding Fundraising module
- Easy system navigation
- Solid reporting capability
- Excellent budget functionality

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No document management capability
- Limited/no dashboard functionality

SUMMARY & PRICING

FUND E-Z Fund Accounting Standard currently costs $1,995 and Pro $3,490 for a single-user system. The Fundraising module is an additional $995. Available in two editions, this product is suitable for the smaller nonprofit looking for a product that can grow along with them.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★★ BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★ CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★☆ MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★ FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★½ INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★☆ HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416827

877-696-0900 www.fundez.com

Intuit Inc — QuickBooks Premier Nonprofit Edition

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

QuickBooks Premier Nonprofit 2011 is best suited for smaller nonprofits that are looking to get organized quickly and inexpensively.

STRENGTHS

- Easy installation & system navigation
- Numerous tutorials & training videos available
- Good reporting
- Affordability
- Solid budget tracking
- At-a-glance snapshot of customer activity

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Easy to outgrow
- No true grant or fundraising capability

SUMMARY & PRICING

QuickBooks Premier Nonprofit 2011 is priced at an affordable $399.95 for a single user, which reflects a drop in the pricing from 2010. The product is well-suited for the small nonprofit organization that requires solid financial capability along with a nonprofit-specific account structure. Generally affordable for even the smallest nonprofit organization, QuickBooks Premier Not-For-Profit provides the features needed at a user-friendly price.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★½ BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆ CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★ MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★☆ FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★★ INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★ HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416588

866-379-6636 www.quickbooks.com

Sage Peachtree Premium Accounting for Nonprofits 2012

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

Sage Peachtree would work well with smaller nonprofit organizations that place affordability equal to functionality, and it is optimally designed for the one- to 10-person organization.

STRENGTHS

- Easy to install & easy to navigate
- Good nonprofit reporting capability and advanced Business Intelligence for custom reporting and analysis in Microsoft Excel
- Excellent integration with Microsoft Word for producing donor & fundraising letters
- Solid dashboards & cash flow management tools allow employees to see how the organization is performing

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Limited growth capability
- Limited fundraising capability, but vendor notes that it is working on integration with Fundraising Online

SUMMARY & PRICING

Sage Peachtree Premium Accounting for Nonprofits 2012 is available for $499 for a single-user system. It is an excellent option for the small nonprofit organization looking for solid nonprofit reporting at an affordable price point.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★★ BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆ CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★☆ MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★☆ FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★½ INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★ HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416762

877-495-9904 www.peachtree.com

Blackbaud, Inc. — The Financial Edge

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

The Financial Edge is well-suited for mid-sized to large nonprofit organizations and government entities that require both top-notch reporting capability along with excellent donor and grant management.

STRENGTHS

- Excellent customization capability
- Easy integration with dozens of add-on modules
- Unlimited customized dashboards
- Solid grant tracking
- Easy integration with The Raiser's Edge
- Flexible, scalable product

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Cost may be prohibitive for smaller organizations
- Complex data setup can be time-consuming

SUMMARY & PRICING

Web-based subscription pricing for The Financial Edge starts at $299 per month for a single user, with maintenance and implementation services included. The traditional on-premise license costs $2,995 for up to three users. The Financial Edge is an excellent option for larger nonprofits and government entities, offering an almost endless sea of add-ons designed to integrate with and enhance the product.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

800-443-9441 **www.blackbaud.com**

Blackbaud, Inc. — Fundware

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

Fundware is best suited for mid-sized to large nonprofit organizations that have qualified staff available to set up and maintain the program for optimal functionality.

STRENGTHS

- Available in two editions for increased scalability
- Excellent reporting options
- High level of customization
- Solid Project/Grant tracking
- Strong track record in nonprofit segment

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- System navigation can be challenging for new users
- System setup & customization can be time-consuming

SUMMARY & PRICING

Fundware pricing varies, depending on the modules needed, with individual module prices ranging from $1,295 to $3,995. Available in an edition for up to five users, as well as an Enterprise Edition, Fundware is scalable and is optimally designed for larger organizations with more complex customization needs.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★½	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★½	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★☆	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★½	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★☆	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10417707

800-443-9441 **www.blackbaud.com**

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★★	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416824

AccuFund, Inc. — AccuFund Accounting Suite for Non-Profits

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

AccuFund is an ideal fit for mid-sized nonprofits and government entities that desire a modular design and consistency throughout the program.

STRENGTHS

- Two versions available
- Excellent budgeting & grant management capability
- Easy system navigation
- User-defined dashboards
- Solid, customizable reporting options
- Available as a desktop or SaaS version

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No true donor tracking
- Fundraising capability is limited

SUMMARY & PRICING

AccuFund Standard Edition is available for $2,995 for a single-user system. The Professional Edition costs $6,595. AccuFund also offers a series of add-on modules for and additional fee. This scalable product is an excellent fit for both small and mid-sized organizations that require solid budgeting, reporting and grant tracking capability.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★☆	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416620

877-872-2228 www.accufund.com

e*TEK* International Inc. — e*TEK* Fundamentals

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★½

BEST FIT

e*TEK* Fundamentals is a brand new product optimally designed for small to mid-sized nonprofit organizations, offering a high level of security with its SaaS version.

STRENGTHS

- Built on Microsoft Office platform for easy system navigation
- Excellent fund raising module available
- Easy report customization
- Solid import/export capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Pricing could be prohibitive for the smallest of nonprofits

SUMMARY & PRICING

e*TEK* Fundamentals is currently priced at $3,995 for up to three users, with $1,050 in training and support costs. e*TEK* also offers a complete system that includes all modules for around $15,000. The SaaS version is available for $283 per user per month, which drops significantly after 24 months. Other pricing options are available, as well. e*TEK* Fundamentals offers smaller government entities, churches and nonprofit organizations an excellent product that is fully scalable, and contains solid fund accounting features in a completely integrated package. By offering the two delivery models, this product is even more attractive to small organizations.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★☆	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★½	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416323

800-888-6894 www.etek.net

Cougar Mountain Software — DENALI FUND+Accounting

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

DENALI is flexible and easily accessible, making it a perfect choice for small to mid-sized nonprofit organizations that desire a scalable and user-friendly product.

STRENGTHS

- Modular design ensures system flexibility
- Intuitive user interface make system navigation easy
- Financial & Sales Dashboards
- Excellent reporting customization options
- Integration with DonorExpress for solid donation tracking & fundraising
- Solid budgeting capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Lack of document management capability
- No grant tracking module

SUMMARY & PRICING

DENALI FUND + Accounting is an excellent addition to the Cougar Mountain Software DENALI suite. Suitable for small to mid-sized nonprofit organizations and government entities, DENALI modules start at $595 per module (which includes the Software Assurance plan) and a required $295 user license.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★½	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★½	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416351

800-388-3038 www.cougarmtn.com

Serenic Software — Serenic Navigator

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

Serenic Navigator is a powerful system optimally designed for larger nonprofit organizations that need a fully integrated financial solution that provides solid performance and system reliability. Smaller users may wish to utilize the SaaS version, Navigator Online, which was designed for small to mid-sized users.

STRENGTHS

- Excellent financial management capability
- Availability of related modules for donor/grant management
- Scalable to fit needs of just about any size/type of nonprofit/government entity
- SaaS version available (Navigator Online)
- Customizable dashboards & internal sharing of data through portals
- Strong, customizable budgeting capability
- Solid import/export and third-party integration capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Cost may be prohibitive for some smaller organizations
- Complex product installation & setup for on-premises product

SUMMARY & PRICING

Serenic Navigator Business Essentials starts at $3,500 per user. Serenic Navigator Advanced Management starts at $6,500 per user. Additional modules, such as DonorVision and AwardVision are sold at an additional cost. With the availability of the SaaS version, Navigator Online, for $195 per user per month, nonprofits of all sizes will find Serenic Navigator an excellent investment.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★★	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416381

877-737-3642 **www.serenic.com**

Aqubanc, LLC — Cheque 21

Cheque 21 System, from Aqubanc LLC is a donation processing software product designed to speed up donation/gift acceptance for more immediate donor acknowledgement. Cheque 21 works with many popular nonprofit software products including Blackbaud Raiser's Edge and eCRM, Amergent, Talisma, PledgeMaker, Donor Perfect and Sage. Ideal for midsize to larger nonprofit organizations that typically receive 15,000 or more donations on a regular basis through annual appeals and other program outreach activities, Cheque 21 easily processes hundreds to thousands of transactions daily.

While smaller nonprofits have the manpower necessary to process annual appeal donations, larger organizations that run periodic and annual appeals often find themselves hiring additional personnel to process the influx of donations. Since 2003, the Cheque 21 System offers midsize to larger nonprofits expedited donation processing in an easy-to-use solution. Custom quotes are provided to each client based on individual organizational needs

Read more about this product at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416315

800-350-4720 **www.aqubanc.com**

Sage North America — Sage Fund Accounting

2011 OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

BEST FIT

Sage Fund Accounting (formerly Sage MIP Fund Accounting) is optimally designed for mid-sized nonprofit organizations and government entities that require flexibility as well as detailed budgeting and grants management capabilities.

STRENGTHS

- Extensive list of modules
- Contains fundraising & grant management add-on options
- Excellent budgeting capability
- Available as an on-premise or hosted product
- Available in single-user & multi-user editions

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Cost may be prohibitive for small organizations
- Initial setup can be time-consuming if not well-planned to help ensure long-term success

SUMMARY & PRICING

The single-user version of Sage Fund Accounting is available for $2,995. Individual module pricing starts at $895 per module. Grant Management and Fundraising Management modules are available for additional fees. Suitable for just about any size nonprofit or government organization, Sage Fund Accounting is a scalable, flexible system that no organization should outgrow.

PRODUCT DELIVERY METHODS:

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

Sage Fund Accounting

★★★★★	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS
★★★★★	CORE NFP/FUND ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
★★★★★	MANAGEMENT FEATURES
★★★★★	FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REPORTING
★★★★★	INTEGRATION & IMPORT/EXPORT
★★★★★	HELP/SUPPORT

Read the full review of this product exclusively online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10416723

800-811-0961 www.sagefundaccounting.com

PRACTICAL RESOURCES

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Ore Hill Partners	650 5th Ave, 9th Floor, New York NY 10019
Goldman Sachs Specialty Lending Holdings Inc	11605 Haynes Bridge Rd, Alpharetta GA 30009
Van Kampen Asset Management	1 Parkview Plaza, Suite 100 4th Floor, Oakbrook Terrace IL 60181
Deutsche Asset Management	345 Park Ave 26th Floor, New York NY 10154
Levine Leichtman Capital	335 N Maple Dr Suite 130, Beverly Hills CA 90210
Stone Tower Capital LLC	152 W 57th St 33rd Floor, New York NY 10019

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or more of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities. If none, check here. ▪ None

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General Electric Capital Corporate	2325 Lakeview Parkway, Suite 700 Alpharetta GA 30009
GSC Partners CDO Fund II, Limited	888 7th Ave, New York NY 10019
GSC Partners CDO Fund IV, Limited	888 7th Ave, New York NY 10019
GSC Partners CDO Fund V, Limited	888 7th Ave, New York NY 10019
GSC Partners CDO Fund VII, Limited	888 7th Ave, New York NY 10019
GSC Partners CDO Fund VIII, Limited	888 7th Ave, New York NY 10019
GSC Partners Capital Corp, Loan Funding 2005-1	888 7th Ave, New York NY 10019
GSC Partners Gemini Fund, Limited	888 7th Ave, New York NY 10019
Genesis CLO 2007-1 Ltd	650 5th Ave 9th Floor, New York NY 10019
Goldman Sachs Specialty Lending Holdings Inc	11605 Haynes Bridge Rd, Alpharetta GA 30009
Van Kampen Senior Income Trust	1 Parkview Plaza, Suite 100 4th Floor, Oakbrook Terrace IL 60181
Van Kampen Senior Loan Fund	1 Parkview Plaza, Suite 100 4th Floor, Oakbrook Terrace IL 60181
Flagship CLO III	345 Park Avenue, 26th Floor, New York NY 10154
Flagship CLO IV	345 Park Avenue, 26th Floor, New York NY 10154
Flagship CLO V	345 Park Avenue, 26th Floor, New York NY 10154
Flagship CLO VI	345 Park Avenue, 26th Floor, New York NY 10154
Genesis CLO 2007-2 Ltd	335 N Maple Dr Suite 130, Beverly Hills CA 90210
Stone Tower CLO II Ltd	152 W 57th St, 33rd Floor, New York NY 10019
Credit Suisse (USA) Securities LLC	11 Madison Ave, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10010
Morgan Stanley Prime Income Trust	1 Parkview Plaza, Suite 100 4th Floor, Oakbrook Terrace IL 60181
Aurum CLO 2002-1 Ltd	345 Park Avenue, 26th Floor, New York NY 10154

12. For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes:
▪ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
▪ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months

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

A New Perspective on Client Service:

How optimism and remote technologies paved the way to one firm's success

The accounting profession has often been stereotyped as curmudgeonly, grumpy, stodgy, and fiscally dour, and, well … there were probably good reasons for those descriptions at one time. After all, in decades past, accounting was a serious business that was the domain of financially conservative number crunchers who worked 60-hour weeks in a consistent suit-and-tie wardrobe.

Cathy Iconis, a Georgia CPA, is part of a new generation of professionals who aren't necessarily trying to change the way accountants are perceived, but her perspective on client service and an optimistic attitude just might have that effect.

Cathy Iconis, CPA
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PRACTICE SPECIALTIES: Virtual CFO, Bookkeeping, Training, Consulting
EDUCATION: Oglethorpe University, Atlanta
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS: AICPA, Georgia Society of CPAs
MOST RECENT BOOK READ: "Safe Haven," by Nicholas Sparks
SOCIAL NETWORKING:
http://www.linkedin.com/in/ciconis
http://twitter.com/cathyiconis
http://www.facebook.com/cathyiconiscpa

Following several years at a large regional accounting practice, where she worked in tax, audit and forensic accounting, Cathy handled executive reporting and managerial accounting for Balfour Beatty, an international construction firm (www.balfourbeattyus.com) and one of the top five commercial construction enterprises in the country.

This broad experience across most areas of the profession instilled in her the ability and confidence to go out on her own two and a half years ago. It also let her know what she did and didn't like. And as the principal of Iconis Group, LLC (www.IconisGroup.com), she has been able to build her practice around the services and types of clients she enjoys.

Based in Atlanta, the firm focuses on providing part-time CFO services, bookkeeping and training to small businesses. "I don't do taxes; not even my own," she notes with a tone that sounds like a combination of pride and relief. For compliance needs, she refers clients to a non-competitive local firm and works with them to provide accurate data. Ensuring accurate and reliable client financials has become the central component of her practice.

"I really enjoy working with regular small business owners — people who aren't financial experts themselves," Cathy said. "For businesses that can't afford full-time, in-house accounting staff or a CFO, having help with processes and systems that can make them more efficient and fiscally responsible can be a great help. I really feel like I become a part of their team, helping them see the big picture and implement changes that can have immediate and long-term implications."

Her clients are primarily design firms, other professional service providers and consulting companies, with revenues up to $10 million. In this range, some do have internal accounting staff, but partner with Iconis Group to relieve some of the workload and gain more professional insight into their finances.

"I DON'T DO TAXES; NOT EVEN MY OWN"

Although still a small firm, Iconis Group has grown fast since Cathy started it from a home office in 2009. Since then, she has moved to a professional office suite. She supplemented her own capacity by originally using college interns, before more recently adding Jenny Githens as the firm's business manager and Jody Matlock Lappi, CPA as a senior accountant.

Remote access technologies are a central component of the firm's workflow and services, with Jody living and working from an office in Mississippi, and remote clients as far away as Arizona. All clients are guided in their use of an online accounting program that Cathy and her staff can access to perform various services, including managing AP processes and reconciliations.

"Since we don't compete with larger and more traditional accounting firms, and their services don't compete with us, we view them as complementary," Cathy explains. "We have a day-to-day operational and managerial relationship with our clients. We help ensure that they are prepared when it comes time to plan or prepare their income taxes. We help our clients understand what their numbers mean and develop better business strategies, which, in turn, gives the traditional firms a better platform for developing tax reduction strategies."

As a new firm with a younger client base, Iconis Group takes advantage of technology to communicate with clients, typically by email, but also via SMS texting and instant messaging. She also uses Google Apps and notes that she's in the process of improving her project and time management capabilities. She successfully used LinkedIn and Twitter to grow her firm in its early days, gaining like-minded technology and social media savvy clients. As a result of its technology usage and workflow processes, Iconis Group received a score of 172 on the Productivity Survey (www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/productivity-survey), a free online assessment tool for professional tax and accounting firms. Iconis Group uses a pay first, value pricing model. Cathy says, "I really hated tracking my hours at other firms, and fixed pricing provides more consistent cash flow planning for both our clients and our practice."

She has always been somewhat of a "tech guru and Excel Queen," and one of her greatest values to clients and her former employers has been her ability to quickly understand new technologies and integrate them in ways that make processes work better. As

an example, she was commended by the construction firm for creating new templates for revenue projections that reduced the time required to process them from nearly a week to one day. She has also been involved with web development, and recently authored an article about the difference between tax-focused CPAs and what her firm does.

Since she doesn't do income taxes, she doesn't have a busy season … but does have higher workloads with mid-month write-ups, reconciliations and sales and use tax preparation. Her remote technologies allow her to work from virtually anywhere, whether at a client's office, from home or from the firm's office, where she says she spends less than 40 hours most weeks.

"I REALLY HATED TRACKING MY HOURS AT OTHER FIRMS, AND FIXED PRICING PROVIDES MORE CONSISTENT CASH FLOW PLANNING FOR BOTH OUR CLIENTS AND OUR PRACTICE."

Her husband Mike, the COO of a transcription company, also enjoys a somewhat flexible schedule, which allows them both to spend time with their three year-old daughter, Isabell. A graduate of Oglethorpe University (www.oglethorpe.edu), Cathy has lived in Atlanta most of her life and is active with the Georgia Society of CPAs (www.gscpa.org) College Outreach Taskforce, which encourages area accounting students to become involved in the profession. She also served as the chair of the group's College2Career conference and as a member of the GSCPA's Southeastern Accounting Show Task Force. ●

What We've Learned

(an interesting stat)

PRODUCTIVITY SCORE AVERAGES

▶ The "paperless revolution" is pretty much complete, with more than 92% of firms responding that they create digital copies of client tax returns. Likewise, 96% of firms note that clients provide some or all of their tax documents in electronic format.

ABCs of Capturing Best Practices

We've all seen the statistics that point to the incredible brain drain that will occur in the accounting profession over the next decade, and most firms have experienced the loss of a key person that left the firm, taking with them key knowledge or experience that the firm wishes they would have captured. Without a systematic process to document this knowledge, the brain drain will continue. Firms must make a conscientious effort to capture best practices to protect the firm for the future. This knowledge capture needs to go beyond the standard manual provided by the accounting application vendors to include all of the firm's processes and custom-developed procedures for each of the production workflows. It should also be in a format that can be used not only for training, but live guidance when personnel are working in the office or in the field.

Document Workflow & Opportunities

Now is the perfect time to debrief the production processes of the previous busy season and identify opportunities for new applications or workflow processes. Firms should chart out the steps it takes to process work. For example, they should take a look within the tax practice, beginning with the acceptance of a client, creation of their organizer, how their information is received and processed, all the way through delivery of the final return and invoice. The firm should then evaluate bottlenecks and identify today's solutions by having key production personnel network with peer accountants, view webinars and attend training from their tax, audit and accounting application providers.

Roman H. Kepczyk, CPA.CITP

Roman H. Kepczyk, CPA.CITP is president of InfoTech Partners North America, Inc. and works exclusively with CPA firms to implement today's leading best practices and technologies. Roman authored "Quantum of Paperless, a Partner's Guide to Accounting Firm Optimization" which is available at Amazon.com.

Identify Expertise & Existing Knowledge

Each firm has personnel that everyone goes to with questions on applications, and these individuals are often measurably more efficient than peers because they just have the system figured out. These are your experts, and they should be the ones called upon to explore best practices, attend training and document their knowledge in a format that can be easily shared. Usually, these experts are also the most likely to be aware of the resources and documentation the firm already has captured, which can be in the format of physical manuals, digital forms stored on the intranet, or documented processes saved somewhere as a Word file. These resources should all be accumulated and "flow charted" so the firm has a good starting point for understanding visually what they are doing today.

ABC Prioritization for Success

Once the firm experts have documented each workflow, it is important to take an independent look at each individual step and rate the firm on how well they are doing. An "A" step is one that is documented, everyone understands and for which firmwide training has been provided. A "B" step is one that some personnel have figured out, but the process is not documented or personnel throughout the firm have not been trained on that process. "C" steps are those that everyone in the firm agrees are inefficient and new applications or processes must be explored to see if there is a viable solution for the firm to adopt.

Each department should identify the ABCs within their workflow and then prioritize each grouping based on which items would have the greatest impact on improving firm productivity, taking into account the amount of effort and resources needed. In most cases, the "A" items just need to be organized within the context of the documented department workflow and with minor customization to the firm's file naming and network directory conventions to be standardized. The firm would then allocate time to the identified experts for the "B" steps until the best practices for that step are well documented and firm personnel are trained. In most cases, the expert is among the most in demand within their department. I suggest that at least four hours per week be allocated (based on that person's availability) for them to focus on standardizing that step until it becomes an "A." For this process to be successful, the expert should be given "chargeable" credit so it is valued as highly as client work, because the reality is that each captured practice will make the entire firm more standardized and more productive. This time should also be *focused*, meaning it may be best to block out a conference room or work remotely to minimize external distractions and interruptions.

> ONE OF THE KEY DIFFERENTIATORS OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE FIRMS IS THAT THEY IDENTIFY AND CAPTURE STANDARDIZED BEST PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE EFFICIENCY.

While the firm's "A"s and "B"s are being documented, the department can address the prioritized "C" items, which will require outside personnel, training and vendor resources to resolve (and usually require expenditures and CPE that must be approved by the partner group). By specifically documenting the possible solutions to a "C" step and the educational resources that can provide the solution (articles, webinar, vendor training, user conference), the partners can outline expectations that can then be used to justify any expense and time requirements. The ABC prioritization process should be repeated annually to evaluate and adopt new tools and technology processes.

Best Practices Identification

I have found the most effective processes to identify and evaluate best practices come from vendor webinars and user conferences that are validated by peer accountants. Each fall, the major vendors have user conferences and webinars that introduce new products and offer end-user sessions to discuss optimization of current tools. By attending, firm experts can be educated on what is possible as well as be exposed to trainers and end users who have already implemented these processes. By networking with such individuals, the expert can confirm the best practices are working and possibly get access to already developed documented procedures that the firm can customize to its needs.

Knowledge Documentation

The key to capturing best practices is to put them into a format where they can be effectively utilized by all personnel whenever and wherever they need it. By default, this would be a digital document that is stored on the firm intranet, local hard drive or portal. Most firms store these documents in a searchable PDF or Word documents so keywords can be used to find information. In addition to explaining the process in a textual context, it is important to integrate actual screen captures of processes that show the menu options, firms' network directories and file naming conventions. For firms still on Windows XP, tools such as SNAG-IT and Camtasia can capture images in condensed format. Windows 7 has an integrated "Snipping" tool. The documentation should be developed so that it can be utilized not only as a reference guide, but also for training of new personnel. By exposing them to best practices in a centralized format available online, they will learn to rely on that resource whenever they have questions and can access it at their own convenience.

One of the key differentiators of the most effective firms is that they identify and capture standardized best practices that promote efficiency (and profitability) in such a way that every person in the firm can take advantage of them. By prioritizing the ABCs of workflow, firms can start a process to capture best practices before they walk out the door.

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