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CPA Practice Advisor

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Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

10th Annual Innovation Awards

How to Get Better Service from Your Tech Vendors

Embrace Consumerization!

SPECIAL SECTION

2013 Accountant's Technology & Services Guide

Small Business Innovators

How the Sleeters are Helping Shape Small Business Tech

PRODUCT REVIEWS:

— Document Storage Systems

— Sales & Use Tax Programs

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CYGNUS BUSINESS MEDIA
BPA WORLDWIDE
PRINTED WITH SOY INK

By M. Darren Root, CPA.CITP, Executive Editor

Strategic Partner Retreats … *It All Starts with a Vision*

We just completed the first Strategic Partner Retreat as I write this. This was the first in our series of three, and was hosted in balmy Tampa, Florida. I'm happy to report that we presented to a room full of firm partners and several of their trusted administrators—all eager to learn how to elevate their firms to Next Generation Accounting Firm status.

Over the course of a day and a half, we discussed the processes and challenges to building a Next Generation Accounting Firm within a peer-supportive and highly interactive forum. Participants were active with their questions, concerns, challenges and, in many cases, insecurities, about how to move their firms forward given the environment we live in. Overall, we focused on strategy to get firms going.

THERE ARE STILL TWO STRATEGIC PARTNER SUMMITS ON THE CALENDAR. DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE HOW YOUR FIRM CAN REACH NEXT GENERATION STATUS.

Randy Johnston and I took turns facilitating the different sections during the two-day event. The following is a list of the big takeaways that I believe will be helpful for you:

- ***Vision Challenged —*** Most firms, and I see in firms across the country, have not taken the time to define exactly what they want from their businesses. The fact is that more than 90% of firms in the U.S. are small firms, and the partners within these firms continue to "just do their thing" each day with no clear vision on where they want their business to go.

Michael Gerber, author of the popular *E-Myth* book, talks about the E-Myth Five Core Principles. At the heart of these principles is LIFE: "The principle that your business should be a way to get more of what you want out of life … a vehicle through which you gain personal and financial freedom." Unfortunately, too many firms are not living by the LIFE principle. They like what they do for a living, but not the way they do it.

- ***Software Direction —*** Partners lacking a clear direction on where they want their businesses to go tend to select software with no clear understanding of how all the pieces and parts fit together. For example, if firm leaders wish to provide a certain level of client service, they might indicate: "We believe that the information we create for our clients should be available anytime, anywhere and on any device." However, if their vision for how to offer this level of service is unclear, often they will select technology that does not work together—such as a document management system that does not integrate with their portal solution.
- ***Firm Infrastructure —*** Many of the firms we see are really struggling with the decision of whether to move to the cloud, stay on premise, or go with a hybrid. This is not an easy issue to solve. And it's even more difficult to solve if you have no idea about what your firm infrastructure should look like.

This is just a sampling of the many topics covered in our Strategic Partner Retreats. Randy and I lead these events and do our best to help firms develop the key components they need to advance their firms. It's important to understand that advancing one's firm is not an event; it's a process. And it's a process that is ongoing and requires thoughtful focus and help from those who have already been down this road and found success.

There are still two Strategic Partner Summits on the calendar. Don't miss the opportunity to see how your firm can reach Next Generation status. For more information, check out our website at cpapracticeadvisor.com and register today. ●

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.*

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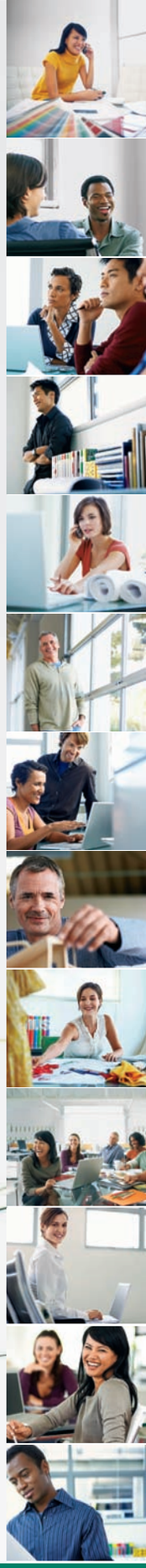

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Small Business Innovators:

How Doug and Sherrill Sleeter are Helping Shape the Profession

By M. Darren Root, CPA.CITP , Executive Editor

I recently sat down with friends Doug and Sherrill Sleeter, founders of The Sleeter Group. Doug and Sherrill have been married for 27 years and have worked together for nearly 20 of those years. They are successful business owners, innovative thinkers and strategic partners to the tax and accounting technology profession.

Doug has been a columnist for *CPA Practice Advisor* for the past nine years. I wanted you to get to know Doug and Sherrill as I do.

DARREN: *Tell me when and why you started The Sleeter Group?*

DOUG: We started The Sleeter Group in 1994 when QuickBooks (the DOS version) was new in the market and the world was moving toward PC-based accounting software. When we looked at QuickBooks, it was obvious that the ease of use would be very attractive to small business owners who were quickly adopting DIY accounting solutions.

We've always been passionate about small business, and helping business owners streamline their processes. We started by building a local consulting practice in the San Francisco Bay area, but quickly discovered that the same questions kept coming up with client after client. So in order to help more clients, we set out to teach QuickBooks to accountants, bookkeepers and CPAs who in turn could help clients. That led us to build an international network of professionals that has developed into over 700 professionals who serve over 300,000 small businesses each year. Our members are independent consultants and small to medium sized accounting firms who focus on small business.

DARREN: *What has been some of the greatest challenges you have faced in building The Sleeter Group? How about your own internal technology? You're running a business, how aggressively are you pursuing moving to the cloud with your own company?*

DOUG: Three challenges come to mind. First, it has always been a challenge to focus our efforts where they'll have the most impact; second, finding the right people and resources is always challenging; and third, staying on top of the changing technology innovations and customer demands is a huge challenge. Most likely, our top three challenges are similar for every small business.

Regarding the internal technology issues, we use our own company as our "lab" for testing out new products, new business processes, and new models for collaborating with customers. When we started, we were using Mac IIs with 50GB hard drives — no shared calendars, no websites, no online meetings, and no cell phones. But we did have a CRM and it was probably the most important technology we had in terms of driving our success early on. Like so many businesses, our challenge over the past several years has been to move our processes to the cloud. Just like every business, the cloud allows us to run the business from anywhere, and it allows us to securely work with customers, vendors and employees anytime, from anywhere.

Today we use a variety of cloud-based products that greatly improve our business. We use Cloud9 Real Time to host our QuickBooks files and other add-ons; we use Bill.com for our paperless A/R, A/P and cash management; we have an online payroll service; and we use an outsourced product fulfillment center that ships all of our textbooks to colleges and customers directly. And currently, we're converting our CRM to Zoho CRM where we can integrate several business processes using Zoho's suite of over 20 cloud applications. We have two Web stores, two web sites, a blog, a central customer database, and a growing number of connections between all of our systems to streamline processes and synchronize data. It's not perfect yet, but we're making progress, and as we learn, we write about it and recommend the great solutions we discover along the way. Our business is an ideal sample company because we sell services, products, memberships and events, all of which require unique business processes.

DARREN: *We have discussed on many occasions that you really focus on the end user of technology, the customer of accounting firms or consulting businesses as opposed to focusing on the accounting firm itself. Can you explain how you try to make accountants and consultants better by your focus?*

DOUG: The most-trusted-advisor status should never be taken lightly. We are passionate about helping SMBs succeed by helping them streamline their processes. But the people who are most trusted are the ones who can help them the most. So we focus on helping those most trusted advisors be better at what they do. We believe there are great opportunities for accounting professionals to embrace new business models that include small business technology consulting and business process engineering. Tax and accounting will still lead, but some of the best *new* opportunities for accountants will be in business process consulting. These services are sticky and involve much deeper client engagement than just tax and accounting.

DARREN: *For many years you were seen as "the leading QuickBooks Experts." Why do you think that is and do you still see that as the case today?*

DOUG: Well, we were one of the first companies to offer QuickBooks training in the nation, and we have been

authoring reference and college textbooks on QuickBooks for almost 20 years. We are still the leading go-to company for QuickBooks information. We publish a very successful *QuickBooks Consultant's Reference Guide*, numerous QuickBooks reference books, and our *QuickBooks and Beyond* blog. Charlie Russell, the editor of the blog, along with seven columnists, write about all things QuickBooks *and BEYOND*. Every detail of new QuickBooks releases is reviewed, along with commentary and discussion of the most relevant technologies for small business. Several hundred colleges teach from our textbooks published directly and through Intuit's education program.

Our mission is to help accountants and their clients understand what today's technologies can do for them (e.g., QuickBooks Simple Start, Pro, Premier and Enterprise), but also why and how the new technologies (QuickBooks Online and their competitors such as Xero, Wave, Intacct and others) matter. We start with helping people sort through the options in the market and make comparisons about which ones are appropriate for each different type of client.

DARREN: *The Sleeter Group gives the Awesome Application Awards each fall; these are products that meet a high standard you set for accounting software. How do you go about making these selections each year?*

DOUG: In addition to exhibiting at our conference, our Awesome Applications program is probably the most effective marketing program for small business application developers. We've helped over 300 software companies get the word out by evaluating their products, consulting with their product managers and engineers, and recognizing their products with our Awesome Application Awards. This not only helps the developers, but also the consultants and accountants who are desperately looking for a credible source of information about solutions worth considering for their clients.

In order to qualify for an Awesome Application Award, an application must be developed by a solid company with a reputation for outstanding customer support, must conform to good accounting principles and operating standards, and should use appropriate transaction types and field population for recording data into the accounting software so as to preserve and/or enhance the standard reporting features.

DARREN: *As you know, there are lots of products in the tax and accounting technology space. On any given day you can find consultants talking and writing about all the various products. You go to trade shows and there are booths everywhere full of solutions. Our readers are faced with the task of implementing solutions in their businesses. What's your advice to them for cutting through all the noise to find the solutions that are right for their business?*

DOUG: This is exactly the problem we seek to solve. A major part of our company mission is to evaluate solutions in a vendor-neutral way, and then consult with developers to improve their solutions and reach broader markets. We are on a continuing journey to be the place where SMBs and accountants go to look for solutions.

DARREN: *QuickBooks Online has been around for several years now. Intuit seems to be investing heavily in making this solution better … how should a practitioner or consultant be positioning themselves and their clients with regard to QBO?*

DOUG: QBO is definitely one of the solutions accountants should learn about and in many cases recommend to their clients. The product is solid and quite mature relative to many of the competing online accounting products. QBO had a rough start and many accountants have been wary to take another look, but numerous improvements have been made and we guarantee many more are coming.

In addition to QBO, there are many other products that accountants must educate themselves on. In the past 20 years, QuickBooks has dominated the market, but the cloud completely changes the paradigm for how solutions are developed, marketed and adopted by users. There is no longer a retail channel that can be controlled by just a few vendors, and the world really is "flat" when it comes to developing, marketing and delivering solutions to small businesses. New products are gaining incredible momentum even though many users have never heard of them before finding them in a Google search. Even Microsoft is finding it very difficult to dominate like they used to because of cloud vendors like Google, FaceBook, Twitter, Pandora, Apple, SalesForce, Yahoo and Zoho. Each of these companies is having great success, and has been able to reach customers directly on the web, using cloud solutions to compete with the market-dominant desktop applications such as Microsoft Office.

So our advice to accountants is that in order to have a meaningful conversation with your client about the strengths and weaknesses of any particular solution, you need to arm yourself with knowledge about the alternatives. We recommend you focus less on your ability, and more on your agility. Because your clients will increasingly require you to work with them using a variety of products, from a variety of vendors.

DARREN: *There has been quite a bit of buzz around the industry talking about Xero Accounting. I know you spent quite a bit of time looking at this application; do you see this solution as a viable competitor to QuickBooks Online?*

DOUG: Xero is a fantastic product. It's a perfect example of why we say people need to look at the broad set of alternatives available to their clients. Xero is a young company that has developed an impressive global following in just a few years. It's the accounting equivalent to what we've seen with other Web-based successes like those mentioned above. We expect to see many more products like Xero, but our bet is that Xero will continue to do very well in the market.

DARREN: *There's a lot of discussion among many of us about how long desktop software will continue to be relevant. Some think just a few more years and others feel the relevance will be around for quite some time. What's your take on the longevity of desktop software?*

DOUG: We believe that desktop software will only last a few more years, maybe into 2020 or so. But to be honest, we thought it would be dead by 2003 when we saw Netsuite, Intacct and QBO all those years ago. To be sure, the trend is toward pure SaaS products like those as well as Xero, Wave Accounting, Zoho, Bill.com and others.

The technology that is extending the life of desktop software is the Windows software hosting business. Companies like Cloud 9 Real Time, Right Networks and others have done a great job of allowing people to continue using their desktop software in a cloud environment. If it weren't for them, we would predict a much quicker demise of desktop software.

DARREN: *The Sleeter Group's Accounting Solutions Conference is one of the most popular conferences each year. What are your goals for putting together the conferences? I guess what I'm asking is how do you develop your themes and from there how do you put the conference together?*

DOUG: Our goal is to arm accountants and consultants serving the small to medium sized business market with the skills and tools that drive success. Our annual conference is designed to help accounting professionals become indispensable assets to their clients by providing deep educational sessions, as well as one-stop shopping on the trade show floor with top solutions in the marketplace.

Each year, we survey our audience and our exhibitors, who consistently tell us that this is the most valuable conference they attend all year. The level of engagement between the audience, the speakers and the exhibitors is deeper than at other conferences. Most of our attendees come back every year to hear the latest trends in small business accounting and to meet the vendors who are innovating the next generation of small business accounting solutions.

We develop the conference theme and select our speakers and educational topics by focusing on the relevant topics facing small businesses today and in the near future. We consult with several thought leaders to help design the best mix of technology, business development and practice innovation topics.

REVIEW SECTIONS

CORE PRODUCT FUNCTIONS/ FEATURES

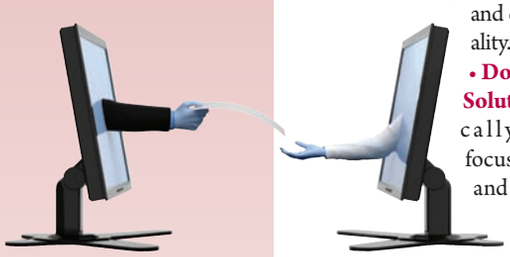
- Ease of Use/Navigation
- Print Driver
- Folder Creation
- Search/Index

INTEGRATION

- Email
- MS Office
- Tax & Accounting
- Scanning/OCR

ADVANCED FUNCTIONALITY

- Document Security
- Archival Capabilities
- Hosting Option
- Bonus Features



Brian F. Tankersley, CPA, CITP, CGMA Technology Editor

Brian is the Technology Editor for CPA Practice Advisor, *and is a frequent speaker at national continuing education courses on auditing and technology, as well as a consultant, coach and instructor for K2 Enterprises. He can be reached at brian@k2e.com.*

Document Storage: It's All About Efficiency

Document Storage Solutions are one of several types of applications which accounting professionals may use in a firm to store, organize, search and retrieve their digital documents. Document storage applications are most commonly compared with document management solutions (which we reviewed in the May 2013 issue). The primary distinction between document management and document storage solutions is the breadth and depth of functionality.

- **Document Storage Solutions** (DSS) typically have a more focused set of features and functions, which are often targeted to a specific niche such as direct integration with a particular tax prep package, integration with QuickBooks, or providing a secure file sharing solution. These applications are generally designed to index data in a single (or small number) of ways, and may have a fixed organizational hierarchy.
- **Document Management Systems** (DMS) are designed as comprehensive enterprise solutions for automating the capture, storage and dissemination of all electronic documents and files in an organization. DMS applications typically, but do not always, have the ability to connect with products from multiple vendors and multiple index fields so that a single document can be simultaneously filed more than one way.

Document storage solutions are less sophisticated than document management systems, and typically offer fewer options for how documents are stored, indexed and retrieved. These solutions may be offered as "best in breed" applications like Personable's Workflow DMS or SmartVault, or they could be part of a broader suite of integrated solutions like the other five applications included in this review.

Our 2013 review includes the following applications:

- **CyberCabinet** by AccountantsWorld
- **Drake Document Manager** by Drake Software
- **Lacerte DMS / ProSeries DMS** by Intuit
- **Practice Management 2013** by Office Tools Pro
- **Workflow DMS** by Personable
- **SmartVault**
- **FileCabinet CS** by Thomson Reuters

Some features to look for in document storage solutions include:

- **Ease of Use –** Is the application easy to work with, and can novice users perform meaningful work without extensive training?
- **Index and Search –** Is it possible for users to customize how documents are organized with folders and customizable index fields? Is search limited to file names in a single folder, or is it across all client folders? Are the contents of documents indexed and searchable?
- **Integration with Other Applications –** While all of the applications which are part of a suite had good integration with related offerings from the same publisher, many of these same applications were difficult to use with software from other publishers. Are there any toolbars or add-ins which make it easier to store, organize, search and retrieve documents, or must users go through a multi-step process every time they wish to view or edit a document? Are portal solutions available, and if so, how smooth is the integration between the document storage application and the portal service?
- **Document Security –** Are there user-level permissions for the application? How granular are the settings — do the settings govern the entire document repository, or are they set at the client, subfolder or document level?
- **Cloud Availability –** While not every firm is running at breakneck speed toward cloud-based applications, some applications do not have a web version, and the publisher does not support application hosting.
- **Bonus Features–** Are there other capabilities of this document storage solution which make it more interesting to some users? Some examples would include Workflow DMS works with Personable's ScanWriter software, which extracts accounting data from images of commonly received statements.
- CyberCabinet and SmartVault include integrated client portals as part of the portal offering.
- Practice Management 2013 is a single application which is used for a wide variety of tasks within a firm, including document storage, client relationship management, project management, practice management and calendar management.

The document storage needs of a 25 person organization with two offices which prepares tax returns, does client bookkeeping with QuickBooks, and processes payroll for hundreds of companies are radically different from the requirements of a solo practitioner who works from a virtual office with clients around the world on expatriate returns.

Just as these firms would likely evaluate the products differently than we have, firms should use the ratings as a guide to help them evaluate a wide range of solutions. We encourage you to see at least three or four demonstrations before you select a product, as the evaluation process will help you determine in your mind what you want and do not want in a document storage system.

Even if you know you are going to pick a particular product because of the suite of solutions you use, you will learn ideas on how to effectively implement this solution by seeing how other products handle common issues and challenges.

Drake Document Manager

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957517

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms who use the Drake Enterprises suite of applications for professional tax, accounting and bookkeeping firms.

STRENGTHS

- Simple to use and included with the budget-priced Drake suite.
- Good integration with Drake's add-on services for customers, including GruntWorx tax document organization tool and the SecureFilePro client portal service.
- The addition of the new Drake Hosted option gives users of this suite access to data over a remote desktop connection from anywhere.
- Users can specify password patterns (e.g., last name plus last five digits of SSN) which are applied when creating PDF versions of confidential documents like tax returns.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- There is not a web version of the application, although it can be accessed on a hosted basis through a pilot program called "Drake Hosted," which will be widely available for customers next tax season.
- No add-ins for Microsoft Office applications or document markup tools are included with the application, although users can purchase third-party markup tools like cPaperless' Tic, Tie and Calculate.
- The search tool will only search for clients by name, and will not search for words within the files stored in the application.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Drake Document Manager is bundled with the Drake Tax suite (tax prep, tax planner, write up and document manager) and is not available for separate purchase. An unlimited version of the 2012 Drake Tax Suite is priced at $1,095 when discounted (regularly $1,495), and other purchase options are described on the company's website.

800-890-9500
www.DrakeSoftware.com

Intuit Lacerte DMS and Intuit ProSeries DMS

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957514

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Small tax and accounting firms who use Intuit's Lacerte or ProSeries tax software and need to store documents associated with tax engagements.

STRENGTHS

- Good direct integration with the Lacerte and ProSeries applications, including Lacerte Tax Planner, Intuit Tax Import and other offerings.
- Documents can also be saved directly to DMS from Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook with the included DMS add-in.
- Users can create a standardized default folder structure for each client.
- Annotations can be made with this solution, and practitioners can choose to exclude the annotations when sharing documents with outside parties.
- Although Intuit does not currently have a traditional client portal offering (our preferred method for securely delivering confidential documents), documents can be faxed directly using a fax modem, or a password protected PDF can be emailed directly from DMS.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Users need to use the Lacerte or ProSeries tax software to use this application effectively.
- Hosting options for using this tool from the cloud are limited, and the product does not support integration with the cloud-based Intuit Tax Online tax prep solution.

SUMMARY & PRICING

ProSeries DMS is priced at $499 and Lacerte, $349, and includes the first year of technical support and product updates. The company charges 25% of the initial purchase price for support and maintenance in each subsequent year.

800-934-1040
accountants.intuit.com/proseries

Thomson Reuters File Cabinet CS

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957527

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

FileCabinet CS from Thomson Reuters fits best within tax, accounting and bookkeeping firms who use other components of the Thomson Reuters CS Professional Suite.

STRENGTHS

- Tight integration with other components of the Thomson Reuters CS Professional Suite of professional accounting applications, including automatic batch publishing of data into client folders.
- Integrated automatic backup of client data for most CS Professional Suite applications (except Accounting CS and Practice CS).
- Includes check-in and check out, which is normally a feature of a full document management system instead of a document storage system.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- There is not a web-based version of the application, although it can be hosted by Thomson Reuters on a Citrix remote desktop platform through Virtual Office CS.
- No "recycle bin" exists in this system. Once a document is deleted (accidentally or intentionally), there is not an easy way to retrieve it.
- Integrated PDF editing requires the use of Adobe Acrobat (Standard or Pro, version 9 or higher). Other PDF editors are not supported.

SUMMARY & PRICING

FileCabinet CS licensing starts at $1,500, and pricing for an eight-user firm would be approximately $2,500 for the first year and $670 for maintenance and support in subsequent years. Training, consulting and implementation services are priced separately.

Thomson Reuters offers a number of ways to obtain FileCabinet CS, including hosting through Virtual Office CS, a "pay as you go" arrangement similar to leasing or renting software through their SaaS offering, or a traditional up-front purchase. The publisher offers some discounts off of the full suggested retail through application bundles and volume licensing.

800-968-8900
CS.ThomsonReuters.com

AccountantsWorld CyberCabinet

2013 OVERALL RATING
4.25

BEST FIRM FIT

CyberCabinet fits best for tax, accounting, bookkeeping and payroll firms who use the other components of the AccountantsWorld PowerPractice System for client accounting, payroll, and practice management. As a cloud-based solution, the application also fits very well for "virtual" or multi-location practices.

STRENGTHS

- 100% cloud-based SaaS document storage application designed for bookkeeping, payroll and other public accounting services.
- CyberCabinet includes unlimited client portals at no additional charge, and integrates with the rest of the AccountantsWorld PowerPractice System.
- Supports all major browsers, including Internet Explorer, Chrome and Firefox.
- The free CyberDrop add-in on the user's local computer automatically uploades documents from the PC to CyberCabinet, and an Outlook add-in (CyberSend) permits staff members to automatically file emails in a client folder.
- Accountants can customize individual user access by folder (for clients) and by client (for staff).

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- The PowerPractice online suite does not offer an income tax preparation application, and CyberCabinet does not have any direct integrations with tax software applications.

SUMMARY & PRICING

CyberCabinet is priced at $59 per month, or $595 per year for Base Storage up to 5Gb for an unlimited number of users. Additional storage is available in 1Gb increments for $19.95 per year.

888.999.1366
www.AccountantsWorld.com/CyberCabinet

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957534

AccountantsWorld®
Do More. Do Better.™

Personable Document Management Suite

2013 OVERALL RATING
4.5

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms who work with the desktop version of QuickBooks, as well as those who would like to set up workflow processes within the firm as well as with clients.

STRENGTHS

- Offers integration with Outlook, Windows Explorer and QuickBooks.
- ScanWriter OCR capabilities have a great deal of promise; however, document type templates must be downloaded from Personable and selected when scanning for effective classification of forms and statements.
- Includes tools for annotating and editing PDF files without users having to purchase Adobe Acrobat.
- Documents can be scanned to a "TurboFolder" (inbox) where they can be accessed from the SourceLink toolbar within QuickBooks or from within Workflow DMS.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- The initial configuration of SourceLink workflow and ScanWriter OCR may require some effort and assistance.
- User level security and archival capabilities are very limited.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Personable's Workflow DMS is an interesting tool which offers good integration with QuickBooks Pro or Premier, and Enterprise and when used in connection with SourceLink and ScanWriter, provide an agile tool set for small and midsized businesses and their accounting firms.

A single user license Workflow DMS is $289, and the five-user server version of Workflow DMS is $889. Purchase and maintenance of ScanWriter and SourceLink is priced separately. A hosted version of the application is available, and is housed on dedicated servers in a Southern California commercial data center, and pricing for this service is available upon request.

800-688-4281
www.personable.com

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957513

personable.com℠
your desktop on the internet.℠

Office Tools Professional Practice Management 2013

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957528

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms with 100 or fewer users who want to combine practice management, document management, workflow management and CRM capabilities into a single, integrated application. This application is particularly useful for sharing client data within client service teams so every team member has all of the latest information on client projects.

STRENGTHS

- Product is one of the few applications which combines practice management, document management, time and billing, project management, in-firm instant messaging and customer relationship management into a single, integrated application.
- Very effective tool for organizations with the discipline to implement customer relationship management and automated workflow tracking.
- Includes tools for document creation and follow up on review notes. An Adobe Acrobat plug-in allows Acrobat Standard users to markup and save files directly into Practice Management 2013.
- The product's Outlook Sync will automatically move inbound and outbound client emails to the proper folders based on the email address of the sender. And now offers synchronization with Microsoft Outlook 2007 and 2010.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- May not be the best fit for those who need only document storage, and do not wish to use the other integrated features of the product.
- The application requires users to have a relatively new computer due to the SQL backend and advanced nature of the application.

SUMMARY & PRICING

The application is priced at $600 for a single user and $1,600 for a five user package. Discounts are available for tax-season only users and other limited use profiles. Annual maintenance and support is priced at 80% of the initial purchase price, and includes all updates and support. Hosted portals, Training and Consultation along with a number of other add-ins which facilitate data exchange with other applications are available, and are priced separately.

661-794-2220
www.officetoolspro.com

SmartVault

2013 OVERALL RATING
4.75

BEST FIRM FIT

Accounting professionals and their clients whose practices involve working with the desktop version of QuickBooks or QuickBooks Online, and would like to view images of documents linked to transactions.

STRENGTHS

- Secure and stable (99.9% uptime) document storage and file sharing which scales well to small and mid sized businesses.
- Many file types (PDF, Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook email) can be viewed from within a web browser without needing to download and open the file.
- Strong integration as a document storage system portal with QuickBooks, Results CRM, MethodCRM, SpringAhead, Tallie, ACCTivate!, Digieon and XpandedReports. Supported by many top commercial QuickBooks hosting companies.
- The product has apps available for iOS and Android, and features add-ins for Outlook, QuickBooks and QuickBooks Online. SmartVault is a supported application for four of the largest QuickBooks desktop commercial hosting companies.
- SmartVault can also be mapped as a drive to a Windows computer, and some users report that they maintain an off-line copy of their archive using third-party tools like GoodSync.

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957524

SmartVault™

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- SmartVault maintains copies of your documents both in its live data center and in off-site archives. Full backups of documents and metadata are made daily, so in the event of a failure, a secondary server is immediately brought online. Full backups are taken off-site weekly, so in the event of a catastrophic failure (qualified as an act of terror or nuclear event), at our data center, CyrusOne, users could potentially have a loss of a few days of data, with expected total downtime not to exceed 24 hours.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Plans start at $19 per month ($205 per year) for a single user with three QuickBooks Companies and 5 GB of storage. Add-on services are $10 per month for each additional user, $5 per month for each 5GB of additional storage, and $9 per month for each additional QuickBooks Company. Some features require the Team or Professional plans, which are detailed at www.smartvault.com/pricing.

866-674-6785
www.SmartVault.com

SPONSORED CONTENT

FIRST-HAND

An Easier Way to Share Documents with Clients and Backup QuickBooks

Taking an accounting firm paperless is one thing, getting clients to do it is another. As the owner of Inform Restaurant Accounting (www.inform-accounting.com), an Oregon firm that specializes in helping restaurants, Jan Walker knows this first-hand. Although she was able to get her staff of six to buy in to moving to digital storage and collaboration within the firm, but the real challenge was ahead. How to get clients to understand the potential benefits?

Jan had tried one solution in 2012, but was unfortunately plagued with poor customer service, installation problems and weak tech support from a suite of cloud solutions offered through her copier leasing company. Jan stated, "I was disappointed and eager to find a service that I felt we could really get behind. I knew the technologies were out there, but you still have to pick a starting point based upon the reality of where you are with your current equipment and work flow systems."

The good news is she learned about SmartVault from information found on The Sleeter Group's website. SmartVault provides accounting firms and businesses with an easy-to-use paperless system that integrates directly with QuickBooks, allowing users to scan and attach document to any QuickBooks transaction: invoices, receipts, tax documents, bank statements and other source items are attached in QuickBooks and accessible in the cloud as PDF files. Clients can be set up as Guest Users, allowing unlimited access to view documents, or can have a more interactive experience through a User License. SmartVault is available for use with QuickBooks desktop software and QuickBooks online.

The web-based program also backs up QuickBooks company data files, an easy way for clients to restore QuickBooks. Jan and her staff started using SmartVault in 2012 and she says they immediately experienced efficiencies in workflow. Soon after, she started educating her clients on how it could help them, too.

For her clients who also use SmartVault, it helps reduce the time and effort needed to exchange documents and QuickBooks files by mail, email, fax or hand delivery. But Jan wasn't only looking to increase her firm's productivity. She wanted to see a return on her investment and has developed SmartVault services into a revenue-generating value-added service she offers clients.

"Not every restaurant is set up to take advantage of this technology" she said, "But over time, we've approached clients one by one to help them understand the benefits and see how easy it is to use" The web-based system also allows her remote workers, to access client documents easily from their home office computers or iPads with apps that make the work easy from anywhere.

"We are committed to using SmartVault in my business. It has given me the efficiencies I had hoped for and my staff continues to find new ways to improve our internal workflow. SmartVault's knowledgeable sale and tech support staff, plus resource and training tools allowed us to get going with this program faster than expected. Just as important to me is knowing that I have an added value service to offer new clients and a way to continue helping existing ones."

READ THE 2013 REVIEW OF SMARTVAULT

CPA Practice Advisor

By Randy Johnston

Document Management — *Should You Think Again?*

Document management seems to be a recurring theme for my practice this year. It may be because there are so many improvements in products. It could be that document management can be resource intensive to implement and that it raises so many procedural and cultural issues. It could be that the promise of document management has not paid off for you and your firm. You might be one of the lucky ones who are in the position that you couldn't live without your paperless system. Without exception this year, every consulting engagement I've had in either CPA firms or industry businesses has included a discussion of document management. Why?

There are relatively few accounting firm centric document management products. We maintain a list of reputable paperless products at www.totallypaperless.com/solutions, and this publication has reviews of many of these offerings in this issue. The bigger question is what are you trying to accomplish with document management? Why use a document management system, workflow, portals or 1040 Workpaper software? We've seen happy and unhappy users on every system. Why?

Firms frequently try to use the wrong tools in the wrong way to accomplish a job. We are amazed to see firms using engagement managers for long- term document storage or to revert to paper methodologies because the belief is that the process is faster when the real issue is lack of training or a poor process. We've seen document management systems used as substitutes for 1040 Workpaper and Engagement Trial Balance management. We are also amazed when the right tools are in place and not used by team members. Why?

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.

Why, Why, Why? Should We Change?

New document management implementation projects are being considered again. The discussions include these key areas:

- Local storage, backup, networking and transfer capacities needed to support document management as well as the cloud options.
- Integration of workflow.
- Integration of portals.
- Improved economic conditions are making employees harder to find again, and document management is seen as a productivity tool.
- There are ample capital budgets to make expenditures.
- Some of the new paperless technology advances are attractive compared to the technologies in use. We have seen improvements in most of the document management products, including some very notable advances in products like Doc-It, SmartVault and eFileCabinet, and even products with larger installed bases such as CCH Document are seeing usability changes.
- Firms that have been using Do-It-Yourself (DIY) paperless techniques are starting to have record retention issues.
- Management teams are looking at productivity gains from software and systems improvements. Management teams are also looking at the lack of productivity that was expected from paperless technology. Teams are reviewing firm processes and questioning their approach. This review and questioning process is a good thing that should be done at least annually.

In most cases, management teams are discovering that improper implementation, inconsistent processes, lack of compliance among partners or a bad product fit are among the root causes. It has been interesting to watch firms try to find the most effective ways to accomplish the business goal at hand. Because of this, we have seen firms jump in and out of the paperless technologies including document management, engagement man-

agers, 1040 Workpaper products, time and expense management, and accounts payable automation.

So, What Should You Do About This?

Think. Think about your firm strategy. Think about your process. Think about your client experience. Think about the best way to do the work. Think about alternatives. Think about how to implement, train and make your vision a reality. Ask for help from team members, peers, associations, software providers or consultants. You and your team members can't know everything about all software, processes and best practices, but you can certainly learn them. Filter the advice with your vision, needs and a practical, simple eye on how to do the job in the easiest way possible.

If you are having issues in a particular area, consider the best, simplest and most consistent way to accomplish the task. Look for shortcuts that don't compromise quality. Look again and again. Look in other places, sources and industries to find innovative ways to solve the problem. Look for contracted services that can show you a better way. CCH, Thomson and Intuit all report that they have had to create services to show firms a better way, because they were not discovering the methods on their own. Using knowledge from associations who have been through the process is another great resource. However, as most of us have learned, not every peer or vendor resource has every answer and things are not always as they seem. Even if things aren't perfect from your resources, take the best ideas that work for you, and apply them.

So, you are ready to look at document management again and you want to know where to go. Think about document management options holistically. Consider the whole problem and then tackle a small part at a time. Where should you look? This list is not intended to be comprehensive, but merely reflective of products that are in the market today. Publishers like AccountantsWorld with CyberCabinet and Web Site Relief, CCH with Document, Portal, Workstream and Scan, Thomson with GoFileRoom, FirmFlow, FileCabinet CS, and NetClient CS, Doc.It, Office Tools Professional, ShareFile, SmartVault and XCM all have offerings that solve document management issues.

> THINK ABOUT DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT OPTIONS HOLISTICALLY. CONSIDER THE WHOLE PROBLEM AND THEN TACKLE A SMALL PART AT A TIME.

Software and Processes Are Not Enough!

The number one deficiency we see in document management implementations is lack of training. The second most common issue is lack of processes. A third fatal flaw is lack of compliance. A fourth error is expectations that are unrealistic.

Most projects seem to take more time and money than we think they should. Document management is certainly prone to this because a proper implementation is not easy. However, a document management system that is running correctly is priceless. Is that how you feel about your paperless efforts? If not, take action to make the improvements needed! ●

By René Lacerte

Blowing in the Wind

Do you feel the winds of change blowing? Do you feel the impact of the cloud on your life? If not yet, you soon will. When I founded my first company PayCycle, I thought the web was all about anytime, anywhere access.

We were the first payroll solution on the web and as a result we built a great business. But I was so wrong. The web, at its core, is all about collaboration.

Just look around your personal life. How many friends do you have today that you never knew you had? Can you keep up with all the LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Foursquare activity? Probably not, and that is because we are social animals that like to share. We love to share what we ate for dinner, where we are going on vacation, who we know and what we are thinking about. But all of that is about us collaborating as individuals in the consumer market. What about the business arena?

I believe businesses follow consumers and that as you get comfortable with all the collaboration at home, you and your clients will look for Web-based tools to collaborate around your business, too. The primary reason is that it makes your business life more efficient. It provides you information you didn't have to find to make decisions and it provides it much faster than you could ever get in the manual world.

You only have to look to the Middle East to see the power of the web. The democratization of information has empowered citizens and toppled governments. Sharing your voice, collaborating with people that share your views, and learning from others that don't makes us all more informed. So while we are all adapting to the power of this collaboration in different degrees, you cannot deny that it is changing the political landscape all over the world.

And it will change the way you do business. I conduct business on the cloud every day and know that it has changed everything. Your smart phone is not that interesting without the underlying architecture of collaboration that the cloud enables. Staying connected to friends, family and co-workers is a fundamental form of collaboration. And yet more is coming.

Tech companies like Bill.com are racing to create the solutions you need to collaborate and transact with clients, employees, vendors, customers and more. Most of my career has been focused in payments and finance efficiency, and I have never seen more start-ups in both categories than I do today.

FORGET SENDING PAPER BILLS: ONLINE INVOICING IS TAKING THE PAIN AND INEFFICIENCY OUT OF BILLING.

One example that comes to mind is document management. Two of the highest valued companies in Silicon Valley these days are DropBox and Box.com. Both are probably valued in the billions and are growing extremely fast. And yet, there are many more in the document management space: Memeo, Simplicity and Sugarsync to name a few.

In the finance/payments space, there is of course Square, probably the highest valued start-up in the Bay Area but again there are a host of others. Some are focused on tablet registers, others on expense management, some on accounting and services like accounts payable automation and others on lending to small businesses.

The common theme with all of these start-ups is collaboration. Sharing documents and money is at the core of any business relationship. It is what makes up the transaction. The accounting systems of old have helped us track the transaction but they have failed to complete the entire process. The web is changing that. Whether it is an expense report or a contract or an invoice or a loan application, content is required to transact. And that is where the web and the power of the cloud is at your disposal. Forget sending paper bills; online invoicing is taking the pain and inefficiency out of billing.

As someone who has been starting companies for over 20 years, I see the pace of innovation moving faster than ever before. And while that means adapting and learning have to become core competencies for each of us, it also means solutions that will rock your world are coming your way.

So put on Bob Dylan's "Blowin in the Wind" and start your own revolution with your firm and your clients. You'll be happy you did.

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

Jack In The Box

Jack in the Box Franchise Owner automates entry of cash & sales receipts into QuickBooks® for multiple restaurants, in seconds! To make his business more efficient, the franchise owner relies on ScanWriter to do the work.

"The powerful features in ScanWriter provide time and cost savings for... family business."

- Franchise Owner,
Jack In The Box

1. Franchisee Cash & Sales Statement

ScanWriter reads revenue, restaurant # and more.

Week Ending 10/10/10 CASH & SALES Page 1 Of 2
Restaurant: 5555 Manager's Signature _____

DAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	TOTAL
DATE	10/04/10	10/05/10	10/06/10	10/07/10	10/08/10	10/09/10	10/10/10	
Downtime Sales								
Pos Gross Sales	5298.49	5031.08	5069.31	5197.98	5543.21	5110.69	4013.97	35264.73
Overrings								
Refunds	8.84	9.92	3.99	6.62	37.13	3.25	1.88	73.63
Coupons	13.72	26.46	78.06	56.42	95.97	53.89	26.05	350.57
Employee Meals	5.84	12.71	15.50	23.11	18.91	18.65	7.09	101.81
Manager Meals			5.88					5.88
Percent Discount								
Senior Discount		0.50			0.50	0.50		1.50
ADJUSTED GROSS	5270.09	4981.49	4965.88	5111.83	5390.70	5034.40	3976.95	34731.34

2. Import into QuickBooks® to create Sales Receipts

Sales Receipt

DATE 10/10/2010
SALE NO. 9999
SOLD TO Resturant 5555
CHECK NO.
PAYMENT METHOD

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	QTY	RATE	CLASS	AMOUNT
POS Gross Sale			35,264.73		35,264.73
Cash			0.00		0.00
Overrings			0.00		0.00
Refunds			-71.53		-71.53
Coupons			-350.57		-350.57
Employee Meals			-101.01		-101.01
Manager Meals			-5.00		-5.00
Senior Discount			-1.50		-1.50
Percent Discount			-3.78		-3.78

34,731.34

Customer Profile

Jack in the Box® franchise owner, Chris and his family, pioneer the restaurant industry. For over 20 years, Chris and his family have several Jack in the Box® chains and continually expand their presence.

Business Challenge

While managing multiple Jack in the Box® locations, Chris found himself overwhelmed with weekly cash and sales receipts. He needed a way to quickly and accurately enter receipts in order to oversee the most recent transactions. Chris also needed a solution to manage his cash flow with efficiency to allow him time to focus on other crucial business aspects.

Solution Overview

Using ScanWriter, receipts are automatically entered, allowing the franchisee to:

- See itemized revenue for each week
- Organize by restaurant #

It transfers data from cash and sales receipts into QuickBooks®, allowing the company to spend seconds instead of hours to enter their weekly and monthly transactions. Using the speed and accuracy of ScanWriter, Chris can now oversee the up-to-date cash and sales receipts that are imported into QuickBooks®.

Additionally, he can immediately reference any transaction using the paperless document management solution SourceLink.

Chris recommends SourceLink to members in the same industry as well as the general public,

"...With SourceLink, everything is organized. The cost saving is huge!"

Contact Us Today at

www.personable.com • 800.688.4281

By Brian Tankersley, CPA.CITP, Technology Editor

Want Better Service from Technology Vendors? Work With Your Account Rep

Over my 20-year career, I've spent an eternity in queues for tech support from a variety of companies. As I write this, I've been on hold for 80 minutes during business hours on a weekday to speak to a human about an issue. Dealing with hardware and software support is a hidden cost of doing business in every organization.

Most organizations have an outside person who will take care of these issues for you — the sales representative. The account rep is the person who is supposed to make these problems go away for you. If you are trying to save $10-$20 per month on internet service, mobile telephones, and other services by not using the concierge services routinely provided to business customers, you stand to lose thousands of dollars in time dealing with problems yourself.

An example of a great account rep is my Verizon account rep, Sean. Sean is a commissioned salesperson, and since I spend a few hundred dollars a month on wireless, he takes care of me. When my phone breaks, he gets me a new one without me having to spend an hour on hold. If I'm heading out of town and have a damaged phone, he gets me a "loaner" phone I can use until mine is fixed and he sets it up for me.

Sean gets paid to make my experience with Verizon Wireless better, and has the authority to "bend" the rules to fix my problems. I can reach him 24x7x365, and he frequently fixes things for me on the weekend between two business trips – outside of normal business hours. He does a semi-annual wireless review for my small business account (five lines), and proactively finds ways for me to get more value from the relationship. He finds ways to be a trusted business partner to my organization.

There are rules to my business relationship with Sean which must be followed to maintain this relationship. Sean will deliver the phone and personally train users, but he will not invest this kind of time with a customer who purchases a phone or service from another outlet. Sean charges me a fair price for his services. I don't complain about price, and he doesn't take advantage of me. This means that I sometimes try services I don't think I need, but his good judgment and excellent listening skills means that almost universally I can't live without the new service three months later. Because Sean conducts business in accordance with the Golden Rule, I never feel like I'm getting ripped off.

A contrast to Sean is one of my internet service providers, which is a "home grade" connection. This service provider is truly a nightmare. The connection becomes spotty when it rains or snows, and the whole customer experience is much more unpleasant than any dental work I've personally experienced. Their phone menu system always results in at least 30 minutes on hold, and usually, an inexperienced call center employee.

I saved $20 per month with this ISP by having a home internet connection instead of a business account. Home users only have support available 12 hours a day, six days a week, vs. 24x7x365 and priority service for business accounts. A few years ago, we had a storm which caused a loss of service on a Sunday night right before March 15th.

I called the provider as soon as their offices opened on Monday morning, and they politely informed me that the first time they could look into the problem was Friday afternoon. (Side note — they didn't make it to my home during the half day window five days later, and we had to reschedule for the next week). I lost more billable time working around my lack of service that week than I could have hoped to save by having the "cheaper" service for a decade. A business account and the service from a dedicated rep could have saved me hours and hours of dealing with bureaucracy.

If you have a mission-critical service like internet service, wireless communications, or telephones in a professional environment, you should get the best service level you can afford. Service outages in these critical areas are inexcusable, and put you and your firm effectively "out of business." The small amounts you pay for higher quality service help you avoid these problems. You and your employees can more easily focus on solving client problems instead of wasting time fixing technology problems.

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 emailed to brian.tankersley@CPAPracticeAdvisor.com.

Innovate or Perish:

2013 Innovation Awards Go Mobile and SaaS

s anybody even developing new desktop software anymore?"

That question came from Executive Editor Darren Root, CPA.CITP, as he was preparing to present *CPA Practice Advisor's* 10th annual Tax and Accounting Technology Innovation Awards during a reception in June at the California Accounting and Business Show in Los Angeles.

Over the past decade that the awards have been presented, there has been a very noticeable movement by professionals, small businesses and consumers alike toward increased use of mobile and web-based technologies. That evolution definitely isn't slowing down, as all five of the Innovation Award winners and all five of the Award Finalists this year were presented to companies for online programs or mobile apps.

The 2013 winners are: CCH Axcess; the Doc.It Suite; the Net-Client CS mobile app from Thomson Reuters; Intuit's QuickBooks Online for iPad; and SmartVault for QuickBooks Online.

The five finalists for the 2013 Innovation Awards were also recognized: ADP Smart Compliance; AICPA Navigator from CPA2Biz; the BNA Income Tax Planner Web system; CertCapture from Avalara; and Confirmation.com.

The Innovation Awards were first presented in 2004, and serve to honor new or recently enhanced technologies that benefit tax and accounting professionals and their clients through improved workflow, increased accessibility, enhanced collaboration or other means.

"Technology has been a driving force behind the significant advances that professionals have made in productivity, and enhancements in workflow efficiency have been at the core of this evolution," said Root, who is also the managing partner of the Bloomington, Indiana, accounting firm Root & Associates, LLC, and is CEO of RootWorks, LLC.

"With increasingly mobile lifestyles, it is not surprising that this year's award winners and finalists are all cloud-based, since professionals have come to expect full access to their programs and data anywhere, at any time, and from whatever device they prefer to use."

Award winners are selected by *CPA Practice Advisor's* editorial board and awards committee, which include thought leaders and professionals from across the country. The publication, along with its digital content and interactive media, is the leading independent source of practice management resources and technology information for tax and accounting professionals in public practice.

2013 INNOVATION AWARD WINNERS

Wolters Kluwer CCH

CCH AXCESS

The latest innovation from CCH is Axcess, a completely cloud-based system that includes modules for all areas of professional accounting firm services and internal management and that, for the first time, offers a singular database across every aspect of the system. The system includes modules for tax compliance, document management, client portals, practice management and workflow optimization.

"CCH is honored to win the prestigious *CPA Practice Advisor* Innovation Award," said Teresa

Mackintosh, executive vice president and general manager of Tax for Thomson Reuters. "It is exciting to celebrate both 100 years serving the Profession of Public Accounting and still be driving truly revolutionary innovation in helping our firms grow, manage and protect their business."

DOC.IT SUITE

Doc.It Suite was awarded a 2013 Innovation Award based on numerous innovations during the last 18 months, evidence of the company's continuing research and development efforts to help accounting firms standardize and ease document management with workflow. These include the addition of new workflow tools, web portals, cloud-based technologies, PDF editor, publishing functions, dashboards, search functions, reporting and the new Binder Explorer utility.

"Everyone at Doc.It is excited and honored to win the *CPA Practice Advisor* Innovation Award," said Brock Philp, president and CEO of Doc.It. "We fully recognize we are amongst tough competition. A key part of Doc.It's culture, and what makes our company excel in this industry, is our customer-driven product management philosophy which results in constant and interactive discussions with our customers on a daily basis."

THOMSON REUTERS

NETCLIENT CS MOBILE APP

The first mobile app of its kind, NetClient CS mobile lets accounting firms give their clients mobile access to the services and content that the accounting firm performs for them. Clients can access tax returns, financial statements and other documents that have been pushed to NetClient CS by the firm, as well as online accounting and payroll services and more. The firm-branded app makes real-time collaboration between accountants and their clients easier, more automated and more convenient.

Kasey Bayne of Kashoo explains the benefits of cloud accounting for small businesses and accounting professionals.

Jon Baron, president of Thomson Reuters Tax & Accounting, and Teresa Mackintosh, Executive Vice President of CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business.

"The NetClient CS mobile app opens a whole new set of possibilities for how accounting firms connect and collaborate with their clients," said Scott Fleszar, vice president, strategic marketing, for the Tax & Accounting business of Thomson Reuters. "From viewing and sharing finished reports, statements and tax returns, receiving messages and news from the firm to payroll time entry and check stubs, our new mobile app makes it much easier for firms to serve their clients and solve problems from anywhere."

INTUIT QUICKBOOKS ONLINE FOR IPAD

The Intuit QuickBooks Online for iPad app helps small businesses work more productively, wherever they are by bringing the most widely used small business cloud accounting solution to one of the world's most popular tablet. It includes useful on-the-go business task functions in an easy-to-use, friendly native iPad app that leverages device features, including integration with the camera, contacts, notifications and location services, to save small businesses time on key business tasks.

"When the iPad came out, we saw it as an incredible opportunity to solve our customers' needs even better," said Will Lynes, senior product manager, QBO for iPad. "Portable and simple, we envisioned an accounting product that would let more small business owners than ever before be successful with QuickBooks. We aimed to eliminate the learning curve and make a product so easy and beautiful that small business owners would want to use it."

SMARTVAULT

SmartVault received one of this year's awards by taking its patented Toolbar technology for QuickBooks and extending support to QuickBooks Online. For the first time, users of QuickBooks Online can now attach and view source documents (such as receipts, bills and invoices) directly from within QuickBooks Online. SmartVault is the first to deliver this type of "attach and view" document management functionality integrated seamlessly into the QuickBooks Online interface. Currently, QuickBooks Online does not offer this functionality to its users.

"Our vision at SmartVault has always been to find ways to inject technology directly into applications that businesses already use in order to create more efficient workflows and ultimately increase the value of that application to the customer," stated SmartVault founder and CEO, Eric Pulaski. "It's incredibly exciting for us to see this vision become a reality for thousands of customers and an honor to be recognized by *CPA Practice Advisor* for our efforts. It's a huge win for the entire SmartVault team."

BQE's Shafat Qazi and Bob Wolffe, center, at the 2013 Innovation Awards reception.

ADP SMART COMPLIANCE

This unified, cloud-based platform helps accounting departments better manage tax, employment and payroll compliance. ADP SmartCompliance helps mitigate company risk, improve efficiency and drive growth. It provides

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

SPONSORED CONTENT

CPA Practice Advisor TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD Spotlight

Bloomberg BNA

BNA Income Tax Planner Web

BNA Income Tax™ Planner Web is a web-based tax planning system that builds on the solid foundation of Bloomberg BNA's highly respected Income Tax Planner. Long recognized as the leader in tax planning, the desktop version offers top-rated technical support, absolute accuracy, and clear analyses. Bloomberg BNA's software products are used by more than 70,000 customers, including the IRS, because they trust its strong tax, regulatory, and compliance expertise.

A Great Product, Now Web-Accessible

In addition to the strong capabilities of its desktop tax planning software, BNA Income Tax Planner Web has all the mobility and ease that come with the web. The system's web functionality and intuitive design allow for impressive data accessibility, so users can find client information quickly and easily. "The SaaS version of our tax planning software enables tax and accounting professionals to provide seamless services and access the latest BNA Income Tax Planner version anywhere, anytime, from most browser-enabled computers," says Dean Sonderegger, executive director of product management for software at Bloomberg BNA. "As many accounting and tax professionals have begun taking advantage of the benefits offered by cloud computing, we wanted to ensure our clients would have the right solution for their individual business needs."

Having a powerful web-based system means users can track income tax planning activities, documents, and a history of client communications, leading to informed and targeted client interaction. The system also tracks changes to client data and plans, which users can view with on-demand history queries of user activity, offering a wealth of information, as well as an additional layer of security.

BNA Income Tax Planner Web's document storage and management capabilities allow users to both store and link to client documents in a variety of formats to ease management of clients' tax planning cases. It also offers the same powerful in-depth analysis and consistently accurate projections and calculations that the desktop version has long been identified with, letting users set up multiple, side-by-side scenarios for federal, all resident states, NYC, DC, and over 30 nonresident states.

BNA Income Tax Planner Web has lived up to the high standard set by the BNA Income Tax Planner, with an "Accounting Today 2012 Top New Product Award" for Tax Planning, recognition as a "Top 100 Product" by Accounting Today, selection as a finalist in the CPA Practice Advisor 2013 Tax & Accounting Technology Innovation Awards, and a five-star rating from *The CPA Practice Advisor*.

A Commitment to Security

BNA Income Tax Planner Web also has the necessary strong commitment and infrastructure to ensure data security. All of its client and user data is hosted in audited SSAE 16 facilities, the industry's security standard for the strongest protection. In addition, its industry-leading security is supported by ISO 27001 certified facilities, SSL v.3.0 encryption, and independently tested and validated controls on data and application access.

This focus on security is apparent in every facet of its operations, particularly access management, where privileges are granted at different levels — edit, read-only, blocked — and can be matched to the role of the user. The ability to track users and groups, including access rights to client plans and data, as well as the ability to monitor system usage with history reports, reduces risk and ensures administrative control. And of course, if they choose to, administrators can also export all client data from the web-based system for backup on their internal systems.

Time-Saving, Cost-Saving

Since there is no software to install or maintain and no additional investment in server hardware, a firm's capital and operational costs are lowered. The combination of BNA Tax Planner Web's powerful search, document storage, and file-sharing capabilities increases productivity, saves time, and simplifies client management. And there's no longer the need to worry that different employees within a firm are working on different versions of software.

BNA Tax Planner Web means tax professionals can be more mobile, and more up to date throughout the firm, with the confidence that comes from knowing they have great security, regular data backups, and the latest version of the program because of automatic updates. BNA Tax Planner Web is a top tax planning tool that's accurate, exact, and always in compliance; it helps tax professionals organize, track, and analyze their data, then uses the web to ensure that data is searchable, available, and secure.

For more information about this product:

Bloomberg BNA

Visit:
www.bnasoftware.com

Contact:
800-424-2938

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CPA Practice Advisor TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD Spotlight

CCH Axcess™

At the center of a well-run firm is the technology that fuels **growth**, supports effective firm **management** and **protects** the firm's reputation. That solution is CCH Axcess™ — the profession's first modular, cloud-based tax preparation, compliance and firm management solution that can be tailored to meet the needs of any firm. From a single solution, firms can:

- Accelerate **Growth** — providing tech-savvy services that build positive client relationships and lead to higher-billable work and new business.
- Enhance Firm **Management** — simplifying data management, standardizing workflow processes and elevating efficiency.
- **Protect** their Reputation — remaining compliant with regulations and offering heightened security to safeguard sensitive client data.

CCH Axcess is the only complete tax practice application built on a single platform that leverages a single integrated database. The centralized database allows users to:

- View, manage and access all functions through a common dashboard
- Set up permissions through the administration module
- Access document management and firm management tools
- Improve collaboration with clients

CCH Axcess includes:

CCH Axcess™ Tax: the heart of a streamlined, digital tax process — supporting ease of tax preparation with thousands of automatically calculating forms and schedules for federal, state, county and city entities; robust diagnostics; and a state-of-the-art electronic filing system.

CCH Axcess™ Document: a feature-rich document management solution to electronically organize and store client source documents and achieve a true digital work environment.

CCH Axcess™ Portal: a secure online space where clients have 24/7 access to financial documents and the ability to collaborate with firm staff in real-time, at any time.

CCH Axcess™ Practice: a full-scale practice management system to monitor staff time, produce invoices and handle all aspects of managing firm operations.

CCH Axcess™ Workstream: a full-featured project management solution designed to streamline administrative tasks, such as tracking due dates, identifying key milestones and monitoring project status.

Much more than an integrated product suite, CCH Axcess represents the profession's most powerful solution to grow, manage and protect firms.

Visit **CCHGroup.com/Axcess** to find your power.

For more information about this product:

Wolters Kluwer
CCH

Website:
CCHGroup.com/Axcess

Phone:
800-739-9998

2013 INNOVATION AWARD FINALISTS

cross-service dashboards to quickly assess the status of multiple business areas and take immediate action

AICPA NAVIGATOR FROM CPA2BIZ

CPA Navigator is a state-of-the-art learning management system designed to advance the professional development of CPAs. It automates tracking of compliance and competency requirements and helps professionals and firm administrators spot gaps in training and map out career development paths. The cloud-based system's content can be accessed anytime, whenever it is most convenient for them, and firms can also schedule on-site training. Administrators can set up alerts, assign requirement courses and suggest appropriate programs to build specific skills for staff members and groom promising employees for leadership posts.

BNA INCOME TAX PLANNER WEB

BNA's desktop system has long been recognized as one of the premier tax planning systems. In April 2012, Bloomberg BNA launched a SaaS edition, BNA Income Tax Planner Web, that made the solution even more powerful. BNA Income Tax Planner Web allows professionals to efficiently show clients their tax situation with in-depth analysis and comparison of multiple, side-by-side scenarios for federal, all resident states, NYC, D.C., and over 30 nonresident states. Always in compliance, it provides anytime, anywhere web access to the most accurate, up-to-date calculations and analysis.

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SPONSORED CONTENT

CPA Practice Advisor TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD Spotlight

Doc.It® Suite

A Full Suite of Document Management Products

Doc.It® Suite is a powerful scalable full suite of document management products for accounting firms with 2 to 300 users. Accounting firms use Doc.It® Suite to maximize efficiency and effectiveness as accounting professionals gather, process, store, and deliver documents.

Doc.It® Suite Products include:

MAIN DASHBOARD: With Doc.It®'s Main Dashboard, everyone has access to work tasks, Doc.It® Suite client Work Binders, documents, the Doc.It ® Archive, and a complete set of fully-integrated tools.

INBOX: The Doc.It® Inbox is your temporary storage location and routing utility for all printed or scanned PDFs. Documents can be sent to co-workers, Doc.It® Work Binders, other binder systems (i.e. fx Engagement, CaseWare) or to the secure Doc.It® Archive.

SCAN AND ORGANIZE: Doc.It® Suite includes scan and OCR support for all types of scanners with built-in features to ensure the accuracy of scanned documents. As documents are gathered, Doc.It ®'s Advanced Forms Recognition technology identifies, names, and organizes an unlimited number of document types.

POLICY MANAGER: Doc.It®'s Policy Manager ensures uniformity across the firm by applying the firm's file naming and location policy to all documents as they are gathered and then prepared for storage.

WORK BINDERS: The Doc.It® Suite Work Binders organize documents of all types and formats. Documents are gathered and launched from within the Doc.It ® Work Binder in their native file format, providing staff and partners immediate access to all of the documents needed to complete work tasks.

WORKFLOW: Doc.It® has standardized document workflow by providing firms with a systematic process to follow that is developed based on industry best practices, digital document creation standards, and regulatory compliance requirements.

CLOUD + MOBILE: Doc.It® is cloud enabled, allowing firms to access to documents from anywhere in the world. Users can access Doc.It® Suite via Android or iPad tablet, delivering a truly portable experience.

PDF EDITOR: Doc.It® Suite incorporates a full-featured PDF Editor including bookmarking, annotating, editing and mark-up of documents. Additionally, when a document is in high demand, it can be viewed by multiple users while protected from conflicting changes.

DOCUMENT ARCHIVE: The Doc.It ® Archive is where firms store fully-indexed, bookmarked PDF files, independent of the engagement's originating software. Easily send a copy of any document from the Doc.It® Archive to clients using the integrated Doc.It® Web Portal or email. Your firm retains complete control of your data. Easily migrate your data if you change vendors or if a partner leaves.

DOCUMENT PUBLISHING: When an engagement is complete, Doc.It®'s publishing tool collects all documents associated with an en gagement and combines them into a single fully indexed, bookmarked PDF as a complete record of the finalized engagement.

SEARCH: Doc.It® Suite's search technology allows users to more easily search based on content and metadata.

REPORTS: Doc.It® Suite makes the creation of custom reports easy.

WEB PORTAL: Doc.It® Web Portals give clients secure easy access to documents such as financial statements, tax returns, invoices, large bookkeeping files, and any other reports you would like to share and make available to them. Clients can also send files to you for processing.

For more information about this product:

Doc.It®

Visit:
www.doc-it.com

Contact:
888-693-6248 (Ext. 1)

CPA Practice Advisor TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD Spotlight

AICPA Navigator

AICPA Navigator is a state-of-the-art learning management system for the accounting profession and designed to advance the professional development of CPAs. Navigator is the perfect tool to ease compliance monitoring and expand a firm's skill and knowledge base. It automates tracking of compliance and competency requirements to help individuals and firm administrators spot gaps in training and map career development paths for accounting and finance staff.

The Innovation Awards are designed to highlight technologies that significantly benefit accounting firms or help them streamline engagements," said Isaac M. O'Bannon, editor of *CPA Practice Advisor*. "AICPA Navigator gets directly to the heart of professional development, providing a streamlined, cloud-based educational management system that helps firms build their staff expertise. The system is exceptionally deserving of recognition in this year's awards."

Subscribers gain access to an extensive catalog of high-quality, authoritative courses that firms can easily incorporate their own in-house training programs. This interactive online platform is easy to use, delivers education in manageable, targeted segments and also allows employers to monitor progress.

CPAs can access cloud-based AICPA Navigator content whenever it is most convenient for them, and firms can also schedule on-site training. Administrators can set up alerts, assign state-specific requirement courses and suggest appropriate programs to build specific skills for staff members and groom promising employees for leadership posts. The system also allows firms to brand the platform with their own logos and color schemes to give it a personal touch.

"I've had the opportunity to speak to several chief learning officers at top firms this year, and there is great demand for innovative professional education and development platforms," said Erik Asgeirsson, president and CEO of CPA2Biz. "AICPA Navigator fills this need, and we're glad to receive this endorsement of its capabilities."

Premium Learning Package

An investment in learning directly impacts the firm's bottom line. Our Premium Learning Package allows firms access to a full range of learning options – all in one delivery format – for a lower annual amount. Now you'll be able to take advantage of blended learning formats while meeting mandatory CPE requirements, and increasing value for your firm and your clients. Organizations can now build their own custom blended curriculum. For instance they utilize one of our over 900 online self study courses as pre-work before having our instructors come in for live on-site training, followed by a series of internally created lunch and learn programs, and then ending with an AICPA webcasts update. Curriculums like this can then be easily assigned to staff and progress reports allow managers to monitor and advise staff.

For more information about this product:

AICPA® Navigator

Visit:
www.cpa2biz.com/navigator

Contact:
800-634-6780

CERTCAPTURE FROM AVALARA

The CertCapture system offers advanced, online document management tools for collecting, managing and retaining sales tax exemption certificates; reporting and analysis of tax status; and audit exposure. Built for any size business, Avalara CertCapture databases easily scale into the millions to meet the storage demands of even the largest corporations. The system is ideal for groups with resources in multiple locations and can be configured for each business entity in a multi-level environment.

CONFIRMATION.COM

Confirmation.com's electronic audit confirmation solutions were recently expanded to include a new electronic AR/AP Confirmation application. Until now, auditors created AR/AP confirmation requests using some type of mail merge functionality and sent those out to responding entities by mail, email or some other delivery method with little or no ability to track responses or monitor for fraud. This new product offering transforms the outdated mail-merge process into a much more efficient one with time-saving and fraud control features.

NOMINATIONS FOR THE 2014 INNOVATION AWARDS WILL OPEN AROUND MID-JANUARY 2014. TO QUALIFY, A TECHNOLOGY MUST BE LESS THAN TWO YEARS OLD OR HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY REVISED DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS; IT MUST BE IN FULL RELEASE (NOT BETA) AND IT MUST BE ACTIVELY MARKETED TO TAX AND ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONALS.

SPONSORED CONTENT

CPA Practice Advisor TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD Spotlight

NetClient CS mobile app

The first mobile app of its kind, NetClient CS® mobile provides accounting firms with on-th e-go access to NetClient CS portal content from a variety of mobile devices while enabling the firm to retain control over which services are available. Using an interface that's customized with the firm's branding, the app provides mobile access to a wide variety of NetClient CS content and services, including:

- **My Account**—Manage all account details
- **Documents**—Access key documents from multiple sources, including tax returns, financial statements, and more
- **Messages/Notifications**—Read important messages and receive notifications for account activity
- **My Invoices**—View invoices delivered from Practice CS®
- **Account Aggregation**—Pull account information from multiple sources into one central location, making it easy to access and review
- **Stock Quotes**—Get quick access to an online stock ticker that's continually updated
- **News and Links**—Access industry-related articles, news, and links

Mobile time entry and payroll information

For firms that license Accounting CS™ Payroll, The NetClient CS mobile app enables both the firm's own employees and client employees to enter time and access a variety of payroll features from their mobile devices. Available features include:

- **Time Entry**—Enter and complete time for the current pay period
- **Time History**—View a history of the time entered for prior pay periods
- **Check Stubs**—View and print copies of paychecks
- **Earnings**—Get access to up-to-the-minute copies of earnings reports
- **Leave Balances**—View current leave balances
- **W-2s and W-4s**—View and edit W-4 information at any time

New possibilities for firms and clients alike

The NetClient CS mobile app enables firm employees to stay connected with clients and be more productive, increasing efficiency and helping the firm build stronger client relationships. It also provides an important new branding tool to firms by extending the firm brand to increasingly ubiquitous mobile devices. This creates new branding opportunities for firms and provides a unique way to cultivate a client-friendly, tech-savvy image with clients. It also provides a single, central way for clients to exchange files with the firm using their mobile devices, providing a better alternative to the many generic consumer file-sharing applications and improving consistency across clients.

As an automatic extension of NetClient CS client portals, NetClient CS mobile is a value-added tool that clients will find convenient and easy to use. Firm clients can now access up-to-the-minute data anytime, anywhere simply by downloading a free app from the Apple® App Store or Google Play. This paves the way to closer firm-client relationships and better communications—all with no additional investment of time or money from the firm and no need for clients to contact the firm. NetClient CS mobile is automatically included for all firms deploying NetClient CS portals. Clients securely access their content using their NetClient CS login credentials.

Available as a free download to Apple and Android™ devices, the NetClient CS mobile app comes with demo data, allowing anyone to review its features and functionality. Approximately 4,000 users have downloaded the app since it was introduced in early 2013.

The NetClient CS mobile app builds on the functionality of the NetClient CS platform, which offers firms and their clients a convenient, secure way to access finished documents and tax returns, transfer data, convey information, receive and pay client invoices, access client accounting software, and more—anytime, anywhere. Since 2001, the Tax & Accounting business of Thomson Reuters has offered portal solutions designed specifically for the tax and accounting profession. More information about NetClient CS is available at CS.ThomsonReuters.com/Portals.

For more information about this product:

THOMSON REUTERS

Visit:
https://cs.thomsonreuters.com/netclientcsmobileapp/
Contact:
800.968.8900
Email:
CS.Sales@ThomsonReuters.com

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTION
- General Navigation & Ease of Use
- Installation Process
- Multi-Company Management

CORE ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES
- Multi-Jurisdictions
- Forms Preparation
- Electronic Filing & Payment
- Rate Updates

INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT
- Data Output Options
- Reporting
- Integration With Accounting Systems

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

Brian Tankersley, Technology Editor

Brian is a frequent speaker at national continuing education courses on auditing and technology, as well as a consultant, coach and instructor for K2 Enterprises. he can be reached at brian@k2e.com.

Streamlining Sales & Use Tax: Solutions Are Out There

Sales & use tax is one of the three primary areas which legislators use to fund state and local government. The other two major areas are income taxes and property taxes. The concept is relatively simple: If you buy something tangible, you pay a fixed percentage to the local government as a tax.

There are a number of problems: thousands of tax jurisdictions with shifting boundaries, changes in definitions of what is taxable and what is non-taxable, sales of intangible items like computer software and MP3 files, and electronic commerce.

Even a child's lemonade stand might have to agonize over charging different tax rates for takeout refreshments versus those consumed on the premises.

As most readers know, online sales are not truly "tax exempt" — the states are prohibited from forcing out-of-state retailers without a physical presence in a state to collect the tax at the time of sale. While the state still levies the tax on the purchase, the tax cannot be collected economically, and few, if any, states have adequate personnel to audit the millions of citizens who fail to pay use tax.

The National Conference of State Legislators estimates that states lost $23 billion in sales tax revenue payable under existing law due to this problem, often referred to as the "online tax gap." While this is a significant and growing amount of revenue, the complexity of accomplishing this task is very real.

Some observers estimate that there are over 9,600 sales tax jurisdictions in the United States where online retailers would have to prepare returns, remit taxes and be subject to audit if this federal law was changed. Brick and mortar retailers complain that this effectively gives online retailers a price advantage over traditional stores in the amount of the sales tax.

A bill which would change federal law to require retailers with more than $1 million in online sales to collect, report and remit tax for customers based on where the item will be shipped is pending before Congress. The bill, called the Main Street Fairness Act, passed the Senate in May. Although many legislative observers on both sides of the aisle consider it extremely unlikely that the bill will be approved by the House of Representatives during this Congress, this inequity in our tax system will eventually be addressed.

If the Main Street Fairness Act becomes law, it is likely that the template for charging sales tax will change to follow the principles of the Streamlined Sales Tax. Twenty- two states have approved the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement, which provides a common legal framework for calculating, collecting, reporting and remitting taxes based on the recipient's location.

This framework is implemented by using a "Certified Streamlined Sales Tax Service Provider" who is set up to handle this responsibility for a seller. We reviewed three providers of integrated sales tax rate engines, and two of them (Avalara TrustFile and CCH CorpSystem Sales Tax Pro) hold this certification. The third provider, Thomson Reuters OneSource Indirect Tax, is actively working on this certification for their service.

Our review of sales and use tax compliance solutions is broken down into two segments:

- **Sales Tax Preparation Solutions**, which are designed to calculate and prepare sales and use tax returns. These applications will generally be used by firms and small businesses who would like to prepare their own sales tax returns.
- **Integrated Sales Tax Rate Engines** are databases which use address data and geolocation to identify and calculate sales tax rates on transactions entered into a company's ERP application. These systems are normally limited to midsized or larger organizations with complex tax requirements and difficult tax calculations.

Comparing the solutions is a challenge, as one of the offerings is a tool for filling out forms suitable for any taxpayer, and a different offering in the same review is used almost exclusively by multi- state and multinational organizations with billions of dollars in sales.

The solutions we reviewed are:

Sales Tax Preparation
- Bloomberg BNA Sales & Use Tax Forms & Rates
- CFS Tax Software CA & NY Sales Tax Preparer
- Avalara TrustFile Sales & Use Tax

Integrated Sales Tax Rate Engines
- Avalara AvaTax Calc
- CCH CorpSystem Sales Tax SaaS Pro
- Thomson Reuters OneSource Indirect Tax

The challenge for the practitioner is not finding a solution which will meet the needs of a Fortune 500 company, nor is it finding a tool to fill out forms. There will always be tools like this which are either "too big" or "too small" for the needs of small and midsized businesses. The hard part of software selection in this segment is finding the "Goldilocks" solution — that is, the one that is "just right" for the needs of the firm and the client.

One change is that some sources now provide tax rate information by zip code in electronic format for free. TaxRates.com offers tax tables updated quarterly for free which can be imported and set up in accounting software or shopping cart applications.

Some users are calculating sales tax based on five-digit zip codes instead of nine-digit zip+four codes or geospatial location of the subject property. We discourage users from using tables based on five-digit zip codes, as multiple jurisdictions frequently exist within a single zip code. Accountants who have to use these tools may want to view the subject property on tax maps or the city/county/state geographic information system (GIS) to validate the borders of the districts in the area before relying on the identified rates and tax jurisdictions.

Even though a comprehensive, free solution to all sales tax issues is not on the horizon, the tools reviewed are some of the best available to help your clients comply with the thousands of taxes levied on purchase transactions every day.

Avalara — AvaTax

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957542

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Businesses who must file sales tax, use tax or VAT returns in multiple jurisdictions across the U.S., Canada and over 70 other countries. Firms with clients who are subject to Streamline sales tax requirements (22 states) and want to use a tool for automation of sales tax calculation based on address verification and geospatial identification of tax jurisdictions.

STRENGTHS

- AvaTax Calc verifies address against a database of addresses, and has direct integrations for use as a sales and use tax engine for over 250 accounting, ERP, e-commerce, billing, mobile commerce (m-commerce) and point-of-sale applications.
- AvaTax Calc is one of the only applications which can determine the tax jurisdictions based on latitude and longitude coordinates for construction sites and other locations where a physical address is not available.
- AvaTax Certs allows customers to electronically request exemption certificates via email, and allows recipients to sign digital exemption certificates with a mouse.
- AvaTax Certs has tools for exporting exemption certificates en masse for use in audits.
- AvaTax Returns supports preparation of returns for all U.S. tax jurisdictions, although returns cannot be prepared unless the transaction level sales tax was calculated using AvaTax Calc.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- The application is designed primarily for use by companies as part of ongoing transaction processing, and does not include built-in self-prepared e-filing or payment options.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Avalara's AvaTax is one of the leaders in SaaS sales and use tax compliance, and the company's two offerings (AvaTax and TrustFile) provide a range of options which meet the needs of many different practitioners. Based on the number of U.S. jurisdictions claimed to be covered by the company (14,000), AvaTax appears to cover more U.S. tax jurisdictions than the other tax engines in this review. When combined with the company's integration into over 250 accounting, ERP, POS, billing, e-commerce and m-commerce applications, and its TrustFile offering, the company provides a complete set of solutions for U.S. sales and use tax.

877-780-4848
www.avalara.com

Thomson Reuters ONESOURCE Indirect Tax Global Software Suite

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957537

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

In-house corporate tax departments or tax consulting firms who outsource tax compliance for organizations of all sizes who are faced with simple to complex indirect tax needs. Also suited for multi-national corporations with the most complex global challenges for sales tax, use tax, VAT and GST.

STRENGTHS

- Rate and rules database covers sales tax, use tax, VAT and GST for all U.S. and Canadian jurisdictions, as well as over 180 other countries.
- Provides solutions for automating the entire end-to-end indirect tax function, including tax research, calculation, reporting, compliance filing and remittance.
- Full integration into many supported accounting systems.
- Supports e-filing of over 70 forms to all states that accept e-filed sales and use tax returns.
- Includes web-based reporting and analysis tools.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

ONESOURCE Indirect Tax is better suited for companies with more complex tax needs, which tend to be mid sized to larger-sized companies vs. smaller ones. While the company's recent acquisition of Tax Data Systems is more suitable for smaller companies with more straightforward product taxability needs, that solution is not part of this year's review.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Thomson Reuters ONESOURCE Indirect Tax is a rules-based tax engine which is designed to provide sales tax, use tax, VAT and GST liability calculation throughout the period for tens of thousands jurisdictions in over 180 countries. The system is designed for organizations of all sizes with complex indirect tax compliance requirements. Pricing starts at around $10,000, not including training and implementation.

888-885-0206 x1
www.onesourceindirecttax.com

TrustFile Sales and Use Tax

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957541

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Businesses who would like to prepare and electronically file sales and use taxes in any or all of the 12 supported states. Firms and businesses who need sales tax, use tax and VAT (GST/HST) forms for all U.S. and Canadian jurisdictions. When combined with the optional TrustFile Forms product, this product provides access to all forms needed to file sales and use tax returns in all US and Canadian jurisdictions.

STRENGTHS

- Relatively simple application which supports multiple businesses or clients.
- Provides e-filing and online tracking for 12 states, plus a separate forms library is available with forms for all other states.
- Includes support for output to PDF or printer.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- State programs do not allow users to share data between multiple state applications. However, TrustFile does support the ability to upload company information into the software, so that location data does not need to be retyped for each application.
- Avalara TrustFile supports electronic filing for the 12 states that allow electronic filing (CT, FL, GA, IL, KS, LA, MD, NJ, PA, SC, TN and WI). Other state returns must be prepared using the optional Avalara TrustFile Forms tool and filed on paper.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Avalara's AvaTax is one of the leaders in SaaS sales and use tax compliance, and the company's two offerings (AvaTax and TrustFile) provide a range of options which meet the needs of many different practitioners. When combined with the company's integration into over 225 accounting, ERP, POS, billing, e-commerce and m-commerce applications, and its TrustFile offering, the company provides a complete set of solutions for U.S. sales and use tax as well as Canadian GST/HST (VAT).

TrustFile is priced at $159 for each of the 12 available state programs, and includes permission to prepare returns for up to five EINs with that program. The optional TrustFile Forms application has a variety of packages, including $149 for a single state and $1,995 for a package which includes all U.S. states, all U.S. territories, and all Canadian provinces. Support is available for an extra charge, and is provided on a 24x7x365 basis.

877-780-4848
www.avalara.com

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

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957540

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Accounting professionals responsible for preparing sales tax returns for small and medium-sized businesses with multiple locations in California or New York

STRENGTHS

- User interface is intuitive and easy to use.
- The application creates most ancillary documents associated with assembling a paper return, including invoices, cover letters, fax cover sheets, mailing labels and envelopes.
- Supports multiple entities and clients in the same application.
- The California application supports e-filing and remittance from within the application.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- The company only offers sales tax products which support the states of New York and California.
- The products do not have integrations with accounting systems.

SUMMARY & PRICING

The annual versions of CFS Tax Software's CA Sales Tax and NY Sales Tax Preparer applications start at $119 and $169, respectively, for new users. Customers of prior versions of the application receive a $20 discount on the current year's software. An upgrade to convert either application into a network-based application is $50 per year.

800-343-1157
www.taxtools.com

CCH Sales Tax SaaS

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957544

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Businesses or firms that need a sales tax calculation solution integrated into their live systems and an automated returns preparation tool with the option to outsource their tax return compliance work to CCH.

STRENGTHS

- Rates, rules and calculations can be linked to the nine-digit Zip+four code associated with a location and used to calculate sales tax in real time through a number of applications.
- Excellent coverage of more than 14,000 jurisdictions in the U.S. and Canada, and rules include tools for date-related events like back to school sales tax holidays.
- Product is a Certified Service Provider for Streamlined Sales Tax.
- Optional PLUS suite includes auto-population of state tax forms, PRO version includes tools for managing multiple entities or multiple clients.
- Includes a workflow process for routing and digitally approving returns, as well as reminders and alerts for due dates and tasks.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- E-filing and payment to state taxation agencies primarily available for Streamline Sales Tax member states.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Pricing is based on the number of returns submitted for an unlimited number of clients. Pricing starts at $1,425 annually, not including a one-time setup fee.

866-513-2677
www.cchgroup.com

Bloomberg BNA Sales & Use Tax Rates & Forms

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/10957543

2013 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIRM FIT

Firms who need a comprehensive source for nationwide sales tax rates and an exhaustive forms library.

STRENGTHS

- Rate tables include all U.S. jurisdictions, and include functions to validate input and calculate most totals.
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- Forms library includes over 3,400 sales and use tax forms, exemption certificates, business registrations and other documents. Instructions for forms are also included or linked.
- User interface is logical, and will be familiar to current and former users of BNA's income tax forms applications.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Sales tax rates are stored up based on five- digit zip codes. Zip code boundaries frequently do not match the borders of the related tax jurisdictions, which may result in errors.
- Rates service and return preparation are two separate services without integration, which results in rekeying of data.
- No options for electronic filing or payment of taxes.

SUMMARY & PRICING

BNA Sales & Use Tax Rates and Forms make up a basic tool kit for low-volume compliance in a wide range of tax jurisdictions. While the services are not integrated with each other, and do not support any electronic filing or remittance, they do give users access to forms and rates anywhere in the country.

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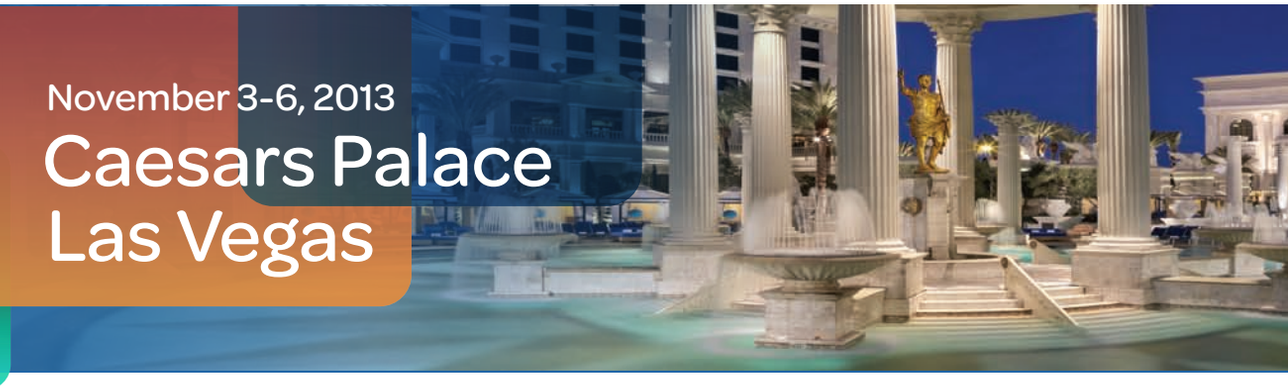

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2013 ACCOUNTANT'S TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES GUIDE

A Successful Practice is Built on a Solid Foundation of Knowledge, Service and Technology

By Isaac O'Bannon, Editor

Our executive editor, Darren Root, CPA, CITP, speaks to thousands of accounting professionals each year, sharing his wisdom on how accounting firm owners can build more successful and profitable practices. The key is finding new ways to work more productively, of course. To do that requires constant evaluation and oversight of firm workflow and finding the right tools and best practices that meet the needs of the firm and its clients.

When the right combination is achieved, the results are profound. The AICPA's bi-annual MAPS survey shows that partners at the most successful firms actually work fewer hours per year and earn more. Not billable hours, but total hours ... as much as a week or two less than partners in firms with lower revenue. That means that work-life balance is not only achievable, but it can be realized without sacrificing firm success or profit.

So, the secret isn't working more or harder, but striving for more profitable engagements and better managing processes. While half of this equation is knowledge-based best practices, the other half is critically dependent upon finding the technologies that best fit an evolving firm's workflow, and helping clients find technology that helps them in their work and in their interaction with the accounting firm.

With an overwhelming number of software and services for accounting firms and small businesses on the market, no professional can stay on top of all technologies that are available. That's why we produce the Technology and Services Guide each year, providing a home base for finding the best tools for professional accountants and their business clients.

The guide features categorized listings for firm and client-side technologies and services. This is just one of the resources that *CPA Practice Advisor* and *NSA Practice Advisor* offers as your source for the technology information you need to help your clients and your own firm be more productive and profitable. ■

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By Jim Boomer, CPA.CITP

Embrace Consumerization!

Oh the glory days of IT — the calculator, the brick mobile phone, the fax machine! Remember back when new technologies got their start in business markets?

Consumers waited anxiously for the products to commoditize so prices would fall and they could get their hands on the latest and greatest devices. And, in the workplace, the IT department ruled with an iron fist — dictating what technologies would be used by whom. Well, those days are now a distant memory as the Consumerization of IT has taken hold.

What is Consumerization of IT?

Consumerization of IT is the growing tendency for new technologies to emerge first in the consumer market and then spread into business and government organizations. The Consumerization trend is all about driving innovation in technology from the perspective of the individual consumer or employee. This shifts innovation into hyper speed compared to the past.

Jim Boomer is a shareholder and the CIO for Boomer Consulting, Inc. He is the director of the Boomer Technology Circles™ and an expert on managing technology within an accounting firm. He also serves as a strategic planning and technology consultant and firm adviser in the areas of performance and risk management. In addition, Jim is leading a new program, The Producer Circle, in collaboration with CPA2BIZ and the AICPA.

What Does it Look Like to a CPA?

In our CPA world, Consumerization looks very similar to the way it does to everyone else. Amazon.com started as a consumer marketplace and now sells enterprise cloud services to business and government. Social media tools, iPads and iPhones and even Wikipedia, are all included in my definition of Consumerization above. But let me try to give you a few specific examples of how this trend is impacting CPA firms today.

- ***CLIENT PORTALS*** – Most clients have adopted online access for their banking, investments and credit cards. They've come to expect self-service options when dealing with financial matters, and this is driving many firms to offer portals as a way to interact with clients online.
- ***SOCIAL MEDIA*** – This trend started on the consumer side and exploded to new heights no one ever imagined. So much so that businesses, including CPA firms, couldn't ignore the power of its reach and influence and are now leveraging it for business purposes.
- ***BYO*** – We've heard a lot about Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), but Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) and Bring Your Own App (BYOA) are also consumer trends that are affecting firms across the country. Whether it's an iPad, a MacBook Air or DropBox, employees are bringing tools to work that they started using in their personal lives and now want to leverage in the workplace.

Impact on IT Department

Consumerization completely changes the role of IT in the firm. IT must shift from an attitude of command/control to enable/embrace and that's a lot easier said than done. End-user attitudes about what should be expected from IT and how quickly it should be expected are also shifting due to Consumerization. This is forcing IT to become much more agile than they have been in the past to respond to growing (and diversifying) demands and shrinking wait times.

> IN THE END, THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO EMBRACE AND INFLUENCE THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF TECHNOLOGY WILL WIN.

Additionally, firms must rethink how they procure and manage technology equipment and services. A dependency has also developed between the consumerized services and the businesses that rely upon them. The challenge for IT becomes how they provide enterprise level security on consumer-grade products and services.

Tools for Balance

So what are some tools to balance the end-user wants with the need for enterprise security? The leading area we are seeing firms respond is with mobile device management platforms. Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync gives you a lot of capabilities for free, but tools like AirWatch, MobileIron, MaaS360 and Good give you much more. You're able to separate out the business and personal content on mobile devices and manage activity at a much more granular level.

The other area that we see IT having a major impact in this new frontier is process improvement, and there are tools available in this space as well. Lean Six Sigma has been popular in manufacturing for years and is now gaining traction within accounting firms. Lean is all about eliminating wasteful activities while Six Sigma focuses on improving quality and eliminating variation. Combined, these two offer drastic improvements in process efficiency. IT tends to excel here because they typically have strong process skills and they've been exposed to all areas of the firm. They can also play that careful balance between giving end users what they want and minimizing the risk to the firm through process.

So What?

Consumerization of IT is happening whether we like it or not. How firms respond to it will determine the long-term success or failure from a technology perspective. The role of the IT professional is also transforming within the firm, and Consumerization is creating an opportunity to become more strategic to the business by becoming an enabler. In the end, those who choose to embrace and influence the changing landscape of technology will win. Those who resist and control, risk obsolescence. I, for one, welcome Consumerization with open arms, and suggest you should, too.