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

MY PERSPECTIVE

Are You Suffering from a Professional Disconnect?

If you're like me, your mobile device is an indispensable tool that you use on a daily basis to manage your personal life. The list of digital tools that I use is a long one. I use my smartphone or tablet to access websites when booking my air travel, to check-in for flights and to display my boarding pass. I use my bank's online portal to do all of my business and personal banking including making deposits, transferring funds and viewing transactions.

I also use QuickBooks Online (QBO) to handle my personal financial accounting so that all my bank and credit card transactions flow automatically into QBO. And of course, I use my mobile device to access my email, calendar, firm contacts, social media and other financial applications.

Current consumer research shows that I'm not alone in my digital device usage patterns. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, last year 55 percent of adults used the internet on their mobile phones—double the number who reported doing so three years ago. In addition, 31 percent of mobile internet users said that they go online using their mobile phone most of the time instead of using a desktop or laptop computer. Given these statistics, I think it's safe to say that we've reached the point where it is *expected* that information and our personal and business functions will be available at our fingertips.

If I need to make a bank transfer, and I'm not sitting at my desk, I want a vendor that will provide me with the tools to do it at my convenience. For most of us, this is our life today in the digital age. However, for many of us who own or manage professional accounting firms, there is a major disconnect between our own mobile habits and expectations and our

perception of our clients' expectations for the same things. In a nutshell, while we can't imagine not using digital tools and services on a daily basis, we don't make the connection that our clients expect the same type of services as us.

So, with this disconnect in mind, what is your firm doing to accommodate your clients' needs? I know, you're providing wonderful customer service and your product quality is outstanding. Again, I ask you, what are you doing to meet your clients where they are, in the way they want to consume information? If the answer is "nothing" or, "I'm not sure" then you have a professional disconnect. In essence, you are providing the same services using the same delivery model that you have for years, yet your clients are expecting to receive your services differently.

Not sure about the services that your clients may wish to have any-time/anywhere access to? Here are a few ideas. If you process payroll, client employees might like the convenience of accessing their payroll check stubs from their mobile devices. Clients may find it helpful to have access to their tax returns, financial statements, and other reports on multiple devices. For clients using QuickBooks, you can provide access to company files from a tablet device—very helpful when

your clients are out of the office. The common theme here is that we all need to evaluate our old business models in order to meet the reality of today's connected clients.

Solving the professional disconnect between what your firm does and what your clients want doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start by understanding how your clients are consuming information and interacting with vendors that do offer their services in digital and mobile formats. Then map out your existing delivery models and compare them to those service providers. From there you can start to look at solutions to repair your firm's professional disconnect and truly deliver the quality service that your clients desire. ●



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.



5



6

40 RTY UNDER 40 RTY

12

CONTENTS

COVER STORY

- 6 The Changing Face of Accounting & Technology** *By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Editor*



COLUMNS

- 3 My Perspective:** Are You Suffering from a Professional Disconnect?
By M. Darren Root, CPA.CITP, Executive Editor
- 11 Marketing in Practice:** How Content Marketing Can Help Your Firm
By Kristy Short, Ed.D and Gaynor Meilke, MS
- 14 Business in Practice:** Time is on My Side
By Rene Lacerte
- 16 From the Trenches:** Where's the Cloud Now?
By Randy Johnston
- 20 Bridging the Gap:** The Benefits & Challenges of Cloud Accounting
By Jim Boomer, CPA.CITP
- 33 Technology in Practice:** The In-Firm Annual IT-Security Employee Briefing
By Roman Kepczyk, CPA.CITP



FEATURES

- 5 The Baggage-Free CEO: 5 Ways to Profit**
By John Warrillow



- 12 40 Under 40**
By Taija Jenkins, Associate Editor



- 21 The "3 Cs" of the Cloud — Does Your Firm Fit?** *By Drew West*



- 24 A Brave New World of Mobility & Changing Expectations**
By Teresa Mackintosh, CPA.CITP



- 25 New QBO Version Provides Harmony for Accountants and SMB Owners**
By Taija Jenkins, Associate Editor



- 35 Complying with the PCAOB:** The Various Options for Independence Training
By Mike Mirretti, CPA



2013 PRODUCT REVIEWS

- 9 2013 Review of Tax Planning Systems**
By Dustin Wheeler, CPA



- 30 2013 Review of Point-of-Sale Solutions**
By Mary Girsch-Bock



IN THE CLOUD

14-29

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The Baggage-Free CFO: 5 Ways to Profit

By John Warrillow

Recently we did a survey of the Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A) professionals who use The Sellability Score and asked them what makes a business attractive to an acquirer. The M&A experts said businesses that have a management team in place are much more attractive to buyers than owner-dependent companies.

We went further and asked the M&A pros what roles were most important to have filled on a management team. They said recruiting a second-in-command is the key hire for any business looking to sell, followed by someone in charge of sales & marketing. Interestingly, in the eyes of M&A professionals, recruiting a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) was the *least* important role to have on staff.

The CFO: A liability, not an asset

Given that business owners often have a weak spot around financial reporting, the recommendation not to hire a CFO may come as a bit of a surprise. The explanation can be found in analyzing what happens to a business when it is *acquired*. Typically,

the finance department is the first functional area to be integrated into the acquiring company, and therefore the CFO is often the first C-level executive to be made redundant in the aftermath of an acquisition.

In an acquirer's eyes, the CFO may be nothing more than a large severance check waiting to be written.

The opportunity for accountants serving small to mid-sized companies is to offer a *virtual* CFO service. You can provide CFO-level advice to the owner on a monthly retainer basis. The owner gets your brains and experience as they grow toward an exit with none of the liabilities associated with a traditional CFO. Here are five ways to play the role of a virtual CFO:

1 Attend management meetings. Just because you're not on the payroll as a full-time employee, it

doesn't mean you shouldn't be at the table for regular management team meetings. By being involved as a regular, you can provide a financial point of view on strategic decisions the team is considering.

2 Advocate with the bank. Get permission from the owner to be the primary point of contact with the bank. Provide a regular stream of communication to and from your client's financial institution and ensure the banking fees and rates are reasonable. Often you can make up a portion of your virtual CFO advisory fees by finding and negotiating for savings with your client's business bank.

3 Model the future. Many owners run their business by intuition, making reactive decisions based on one crisis or another without thinking about the long term. By modeling the financial impact of key decisions, you can be the ballast that steadies the boat and shows how decisions made now could impact the company's business over the long term.

4 Oversee the bookkeeper. You can add value by offering to oversee the in-house financial team. This could include verifying a bookkeeper's day-to-day work, providing first level support for their questions, and/or being the mentor figure for the financial people on the payroll.

5 Plan for an exit. Business owners preparing to sell their business often need help to get their business exit-ready without notifying their full time staff that the company is about to be put up for sale. By discreetly looking at the business through the lens of a potential sale, you can quietly coach the owner on how their decisions will affect the company's "sellability" – without risking the potential chaos triggered by notifying full-time employees that the company is on the block.

Smallish businesses often can't afford a CFO. And if they're planning to sell, a full time CFO may actually be more of a liability than an asset. Offering your clients virtual CFO services can provide a baggage-free way to get the expertise they need to grow and sell a valuable business. ●



John Warrillow is the founder of The Sellability Score, a tool used by accountants to start the succession planning conversation with their clients. He is also the author of "Built to Sell: Creating a Business That Can Thrive Without You."

In this photo from left to right: Kim Hogan, Shayna Chapman, CPA, and Michelle Golden.



The Changing Face of Accounting and Technology

From social media to value pricing, these women (Michelle Golden, President, Golden Practices, Inc.; Kim Hogan, Director, West Coast Operations, XCM Solutions, LLC; and Shayna Chapman, CPA CITP CGMA, Managing Member, Shaynaco, LLC) have each made a name for themselves by leveraging new avenues of communication, embracing cutting-edge technology and promoting forward-thinking business models for practitioners and clients.

All three have been recognized by *CPA Practice Advisor* for their efforts in influencing accounting professionals. We take an up-close and personal look at what they're doing to redefine the accounting community, overcome obstacles, and leave their marks on the rapidly evolving profession. They each have a unique style, bring their individual perspective, and serve the accounting profession in a different

capacity, but one thing that ties them together is their desire to change the profession for the better.

Collaboration, Community, Camaraderie

In an ever-changing profession filled with new faces and emerging technology, professionals find that breaking down barriers between practitioners, vendors, and consultants is proving to be a win-

win-win.

KIM: In recent years there's been a paradigm shift between an industry divided and what we have today. There's a growing collaborative presence where technology vendors realize that peer-to-peer interaction is infinitely more valuable than advertising and self-promotion. Most of all, the emergence of social media has provided platforms for interaction across miles

and organizations. The reality that people want to do business with people that they like is more evident now than ever. Today's technology helps build trust, foster relationships, and form lasting bonds with fellow accounting colleagues in ways that just weren't possible five or ten years ago.

SHAYNA: In the past, we've each worked in our own little box and expected our counterparts to fit inside that box with us. This often led to frustration. The software wasn't exactly how we wanted it. The consultant is hard to communicate with. The CPA refuses to be open to change. The dynamics have certainly evolved. Vendors aren't just people trying to sell you software anymore. They really are listening to your ideas. To make this noticeable, their sales people are

becoming the face of their software and are forging real relationships. This certainly has a positive effect on software. They're listening to the CPA and consultant and constantly asking, "What do we need to improve upon?" Likewise the CPA and consultants are stepping outside of their boxes and saying "Hey, what great ideas have the vendors put in place that we haven't thought of and how can we use that to our advantage?"

MICHELLE: We're seeing the trend of blurred lines between practitioners, vendors, and consultants – and I like it. Lots of "recovering CPAs" join companies that serve accountants, whether product-based or advisory. The companies and their CPA customers wisely embrace the views they get from these experts from within. Looking inside the profession for ideas has its limitations though, and so it's good to see much more willingness to deviate from in-profession navel-gazing and consider ideas and develop approaches and business models inspired from well outside the profession. Consultants and vendors are working more effectively with CPAs because of more real-time collaboration and franker conversations—it's the same between CPAs and their own clients. Technology certainly contributes to the need for and acceptance of more transparent, authentic relationships. This makes business better for everyone.

Facing Down Challenges

We're all in a quest to move the profession forward and experience speed-of-adoption obstacles with clients, partners, and a slow-moving industry as a whole... but we don't let that stop us.

MICHELLE: It has to be about working with the right people. Everett Rodgers introduced the Diffusion of Innovations (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion_of_innovations) that illustrates how new ideas (and technologies) are adopted: 2.5% are innovators and 13.5% are early adopters followed by early majority, late majority, and laggards. To be effective, enjoy the process, and stay personally inspired to innovate, I work with the 16% at the front of the curve. When there's opportunity to grow or improve, an attitude of "maybe someday" isn't found in firms who are serious about staying competitive, serving customers exceptionally, and being around for generations to come. It's exciting to see the number of firms with emerging leaders who see a need to embrace new ideas.

KIM: With so many moving parts in today's business world, roadblocks can often appear out of nowhere. Just when you think you've convinced the last person to stop being afraid of the Cloud, something happens that forces all of us to face reality: not even the Cloud is perfect. Finding the right balance between the ability to have anytime/anywhere access and ensuring data is always safe and secure can be a difficult feat. In the end, firms that find ways to creatively overcome obstacles for themselves and their clients are the ones who will thrive.

SHAYNA: As we all know, tax laws only keep growing and the accounting rules keep evolving. Historically, firms would spend lots of time going through their limited library of paper books and researching issues. With social media, research websites, and vendor's assistance programs online, firms have a wealth of knowledge to access and people to collaborate with to help guide them to proper answers and challenge them to

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step outside the box in solving customers' problems. When they need to take that extra step, firms also have more access to vendors and consultants that can take them to the next level in servicing their customers.

Commanding Change in a Profession Reluctant to Change

Change is a word that evokes anxiety among even the best and the brightest. There's a constant tug-of-war between the old-school mentality that says, "but we've always done it that way" and a new régime that insists that there's a better way. The key is finding that middle ground where change can be embraced rather than feared.

SHAYNA: The accounting profession has historically not been seen as agents for change. With acronyms like SALY (same as last year), we appear as if we're taking two giant steps back instead of looking forward.

The difficulty lies within the size of the firm and the age of the staff and partners. While college graduates come out of school ready to use technology to trade in their pens and paper, older partners who have been doing things the same way for years do not want to change the way they conduct business. While "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" may seem like a viable solution, history has proven there are always ways to improve to be faster and better.

MICHELLE: While a lot of firms talk

about making change, it's often that only one or two partners are willing to stomach it and, without the support of their remaining colleagues, they simply can't succeed. Change is hard enough without active resisters. Unfortunately, democratically led firms (most firms) end up stuck in status quo. To be able to affect change in our profession, I work with firms who insist on looking ahead—who

are philosophically opposed to adhering to old ideals. Characteristics of these firms are more corporate (less committee) leadership models, a culture of innovation with viewing change as healthy and constant, and higher-than-average trust and autonomy versus command-and-control environments. Talk about change! You didn't see many firms like this even ten years ago. The profession is shaking up and it's wonderful to see practitioners, vendors, consultants, and the industry's membership organizations all encouraging and supporting the behaviors that change requires: collaboration, learning, and strong leadership.

KIM: We're seeing this determination to change first hand in industry groups such as the Information Technology Alliance (ITA). After 15 years as a premier IT-focused organization creating a sturdy bridge between technology providers and firms, today's ITA is chock full of new, young faces who are calling out for change and bringing new ideas to the table.

That's just one example, but the issue around succession planning is critical to long-term viability. Growing pains are tough, but when an organization does nothing and decides, instead, to remain complacent, it will cease to exist. However, if the group identifies and encourages forward thinking, and continues growing and feeding talent, that organization will ultimately usher in a new wave of leadership.

When we fast forward 10 or 20 years from now, it's tough to say exactly who or what will be the breaking news in the accounting profession. Yet, history has taught us that the industry will always need a healthy mix of stability and change. Surely there will be new communication platforms, more advanced technology solutions, and influencers we haven't yet heard of – that's human nature. Perhaps more than anything, our profession will experience the continued evolution of the community – and the heightened collaboration that comes with it – that will ultimately drive the success of tomorrow's accounting world. ●



REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS

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

CORE TAX PLANNING FEATURES

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

REPORTING

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

IMPORT/EXPORT/INTEGRATION

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

HELP/SUPPORT

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



By Dustin Wheeler, CPA

Dustin Wheeler is a Las Vegas based CPA and QuickBooks ProAdvisor

providing tax, audit, accounting, and technology consulting services. He blogs about technology and accounting at www.dustinwheelercpa.com.

Income Tax Planning Takes More than a Magic 8-Ball

On the conference room shelf of a CPA's office I visited recently, I noticed a Magic 8-Ball with the label "free tax answers." When turned, the die floating in colored liquid inside the ball presses against the window to reveal an affirmative, negative, or non-committal answer such as "cannot predict now."

While I found the CPA's 8-ball to be a clever joke, serious tax planning in uncertain times often takes a similar approach. A Magic 8-Ball with phrases customized for tax accountants would contain statements like "if tax rates go up" and "if Congress extends current tax law." Although some tax law changes may seem to be more predictable than others, I've learned to expect the unexpected. For example, who would have guessed that Congress would allow the estate tax to lapse in 2010?

Tax planning reached unprecedented levels of difficulty near the end of 2012 as the United States approached the fiscal cliff. At the time, the potential expiration of the Bush tax cuts along with the expiration of many other provisions likely caused many accountants to advise their clients to do the opposite of traditional tax planning.

Strategies included accelerating income and postponing expenses to avoid significantly higher tax rates in 2013. After months of debate, Congress passed the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012, resulting in lower tax liabilities for many taxpayers than had we gone over the fiscal cliff. Unfortunately, some accountants spent the New Year's Day holiday studying the new tax laws.

2013 Reviews of Retail Point-of-Sale Systems

In this review, we looked at 4 income tax planning systems.

- BNA Income Tax Planner
- CCH ProSystem fx Planning
- Intuit Lacerte Tax Planner
- Thomson Reuters Planner CS

While today's professional tax planning systems can't tell you what future tax law is going to be, tax accountants can extract useful information from them for developing tax strategies. With the help of these sophisticated software packages, accountants can project tax liabilities several years into the future under multiple scenarios. Each scenario may contain varying amounts of income, deductions, carryovers, dependents, exemptions, credits and other quantifiable details from tax returns. Accountants can adjust each scenario for anticipated tax law changes, such as standard deduction and exemption amounts, expiration of tax credits, and various tax rates and brackets.

These tax planning systems can generate reports helping taxpayers weigh the impact of earning additional income or making additional deductions. For example, conversions of traditional IRAs to Roth IRAs have been a popular tax planning strategy since the limits based on modified adjusted gross income and taxpayer filing status were removed for conversions made after December 31, 2009. With the help of the software, accountants can produce professional-looking reports, assisting clients to make an informed decision between converting to a Roth IRA in the current year or in subsequent years.

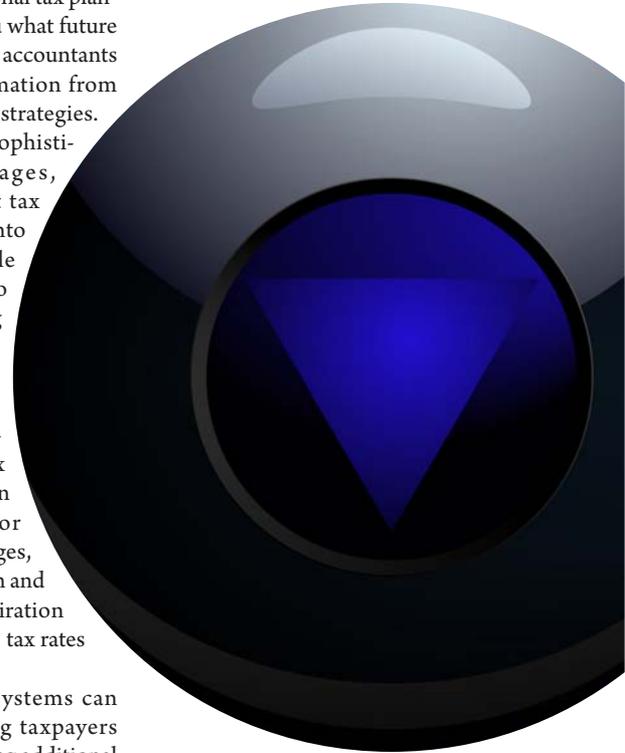
An example of comparing one-year scenarios is a client who wants to know the tax implications of holding an appreciated stock, selling it, or donating it to charity. Chances are that tax planning software will calculate the tax for each scenario more accurately than an accountant can in his or her head and more easily than on a spreadsheet.

Some of the tax planning software reviewed in this section contain advanced tools for handling complexi-

ties with your individual income tax client base beyond calculating federal income tax, such as estimating state and local income taxes, integration with tax research programs, as well as charts and graphs. Also, some programs import data from tax preparation software, resulting in significant time savings.

Most importantly, tax planning software empowers accountants to perform value-adding activities like analyzing clients' future tax positions and reducing tax liabilities. Where traditional compliance services may be viewed as overhead, effective tax planning can turn tax accountants into superheroes in the eyes of their clients.

Although there is always some degree of uncertainty in tax planning, tax superheroes don't use the Magic 8-ball. They stay current on tax law changes, are informed about pending tax bills in Congress, and use their tax planning systems to their full potential. ●



BNA Income Tax Planner

2013
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

Firms with clients requiring complicated tax planning across multiple states and firms that take advantage of its web-based capabilities (such as accessing the program from multiple computers and/or locations).

STRENGTHS

- Only planning product among those reviewed with mobile apps and web-based administrative tools.

- Imports tax data from several popular tax preparation programs
- Many reporting options including charts and graphs
- Calculates present value of total taxes and cash flows over multiple year periods

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Web version allows many administrative functions, but launching plan creation and calculations requires a plug-in that

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077549

may not work on all portable devices

Bloomberg BNA, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bloomberg L.P. and a widely recognized publisher of specialized news for business, offers several software programs used by tax and accounting professionals. BNA Income Tax Planner with optional Fifty States is a powerful tool for creating both federal and state tax plans for clients with complex tax situations.

SUMMARY & PRICING

A user-friendly and power tax planning system, BNA Income Tax Planner differentiates itself from the market with its accessibility from the web and versatility to integrate with several different tax compliance programs. Pricing varies based on platform and specific firm state needs, with the base federal system starting at about \$600.

855-466-9435
www.bnasoftware.com

CCH ProSystem fx Planning

2013
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIT

Firms using other components of the ProSystem fx Suite or CCH Axxess Tax that take advantage of the direct integration.

STRENGTHS

- Imports tax data from ProSystem fx Tax and CCH Axxess Tax
- The license allows for an unlimited number of users at a firm location

- Interactive tutorial and ample help resources

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Only produces spreadsheet-type reports (no graphs or charts)
- Reporting output limited to PDF files (no direct exports to Excel or other programs)

The ProSystem fx Suite from CCH offers integrated applications for tax and accounting firms. While

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077548

CCH also has cloud-based solutions known as CCH Axxess, for now Planning is only a network or locally installed program which can import tax data from either ProSystem fx Tax or CCH Axxess Tax. However, plans can be created manually for firms not using the CCH suites.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Firms using the ProSystem fx or CCH Axxess suites may want to consider the

planning product due to the integration benefits, though it can be used as a standalone program for estimating tax for clients with complex tax situations. The software costs \$716 for either a standalone or network installation for any number of users within a licensed firm location. There is no additional charge for states.

800-PFX-9998
www.cchgroup.com

Intuit Lacerte Tax Planner

2013
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIT

While firms using Lacerte Tax and DMS will benefit with the direct integration, it may also be considered as a standalone product because it is easy to use and a lower cost alternative than the products reviewed.

STRENGTHS

- User-friendly interface similar to that of the tax program.
- Easily imports client tax data from Lacerte Tax.
- Reports can be printed directly to

Lacerte Document Management System

- Comes bundled with Lacerte Tax Analyzer and DMS
- Quickly estimates yearly wages from pay stubs with the W-2 Projector

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Not preconfigured to calculate tax for all states (though a user can create a generic state)
- Calculates tax for only one state per plan

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077547

Intuit's Lacerte tax software is used by many small and medium-sized firms for tax compliance. Lacerte Tax Planner imports client data from the tax preparation software to project individual income taxes for up to ten years with up to ten scenarios each.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Users of Lacerte Tax and DMS will benefit from the time savings and efficiencies that the planning product provides through its integrations.

Lacerte Tax Planner is sold as part of the Lacerte Productivity Plus Bundle. This bundle, which is \$349 for as many Lacerte user "seats" the firm has purchased, also includes Lacerte Tax Analyzer and Lacerte Document Management System. A free demo comes with the Lacerte Tax program, allowing potential users to try all aspects of the program before purchasing it.

accountants.intuit.com

Thomson Reuters Planner CS

2013
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

Firms using the Thomson Reuters CS Professional Suite that can benefit from the integration between Planner CS and the suite's tax preparation and document management products.

STRENGTHS

- Capable to producing projections for an unlimited number of years

- Integration with several components of the CS Professional Suite
- Many options for customizing reports and graphs
- W-4 Calculator

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No option to export reports to Excel

The CS Professional Suite from Thomson Reuters offers an inte-

grated set of tax, accounting, and practice management applications. Planner CS tightly integrates with the suite to provide tax projections for a virtually unlimited number of years and scenarios.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Planner CS is a powerful tax planning product for firms with clients who have complex tax situations and

multistate issues. Users of the CS Professional Suite will find time savings and efficiency gains because of the integration. When not attached with UltraTax CS, the standalone current price is \$710 for the Federal application, \$200 for one state, and \$320 for all states.

800-968-8900
cs.thomsonreuters.com

How Content Marketing Can Help Your Firm

Content marketing is today's hot topic. You certainly can't ignore it (not that you want to)—with countless articles on hand that tout the importance of developing useful, timely content to

support a strong marketing program. Gone are the days where straight-up traditional marketing was enough. Today, relying solely on *outbound* initiatives to gain interest and convert prospects to clients (e.g. telemarketing, sales-oriented direct mailers, etc.) is an ineffective strategy. In contrast, content marketing is an *inbound* tactic that can help to increase your firm's online visibility with today's research-obsessed consumers—while also positioning you and your team as credible advisors. And in a world where the Internet is THE research tool of choice, content marketing is the ideal tactic to employ.

If you're still not sure about content marketing, don't worry. Read on for an easy-to-understand definition of content marketing and sound tips on how to deploy a content-driven strategy for your practice.

Content Marketing - What It Is and Why You Need to Embrace It

Content marketing is not exactly an intuitive descriptor. The main issue is that the word 'marketing' on its own can throw accountants into a head spin. Add the word 'content' (considering most accountants don't exactly

get jazzed up about writing) and you may hit full-on seizure mode. To truly grasp what content marketing means, it's best to think of it as a tactic and not an action.

If you read nothing else in this article, understand this: **Content marketing is a tactic used to generate traffic by sharing valuable and free content.** By developing content that your existing clients and prospects want to read (an important distinction), you can increase interest in your firm, create rapport, and build trust, which ultimately leads to new business. Content marketing provides another

benefit as well: the more quality content you publish, the more 'findable' you are online—especially if proper attention is given to creating keyword-strong content (keywords are words and phrases that search engines use to index web content). The main goal of content marketing is to engage your audience and drive them back to you (inbound) for more information.

Simply understanding what content marketing means is the first step to mastering this tactic and building a strong marketing program overall. It's also important to note that content marketing should include both existing clients and prospects. Current clients want to be educated too, and, bonus, this offers another way to strengthen client relationships and ensure they stick around for the long haul.

So, now on to the content itself. There are two points to consider here: 1) the type of content and 2) the channels you use to deliver it.

When considering the type of content to publish, it's important to understand that your content should be closely related to what you sell. In other words, provide content that educates the reader on your area of expertise. If you specialize in outsourced accounting or CFO services, publish a white paper on the value of outsourcing these services, including cost effectiveness, convenience, and assurance of proper accounting principles. This will allow readers to get to know and trust you enough to do business with you, or in the case of existing clients, to expand their business relationship with you.

Once you have decided the type of content that your clients and prospects will find valuable, it's time to consider the channels you will use to deliver it to them. In other words, where should you publish your content? The good news is that you have many options. The web has made publishing content easier than ever.

Today, you are in control of what is published and where it appears. You can even create your own channels. As such, your content can take many forms—from YouTube how-to videos (e.g., How to Effectively use Online Client Accounting Software) to educational articles published on your website or within a local magazine (e.g. Top Benefits of Outsourcing Payroll for Small Businesses). Other options include writing a regular blog, developing a newsletter that can be sent to clients and prospects, or tweeting and posting useful, timely tips (e.g., reminders for quarterly estimate payments). There are numerous delivery options available to push your content out. Take full advantage of them.

Final, Helpful Thoughts...

The key to good content marketing (and pay close attention to this) is that it should not read, sound, or feel like marketing. The content you develop should always be informative... while very subtly selling your services. Prospects will know who you are because you are the content provider, so no need to get into detail about your firm and your services within the content (save this for an 'About the Author' section at the end). Keep in mind the primary objectives of content marketing: build relationships, create rapport, and gain trust through appropriate and consistent knowledge sharing. The essence of effective content marketing is to offer something a viewer or reader wants and needs—information!

In general, the most powerful content focuses on helping clients and prospects, while quietly promoting your services and expertise. This is the type of information that consumers search for online and that will ultimately lead them back to you as a trusted resource. Helpful, wonderful you! ●



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40RTY
UNDER
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40 Trailblazers Who are Changing the Accounting Profession

By Taija Jenkins, Associate Editor

This year's 40 Under 40 honorees are exactly what leaders of a Next Generation Firm look like. They're trendy, innovative, creative and flexible. They know that the value of their work is not defined by four walls and computer desks. Armed with their smartphones and tablets, they are ready to tackle business and technology challenges from anywhere.

They may not be able to agree on if they are Team Apple or Team Samsung, but they do agree that true mobility is a necessity for success. They also know that with great freedom comes great responsibility and are more than willing to work on vacation. Forget traditional business hours. These young men and women are open for busi-



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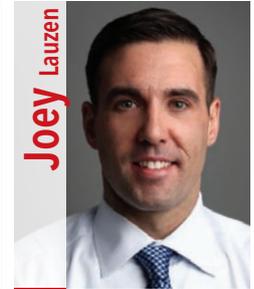
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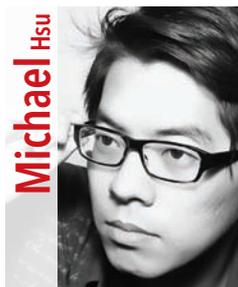
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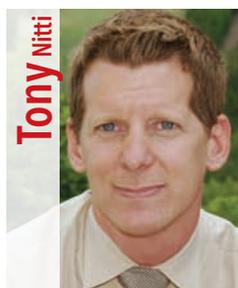
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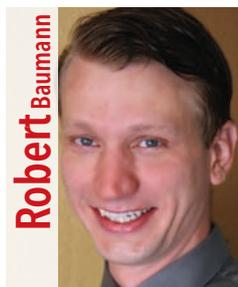
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ness 24/7, and many balance answering tax questions for clients while cheering on their young soccer players or doing a load of laundry.

Many are business owners themselves, some help develop technology and products, but they are all working to revolutionize the way businesses and accountants do business. They have a natural knack for anticipating where the future of accounting is heading and fulfilling the needs of their clients. They may be early adopters of the latest technology, but they don't just follow the trend, they are the trendsetters.

"When I see these young influencers, it gives me a great deal of confidence in our profession, as a professional," said Sandra Wiley, Shareholder & C O O, Boomer Consulting, Inc. "They are really changing the face of our profession as they look for new and better ways to operate and serve their clients. These professionals naturally embrace the technology that's not just changing our profession, but the world." Wiley is a 2013 *CPA Practice Advisor* Thought Leader and recipient of the 2012 Most Powerful Women in Accounting Award.

The 2013 40 Under 40 honorees represent some of the best and brightest talent in the accounting profession. Each year, vendors, consultants, thought leaders, peers and clients recognize the young professionals they feel are making a difference with their contributions to public accounting. These professionals are committed to serving their clients and customers in the most productive and efficient way. They believe their success is tantamount to their clients' success.

Congratulations to each and every one of you!

Ti-i-i-ime is on My Side

Ti-i-i-ime is on my side. Yes it is! Or is it? While new technologies make us more productive giving us back time, the failure to adopt them can lead to missed opportunities. So, when I started thinking about this column and learned that the September issue was about the cloud and what's next for small businesses in the cloud, this song popped into my head and seemed like a great way to make that point.

I am a big believer in efficiency. It is why I do what I do for a living. Creating solutions that make people more productive is the only way to give someone the precious gift of time. Giving it to businesses has been the focus of my career. I am not sure when I realized that the adage "Time is Money" is the backbone of all small business productivity tools but it is. And it is especially apropos in the age of the cloud.

Here's why. Centralizing data is



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at the core of the cloud. With the data centralized, multiple applications can leverage the same data at the same time. This enables collaboration at the right level across people, systems and documents. That means mundane tasks can be eliminated, thereby creating efficiency. That results in less labor and less time and more money. That efficiency gives people time to think more strategically about their business. When that happens, you get even bigger returns on the time saved.

I believe that we are in the middle of a revolution of sorts when it comes to small business tools. It is hard to predict all the things that will happen but given the other topic in this issue, POS, let's look at one that is getting lots of attention: Credit Card Acceptance.

Since credit cards were invented businesses have had to go thru complex applications, buy expensive equipment and spend lots of dollars on integrating their systems. That is all changing. Thanks to companies like Square, Shopkeep and Revel systems, it is getting much easier and cheaper to accept credit cards.

Square started the revolution by eliminating the need for expensive merchant equipment. All you needed was a dongle and a smart phone. Then they used the centralized data capabilities to approve applications in real-time. Now they



**IN THE
CLOUD**

have millions of merchants that have never ever experienced the hassle of setting up a merchant account. Imagine all the time saved and the creative thinking that their small businesses were able to pursue. Pretty cool!

While Square has focused on the sole proprietor, ShopKeep and Revel have focused more on the retail establishments using iPads as terminals. The graphical interface means no one has to learn to use the terminal, which saves time. The centralized data in the cloud though is more important in the long term. It allows businesses to seamlessly integrate their POS system with their accounting system. This is only possible because the accounting systems such as Intuit's QuickBooks, Netsuite, Intacct and Xero, all have an open API architecture for sharing data to and fro. Again, the cloud is saving time allowing businesses to make more money.

Now here is the bad news. The cloud is new to all of us. That means changing a process and that means investing time to get started. This is the same challenge with anything new but can be especially challenging with cloud technology given the pace of change. Unfortunately, we all know that learning new things gets harder if you are entrenched in

your old way of doing things. It helps to keep an open mind. So, oddly enough time work will work against you if you don't adapt to new technology.

If you wait to adopt the technology while some of your competitors jump right into it, they will continue to learn and try new things distancing themselves from you. We have lots of customers and the example that comes to mind is the owner of 35 fast food restaurants. When he started with us he only had 12 and his growth was stalled. He didn't have the capital nor did he want to expand his team to make growth happen. After he started using cloud solutions like Bill.com, he was able to grow and now has 35 restaurants. So the little bit of investment of his time has paid off handsomely.

Now that you have taken the time to read this article, I hope it got you thinking about how time can be on your side. Oh, and for those regular readers, this isn't the first column that I have written using the Stones as inspiration and I doubt it will be the last! ●

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Where's the Cloud Now?

Cloud definitions, strategies and marketing messages continue to shift. What is **MOST** important is the business problem you are trying to solve and the solutions available. We will continue leveraging cloud resources throughout the rest of this decade and beyond. We expect a blend of local resources and cloud resources will be needed for the foreseeable future.

For example, Microsoft Office 365 is a blend of storage in Microsoft public cloud data centers, applications that can be run through a browser and traditional Microsoft Office that can work locally or connect to the cloud storage. You can extend local

resources over the internet, commonly referred to as a private cloud. You can share computing capability with others in the public cloud.

So what capabilities are working well and should be considered? Where are the risks? How about the costs? When should you choose SaaS, private and public cloud offerings? Who does the implementation work? Why should you consider these strategies? Although a complex topic, hopefully this article will serve as a summary of your choices.

Private Cloud, Public Cloud?

In prior columns, we have explained that software applications can run in a browser. This is called Software as a Service or SaaS. Examples include: AccountantsWorld (among the first!), CCH Access, GoFileRoom, GoSystemRS Tax, Intuit Online Tax, XCM, ADP Run, Avalara, Concur, QuickBooks Online, Xero, Wave, SageOne, FreshBooks, Kashoo, Intacct, SAP Business By Design, ShareFile and SmartVault. Productivity applications that are SaaS include the



Microsoft Web Apps and Google Docs. Some vendors have been concerned about keeping your local speed and user experience fast and rich, and they have used more robust local clients as a solution to this issue today. Examples of this

Traditional applications can be hosted in a data center. Thomson Virtual Office, Cloud 9 Realtime, InSynq, Cloudvara, XCenteric, Right Networks, Qutera and IVDesk would be examples of hosting services for traditional

WITH EITHER A PUBLIC OR PRIVATE CLOUD, YOU CAN WORK ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, ANYPLACE ... OR NOT.

approach include Microsoft Office 365, as noted above and the CCH Access Suite. All of these product examples are public cloud offerings.

applications. All of these vendors' approach of hosting applications should be considered **public cloud**. Your files can be private or shared,



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a separate private cloud for you at a premium charge. The key benefits to a private cloud are more flexibility, integration and customization, and in most cases greater security but at a premium price.

So, What Should Be Your Strategy?

You should look at what you are trying to accomplish as a firm. If you are in public practice, think about the interfaces to your clients first. If you are in industry, think about how you interface with your customers and suppliers. The technical tools today allow you to work anywhere, anytime and anyplace. You should look at the software that fits your needs the best.

If the solution you need is only available as an in-house or network based application, then don't feel badly about choosing that approach. If your needs can be met by a SaaS application, then choose that. Make sure you understand that you'll have to spend money on interfacing systems unless the vendor provides the interfaces. Generally vendors will provide many interfaces to make it easier for you to adopt their system.

If you conclude you need an in-house application, as noted above, you have two primary choices: implement a traditional in-house LAN/WAN extended with technologies from Citrix and others OR turn to a hosting company that supports all of the applications that you need and want to run. If you have a mix of in-house and SaaS applications, or a hybrid solution, then you have to make sure your hosting provider can support all of the applications you desire.

Model all of the costs for a ten year period. This will help you see the cost/benefit of being in the cloud or remaining in-house. The reason for using ten years in the model is that traditional servers and Storage Area Networks (SANs) need to be scheduled for replacement every five years. One of your largest unexpected costs will likely be on software licensing and upgrades if you have an in-house implementation. Cloud vendors factor in hardware infrastructure and upgrades in their monthly costs.

You will continue to have technology local resources that have to be maintained whether you are in the cloud or have an in-house "private cloud" implementation. These technologies include: a next generation firewall, good cabling (CAT 6af), 1GBps switches with Jumbo Frame and Power Over Ethernet support, Phone service (VOIP), copiers/MFP, end user computers including UltraBooks or desktops, multiple monitors, scanners, printers, smartphones and encryp-

IN THE CLOUD

tion everywhere. Optionally, you may want to have: redundant internet lines, wireless (public/private), tablets, cellular data, portable monitors (MMT, HP U160), conference room displays or projectors connected with an Apple TV or McTivia appliance, a well thought out web site, and digital signage.

The advantages to being in a data center include: redundant communication lines, generators for backup power, SLA (Service Level Agreements) of 99.999(9) percent, physical security and control, command centers, SOC/SSAE 16 certifications (often inherited), and probable BC/DR preparedness. The issues for private cloud implementations include: sufficient local expertise, Microsoft licensing, on-going maintenance and managed services costs, software updates, the capital expense of replacing server, SANs and backup appliances every five years, power outages, physical risk in the office, and internet costs for greater speed.

As you do your evaluation of how to use the cloud, think about your goals. Look to maximize reliability and speed, minimize downtime and costs, and provide flexible client/customer solutions. With either a public or private cloud, you can work anywhere, anytime, anyplace... or not. ●

but you are still using resources that are publically available with supporting hardware infrastructure components shared by more than one company. When security is set up correctly, your private data will be secure. Some vendors would argue that even though you are sharing common data center and applications, your firm's data is kept private, and they'll refer to their offering as a private cloud.

We prefer to think of private cloud offerings where you build and maintain a private cloud in-house or in hosting centers that provide a completely separate infrastructure using offerings like Citrix XenApp,

Citrix XenDesktop or VMware View. You may find the long-term costs to be less to build a private cloud in-house and you will typically see greater speed and flexibility. For most CPA firms, Microsoft's Hyper-V and App-V aren't as fast for CCH, Thomson or Intuit products today. When a virtualized network is extended with these technologies, whether the network is in your firm or in a data center, you provide users the ability to run from anywhere, anytime with similar performance to the office.

This approach is a **private cloud**. A few vendors, Cloud 9 Realtime and Xcentric for example, will build

SEEING THROUGH THE CLOUD

Get Your Head (and Servers) in the Cloud!

The Cloud is nothing new; this technology has been around for many years and large corporations paid high dollars to take advantage of the security and benefits that only the Cloud provides. Today, with technological advances, the small to mid-size firms can not only afford to be in the Cloud, but save big on IT costs, time and resources by outsourcing their servers to a Cloud provider.

Why are Cloud based servers a better option than on-site infrastructures?

There are so many reasons that a firm should move their servers to the Cloud, but to me the top 5 benefits over having an on-site infrastructure are:

- **Security & Liability:** Vetted Cloud Providers can offer a level of security that the local firm could not replicate without a substantial investment into infrastructure, IT staff and redundancy. In keeping a local infrastructure, the firm is absorbing the liability should a breach to their client's sensitive data and information occurred.
- **Mobility:** With the Cloud, you can login from any device anywhere, with internet connection. You are no longer tied to a workstation or geographic location. You can work in the full desktop version of all of your applications no matter where you are.
- **Cost:** All firms are different in what their total costs will be because they have different user, software application, and data requirements. However, most firms save between 30-50% over having a local infrastructure. In compiling your cost savings, you will need to include not only hardware, software licensing but also backups, electricity, and IT labor or even your own staff time.
- **IT Headaches:** CPA's do not go to school to spend their days updating applications, computers and doing IT work. The

Cloud allows you to shift the focus from IT back to billable hours.

- **Client Service Offering:** The technically advanced firms are offering their clients technology solutions that set them apart from their competition. They can then expand their service offering, be relied upon as a trusted consultant, and work in real-time with their clients in the files versus sending files back & forth and addressing an issue after it's too late.

What about Security?

The Cloud is by far a more secure environment than keeping a local server in your office. A small to mid-sized firm would have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to recreate the enterprise level security infrastructure that Cloud providers have installed.

First and foremost, the backups should be offsite from the local office which Cloud innately provides. Second, vetted Cloud providers are delivering their services from SOC2/SSAE 16 certified data center facilities which provide 24/7/365 days a year of onsite security staff, continuous monitoring, an uninterrupted power supply and RAID implementation. Additionally, Cloud providers can deploy N+1 or 2N redundancy on all systems, as well as purchase enterprise level firewalls and anti-virus protection.

Keeping your server in-house opens your firm up to the liability of having it physically stolen but also the risk of being hacked. Enterprise level firewalls allow the Cloud providers to not only block spe-

cific IP addresses but even entire countries that pose a risk.

What is the user experience like?

Cloud9 has been connection manager free for 2 years now. That means there are no clunky Citrix downloads that are not only costly, but also cumbersome to work with and can slow things down. The Cloud9 platform is delivered through a Microsoft Installer which actually streams the application to the user PC; you can actually see it running in your Task Bar like a local application, and it's hard to tell whether you are working locally or in the Cloud. It's a seamless integration between the user's local system, the hosted desktop applications and their chosen SaaS solutions. Here are some of the ways that our Accounting clients describe their user experience:

"It was probably one of the smoothest implementations of a new technology that I've ever had. All of the setup and orientation was done remotely, once the employees logged into the system, they felt like they were home."

— Doug Sleeter, The Sleeter Group

"We've had a great experience with Cloud9. The service is fast and the uptime is great. Never any downtime. Support response is timely. If an emergency arises, Cloud9 has always been there to help and will always provide good advice about certain products or issues when asked."

— Myles Smith, President at
L. Myles Smith & Company, P.C.



KACEE JOHNSON, MBA
Executive Vice President
Cloud9 Real Time

Cloud9's Executive VP, Kacee Johnson, is a regular speaker and commentator at Accounting, Legal and Technology conferences nationwide; focusing on business development and education about Cloud technologies. Awarded the *CPA Practice Advisor* Magazines "Top 40 Under 40" Award in 2012 and 2013, she is recognized as one of the young professionals leading the Accounting profession into the future. Kacee is dedicated to helping companies adapt to doing business in the Cloud and bridge the gap between users, applications and IT.

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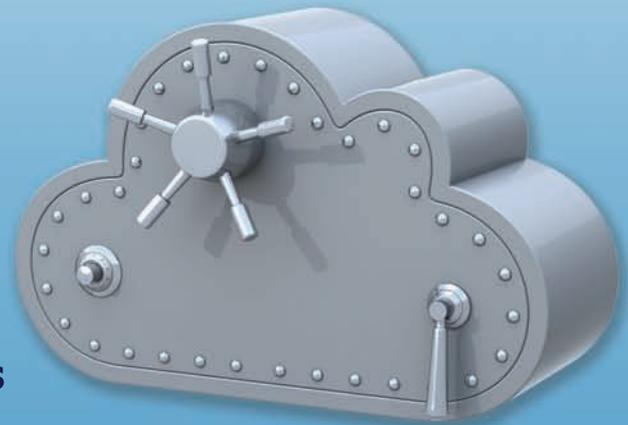


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The Benefits and Challenges of Cloud Accounting

Accounting firms across the country are looking to the cloud to transform their client accounting services. They are looking to move from simply transactional book-keeping services to higher value advisory services more in line with the CFO function. And it is technology that is driving this newfound interest in a service that has often been viewed as a low-profit, necessary evil in most firms.

Offering a collaborative environment with access to real-time data, cloud accounting platforms are allowing CPAs to take a more proactive approach in positioning themselves as trusted business advisors. We

are still in the early adopter stage of this movement and the interest level is further down the adoption curve than the execution. However, those firms that are already successfully implementing their strategies are recognizing tremendous opportunity – beyond what many of them expected when they began their journey. We've seen this first-hand with our clients in The Producer Circle, a community of early adopting firms willing to network with peers, access expertise and develop new services.

Benefits of Cloud Accounting

- **Earn greater profits** – Firms are finding the higher value CFO and planning services offered by cloud accounting carry a much higher profit margin than even the core services like audit and tax. Leveraging the real-time transactional information as a foundation, they are identifying opportunities to provide advisory services that clients truly value and for which they are willing to pay.
- **Make yourself indispensable** – Transactional services are simply a part of doing business and business owners don't place a lot of value in them. However, when they have a partner that uses that information to provide direction and advice, the client begins

to view that partner as an integral part of running their business. One they can't do without!

- **Ensure clean data** – One of the biggest headaches in audit and tax is the initial prep required to ensure the data is clean. The root cause of this pain is the fact that the CPA is usually brought in after-the-fact and charged with fixing the client's mistakes. In a collaborative, real-time environment the accountant can ensure that data is clean on a real-time basis. This streamlines the work required on the core service lines.
- **Reduce technology headaches** – In the traditional model of desktop accounting software, CPAs across the country have been struggling with managing multiple software versions and the licensing models that are less than favorable to the CPA firm. In the cloud, the accountant and client are on the platform and avoid the version/licensing headaches.

Challenges of Cloud Accounting

- **Identifying a champion** – Identifying the leader within the firm that will champion this project is a hurdle many firms are finding difficult to overcome. Finding a leader with the influence within the firm and access to resources is an important first step.
- **Shifting the mindset** – Many of the higher-value advisory services I've previously mentioned can jeopardize independence for the firm. Shifting from an assurance to an advisory mindset can be challenging for many firms. However, most are finding that the advisory services provide much more opportunities than the traditional audit work. To overcome this, several firms are setting up separate entities or referring the audit work to other CPA firms.
- **Building the team** – To do this and do



IN THE CLOUD

it right, dedicated resources are required. Many firms are struggling because they've assigned this as almost a second job to their team-members. It's a chicken and the egg situation where firms want proof before fully committing resources to this endeavor. Yet it's hard to prove without the dedicated resources required.

- **Managing change** – Implementing change is always hard and making this switch – in software, mindset, process, etc. – is no different. Education and effective communication are essential to successfully navigating the change effort. A strong leader as the champion makes all the difference.

Cloud accounting is transformational to our profession in the services we provide and the way we collaborate with clients. Regardless of whether you are just getting started or you've already built out a successful practice, there is still a huge opportunity and growing demand in the marketplace. This is a global movement and is frequently changing. You don't have to take the journey alone though as there is an abundance of information available – blogs, articles and training. There are also peer communities that can harness the wisdom of the crowd, hold you accountable and fast-track your progress. Take advantage of these resources to make sure your firm is knowledgeable and ready to capitalize on the opportunity. ●



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.

The “3 Cs” of the Cloud — Does Your Firm Fit?

By Drew West, Solutions Director, Deltek



ou’d buy a shirt for how it fits you—not for how it looks on 1,000 other people.

So it shouldn’t matter that 6 in 10 companies already have at least one “cloud” application. Or that the “cloud services market” (apparently that’s you) will double in four years, from \$45B to \$95B. No, what matters more than any “cloud” hoopla is if it really fits. Stop wondering if the cloud is a fit for your firm; see if your firm fits the cloud.

The Cloud, Clarified

Simply put, “cloud” systems are deployed *outside* your organization, typically accessed through the internet. Software and hardware are completely external. But users experience these “software-as-a-service” (SAAS) applications pretty much the same as systems *inside* your firm. A cloud solution can eliminate much of the cost, expertise and infrastructure needed to install and maintain internal systems. Yet many feel that control, security and access concerns offset these cloud advantages.

Change, Competence, Cost

To understand where your firm sits on the spectrum of risk and reward, reflect on 3 attributes:

CHANGE

Keep in mind your firm’s attitude towards innovation in the face of change and competition. If a technology advantage is a key to your strategy, the cloud’s efficiency and cost savings make

sense. Also consider tolerance for change. Cloud solutions offer frequent, often automatic, updates—great for users who like the latest features, and good for IT departments that don’t have to install every update.

Yet frequent change sometimes bothers partners or staff slow to embrace technology. If that’s the case, internal systems let firms like these dictate the pace of change. Finally, think about ongoing needs, like unique reports or special workflows. Are these frequent and urgent?

Cloud-based practice-management systems are typically packaged with common workflows repeatable across most firms. Advanced cloud solutions will even allow broad configuration, but internal systems could work best for firms with highly unique—and constantly changing—needs.

COMPETENCE

In firms large or small, internal systems work well for those with a skilled IT staff to maintain hardware, deploy and update software, and keep everyone connected. But your firm may not *want* to be good at those things. Installed offsite and maintained for you, cloud-based systems are a great “hands-off” approach. And pushing maintenance responsibilities to a cloud solution frees IT for strategic work like business intelligence,



or even application development.

Internal IT teams don’t often lack the *skills* necessary to manage hardware, monitor security, or maintain software—but *focus* is different. Internal IT teams are often resource-constrained, facing a challenging workload without optimal staff. Splitting time across so many responsibilities, while putting out any fires that may arise, doesn’t necessarily introduce risk into an internal environment—but it does mean lots of stress worrying about possible viruses, hackers, or bugs.

Firms seeking to eliminate risk or worry should consider the cloud: A cloud-solution brings with it a team solely dedicated to maintaining the software, ensuring its availability and protecting it from malware or virus threats. And unlike an internal IT department, the cloud-solution’s vendor is bound to the service-level agreement stipulated in a subscription or contract. Where an internal IT department might falter under an increasing workload, a cloud solution is obligated to a constant service level no matter how many clients its vendor takes on.

CONFIDENCE

Your data-center may be an entire climate-controlled limited-access floor, or a closet in the back-office. That you can even find your data-center is an important contrast: you’ll never “walk by” the data-center of a cloud solution.

Beyond the fact that it’s offsite

(often an undisclosed location,) data-centers for any appropriate cloud solution are typically guarded by physical security and video surveillance, and double-verify anyone seeking to be anywhere near the systems or the data within them. And there’s usually more than one—cloud solutions providers obligated to ensure availability and security typically provide a least one redundant environment, ready-to-go in the case of any issues.

Firms wanting high availability and exceptional security might find the cloud a better option than the cost and complexity of bringing an on-site data-center to a similar level. Yet your data is still yours—it shouldn’t be mingled with anyone else’s, and completely available to you for reporting or in any way you might need it. An internal system might be a better option if you don’t get this assurance from the cloud.

Making the Move

Internal practice management systems have brought accuracy and efficiency for years. Yet the cloud’s growing adoption may have you curious about its advantages. Keep in mind as you consider the cloud:

- Your firm’s culture, and your overall technology strategy aligns with the cloud.
- The cloud complements and helps your IT resources flourish as a strategic part of the firm.
- Your cloud solution surpasses the access, availability, and security you have today. ●

SEEING THROUGH THE CLOUD

The Cloud Moves Your Practice Beyond the Desktop

A decade or two ago, PC's brought increased productivity to accounting offices, and today the cloud offers more capabilities that PC's never could.

That means with the cloud you can do many things you could not do before on your desktop. Below are some major advantages of the cloud. By fully harnessing the power of the cloud you can perform your client engagements faster and easier, create stronger bonds with your clients, offer value-added services, increase your relevance and make your practice more rewarding.

- **Work from anywhere at any time.**

You're no longer tied to a software solution installed on your desktop. With cloud-based solutions, you can work from any computer with an internet connection, including mobile devices.

- **Collaborate with your clients as their advisor.**

Most of the problems you currently face in accounting are because you and your clients are doing different parts of accounting in different systems with no connection between them. This disconnect results in clients making bookkeeping messes that you must fix, cumbersome file transfers you need to manage, different versions of G/L systems you have to work with, client data you have to chase after, and so on .

The cloud opens the door to Accountant-Centric solutions that let you and your clients work together using one unified system with everything you both need. Because you're working as a team and not independently, you – the accountant – guide the accounting process from start to finish. Cloud-based Accountant-Centric solutions eliminate all of the above problems and make client accounting more efficient and profitable. Accounting Relief from AccountantsWorld is an example of a collaborative, cloud-based system.

AccountantsWorld is an example of a collaborative, cloud-based system.

- **Offer profitable services you couldn't before.**

Payroll is a good example. Cloud-based payroll solutions created exclusively for accountants, like AccountantsWorld's Payroll Relief, make payroll processing



one of the most profitable services for accountants. The right payroll solution will eliminate most of the payroll processing tasks in their offices such as: payroll data entry, direct deposit, tax deposit, e-filing of tax forms, and printing of paychecks. And this processing power is available at a fraction of what the payroll service bureaus charge.

- **Exchange data and documents faster and easier.**

With desktop solutions, data exchange is limited between applications that are integrated and typically must be installed on the firm's network. The cloud extends integration to a true data exchange between applications anywhere in the cloud. Data can be

easily pulled from bank and credit card accounts into accounting systems, thus minimizing data entry.

Furthermore, the cloud allows the seamless exchange of documents through the use of client portals. Clients can securely upload source documents directly to the firm, or securely download their tax returns and financials anytime, anywhere with an Internet connection, including smart phones.

What is AccountantsWorld's expertise with the cloud?

With more than 13 years' experience, AccountantsWorld is the pioneer for providing cloud solutions for accountants. We have the most extensive suite of fully-integrated solutions, including bookkeeping, write-up, trial balance, live payroll, after-the-fact payroll, client portals, document management, website creation, online marketing, and practice management. It's no surprise our Accounting Relief and Payroll Relief solutions have won *CPA Practice Advisor* Innovation Awards.

AccountantsWorld has one of the largest online communities of accountants and boasts over 110,000 members. We put accountants first by offering our members a tremendous amount of free resources including webinars, forums, whitepapers, and training about the cloud - everything to help accountants advance their practice.

AccountantsWorld®
Do More. Do Better.™



CHANDRA BHANSALI
President, AccountantsWorld

AccountantsWorld Co-Founder and President Dr. Chandra Bhansali is recognized throughout the accounting profession as an expert in accounting technology. Over a decade ago, Dr. Bhansali knew the Internet would have a profound impact on the accounting profession and ever since, AccountantsWorld has been developing cloud solutions for accountants. Today, AccountantsWorld offers a complete suite of cloud solutions for accountants, including award-winning Accounting Relief and Payroll Relief.

888-999-1366 | www.AccountantsWorld.com



Ready for the cloud?

Here's an important fact.



Accountant-Centric cloud solutions outperform them all.

Other cloud accounting and payroll systems put your small business clients first and force you to take the back seat. We believe—and we're sure you will agree—that's the wrong approach.

At **AccountantsWorld**—the pioneer in cloud-based solutions for accountants for more than a decade—we put **accountants FIRST**. All of our products and services have been created with a single focus:

To let you perform your client engagements faster and easier, better serve your clients, make more money, and feel more accomplished.

And that's why our cloud solutions can do more for your practice than all others.

Our complete suite of Accountant-Centric solutions—the **Power Practice System**®—includes: bookkeeping, write-up, trial balance, financial reporting, live and after-the-fact payrolls, document management, client portals, practice management, building websites, and online marketing.

They all work in perfect harmony to let you harness the full power of the Internet. No one else offers such a comprehensive suite of fully integrated cloud solutions that does so much for your practice.

*"With his vision of **accountant-centric** software and his history as a pioneer of the cloud, AccountantsWorld President Chandra Bhansali and his company are natural leaders as the profession finally gets its head into the clouds."*

~ Accounting Today,
"Top 100 People in Accounting", September 2012

Are you ready for the cloud to make your practice more rewarding?
Watch our five-minute video at RewardYourPractice.com.

Accountants FirstSM ... only at
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A Brave New World of Mobility and Changing Expectations

By Teresa Mackintosh, CPA.CITP

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? When we look back on this time in the evolution of the Accounting Profession, I predict it will be nearly impossible to say which came first – the proliferation of mobile applications, or the changing dynamics and expectations of our clients and staff. No matter the answer, we have crossed the tipping point into a brave new world.

Clients and staff expect accessibility first and foremost to information and to their providers of professional services. New staff members joining our teams have limited and distant experiences that were not all “connected.” What is a common baseline assumption really underscores a more critical point – our profession needs to continue to adapt and evolve.

The rapid development of mobile solutions providing innovative new features and added functionality for accounting professionals can be tied to changing expectations, rapid consumerization (the crossover of things from our personal to work lives), and the constant innovation of devices that has made these things possible.

Not too long ago, CCH customers were telling us that being able to call up important tax information by tapping their smartphones while meeting with clients and getting work done outside the office would be ideal. To meet their needs, our first generation of mobile tax research, content and solutions,

including the free CCH Mobile and CCH Tax News Highlights apps, created a consistently updated and trustworthy connection to the latest tax developments. Calling the office for details or wondering if the story popping up at the top of your Internet search was accurate could now be simplified by tapping an icon.

**“IF YOU DON’T LIKE CHANGE,
YOU’RE GOING TO LIKE
IRRELEVANCE EVEN LESS.”**

— GENERAL ERIC K. SHINSEKI, U.S.
SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,
RETIRED U.S. ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF

Constant connections to information quickly moved from convenience to competitive advantage, but our customers said they needed more. They wanted to address certain workflow functions on their mobile devices, but only so much could be done on a screen that fits into your pocket. As the introduc-

tion of the Apple iPad and similar tablets expanded “working real estate,” we answered our customers’ demands for wanting to view specific files, securely retrieve client data, key in billing time and update project statuses – all while they were on-the-go and at any time.

Today, the formidable combination of readily available, up-to-the-minute research integrated with advanced, cloud-based workflow tools, really separates future-ready firms from the rest of the pack when it comes to meeting clients’ growing needs. More robust mobile functionality offered with our solutions such as the ProSystem fx Mobile app, the e-File Status app for checking the status of federal tax returns and now even quick access to documents via the cloud-based CCH Axxess tax preparation, compliance and firm management solution really enables professionals to get more accomplished on-the-go than ever before.

Those changing client and staff expectations in this thriving era of innovation are making the phrase, “I’ll check when I get to the office,” nearly obsolete. Mobile efficiency is now considered the rule, not the exception, when it comes to day-to-day tasks such as:

- Viewing and updating the status of current projects assigned to firm staff members

- Responding to client needs when contacted outside the office (current work status, recent billing information)
- Having mobile access to files stored in document management systems – quickly calling them up whenever contacted by clients

- Communicating/collaborating with clients via mobile devices (specifically via mobile apps that are client facing)

Although it may not be practical to complete a tax return from end-to-end on a mobile device, the advent of more mobile tax workflow functionality and research content that is seamlessly integrated with existing firm software solutions has dramatically closed the gap between professionals accessing what they need, when they need it and serving clients on their time tables. And more mobile innovations are on the way as our customers tell us other things they’d like to do and more importantly, what their clients expect them to do.

Our expectations have fundamentally shifted, and will continue to evolve as technology makes more things possible while significantly impacting our professional workflows. Smart firms will thrive by evolving with these trends. ●

Teresa Mackintosh, CPA, is the President and General Manager of U.S. Software for Wolters Kluwer, CCH.



New QBO Version Provides Harmony for Accountants and SMB Owners

By Taija Jenkins, Associate Editor

A little harmony can go a long way. And that's exactly what Intuit set out to demonstrate when it debuted a new, redesigned version of QuickBooks Online at the Midwest Accounting & Finance Showcase in Chicago in August. With a cleaner and simpler user interface, seamless navigation, new features and increased mobility, this enhanced version is designed to synchronize the collaboration between accountants and their clients in a more efficient manner.

Intuit, developer of business and financial management solutions, has witnessed rapid growth of its QuickBooks Online solution, making it a necessity to provide a seamless experience for the 1.3 million small and mid-sized businesses, individuals and accounting professionals currently using for the service worldwide.

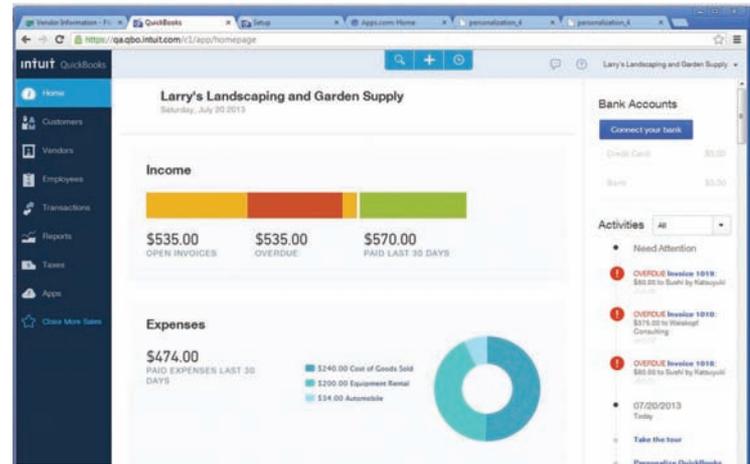
QuickBooks Online now features a simpler layout, and while the software looks and feels different, the product's functionality has not diminished. Users will notice the new user interface is similar to that of the desktop version, eliminating the need to navigate to separate screens to complete tasks.

"Our customers told us that they wanted QuickBooks Online to be just as fast as the desktop version. It wasn't enough for it to just be fast for a web version. They needed better usability," said Kevin Kirn, Group Product

Manager, QuickBooks Online. "Accountants use a lot of different products and they want to be able to ramp up very quickly. They don't want to spend weeks learning new products and they need solutions that their clients can understand easily."

One of the first things users will notice upon logging in is the newly designed Home dashboard. It still offers users the same at-a-glance functionality, but now includes several new features designed to make it easier for QBO users to stay on top of things. For example, users can see how many overdue invoices they have simply by placing their mouse over the "Overdue" bar. One click will take users directly to the list, where they can then manage any overdue invoices. Also newly incorporated into the home screen is an activity feed on the right side. Items that need attention are displayed at the top, followed by company activity. Using a Facebook-like feed, the activity list includes all data that has been entered into the program.

"We've put all of the client's data in one place for them to quickly access. Just like Facebook's newsfeed, additional data will populate once you scroll to the bottom. We designed it so our users have control over how much data appears based on how far they scroll.



With data only populating on demand, users don't have to worry about the program becoming bogged down. It's completely intuitive," said Kirn.

Other enhancements include a redesigned left-hand menu, enhanced search feature and simpler user interface for managing transactions. The left-hand menu now includes fewer sub-tabs, eliminating the need to click through multiple items to perform a task. Users can create and view expenses, checks, invoices and other items simply by clicking the plus sign located in the top center of the screen. The transaction details slide down instead of opening in new windows. The transaction detail screen also has an autocomplete function that ensures users enter the necessary details. In addition, a footer menu has been added that "sticks" to the bottom of the screen, allowing users to access common actions without scrolling to the bottom of the page. To return to the previous screen, users simply press the "X" at the top. QBO will also suggest next steps and reminders for certain transactions. This layout and functionality is consistent across transactions, making for a truly harmonized experience.

Intuit has also incorporated more tablet functionality into this version of

QuickBooks Online. Tablet users can now perform virtually every task from their device, a vast improvement over previous versions that were not very tablet-friendly. While the new tablet version does not support bank feeds yet, users can expect that functionality in the future.

The launch of this new QuickBooks Online version is just the first step in a company-wide initiative that seeks to improve the integration and interface of all of Intuit's online products, from payroll to payments to tax.

"We have been working hard to deliver the solutions our customers want, improving efficiencies yet keeping our products easy to use and giving them the same look and feel," Kirn said. "We are working to truly harmonize our products across multiple platforms and functions." ●



SEEING THROUGH THE CLOUD

The Simple Life: Boosting Workflow Efficiency in the Cloud

What benefits are firms looking for in the cloud?

Firms are looking for improved workflow. They want solutions that work together to streamline their processes so they can focus on providing the highest level of service to their clients.

A true cloud-based solution can provide this through common data and services that are shared across their mission critical applications. For instance, CCH Access™ offers a centralized setup and maintenance of 'common data' which includes client, staff and firm information accessed by all the applications. What this means is that you only have to set up clients once on a single, integrated database and they are immediately available across all the CCH Access modules including Tax, Document, Portal, Practice and Workstream.

Isn't it about more than just sharing common data?

Common data is just the tip of the iceberg. Firms realize true efficiencies when they have access to 'common services' in addition to data. These common services are really just features and functions of the various modules and include actions such as storing documents, updating project status, starting a stopwatch to track time on projects and importing data into a return. A great example in CCH Access would be a typical tax workflow — with a professional opening a tax return and, right off the bat, being able to automatically start a clock to track time spent working on that specific return. As work is finished on the return, the practitioner can route a digital copy to the document management system and post it to the client portal, all in the same step. And, as the job is closed, the user is prompted to save the clock as a time transaction that will be posted

to the time and billing module as well as update the status of the return in the workflow tracking module. The workflow system will automatically notify the next responsible staff person.

What's interesting to note is that everything is accomplished while still in the tax preparation module, either automatically or with a couple mouse clicks. The user doesn't have to navigate to another module to perform any of these workflow steps.

What about applications outside of CCH Access?

We built CCH Access on a true 'service oriented architecture' platform, so common data and services can be shared with external applications. Through our Open Integration Platform, approved third-party vendors can integrate CCH Access common data and services into their applications, providing them at the 'point of need' for our common customers. They have told us that they want the same streamlined workflows that CCH Access offers, such as time tracking, document storage or status updates when they are using other applications, so we are working to support these features in software development kits that can be licensed by both third parties and customers. In fact, we are leveraging these same common services with CCH products not yet on the CCH Access platform. Firms that use ProSystem fx® Engagement

can link their binders to projects in CCH Access™ Workstream, providing one-click access to updating a project's status. These services also allow us to quickly build great mobile applications that our customers can access while they are on the go.

What are the roadblocks that firms need to overcome to adopt the cloud?

These probably break down into a couple areas. First are the security concerns around client, firm and staff data. The reality is that they are already faced with these issues and moving to a cloud solution, in most cases, will improve their security and accessibility and reduce risk. Most firms cannot make the investment on their own to create the secure and redundant environments that technology providers such as CCH can with its business partners. They email files, keep data on multiple devices and rely on Internet providers for their connectivity. The second is focused around strategic planning for migration to the cloud. Many firms are unsure which applications to move and when, which also generates uncertainty around IT infrastructure costs involved in cloud solution migration. We have been partnering and working closely with firms to help manage this planning process — looking at various options that will allow a smooth and seamless transition from on-premise based applications to the cloud.



Wolters Kluwer
CCH

JERRY CONNOR
Senior Manager,
Product Management & Design
Wolters Kluwer, CCH

Jerry Connor is a Product Line Manager for CCH, a part of Wolters Kluwer. Highly focused on customer-driven innovation, Jerry currently has Product Management responsibility for CCH Access, the tax and accounting profession's first modular cloud-based tax preparation, compliance and firm management solution. With 20+ years of experience in the Tax and Accounting market, he has held positions in Center Management, Training and Consulting and various responsibilities in Product Management including Practice, Engagement and Tax.





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SEEING THROUGH THE CLOUD

Right Networks: The Right Way to the Cloud

Right Networks is the leading provider of hosted applications for small business accounting firms. Intuit and Thomson Reuters have unique, exclusive hosting relationships with Right Networks. Right Networks is the right choice to move your organization into the cloud easily, reliably, and securely.

Question 1:

What benefits do firms see when they move to Right Networks?

Some of the greatest benefits that firms see when they move to Right Networks is the ability to collaborate with clients anytime, anywhere in a fully managed secure environment. It allows firms to increase their value to customers as they can efficiently serve their clients with direct access to their files from any internet enabled device. As a firm becomes more mobile and is able to service clients more effectively they become more productive and can focus on growing their business.

Question 2:

What misconceptions do people have about the cloud?

Some of the largest misconceptions of the cloud center around security. How secure is the cloud? At Right Networks we offer banking level security to businesses of all sizes. Our security includes multiple SSAE-16/SAS-70 locations, encrypted communication, firewalls, multi-layer access controls, and encrypted backups. Right Networks has designed an infrastructure that includes end to end redundancy across the entire footprint of our hosting service. Our production networking equipment operate from within two tier IV carrier grade datacenters. Each datacenter

utilizes state of the art 24X7 security systems including biometric scanning, onsite security guards, camera systems as well as key shuffling systems. Each datacenter provides 911 services for its region and is protected by the National Guard during natural disasters and security threats. Right Networks takes all necessary steps to ensure data and applications could not be more secure.

Question 3:

How can accounting firms leverage cloud technology to grow their business?

Accounting firms can harness the power of the cloud to operate their business in a more productive and efficient manner by saving time and resources. They can also expand the services they offer to existing customers through additional applications and add-ons they can leverage via the cloud. Firms can add more customers and collaborate more effectively with the clients they currently have in a cloud based environment.

Question 4:

Why work with Right Networks instead of building my own cloud?

Right Networks offers firms a fully-managed end to end redundant enterprise class infrastructure. A firm would incur costs of tens of thousands

of dollars in hardware, IT resources and office space if they tried to construct their own environment. When you access the Cloud via Right Networks you know that you are accessing a fully managed environment where all updates, upgrades, maintenance, security, and a 90 day rolling backup are all being accomplished in the background, keeping the technology transparent to your firm and your clients.

Question 5:

How easy is it to move to the cloud?

Moving to the cloud is as easy as buying a book on Amazon. At Right Networks we can have you up and running in less than 24-hours. Most customers are up and running within an hour of signing up for the service. Once you are signed up, you have access to the desktop version of QuickBooks you are used to. No training or learning curve as you log in and get started.

Right Networks®

PHIL ROMINE
Partner and Chief Technology Officer
Right Networks

Phil has 20+ years of experience in operating systems architecture and distributed computing to develop an advanced, light-weight virtualization technology to provide end-to-end-redundant, on-demand computing reliably and efficiently. Phil has worked for a variety of tech companies including Data General, Open Data and MangoSoft where he was co-inventor of the distributed virtual web cache system. Phil holds a BS in Computer Engineering from Case Western Reserve University.



Right Networks[®]

The Right Way to the Cloud[™]

Right Networks is the right choice to move your business to the cloud easily, reliably, and securely.

Learn more at rightnetworks.com/cloud

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS

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

CORE ACCOUNTING CAPABILITIES

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

DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS

- Sales/Point-of-sale/Shipping
- Customer/Vendor Employee Management
- Inventory/Purchasing
- e-Features
- Remote Access

MANAGEMENT FEATURES

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

HELP/SUPPORT

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

Point-of-Sale: A Critical Investment for Retailers

By Mary Girsch-Bock

A few months ago, I was in a specialty retail shop with my son. After about 30 minutes of shopping, we both approached the cash register, items in hand, only to be told by a rather embarrassed cashier that his point-of-sale system was down and he was unable to process any sales until it was operational.

We returned our products to their proper place and left as the employee continued to try and resolve the situation via telephone with company headquarters; all to no avail. Passing the store an hour later, it was closed. Apparently the employee was unable to resolve the situation. This situation very accurately pinpointed how vulnerable retailers are regarding their point-of-sale systems.

While many small retailers continue to use a cash register, many others have moved into more sophisticated payment systems; which can increase sale processing speed by quickly scanning bar codes, and processing electronic payments quickly.

These same systems can also track customer details with ease. Unfortunately, if the system 'goes down,' retailers are often left on the phone for hours trying to resolve the situation, and watching sales go out the door in the process.

The answer is not to ignore technology in favor of a cash register, but rather to make sure that the point-of-sale system your client purchases is a good fit with what they need. While large, national retailers are typically on a single, networked system, many small to mid-sized retail businesses are still looking to move away from the traditional cash register.

This is especially important as the economy begins to stabilize and the retail sector begins to see some real improvement. Retailers must be able to find a way to become and remain competitive, and most importantly, remain in business. That means finding and using better tools when processing sales transactions.

Today, nobody wants to wait. If customers find themselves waiting in store lines too long, it's likely they won't return. That's why it's imperative that retailers look at the acquisition of a point-of-sale product as a business necessity.

Today, consumers have more choices than ever before. E-Commerce sales accounted for 5.5 percent of retail sales nationwide in the first quarter of 2013; which is why having a website has become even more important in the retail sector. Linking your website to your brick and mortar store is also important. And while many small retailers may shrug at the importance of customer loyalty programs, they are a great way to track customer buying habits and provide rewards to loyal customers, to keep them coming back.

You already know that each of your retail clients will have very specific needs. The small coffee shop owner will need a different system from the mattress retailer. A convenience store will need a different system than a computer store. As you explore each

of your client's needs, remember that there's likely a system that will work great for them.

In this review, we looked at basic system functions which includes exploring just how easy (or difficult) the system is to use. We also looked at how customizable the system is, whether it can support multiple store locations, and if it offers advanced retail management functionality, which includes e-commerce integration.

Specialized features can also be important, so we looked at things such as touch-screen technology, the ability to accept multiple payment types, and customer management capability. Tracking and reporting is also important, as is the ability of the product to integrate with current accounting systems. Finally, we looked at support options, because, as the gentleman mentioned earlier in the story, will attest, support options are very important, particularly in the point-of-sale world, where a nonfunctioning system means an immediate loss of revenue.

As always, it's up to you and your client to determine what system will work best for their needs, and provide them with the tools they need to remain in business for the foreseeable future. ●



Mary Girsch-Bock

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CAM Commerce - Retail Star

2013
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

Though ideally suited for larger specialty retailers, with the availability of Retail Star Lite, smaller retailers can utilize the product as well. Retail Star offers excellent customization capability, along with applications designed for specific retail sectors.

Retail Star, from CAM Commerce is a fully integrated POS product that offers complete front and back office financial manage-

ment capability, including excellent POS functionality. Retail Star is a modular system, so users can purchase the modules they need, and add others at a later date.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Available in two versions for both small and multi-location retailers
- Modular design allows users to choose only the modules they need

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077544

- Complete front/back office integration with website integration as well
- Excellent reporting capability
- Seven day a week system support available

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Significant training may be necessary
- Cost may be steep for larger retailers

SUMMARY & PRICING

With the availability of both Retail Star and Retail Star Lite, retailers of just about any size can benefit from the extensive array of features found in the product. Subscription agreements for Retail Star Lite start at under \$100.00 per month, with Retail Star pricing available directly from CAM Commerce. Retail

714-338-0200
www.camcommerce.com

Intuit, Inc. - QuickBooks Point of Sale 2013

2013
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIT

Intuit's core audience of small and mid-sized businesses will appreciate the newly enhanced QuickBooks Point of Sale product. A good fit for retailers with up to 20 locations that do not process a high level of sales transactions monthly, QuickBooks Point-of-Sale 2013 also makes good use of Cloud technology and offers flexible payment processing options for small to mid-sized retailers.

QuickBooks Point of Sale 2013 offers small and mid-sized retailers

a newly revised product that offers retailers an enhanced point of sale product with easier system navigation and an easy-to-use interface that makes processing sales easier and more flexible than ever before.

STRENGTHS

- Quick installation and system setup
- Flexibility of Go Payment App allows retailers to use smart phones to accept payments anywhere

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077527

- Affordably priced for even the smallest retailer
- Excellent selection of learning tools available for new users
- Solid point of sale reporting capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Not suitable for high volume retailers such as convenience stores and supermarkets
- Shipping options are limited
- Rapidly expanding retailers could outgrow product

SUMMARY & PRICING

QuickBooks Point-of-Sale 2013 is currently available for \$1,099.95. The product can be used as a stand-alone point of sale solution, or integrated with QuickBooks financial products for a complete front/back office retail/accounting solution.

866-379-6636
www.quickbooks.com

Reliable Softworks LLC - ReliaSale – Version 12

2013
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

ReliaSale, from Reliable Softworks LLC is a point of sale system designed for high-end retail dealers that offer appliances, furniture, outdoor equipment or high-end electronic devices. ReliaSale fits the need of these specialty retailers by providing comprehensive inventory control functionality, flexible product delivery options, and serial number tracking, and an integrated quoting system. ReliaSale is available as a server version or via the Cloud.

In business since 2008, Reliable Softworks LLC offers point of sale solutions to high-end retailers, and also offers ReliaServ, a field service system designed to integrate with ReliaSale. ReliaSale contains a robust inventory system designed for appliance, furniture, and similar retailers and offers users a compact, robust system in a user-friendly package

STRENGTHS

- Product setup is handled by software vendor

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077545

- Robust Inventory Management module
- Available in two versions – Cloud-based subscription and in-house server version
- Browser based system allows easy order processing using iOS or Android mobile devices
- Excellent reporting capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Narrow market excludes many retail types
- Significant time investment required

SUMMARY & PRICING

Reliasale from Reliable Softworks LLC is currently available on the Cloud as a subscription for \$20.00 per user per month. A server version of the product is available as well. For large item retailers, ReliaSale is an excellent, economical solution to help manage every aspect of this niche area, from initial sale, to delivery.

603-490-4766
www.reliablesoftworks.com

POINT-OF-SALE SYSTEMS

Celerant Technology Corp. - Command Retail – Version 6.4

2013
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

While small retailers are unlikely to use many of the features found in Celerant Command Retail, they are just as likely to benefit from its scalability and ease of use. Retailers with multiple locations that have a large web presence will also benefit from Command Retail.

Command Retail from Celerant Technology Corporation is fully integrated Point-of-Sale/Retail Management software, ideal for

larger retailers with more technical needs. Command Retail offers a complete point of sale solution as well as a comprehensive inventory management module.

STRENGTHS

- Robust system with strong inventory management
- Easily integrates with customer e-commerce
- Excellent customer management capability

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077543

- Large variety of industry specific add-ons
- Fully customizable

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Setup and implementation could be time consuming
- Cost and wide array of features could make it unsuitable for smaller retailers

SUMMARY & PRICING

Celerant's Command Retail system starts at around \$12,000, making it a significant financial investment that is ideally suited to larger retailers with multiple locations and complex inventory needs.

718-351-2000
www.celerant.com

ECR Software Corp. - Catapult 5.1.1

2013
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

CATAPULT comes with standard touch screen technology, and with its extensive customization capability, fits perfectly with the high-transaction retailers described above.

CATAPULT Point of Sale Software from ECRS offers complete retail enterprise automation, including both front and back office management. Completely customizable, CATAPULT is designed for

high-transaction retailers such as convenience stores, gas stations, pharmacies, beverage, grocery, co-ops, and vending retailers. CATAPULT is also a good fit for gift shops and vending environments.

STRENGTHS

- Product is fully customized for each market to reflect their needs
- Quick implementation and limited training needed

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077528

- Excellent reporting and dashboard reporting capability
- Scalable, with multiple options available and easily added
- Excellent customer loyalty capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Shipping integration not available
- Not suitable for retailers with high volume of mail orders

SUMMARY & PRICING

CATPULT starts at \$1,500 for a single user system, with add-on modules purchased separately. Designed with the needs of specific vertical retail markets, CATAPULT provides retailers with the customization, flexibility, and transaction processing speed that is necessary for these high volume business owners.

800-211-1172
www.ecrs.com

Cougar Mountain Software — Denali Point of Sale

2013
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

Traditionally Cougar Mountain Software has been a better fit with small to mid-sized businesses, but its expanded, updated point of sale software that is available in three distinct versions make this product a good fit for specialty retailers of just about any size.

Cougar Mountain Software has been providing targeted business solutions to small and mid-sized businesses since 1982. With the creation of the Denali line of

products, Cougar Mountain Software is now able to offer its excellent point of sale product to not just their target audience, but to larger specialty retail businesses as well.

STRENGTHS

- Fully integrated system with POS/back office capability
- Scalable, with 3 editions and server/cloud based deployment available
- System is scalable and easily navigated

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/11077535

- Good selection of reports
- Affordable for most retailers

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Limited touch screen capabilities at this time
- Not truly designed for high-transaction volume retailers
- Does not support customer loyalty or membership programs

SUMMARY & PRICING

Denali's POS module offers easily integration with other Denali modules and is suitable for specialty retailers of just about any size. Denali modules start at \$95.00 with an additional license fee attached. The cloud version starts at \$83.00 per user per month.

800-388-3083
www.cougarmtn.com

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This year's honorees will be announced in the November issue of *CPA Practice Advisor* and at The Sleeter Group's Accounting 2013 Solutions Conference.

The In-Firm Annual IT-Security Employee Briefing

Most organizations today assume that their IT personnel do an adequate job of protecting the firm's network and data by implementing and monitoring firewalls, keeping their operating systems/applications up to date, and mandating password changes on a scheduled basis. While each of these items may be security best practices for protecting the network from an information technology perspective, Verizon's 2013 Data Breach Investigation Report pointed to 78 percent of network security intrusions rated as "low difficulty" and the 76 percent of network intrusions exploited weak or stolen credentials, pointing to employees inadvertently being one of the root sources of security breaches.

The solution to addressing this problem is to make owners aware of their fiduciary responsibility in protecting firm and client data and to proactively develop a plan to minimize the risk of a breach caused by an employee mistake. Firms can accomplish this by making sure management is fully aware of IT security risks, reviewing and updating firm policies regularly, and

educating all firm personnel through annual briefings and regular reminder training.

RISK AWARENESS: Information security has been the number 1 or number 2 item on the AICPA's annual Top Technology Initiatives list for over a decade and the 2013 AICPA Survey also listed Managing IT Risk and Compliance at number

3, Ensuring Privacy at number 4, and Preventing and Responding to Computer Fraud at number 6. The Verizon Data Breach report pointed out that 75 percent of security breaches were driven by financial motives and accounting firms are an attractive target, which was highlighted earlier this year when a Connecticut firm's security was breached and data from over 900 client returns compromised.

Owners must know and understand what signifies a data breach in their own state, have a plan to mitigate and respond to a breach, and ensure employees know how to minimize the risk as well as how to respond if they do suspect a breach. The AICPA's IT Membership section has developed content to address the risks and there are many disaster and security resources



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FIRMS CAN ACCOMPLISH THIS BY MAKING SURE MANAGEMENT IS FULLY AWARE OF IT SECURITY RISKS, REVIEWING AND UPDATING FIRM POLICIES REGULARLY, AND EDUCATING ALL FIRM PERSONNEL THROUGH ANNUAL BRIEFINGS AND REGULAR REMINDER TRAINING.

available on the Internet (StaySafe-Online.org, SANS.org) to help firms develop a comprehensive breach response plan and provide training for firm personnel.

UPDATING POLICIES ANNUALLY:

Most firms have a computer and Internet usage policy as well as a password policy which all new employees are usually exposed to the first week they are hired. Unfortunately, this is usually the only policy exposure the employee gets during their tenure with the firm and with technology continually evolving, most of these policies are woefully out of date. With the advent of social media, remote access and telecommuting, cloud computing, and the Bring Your Own Device transition, it is important for the firm to review all IT policies and ensure personnel understand the impacts of these changes and on how they impact the way the employee works.

Human Resources personnel should meet with IT personnel at least annually to discuss updates to firm policies, particularly in regards to ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of firm and client data. Recommended changes and training should be approved by owners and if necessitated, reviewed by the firm's legal counsel to ensure compliance with local legislation in the States where the firm operates. Owners should be aware of the estimated costs of a breach and discuss acquiring data breach insurance to mitigate the impact. A recent discussion with a professional liability insurance provider pointed out that physically stolen file servers and data being hijacked through unsecure WiFi was surpassing the claims of stolen laptops, which were the traditional concern for CPA firm data theft.

ANNUAL IT/SECURITY BRIEFING:

The next step is to ensure all employees are educated at least annually on these changes which can be done via a formal training session either put on by the firm's

internal personnel or an external integrator. In some States this training can qualify for continuing Professional Education if protection of client data, privacy and security best practices are integrated. In addition to updates in firm policies, there are five areas the annual security briefing should address and below we list examples of items that should be discussed. This is not meant to be a comprehensive listing, but a starting point for firms to develop their own IT/Security listing based on their own policies and infrastructure.

- **Secure Workstation:** Personnel must understand that automatic system updates and keeping their malware/antivirus software running are critical to protecting their workstation and should not be turned off. Any CD/USB flash media should be scanned before loading a client file to minimize malware getting into the system. These rules apply to any Internet-enabled device that accesses firm resources including home computers, tablets and smartphones.

TAKING A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO MAKING FIRM PERSONNEL AWARE OF CURRENT RISKS AND CYBER-THREATS WILL GO A LONG WAY TO PROTECTING THE FIRM AGAINST THE MOST COMMON SECURITY BREACHES THAT COULD IMPACT THE FIRM.

- **Protecting Personal Data:** In addition to complex passwords that are changed frequently and unique between different applications, employees should be taught how to protect these passwords securely (and not on yellow sticky notes!). The IT team needs to be aware of the information sharing policies and privacy settings of the web-based sites the firm connects with to ensure any required firm compliance with HIPAA, GLBA, and Sarbanes Oxley are being maintained.

- **Thinking Before Connecting:** Personnel should be trained to never click a link from within an email/website to go to an Internet resource and then enter any personal or confidential data. The general rule is to type in the address to any "trusted" sites directly into a web browser and to look for a secured connection which will have https:// or shttps:// in the header. If using a public WiFi resource, employees should be trained to verify the proper Wireless Access Point name from the location and to connect through a Virtual Private Network to secure transmissions. If the employee's intuition points to any doubts about connecting, they should be reminded not to click it. To help firms educate users on this there are samples on the Microsoft Security site which has links to a "Real or Rogue" quiz that will help educate staff on what to watch out for.

- **Being Web Aware:** Education of current scams and security breaches will help make your personnel more web wary, but they should also learn

the individual or firm name can have unintended negative consequences.

- **Being a Model Online User:** Promoting employee Internet usage as a solid online citizen means they should regularly follow firm practices within the firm and to promote good usage habits with other employees. This includes reporting any concerns of personnel or system behavior immediately to management so they address them. More IT/Security resources and training tips for educating firm personnel can be found on the StaySafeOnline and Microsoft Safety and Security Center websites.

REMINDER TRAINING: Mandatory training should be repeated at least annually for all personnel and the firm may want to consider video recording the training session for new hires and those that miss the live session. This can be done with webinar capture software such as GoToMeeting, Adobe Captivate, and Camtasia and then posted on the firm's intranet for future use. For ongoing reminders, the firm may want to consider posting notices or posters around the office, such as those found at StopThinkConnect.org or to link to digital versions via email reminders. Many firms also utilize "lunch and learns" for staff training and IT personnel could be brought into these sessions to provide updates on current threats and recent incidents.

Taking a proactive approach to making firm personnel aware of current risks and cyber-threats will go a long way to protecting the firm against the most common security breaches that could impact the firm. It is the responsibility of firm owners to ensure that the firm does all that is reasonably possible to protect the data they have been entrusted with and an annual IT/Security reminder training session is a great way to start. ●

to protect any data on their internet-enabled device whether it is firm, client or personal information by regularly backing it up. Personnel should also be reminded on how social media postings are permanent and the things they do in their private lives can be exposed to current and future employers. If they don't want their family or the owners to see it, they should be reminded not to post it. Training personnel on when and how they can mention the firm in their postings should also be included in any training as Google searches on

Complying with the PCAOB: The Various Options for Independence Training

By Mike Mirretti, CPA

Conducting regular, systematic audits is essential for holding public companies accountable for their decisions and financial records. Monitoring, evaluating and managing public corporations is arguably the most effective way to placate stakeholders. But who ensures that audits are always conducted properly, fairly and thoroughly? In other words, who audits the auditors?

The Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) regulates accounting firms that audit public companies in order to maintain certain standards. Not only does the PCAOB serve to protect the interest of investors but it also, along with the FASB, restores confidence in public financial reporting.

These businesses are the keepers of our investments. It is essential to the system's vitality that auditors consistently prepare informative and accurate audit reports. Therefore, while these regulations create additional obstacles for firms, they are necessary components of the business.

One simple way to stay in good standing with the PCAOB is by committing all independent auditors to standard independence training courses. Continuing education is a reasonable guideline to impose as auditors hold themselves accountable for their own proficiency; all of which is predicated upon instruction and experience.

Because the training is not highly defined, firms tend to adopt different training models, different programs and completion requirements for their staff. Regardless, independence training must be completed

by all auditors of publicly held companies to ensure proper professional judgment and to remain in compliance with the PCAOB.

"In general, firms will adopt one of two models for independence training" says Richard Slusz, Global Accounts Manager at Becker Professional Education. The first model requires all staff involved in public audits to complete independence training courses every three or four years. Staff will submit to training – one extended session or a combination of several – every few years to ensure employees have necessary education and experience to perform their jobs. "The biggest firms, including *The Big Four*, typically follow this model and assign one holistic course to the entire company during a specific time period every third year" adds Slusz. New hires complete the course during the off years and then again with the entire firm as a whole.

The second model follows a less stringent format, allowing staff to complete training just once upon hire or after being brought on through acquisition. The firm then designates mandatory follow up sessions on a regular basis for technical and strategic updates. Because "regular basis"



is defined by the individual firm, it allows for some flexibility. Regional firms have an easier time using this model due to smaller staff size.

So, why is it imperative that a firm implement independence courses? The answer to that is quite simple: staying in compliance with the PCAOB is critical for maintaining credibility and value as a firm. An unflattering peer review can instantly blacklist a firm and defame its reputation. What's more, it is in the firm's best interest to not only require independence training but also to provide staff with a high quality, high content course; a course at the forefront of developments within the business.

Firms must choose between using a course already available like those created by Becker Professional Education and developing their own proprietary course. "A lot of times, creating your own model for training isn't the most cost effective approach as costs tend to add up quickly" says Slusz. "At Becker, we saw this problem and wanted to develop a simple yet constructive set of curriculum that firms could trust.

So, we listened to the market

place and built the most engaging, animated and comprehensive program possible." Without strict guidelines from the PCAOB, firms are left with a number of options and must consider financial risk, quality control and effectiveness of the various training sessions available.

Trust in the independent auditor clearly holds a significant amount of value and weight. The objectivity, skill and education of an auditor should constantly improve to avoid deficiencies in the firm's operations. PCAOB inspections along with regular peer reviews protect audit quality for investors and encourage best practice among firms.

Continued Professional Education, or CPE, has changed over the past several years and now focuses on a more dedicated learning and development process for firms and their employees. It is essential that firms respect the guidelines set forth by the PCAOB, adhere to those standards and adopt a method and training course for their staff as a result. ●

Mike Mirretti, CPA is the Senior Product Manager for Becker Professional Education.

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