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Timely, Accurate Data is Essential to Managing Payroll

A Year in the Life of a SALT Accountant:

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9 Must-Have Apps for Today's Accounting Professionals

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There is Most Definitely “An App for That”

believe it was 2007 when I met Randy Johnston and Doug Sleeter, two of *CPA Practice Advisor’s* thought leaders, both of whom are contributors to our magazine. I continue to meet, correspond, and talk with these gentlemen to this day, and my knowledge of the accounting profession and my own ways of looking at the profession are better and more creative for having these two relationships.

Add seven years and multiply those two thought leaders by 15 because now I have the privilege of knowing all 30 of the *CPA Practice Advisor* thought leaders and hall of fame members, and the result is my mind is constantly being blown away by the new ideas and innovative thinking that surrounds me.

This month our thought leaders were asked to share their favorite apps with our readers. Time savers, quick

fixes, tools of the trade, and just plain fun apps have been flooding my inbox ever since. The hard part wasn’t filling the pages with apps - it was sorting through all the fascinating and clever suggestions to come up with a short synopsis that would fit on two pages.

One of the first apps I remember encountering was a weather app - a quick click, enter the city, and I knew whether I needed to pack an umbrella or sunscreen when I was planning a trip. Then it was on to news apps - as a news junkie, I’m addicted to anything that tells me what’s happening in my community, state, country, and all over the world. Some of my favorite time-saving apps include travel, apps, movie times, banking, and sports scores. Some of the more intriguing apps I’ve found include Night Sky for location of constellations, stars, and even satellites, and various apps for city maps and points of interest when I travel.

I could have just listed all the apps that our thought leaders recommended, but then there wouldn’t have been room for commentary and description. So instead, I’ve culled the list for the overall favorites, the must-haves which are presented in this issue.



Gail Perry (left), with Randy Johnston and Doug Sleeter.

The rest we will trickle out to you, and we have just the vehicle for doing that.

Each of our daily newsletters includes a “Spotlight” section where we feature a video, a solution, an event, or an article that deserves special attention. In months to come we’ll feature the favorite apps in addition to the other important items you need to see.

Clever minds continue to develop apps and it seems there’s always something new to discover, so if you have a favorite app you’d like to share, something that makes your life easier, we’ll be happy to share that with our readers, so send it along or tweet it - my contact information is below.

Cheers for now ~ ●

— Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief
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Follow me on Twitter at @gaperry



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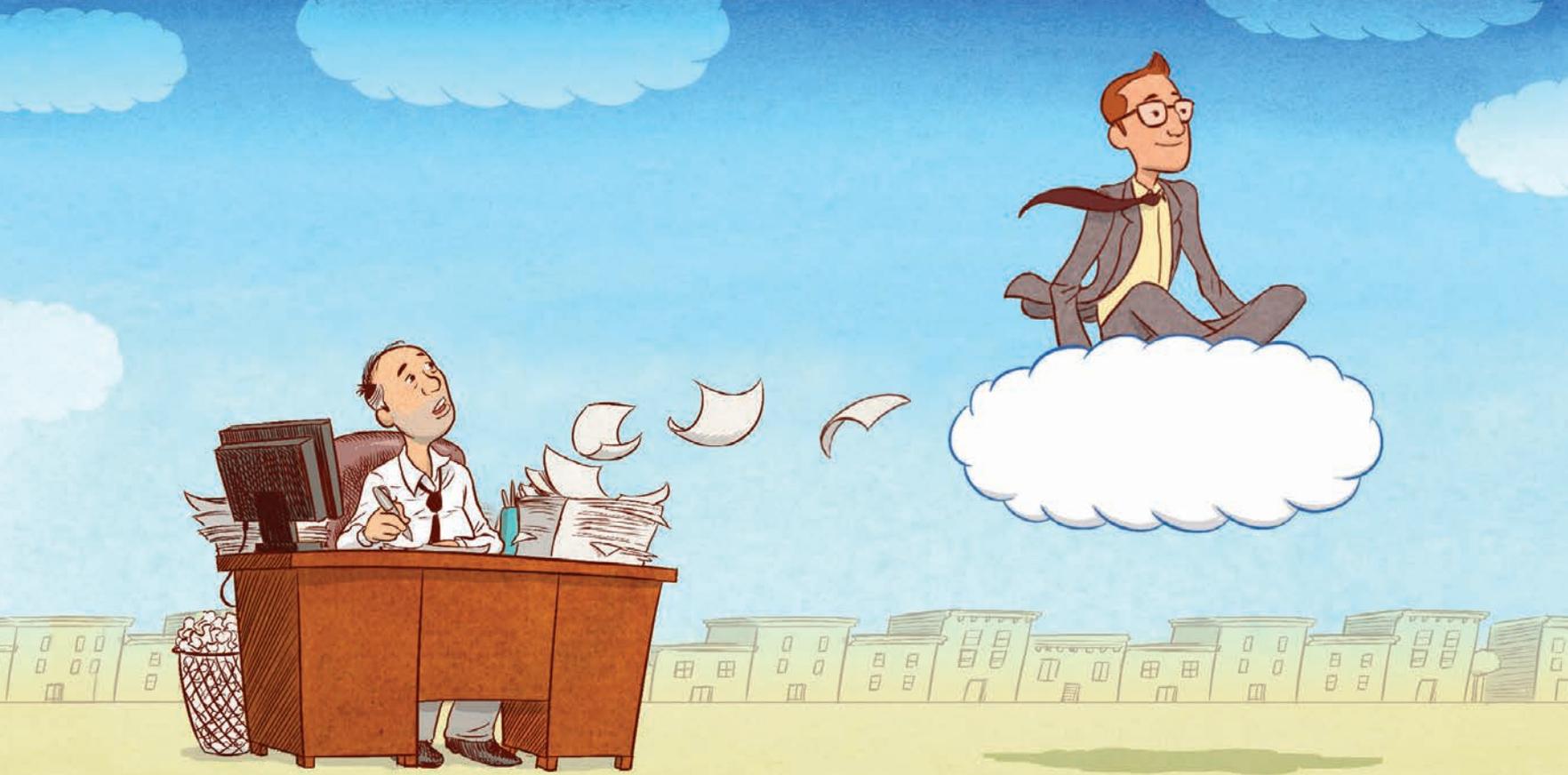
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The typical modern workday is a combination of work at your desk, work on the phone, work on the run, work from remote locations, work at client offices, keeping up with the news - all while juggling your own personal life and staying connected with the lives of friends and family. Almost everyone has a smartphone, a tablet, a laptop, or some combination thereof — devices that can come with you and, more importantly, keep up with you as you move from one project to the next.

It's likely you have familiarity with apps - those little programs, *applications*, that tie a virtual string around your

finger, help you find your way when you get lost, remember your favorite songs, and point out the best restaurants. You

might have your favorites, the apps you feel like you can't live without, or you might be looking for that magic app that's going to change (rule) your life.

We decided to contact the *CPA Practice Advisor* thought leaders - those notable visionaries who are leading the charge for change in the profession - to find out which apps have made a difference in their work lives. There are 25 members of the *CPA Practice Advisor* thought leader group, along with five hall of fame members. Thirty people, some perhaps too busy to reply, and probably some duplicate responses - we expected our informal survey to garner a manageable number of efficiency-generating apps. Instead nearly 150 favorite apps

landed at our doorstep!

We're still experimenting and having a grand time learning about these new tools as well as being reminded of many we already know and love.

So as not to scare you off, we're going to dish these out slowly. We'll start sharing our new-found wealth of app recommendations in the spotlight section of our daily newsletters (if you're not already signed up, you can do so at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/reg/newsletter).

Meanwhile, here are the most popular apps that our thought leaders recommend, along with some of their comments.

EVERNOTE (iOS - Android)

Hands down, the favorite app of our thought leaders is Evernote. According to the manufacturers, Evernote is a suite of software and services designed for notetaking and archiving. A note can be a piece of formatted text, a full webpage or webpage excerpt, a photograph, a voice memo, or a handwritten note. Notes can also have file attachments.



Rick Richardson, CEO of Richardson Media & Technologies, LLC, is an Evernote fan. "It is the focus of all my research, storage and organization. It's the way I'm going almost paperless. Don't know what I'd do without it."

If that's not enough of an endorsement, here's what Tom Hood, CEO of the Maryland Association of CPAs and the Business Learning Institute has to say: "Evernote is truly my second brain and I definitely need one of those! It runs across all devices – iPhone, iPad, and Mac laptop – and it collects and organizes almost all of my information in an easy to search, context rich environment. For example, while I am at a conference, when I take a photo of the agenda – it pops into Evernote with the date, time, and location stamp."



"It not only saves the picture of the document but can search on the text (via Optical Character Recognition - OCR)," Hood added. "Like the feel of pen and paper? Evernote reads your writing and can search on your written notes just as easily. I use my Field Notes to take notes and snap pics every day so I always have all of my notes with me (plus the location where I was when I snapped it). Business cards are the same thing, plus Evernote converts cards into text, adds to contacts, and even offers to connect on LinkedIn. I can email documents to it, clip from websites, voice memo to it and, even tweet to it."

TRIPIT (iOS - Android)

Many of our thought leaders listed TripIt as one of their favorites. TripIt, by Concur (which was recently acquired by SAP), organizes travel plans



into an itinerary that has all of your trip details in one place.

Donny Shimamoto, founder and senior member of the IntrapriseTechKnowlogies LLC's (ITK) consulting and management team, says that TripIt, "Is a must for any frequent traveler. Forward your air, hotel, or car rental confirmations to it and it puts it all together into one itinerary, including inserting maps between the airport and hotel, meeting to meeting, etc. I signed up for the Pro account which also provides me with flight status, baggage claim, and other up to the minute updates."

John Higgins, co-founder of CPA Crossings, LLC, concurs (no pun intended!). "This is a travel itinerary app that populates every aspect of a trip automatically by simply forwarding the confirmation emails (airline, rental car, etc.) to TripIt and my office manager fills in the rest (meeting locations, etc.). The best part is when I get in the rental car, TripIt integrates directly to my navigation app on the phone, so no more getting lost!"



UBER (iOS - Android)

Uber is one of the new wave of ride-sharing services available in large cities. According to the company website, you can, "Get a taxi, private car, or rideshare from your mobile phone. Uber connects you with a driver in minutes. Use our app in cities around the world."



Jim Boomer, CIO of Boomer Consulting, and Mark Koziel, vice president of firm services and global alliances at the AICPA, are frequent travelers and enjoy the ease of using Uber for on-demand transportation. "When your flight is delayed and you arrive at 2:30am, there aren't many cabs. Uber is a convenient and quick tool to get you where you need to go without the long waits you experience with taxi companies." said Boomer.



TALLIE (iOS - Android)

"Tallie has reduced my expense reporting time by at least one hour per week and integrates directly with Bill.com and QBOL, said L. Gary Boomer, CEO of Boomer Consulting, Inc. "It has also reduced others' time in the processing and integration of expense reports with Bill.com. The workflow is built into the app and the support is excellent."

Tallie, an accounting solution for expense reports, is also a 2014 winner of a CPA Practice Advisor Innovation Award.

DROPBOX (iOS - Android)

Dropbox is a free file sharing service that lets you bring your photos, docs, and videos anywhere and share them easily with others. Several of our thought leaders use Dropbox regularly.



Leslie Shiner, owner of The ShinerGroup, uses Dropbox for access to often-used files. Futurist, author, and speaker Rebecca Ryan of Next Generation Consulting, uses Dropbox for sharing files with her team while she is on the road.



AROUNDME (iOS - Android)

AroundMe is an app that allows users to quickly find nearby Points Of Interest (POI) such as restaurants, hotels, theaters, parking, hospitals and much more.



Dr. Bob Spencer, owner of Twenty Seconds in the Future and associate at K2 Enterprises, said that AroundMe "is a great app when traveling and looking a place to eat, restaurant, movie theater, mall, gas station and so forth near to you."

FLIPBOARD (iOS - Android)

According to the company website, Flipboard is your personal magazine. It's a single place to discover, collect and share the news you care about. Add your favorite social networks, publica-



tions, and blogs to stay connected to the topics and people closest to you. Brian Tankersley, director of strategic relationships for K2 Enterprises and owner of Brian F. Tankersley, Consulting and Professional Development, says that Flipboard "is a great visual news reader with seamless social sharing on all major platforms."

GOOGLE MAPS (iOS - Android)

Google Maps is a desktop and mobile web mapping service app provided by Google. It offers satellite imagery, streetmaps, and Street View perspectives, and also functions such as a route planner for traveling by vehicle or by foot.



Chris Frederiksen, chairman of 2020 Group USA, said he uses Google Maps "so I never get lost!"

STARBUCKS (iOS - Android)

And finally, we take a look at the Starbucks app. According to the folks at Starbucks, this app links to your registered Starbucks card so you can pay for purchases and earn Stars through your phone. You can also reload your card balance, find your nearest store, and even leave a digital tip for your barista.



Jennifer Wilson, partner and co-founder of Convergence Coaching, LLC, relies on her Starbucks app to help her find Starbucks locations when she travels.

So... this is just the tips of the apps iceberg, as it were, and we'll be exploring many more of the favorite apps of our thought leaders and our other readers in the months ahead. Keep an eye on the spotlight section in your CPA Practice Advisor newsletters as we introduce more apps that can make both your work life and your personal life a bit easier. ●



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A YEAR IN THE LIFE: PAYROLL ACCOUNTANT

Timely, Accurate Data is Essential to Managing Payroll

By Taija Jenkins, Assistant Editor

It pays to collect the right information at the right time. For payroll practitioners, this payout comes in the form of being able to provide quality service to their clients.

Across the nation, businesses are preparing for the end of the year and accompanying tasks and events. One of the top tasks for businesses is preparing to send out the necessary W-2 and 1099 forms next year. This is also the time where businesses will evaluate their current payroll solutions and providers. Practitioners wanting to retain clients, as well as gain new ones, will be working to prove their services and solutions are top of the line. But before they can do that, they need to do their own internal assessment of their clients, by updating current client information.

“When you get close to year-end, there's this pressure on practitioners to make sure they don't lose existing customers by marketing to them. The first, and very important, step to this is to collect updated client information,” said Scott Schreier, Senior Director, Accountant Channel Marketing, Small Business Services, ADP.

There is more to collecting client information than simply ensuring you have the right company contact. Practitioners want to be thorough in the data they collect. Not only will this provide you with the information you need to send relevant and accurate information to clients later in the year, but it also lets your clients know that you are providing them with in-depth services.

Practitioners want to make sure they are receiving and updating the following information from each of their clients:

- **ACTIVE EMPLOYEES VS. CONTRACTORS** – Check your current client files to ensure you have the accurate number of active employees and contractors hired by your clients. When it's time to send out Forms W-2 and 1099, you need to ensure that each individual gets the correct form.
- **VERIFIED ADDRESSES, CONTACT INFORMATION AND I-9'S** – Remind your clients to have employees and contractors verify their contact information on file. Your clients should have the most current mailing address, telephone number and email address for each worker. If you are sending out Forms W-2 and 1099 as a service to your client, you want to ensure they are going to the right place, whether they are being sent electronically or through the mail.
- **EMPLOYEES ELIGIBLE FOR RETIREMENT PLANS** – Obtain an updated list of each of the employees that are eligible for retirement plans. Does the list line up with the employees that are receiving retirement benefits? This is a good time to audit your clients' files for compliance.
- **EMPLOYEES ELIGIBLE FOR YEAR-END BONUSES** – Sometimes companies payout bonuses at the end of the year and sometimes they wait until the following year. Find out when your clients plan to payout bonuses and who is eligible.
- **PAY RATE CHANGES** – Companies usually offer pay increases for particular circumstances. Find out if the company is planning to make any changes in their wages, as well as what those changes will be, the conditions,



if any surrounding them, and when they will go into effect.

INSURANCE INFORMATION – What insurance benefits do your clients offer? Get detailed information for the various insurances, such as worker's compensation, health insurance, short-term and long-term disability, etc. Also, check if the Affordable Care Act applies to your clients. Then get a list of employees eligible for each coverage, as well as registered employees.

Updating client information can seem like such a small task in comparison to the other payroll services practitioners provide to their clients. However, ensuring you have the most up-to-date information about the various areas of your clients' business can ensure that you are in a position to provide efficient, quality service to them. Showing the value of this service can prove beneficial at time when businesses are evaluating their current options. ●

What's New in Payroll and Labor Laws?

By Taija Jenkins, Assistant Editor

Keeping up-to-date on changes and proposed changes can be overwhelming, especially if you have a business to run that doesn't involve payroll. That's why, as a payroll practitioner, it's important that you help your clients understand any new changes and what they mean for their business.

In 2015, there will be several changes that can affect how your clients pay their employees. Many of these will be on the state level, however, home care agencies across the country will be impacted by the Department of Labor's Final Rule, effective January 1, 2015.

Effective January 1, 2015, home care agencies and third-party employers will be required to pay at least the federal minimum wage and overtime pay to any direct care worker (certified nursing assistants, home health aides, personal care aides, caregivers and companions) that they jointly or solely employ, regardless of the worker's duties.

In addition, agencies and third-party employers will no longer be able to claim the overtime pay exemption for live-in domestic service workers or the companionship exemption. The companionship services exemption no longer applies if the worker spends more than 20 percent of his or her workweek performing care, and the employee is entitled to minimum wage and overtime. However, an individual, family, or household employing such workers may claim any applicable exemption.

Also effective January 1, 2015, the Social Security Administration will no longer process paper third-party sick pay recaps or accept electronic third-party sick pay recap reports. Any electronic and paper wage reports that

contain a W-2 with any of the following conditions will be returned to employers:

- Medicare wages and tips are equal to less than the sum of social security wages and social security tips on the W-2;
- Social security tax is greater than zero and social security wages and social security tips are equal to zero;
- Medicare tax is greater than zero and Medicare wages and tips are equal to zero.

On the state level, laws have been passed, or will be voted on, to increase the minimum wage in several states, including Illinois, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, California, Connecticut and West Virginia.

During the November election, **Illinois** voters will decide if the minimum wage and tip credit should be increased. Both would go into effect January 1, 2015. In addition, Illinois has passed a law to regulate the use of payroll cards, making it the 21st state to do so. Under the new law, employees must explicitly agree to receive payment via payroll card and the card cannot be a condition of employment. Employers may not automatically sign up employees for a payroll card, even if the employee does not have a bank account. The law also regulates the fees that can be charged in relation to use of a payroll card.

Massachusetts passed legislation that will increase the minimum wage

and tax credit in three steps, starting January 1, 2015. The Unemployment Insurance taxable wage base will also increase, effective January 1, 2015.

In the state of **Rhode Island**, the minimum wage and tip credit will both increase, effective January 1, 2015. The law also prohibits municipalities from establishing different minimum wage rates.

In **California**, a proposed law would increase the state minimum wage in three steps, beginning January 1, 2015. Employers would also be required to provide paid sick leave under another proposed law that would allow employees to accrue one hour of sick leave for every 30 hours worked, beginning on the 90th calendar day of employment.

While there are a number of proposed state laws in California, several cities have their own laws that would increase the minimum wage in their areas. Berkeley passed a law that would increase the minimum wage in three phases, effective October 1, 2015. San Diego, one of the largest cities to do so, passed an ordinance to raise the minimum wage in three phases, beginning January 1, 2015, as well as allow employees to accrue one hour of sick pay for every 30 hours worked, up to five paid sick days. Oakland and San Francisco are both set to vote on laws in November that would increase the

minimum wage. In addition, the ballot in Oakland would also seek to require paid sick leave.

Effective January 1, 2015, the minimum wage in **Connecticut** will increase as the first of a multi-phase increase. This will impact all employees, except for service employees in the restaurant industry. However, if a service employee does not earn sufficient tips to equal the minimum wage or more over the workweek, the employer must pay the difference as wages.

In **West Virginia**, a law has been passed to raise the minimum wage in two phases – first on January 1, 2015, and then again on January 1, 2016. In addition, the law will also increase the training wage for the first 90 days of employment for any employee hired after January 1, 2015.

As a payroll practitioner, you can help your clients navigate these changes by making sure they are aware of any changes to local and state minimum wage laws and their effective dates. Ensure they are communicating any forthcoming changes to their employees in a timely manner, as well as updating any legal posters within their offices. As you manage their payroll process, make sure they have the processes in place to implement any changes by the required time. ●

Payroll Accountant's Checklist for October

- ✓ Get updated employment information from clients.
- ✓ Have clients confirm employees' addresses, social security numbers and other contact information.
- ✓ Confirm year-end payroll deadlines and final federal/state deposit dates.
- ✓ Check deduction codes for any employees making charitable donations through payroll deductions. This information will be reported in Box 14 of their Forms W-2.
- ✓ Remind clients to have employees update their consents for electronic Forms W-2.
- ✓ Order Forms W-2 and W-3 from the IRS for the current tax year.

REVIEW SECTIONS

BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS

- General Navigation/Ease-Of-Use
- Ease Of Data Entry
- Multi-Users (Concurrent)
- Client Management (On-Screen Management)
- SaaS Or Hosted Version Available

REPORTING

- Electronic Filing Capabilities (Federal, States)
- Multi-State Capabilities
- Billing Capabilities
 - Integration With Time & Billing Application?
 - Automated Invoice Creation
- Forms Supported
- Savable Formats (Pdf, Etc.)
- Pre-Printed Forms Stock, Blank Paper
- Stuff And Mail Service
- Overall Client Dashboard

IMPORT CAPABILITIES

- Import Capabilities From Major Accounting Systems
- Import Capabilities From Common File Formats (CSV, Excel, Xml, Etc.)

HELP/SUPPORT

- Built-In Support Features
- System Updates
- Support Website/Documentation
- Live Support

W-2/1099 Preparation Programs

By Steven Phelan, CPA.CITP

As we approach the end of the year, many tasks are still a head of accounting professionals. There are year-end tax planning situations to address, year-end accounting issues required to finalize financial statements and, of course, year-end reporting compliance for W-2s and 1099s.

Although the rules have largely remained the same over the past several years, the importance of this year-end filing remains significant. As a reminder, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires certain businesses to report the cost of health care coverage on the annual W-2 filings. The ACA also modified tax forms to include questions regarding the mandate for all businesses to file 1099 forms to recipients as required.

As we look at the current year review of W-2 and 1099 software, it is important to note that not all solutions reflect final 2014 rules and regulations. Some vendors are also in the midst of adding and enhancing features for the upcoming release. Typically, the October through December timeframe produces final software results. Each product review reflects updates and expected changes as each respective software vendor provided information.

For the current year reviews, there is only one cloud option for W-2 and

1099 processing, After-the-Fact Payroll by AccountantsWorld. All remaining products install locally or in a network environment. Most of the software solutions offer add-on modules that provide functions separate from the core product. Without the add-on modules, many solutions produce only basic functionality.

From a design and usability perspective, most products offer input screens similar to the forms themselves. This, of course, makes data entry much easier, especially for less experienced staff members. Throughout this product category, the data entry screens are generally clean and intuitive. Many of the summary forms, such as the W-2 and 1096, automatically populate to mitigate any additional required data entry.

Reporting aspects of each vendor solution are usually the key differentiating factors. As with many payroll solutions, support for all forms beyond traditional forms is often missing. To enhance the forms capabilities, users will typically need to purchase add-on modules. A similar scenario exists for printing features, with add-on modules required to print on plain paper or generate PDF files.

All vendors support electronic filing of the core federal compliance forms. Some of the state electronic

filing compliance is absent, however, in most vendors. Many of the vendors provide functions to assist users in verifying Social Security Numbers through verification programs offered by the IRS and Social Security Administration.

Microsoft Excel and CSV file formats remain the standard for data import. QuickBooks support is available with some products, but often it requires a separate module. Many of the vendors provide the W-2 and 1099 reporting as a separate product within a suite of other product offerings. When this is the case, tight integration with the other suite products is generally positive.

All products reviewed provide a wide variety of help and support options. Traditional in-program help and manuals are included in addition to searchable tools on vendor maintained websites. Phone, fax and email support is available, but each vendor treats these options differently. Some are favoring email and web chat options over phone-based support. All help and support options are included within the product licensing fees. ●

READ THE FULL VERSION OF THESE REVIEWS ONLINE AT
WWW.CPAPRACTICEADVISOR.COM/12004259



Steven M. Phelan, CPA

Steven is currently a tax manager at North Bay Associates, a family group office based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He also owns a small tax and accounting practice as a side business. Prior to this, he spent 12 years in public accounting practice, with a primary focus on tax and technology consulting. He is active within the CPA profession and is a frequent speaker at various seminars and conferences throughout Oklahoma.

W-2/1099 PREPARATION PROGRAMS

AccountantsWorld - After-the-Fact Payroll

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIRM FIT

Public accounting practices looking to manage after-the-fact payroll and year-end tax compliance in a cloud-based solution

STRENGTHS

- Newly re-launched platform is truly accessible from anywhere and any device

- Tight integration with AccountantsWorld suite of products
- Dashboard style reporting and information feedback

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Limited import options – no direct link to QuickBooks or Sage 50 (Peachtree)

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004556

SUMMARY & PRICING

After-the-Fact Payroll is a cloud-based payroll and year-end processing solution. Though designed primarily as a payroll solution, After-the-Fact payroll can handle all the required year-end tax compliance reporting. AccountantsWorld provides a unique pricing structure

for After-the-Fact Payroll. The first year is \$395 and provides full functionality for unlimited clients. Each subsequent year is currently priced at \$395 for the first 75 client files and \$4 for each additional client.

www.AccountantsWorld.com

Advanced Micro Solutions - 1099-Etc

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIRM FIT

Organizations looking to process period end and year-end tax forms for multiple businesses

STRENGTHS

- Strong help and support options
- Modular system so only the items needed by users may be

- purchased
- Supports a variety of common file imports

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Separate modules necessary for plain paper and PDF generation

SUMMARY & PRICING

1099-Etc is a modular forms filing

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004562

system designed specifically around payroll related matters. The base system is required for all other modules and includes all required functions to process all 1099, W-2, and related forms. Additional modules are available that provide advanced printing features, live and after-the-fact payroll processing as

well as electronic filing. All modules are priced separately, with the base system priced at \$79. A full payroll system may be achieved by purchasing all modules, which currently totals less than \$450.

www.1099-etc.com

American Riviera Software Corp - Magtax

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIRM FIT

Accounting firms processing year-end compliance for a large number of clients

STRENGTHS

- All inclusive design prevents the need to purchase multiple modules for full functions

- Capable of cloud hosting by a third-party
- Unlimited client files and forms
- Direct QuickBooks integration

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Limited phone support options

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004593

SUMMARY & PRICING

Magtax Professional is a wage and year-end information reporting system for accounting professionals. Magtax Professional is an all-inclusive offering so there are no additional fees for electronic filing or printing to plain paper. Pricing for Magtax is dependent upon the

edition with the Standard edition currently priced at \$199 and the Professional edition currently priced at \$299. Renewal pricing is offered for both editions and is at a discounted rate.

www.Magtax.com

EG Systems - W-2/1099 Filer

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

Accounting practices managing year-end reporting for multiple clients.

STRENGTHS

- Prior year data viewable on screen
- Strong reporting options

- Remote desktop assistance for users

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Limited state forms and report options

SUMMARY & PRICING

W-2/1099 Filer includes a wide

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004569

variety of form and reporting options for year-end compliance. Strong electronic filing options and the ability to view prior year data on-screen make W-2/1099 Filer a valuable solution for accounting professionals. Initial year pricing currently runs \$109 for the core product that includes calculations

and electronic filing capabilities. A plain paper print module is available for \$40 and the 940/941 module is available for \$10. A discount is offered for renewal pricing on the core product.

www.W21099.com

W-2/1099 PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Intuit EasyACCT Write-Up

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIRM FIT

Accounting professionals looking for one product to handle write-up and year-end compliance

STRENGTHS

- Direct integration with Intuit branded solutions
- Unique help/support system,

including an online community

- Simple, all-inclusive design

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Very limited import/export options

SUMMARY & PRICING

EasyACCT Write-Up by Intuit is a

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004595

unified solution providing accounting functions for most write-up and year-end reporting needs. Pricing for EasyACCT Write-Up Professional, which includes all the items noted in this review, is currently at \$1,416. EasyACCT Write-Up Information

Return System is included with the Professional edition but is available separately as a scaled back offering. Current pricing for the scaled back system is \$299.

<http://Accountants.Intuit.com>

Real Business Solutions - W2 Mate

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIT

Accounting professionals looking for an inexpensive way to process year-end compliance forms

STRENGTHS

- Simple screen layout and data entry design
- Core product is inexpensive and

fulfills the majority of needs

- Wide support for data import, with appropriate module purchase

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Multiple module options and add-ons may confuse some users

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004538

SUMMARY & PRICING

W2 Mate is a cost effective solution for processing year-end tax compliance forms. W2 Mate is a modular system, which may be confusing to some users, with each module carrying its own pricing structure. The core product pricing is \$39 with each add-on module currently

individually priced between \$25 and \$115. A complete system, including all network capabilities and advanced functions, will cost around \$500.

www.RealTaxTools.com

Spokane Computer - MAG-FILER

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIRM FIT

Accounting professionals looking for a solution to handle a large volume of year-end compliance filings

STRENGTHS

- All-inclusive software design; no separate modules

- Strong security options
- Recipients may receive forms via email from within the system

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No direct QuickBooks integration, only through QuickBooks PRN files

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004583

SUMMARY & PRICING

MAG-FILER is a complete package that contains all required functions to complete year-end filing requirements. A number of import, print and electronic filing options are available through the MAG-FILER system. Current pricing for MAG-FILER is \$324 as a download only

file direct form the company website. To receive a mailed disc-based version, the price increases to \$364.

www.SpokaneComputer.com

Tax-Mate 1099 Advisor - Form Magic, Inc.

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIT

Accounting practitioners looking for a full-service and flexible application to handle multiple W-2 and 1099 year-end filings

STRENGTHS

- Available as a tax reporting solution for Windows and Mac

- Comprehensive list of data import types
- Strong electronic filing capabilities

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Potential limited phone support

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004550

SUMMARY & PRICING

Tax-Mate 1099 Advisor is a full-service application for accounting firms that need power and flexibility when processing a high volume of year-end tax compliance. Tax-Mate 1099 actually comes in four editions, with the Advisor edition being the most comprehensive.

Current pricing for Tax Mate 1099 Advisor is \$325 and provides all functions noted above. Pricing for the Print, Print Plus and Transmittal editions are \$99, \$165 and \$215, respectfully. Heavy discount pricing is available for future upgrade pricing.

www.FormMagic.com

Tenez - Laser Link

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.25

BEST FIT

Accounting professionals looking for an inexpensive solution for a small number of year-end forms compliance and processing

STRENGTHS

- No separate module for printing on plain paper

- Cost effective solution for small organizations
- Data entry screens mirror printed forms

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Limited import capabilities

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004588

SUMMARY & PRICING

Laser Link is a cost effective system designed to complement manual accounting systems. Pricing for Laser Link is currently at \$61.99 and includes 25 free electronic filing forms. Pricing for additional forms currently ranges between \$1.00 and \$3.95 depending upon

form electronic filing needs. A sister solution, called TFP, is offered and includes much of the same functionality as Laser Link, but does not support plain paper printing. Pricing for TFP is currently \$41.99.

www.Tenez.com

BillQuick

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and more for Accountants & CPAs.

10 Deadly Accounting Website Mistakes

It's a sign of the sad state of accounting firm websites that in 18 years of competition, none have ever won a Webby award for site design. Some financial and banking sites have won, and even the Arizona Society of CPAs was an honoree in 2006. But no accounting or tax preparation firms, which is astounding given how critical websites are to the overall marketing and communication efforts in support of new business development.

That was excusable two decades ago, when most web sites looked like ransom notes awash in fonts, frames, colors, left-side justification and pictures stolen from God-only-knows-where. In those days, the value of a website was tentative at best, difficult-to-impossible to quantify, and described mainly as a minor footnote to the firm's business development plan.

The accounting website of the 21st Century is an interesting, dynamic, content-rich environment that draws in prospects, informs existing clients, keeps pace with an ever-changing regulatory environment, offers solutions to

problems clients do not even know they have, and puts the firm on the short list of accountants a business will call when they need help and advice.

At least, that's the theory. In practice, the state of the accounting website is much bleaker than that. Not that accounting firm websites have not improved dramatically, but rather with the growth of other social media – Linked-In, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, et al – websites have become the first-generation marketing tool everyone forgot about. In fact, accounting firms with a robust social media program have long since gotten rid of their “webmaster” position. Or contracted it out to their Internet Service Provider.

Which explains why accounting websites continue to make the same deadly design mistakes today that have rendered them ineffective in years past. You don't have to stop at the 10 top mistakes – web designers can cite more than a hundred. But we have to draw the line somewhere, and if you were to avoid just these 10 you would have made major progress toward reviving what should serve as the foundation of your online marketing presence.



Mr. McClure is a consultant and widely published writer on technology issues. He can be contacted at dave.mcclure@cpapracticeadvisor.com



Here's my list:

- 1 WHAT BUSINESS AM I IN?** Professional firms are delighted to tell you about their reputation, the quality of their people, the ethics of their founder and the glowing praise they have won. What they fail to do is provide a simple, 200-word description of what they do. This should be on the first page of the site, repeated on the “about” or “history page.”
- 2 DISABLING THE “BACK” BUTTON.** How clever is this? By disabling this button in the upper left corner of the browser, the visitor is forced to reboot their browser to escape. Clever, perhaps, but that person will never visit the site again.
- 3 NO LINKS TO SOCIAL MEDIA.** Even if the firm does use social media, there is no link to those sites from the website. It's a virtual online orphan. The links should be on every page where they may be relevant.

- 4 WHO'S ON FIRST?** The smaller the firm, the more it relies on the personal style and expertise of its top people. If there is one partner or a dozen, clients and prospects want to know who they are and what they can do. The staff – including key administrative people – need to have their capabilities listed. Hire a photographer to take good staff pictures, and update them every five years.
- 5 BROKEN LINKS.** Few things will irritate a visitor more than the dreaded Error 404 – Page not found. It's easy to have someone check the site to make sure that no links are broken, just to avoid the aggravation.
- 6 CLEVERLY HIDING THE FIRM'S CONTACT INFORMATION.** In the panic to avoid spam and viruses, firms deleted their contact information from the website years ago, replacing this vital information with a long, invasive email form few will bother to fill out. Here's the rule – the name, address, phone number and a generic email address

THE BLEEDING EDGE

should be listed at the bottom of every single page of the site. Then get a good email filter to protect that address.

7 “CANNED” LAYOUT AND DESIGN. You can actually get a website design for free – from any number of places. The problem is that a thousand other firms are using the same design, and none of them look any better than your site. Invest in a design suited to your firm and its capabilities. The worst offense is to present a one-page “business card” website – or none at all.

8 INSTALLING JAVASCRIPT. A decade ago it was a technology that seemed destined to rule the online world. Today, it is the source of never-ending security holes and patches, placing the firm’s site and clients at risk. Get rid of it – if JavaScript is required, there is a design flaw in the site.

9 AUTOMATIC AUDIO FILES. There is nothing worse than going to a website only to have a video or advertisement blare across the office. Visitors should have the right to choose whether to suffer through your audio or video message. Force them to listen, and they will flee.

10 TYPOS AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS. My editors will gleefully attest to the fact that I am a dreadfully bad proofreader. But that is not my job, or that of the firm’s partner, either. Have the site scanned for typos and grammatical errors every month – and buy lunch for anyone who finds one. They will have earned it.

The firm’s website is the cornerstone of the online media strategy, and cannot be ignored or overlooked just because it is no longer shiny and new. Chances are that a quick audit of that site will show what changes need to be made as first steps.

REALITY CHECK

A compendium of ideas, products, rants and raves from the viewpoint of the author. The author has no financial interests in any of the products mentioned. Feel free to disagree, or to share your ideas by sending them to davemcclure@cpata.com.

INTERNET SITE OF THE MONTH.

Website Tool Tester (www.websitetooltester.com/en/website-builder-reviews).

There are both too few and too many sites dedicated to building and testing websites for accounting firms. This site reviews 10 tools for testing a site, along with a book of ideas, and while it may not be perfect it is a starting place.



CPA Practice Advisor’s Review of Web Building Tools (www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/collection/11600550)

Not to tout our own magazine, but CPAPA does an annual review of website builders designed for use by accounting firms. All the usual caveats apply, but the 2014 review by John Higgins is worth reading.



Cheap document scanners. The market is suddenly awash with cheap document scanners of every description – not Fujitsu, or Cannon, or new entrants like Ambir, but rather knock-off brands that are cheaper but have high failure rates and misfeeds. This might not be critical in reading business cards, but you don’t want to be laying in the emergency room while they struggle with admission forms on a cheap scanner. Quality counts.



Small Footprint Computers. A new generation of micro-computers (mini-ITX form factor) is hitting the marketplace, driven by the need for flexibility and power in the same box. They need lots of cooling, but are very suitable for graphics, home theater, and light-duty applications like scanning support.



Apple’s iWatch. Is the third time the charm for this ultimate geek gadget? Only if you are too young to remember the first two times a data watch has been proclaimed the latest and greatest technology. Anyone else here remember the Timex data watch? You can bet Microsoft does, which may be why they are a little more cautious about this bandwagon. I personally would not be caught dead wearing one this time around – I will leave it to those who weren’t born yet the first two times around.



Microsoft Office Mix. It’s still early to see if this new PowerPoint module will be as slick as its promotion says, but the concept is terrific. Microsoft says it’s a new, free solution for PowerPoint that makes it easy to create and share online interactive presentations, or “mixes.” Mixes play like YouTube videos, but with support for animations, live links and more. Get it at mix.office.com. ●

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Leisure

seventy-two percent of workers believe their time management skills improve on days they exercise.

(U. of Bristol)

Have you taken a vacation this year? Will you end the year with unused vacation time? If you go on vacation, do you check your email or take business-related calls? You are not in the minority if you combine work and play. The latest statistics from Work-Life Balance Expert Jeff Davidson make it clear that leisure time plays second fiddle to work time in most of our lives.

Interestingly, his findings also show that those who do make an effort to get away from it all are likely to be healthier, and find that they experience less stress and are less likely to be depressed. So what are you waiting for? Take a break! ●

IF THEY HAD MORE TIME,
40%
OF ADULTS SAY THEY'D SPEND IT
WITH FAMILY.

Day Runner survey

BY THE NUMBERS

18 MINUTES

Average amount of leisure time daily devoted to sports or exercise in the U.S.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

19 MINUTES

Average amount of leisure time daily spent socializing and communicating:

More than **8 in 10** male Fortune 500 CEOs say they wish they had a job that allowed them more time to pursue interests outside of work.

(Fortune)

90 minutes of aerobic exercise per week improves people's stress management.

helpguide.org

7 in 10

employees work after hours and on weekends, more than half because of "self-imposed pressure." (SHRM)

NUMBER OF AGGREGATE VACATION DAYS AMERICANS SURRENDERED IN 2013:

577 MILLION

(Expedia)

83 PERCENT

of workers check their email at least once during vacation.

(AOL)

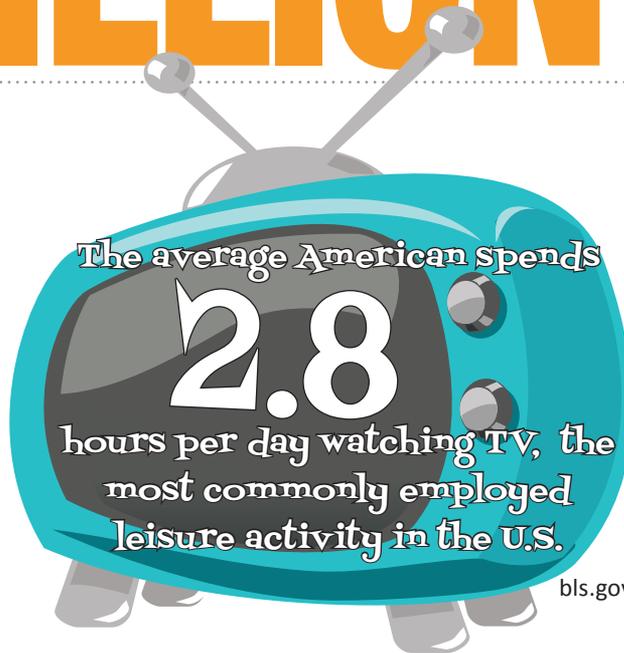
38%

of workers take all their vacation time.

(Expedia.com)

Percentage of workers who send emails or make work-related calls away from the office: **92%**

(WSJ)



bls.gov

Women who vacationed more than once a year reported lower levels of depression and higher marital satisfaction. (NIOCSH)

20%

(State U. of NY)

MEN WHO TAKE VACATION TIME EVERY YEAR LOWER THEIR RISK OF HEART DISEASE BY

Why I Wasn't First in Line for the New iPhone

By Scott H. Cytron, ABC

I used to consider myself an early adopter of all-things technology. Back when I was PC-based, I would upgrade to the newest operating system (OS) right away and buy the latest version of Microsoft Office. Almost 6 years ago when I moved to a Mac, whenever a new OS came out, I upgraded very quickly.

Sometimes, however, I think I upgraded a little *too* quickly. Time and time again, I found myself on the short-end of a new program, frustrated because something didn't work quite right. Of course, I want to ask Microsoft and Apple why in the heck they would even consider releasing new software that wasn't really ready, but that's a rhetorical question. If they waited to work out all the bugs, nothing would ever get released.

Recently, on a still-warm evening in Dallas, I watched ... and waited ... with keen anticipation for the release of Apple's new iPhone 6 and 6 Plus. Earlier in the week, I had seen the news reports on the new phones, as well as the new Apple watch. However, while I was waiting for the new release, I also knew one thing with 100% certainty: I would not order the new phone. In fact, I know I won't order it for at least another 6 months.

I used to think it was a good thing to be an early adopter – and I usually admire accountants who tell me they, too, were early adopters. Yet, I also know the kinds of questions to ask them about technology, systems and processes, so I often assess their levels of risk; after all, if they were early adopters, it correlates that they were able to face a certain level of risk to feel confident that any system changes wouldn't keep them from doing their work.

Almost always, firms who consid-

ered themselves on the cutting edge of technology really weren't as savvy as they thought they were. Sure, a firm would be very proud of the fact that it had an optical scanner, but then I ask something like, "so you've been able to do away with your file cabinets, right?" Wrong.

I'm not knocking those who say they were early adopters; what I'd rather have happen, instead, is for firms to admit to embracing technology, but doing so as a means to an end. In other words, what is the end goal to buying a scanner, finding an app for electronic signatures or even storing information in the cloud?

Firms aren't all to blame; I say some of the fault is with the software companies who want to become first to market with anything they think will outperform the competition. Just recently, I engaged an accountant to write a review of several point of sale apps. She was very excited about the assignment and I had no doubt she could probably write it in her sleep.

After a week or so, she called me to ask me my opinion about the article. Turns out the primary app she wanted to write about didn't have the correct functionality in place to perform a pretty crucial task. When she talked to the software provider about the problem, their response was that they knew about the issue and should have an



• Perform due diligence with all providers in the space you're looking at.

You can do this several ways: visit their webpages, ask for product demos or ask your colleagues for referrals. The very best way, however, to vet your choices is at trade shows. Instead of avoiding the exhibit floor and diving into the cheese tray, walk the floor and visit with the providers who are present. I guarantee you will walk away better educated and more informed.

• Take advantage of any training offered by the software provider you choose. While you may have some staff or contractors who claim they don't need the training, stand by your decision to have everyone properly trained. When you're finished with training, you won't have anyone claim he or she doesn't know how to operate the new software. You'll also feel more confident that your clients will benefit from the new system.

I still think it's better to be an early adopter than be late to the game, but adopt wisely. Your firm and clients will be much better off in the long term. Now as to that new Apple watch ... well, I always imagined myself as an amateur Dick Tracy. ●

update available in a few months.

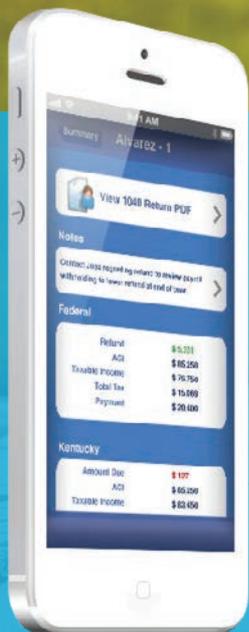
Now, if I were an accountant shopping for POS apps and bought this one or any of the others only to find out my choice made big promises it couldn't deliver, I'd be very mad. After all, if I integrated the app into my software and it wasn't able to perform a much-needed function, I would feel as if I wasted my money.

I think the key is to do your homework prior to purchasing a new OS, software upgrade or something brand new for your firm. I'm just as guilty of not doing this as most everyone else in only having my focus on the shiny new object rather than taking a step back to think through the situation. Instead, try this 3-step process:

• Create a measurable end goal for whatever you're trying to accomplish. For example, if you're interested in saving time and possibly shifting one person's time from data entry to something more strategic, then write something like, "The new program saved us xx hours of time per month." By having a measurable goal, you'll be able to measure your decision.

My success story ends with
the best day ever.

It began with filing more
returns in less time.



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TAX PLANNING SYSTEMS

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



Bill Kennedy, CPA, CA is founder of Energized Accounting, an accounting and consultancy group focused on helping small businesses.



By Bill Kennedy, CPA, CA

The Affordable Care Act changes had the biggest impact on tax software across the country this year, as developers scrambled to incorporate the new Net Investment regulations into their packages, particularly for high net worth individuals. All of the packages reviewed have been updated for the impact of this legislation.

If you view tax software as the system that determines what an individual or corporation owes in income tax now, then tax planning software is the tool professionals use to help their clients minimize the future impact of income tax. Tax planning systems tend to be add-ons to an existing tax software package and are typically available for purchase, although the Drake system comes free as part of their comprehensive package.

With the exception of the changes resulting from the Affordable Care Act, this was a routine year for tax planning systems. This year's reviews include:

- **CCH ProSystem fx Planning**
- **Drake Software Tax Planner**
- **Thomson Reuters Planner CS**
- **Bloomberg BNA Income Tax Planner**
- **Intuit Lacerte Tax Planner**

However, there is one area that this reviewer believes developers should pay attention to and that is the number of users who now routinely have two screens on their desk, as they transfer information from one package to another. Optimizing financial packages for single or multi-screen use would be a good general innovation.

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 exemp-

tion 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.

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. ●

**READ THE FULL VERSION OF THESE
REVIEWS ONLINE AT
WWW.CPAPRACTICEADVISOR.COM/
12004251**

Bloomberg BNA Income Tax Planner

2014
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

- Imports 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

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004765

that may not work on all portable devices

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 is based on

the platform and the number of users. The base license for the web version is \$1,115 and for the standalone version, \$1,050, with tiered pricing for additional users.

www.BNASoftware.com

CCH ProSystem fx Planning

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

The ProSystem fx Planning package will work well for firms with complex tax situations, particularly when they use other components of the ProSystem fx Suite or CCH Access Tax and can take advantage of the direct integration.

STRENGTHS

- Forecast and compare up to 30 different tax scenarios with 8 years of projection data per plan (plus current and previous

years), with complete federal and state estimated tax and penalty calculations

- Imports tax data from ProSystem fx Tax and CCH Access Tax
- The license allows for an unlimited number of users at a firm location
- Interactive tutorial and ample help resources
- Only produces spreadsheet-type reports (no graphs or charts)
- Reporting output limited to PDF

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004281

files (no direct exports to Excel or other programs)

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)

plex tax situations, particularly when they use other components of the ProSystem fx Suite or CCH Access Tax and can take advantage of the direct integration. The base price for ProSystem fx Planning is \$775 and includes federal and all states.

www.cchgroup.com

SUMMARY & PRICING

The ProSystem fx Planning package will work well for firms with com-

Drake Tax Planner

2014
OVERALL
RATING

4

BEST FIT

Drake Tax Planner is a free add-on to the popular Drake Tax Software. It is best suited for small practices with a wide variety of clients, particularly if they have straight forward tax planning situations that involve only one tax return and a limited number of years.

- Deep integration with Drake Tax for working through scenarios
- Comprehensive support options with some after-hours telephone support
- Easy to learn and quick to implement

- Multiple options to access the software – desktop, hosted and online application
- The Tax Planner does not handle more complex situations, particularly if they involve multiple tax returns.

STRENGTHS

- Deep integration with Drake Tax for working through scenarios
- Comprehensive support options with some after-hours telephone support
- Easy to learn and quick to implement

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004286

- Multiple options to access the software – desktop, hosted and online application

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

The Tax Planner does not handle more complex situations, particularly if they involve multiple tax returns.

SUMMARY & PRICING

As a free add-on to Drake Tax, Tax Planner will only be useful to firms who purchased the main product. Even though it is free, it can be used to create and compare significant

money saving tax scenarios for clients. Like Drake Tax, it is designed for quick data entry and return processing. A unique aspect to Drake Software is the all-inclusive pricing model. This allows tax practitioners to process unlimited federal, state and electronic filing at a known, fixed rate with no additional function modules to purchase. Drake's software system includes built-in free modules for client write-up, payroll and practice management.

www.drakesoftware.com

Intuit Lacerte Tax Planner



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)

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004296

- Calculates tax for only one state per plan

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.

<http://accountants.intuit.com/tax/lacerte/>

Thomson Reuters Planner CS



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 of producing projec-

tions 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
- Easy conversion from other tax preparation packages via imports

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12004292

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No option to export reports to Excel

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.

www.thomsonreuters.com

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Success is the Word: A Look at QuickBooks Accountant Desktop 2015

Intuit's Small Business vision remains at the core of its business, as it continues to connect small business owners and accountants through the QuickBooks Cloud. Intuit aims to make it as seamless as possible for users to connect and access their data regardless of the device they use, which is evident in the rollout of QuickBooks Accountants Desktop 2015 and the QuickBooks Online app for Mac.

"We know that our customers all work with a variety of devices and operating systems. Therefore, it's important that we make the QuickBooks Cloud accessible globally on every operating system," said Jacint Tumacder, product manager, QuickBooks Accountant.

In updating QuickBooks Accountant Desktop, Intuit focused on how the program could better help customers and their clients succeed. New features and updates include the ability to send a portable company file, Accountant Toolbox and additional insights and reporting tools. These features center around decreasing the time spent working with company data, better visualizations of company data and simpler ways for accountants to communicate with clients.

"QuickBooks 2015 is all about helping the client succeed by allowing them to do three key things: be more efficient, gain better insights and let their expertise shine," said Tumacder.

The latest version of QB Desktop simplifies the data transfer process between accountant and client by making it easier for clients to send the necessary information to their accountant. Accountants previously spent a lot of time walking clients through the steps to send their company file, as it could be a confusing process. Now, with the addition of the "Send Portable Company File," Intuit has strived to make it almost intuitive for clients. This new option is located under the File menu, by selecting Send File>Send Portable Company

File, and integrates with the cloud storage platform customers are already using, such as Dropbox or Google Drive. QB will remember the previous storage location for next time and automatically appends a Date/Time stamp to the file name.

With the new Accountant Toolbox, available in QuickBooks Pro and Premier, accountants are able to access the tools they need from their client's version. This is helpful for accountants that frequently go to their clients' offices, but may not always have their version with them. By logging into the toolbox with their QuickBooks email and password, accountants can now work just as efficiently from their clients' offices as they would from their own.

QuickBooks Accountants also offers several visual redesigns that will make it simpler for accountants to gain insights into their clients' company metrics. A new "Insights" tab is now available from the homepage and allows accountants to view their clients' profits and losses and open and overdue receivables, as well as create PDFs to share with clients. The updated reports functionality now allows accountants to add comments directly to the report. Accountants can also email multiple reports at once to clients.

"Previously accountants had to perform several steps to truly analyze the company's financials and see what the business was spending its money on. In the 2015 version, they can get all that information at-a-glance and easily share it with their clients. We've

also made it simpler to share comments on reports they run, without having to leave QuickBooks.

The cleaner layout makes it easier to identify the necessary information they need," says Tumacder.

Accountants will also find it's easier for them to manage their clients in the new version. All of their accounting and tax clients appear in once streamlined client list and they are now able to manage unlimited client employees. They can also assign specific tasks to their clients and employees, as well as employees of their own firm. Other new features include the ability to receive a single bill for all of their wholesale clients and easily generate a tax return from the data already managed in QBOA.

The Mac App for QBO was released in August and is a hybrid app, giving users the accessibility of the cloud version with all the power of the desktop app. Users will notice the interface is very similar to QBO, but it allows them to interact with it similar to any other Mac desktop app. Features include keyboard shortcuts, native printing from the app, the ability to stay logged into the app, Back/Forward toggling between windows, multiple windows open at the same time, and a company drop-down menu to easily switch between companies. A QuickView function on the Mac toolbar shows important alerts even when QB isn't open, allowing users to navigate directly to the necessary window within QB.

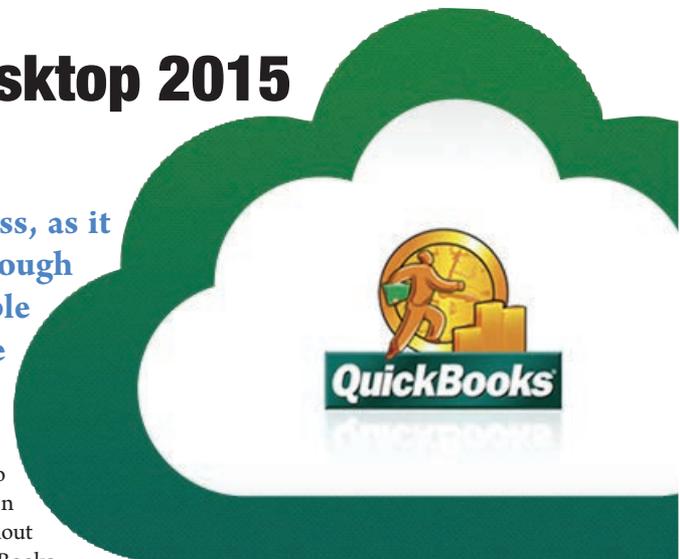
"If you were to do a features

checklist, QuickBooks Online and QuickBooks Mac are pretty close to each other. However, with the QuickBooks Mac App, we've given our customers the added functionality of connecting connects all three of their Apple devices – Mac, iPhone and iPad," said Tumacder.

Intuit continues to add additional functionality for its 683,000 online subscribers via Intuit apps and other third-party apps through its open API platform. The number of users migrating from desktop to online continues to double, and Intuit projects that 78 percent of its small business customers will be fully adapted to the cloud by 2020.

"Our goals are to help accountants save time and grow their practice, while connecting every small business professional with an accounting professional. We are able to do this by focusing on making QuickBooks a product that every professional knows how to use and loves and recommends," said Tumacder.

In addition to the latest version of QuickBooks Accountant Desktop, Intuit is also offering an Advanced Certification Course for QBOA at its inaugural QuickBooks Connect Conference in October. Attending ProAdvisors will be able to attend the course and access the prep material two weeks before the materials and exam are available to every ProAdvisor. ●



How Does the Marketplace Fairness Act Affect Use Taxes?

By Judy Vorndran, CPA, JD

While almost everyone has heard of sales tax, many business owners are unaware that most states have a “use tax.” State laws treat sales and use tax as two separate taxes, but in reality they act in concert to complement each other. Think of them as a “pay me now or pay me later” tax.

Sales tax, the “pay me now” tax, is paid to the retailer at the time of purchase. Generally speaking, traditional brick and mortar stores are required to collect state and local sales tax on retail sales. Many online retailers are not required to collect sales taxes on sales shipped to another state simply because they do not have a taxable presence there (typically, property or employees).

Use tax, the “pay me later” tax, is required to be remitted by the purchaser/consumer/end-user for taxable transactions where the seller/retailer did not charge sales tax (i.e., internet sales). Many purchasers are either unaware of this requirement or choose to ignore it. Some states provide clear guidance and a convenient method for remitting the tax (e.g., line item on the state sales tax or income tax return), while other states provide little to no guidance coupled with confusing remittance methods.

To summarize, if the transaction is taxable, and not taxed at the time of sale, the corresponding use tax is

likely due from the purchaser.

For example, when a Minneapolis restaurant owner purchases new dishes at a Minnesota restaurant supply company (deemed a taxable sale), Minnesota sales tax would be due. However, if the dishes were purchased over the internet from a Wyoming retailer; and the retailer was not required to collect Minnesota sales tax, the restaurant would be required to self-assess and remit the applicable use tax to Minnesota.

As you might surmise from the above example, states have struggled with use tax collection and are looking to the Marketplace Fairness Act as a mechanism to increase sales/use tax compliance.

Last year, the Senate passed the Marketplace Fairness Act (MFA), which would allow state governments to require retailers without a physical presence in the state of the purchaser (Wyoming based restaurant supply from our example) to collect that state’s sales tax. The bill has been referred to a House of Representatives com-



mittee for review. If the bill passes the House, then it will likely become law as the White House has already expressed its support.

Proponents of the bill claim that it will help level the playing field between online retailers and brick and mortar retailers, and will also help struggling states increase their revenue. Opponents argue that it will hurt online businesses not only with price increases associated with collecting sales tax, but also from the potential cost to integrate a new accounting system to file and remit multiple sales tax returns. In an effort to ease this burden, the MFA provides for a “small-seller exception” which is applicable to sellers with annual gross receipts in total U.S. remote sales not exceeding \$1 million.

As it currently stands, the bill would only allow states that meet certain minimum sales tax law/procedure simplification requirements to participate. The allure of increased sales tax revenue via the

remote seller rule may persuade the non-compliant states to revamp their sales tax regimes to comply with the minimum requirements of the bill.

Whether you are a proponent or opponent of the Marketplace Fairness Act, it’s important to understand that a use tax responsibility has always existed on taxable transactions, where sales tax was not collected. The Marketplace Fairness Act is merely one of the latest attempts by Congress to address a major compliance problem. ●

Judy Vorndran, CPA, JD, is a Partner, and Alex Korzhen, JD, MBA, is a Manager with Eide Bailly, a top 25 CPA firm with 24 offices in 11 states. Eide Bailly’s National Tax Office serves as a resource for clients to help analyze complex tax issues related to business decisions.

5 Networking Tips for State and Local Tax (SALT) Practitioners

By Gail Perry, CPA, Editor-in-Chief CPA Practice Advisor

You probably know the income, sales, and use tax rules in your own state and local jurisdictions without having to do much research. But what if a new client walks in the door and presents you with a tax situation in a state where you have not practiced before?

You don't have to turn the client away. You know taxes in general and know how your own state and local taxes work. You already know the questions to ask and the types of forms you'll likely need to help the client file. If you've got lots of time on your hands, you can take a deep dive into the tax laws of the new state.

Or, you can do what many people do and seek help from your colleagues in other states. Here are some tips for getting answers to your tax questions when you're dealing with a new taxing jurisdiction.

Turn To the People You Know

Head over to LinkedIn and search among your connections for someone in the new state. Here's how to do a state search:

- Enter the state name in the Search field at the top of the page and click the Search button (the blue magnifying glass), or just press Enter.
- Click the Advanced option. At the top of the window that appears, it should say "Advanced People Search." If

something else appears, click People on the left side of the screen.

- Check the 1st Connection box.
- Scroll down to the bottom of the search window and click the "Search" button.

All of your first degree connections associated with that state will appear. Note that some of the search results will be people who aren't necessarily in that state now but who have listed that state somewhere in their profile.

Post a Question in a LinkedIn Group

Stay on LinkedIn and search for a group that relates to the state or locale where your client is doing business. For example, if I do a LinkedIn search for Missouri, I find there is a Missouri State & Local Taxes group. You can browse the commentary in a group like this or post a question asking for information. (www.linkedin.com/in/cpapracticeadvisor)

Find a Q&A Forum

Many states have Q&A forums of their own where you can post ques-

tions. Search for the name of the state followed by "Tax Q&A" or "Tax Forum" to find areas online where users can ask questions and make connections.

In groups of this sort or the groups on LinkedIn, you can ask for contact information and connect with an expert outside of the group setting.

Search for a Specialist

Most if not all states have accounting firms that specialize in state and local taxes. A search for a state and local tax expert within your state is likely to produce one or more firms that provide services that you might find useful.

State and local tax accountants are not unfamiliar with the concept of providing services to other accountants. They know they possess expertise in specialized areas and typically they are willing to provide services without your having to fear they will poach your clients. You would work with the accountants directly on behalf of your client and you would still maintain your profes-

sional relationship with your client throughout the project.

You can use social media forums such as Twitter to search as well. Try searching for the state and the word tax and see who comes up in your search. Depending on the state, it's quite possible you'll find an expert in state and local taxes who is willing to work with you to answer questions or even work on projects.

Contact State CPA Societies and Other Professional Organizations

Many state CPA societies have a "Find a CPA" page on their website where you can seek out assistance within that state. You can also contact the CPA Society directly and ask for a referral.

In addition to the state CPA societies, there are organizations like the National Association of Tax Professionals, the Institute for Professionals in Taxation, and others, that you can contact regarding referrals or posting questions. ●

October SALT Checklist

- Open items - help clients track down and account for outstanding overpayments/refunds
- Payments - help clients streamline SALT payments by making sure they are taking advantage of on-line payment methods
- Discuss liability for use taxes with affected clients (see related article)
- Review out-of-state tax status of your SALT clients and set up calls or send emails to determine if there have been recent changes
- Connect with SALT experts in other states if you have any clients that have expanded their business to new locales (see related article)
- Consider making yourself available as an expert on taxes in your own state through social media, your state CPA society, or participation in online state tax forums and groups

Get Hacked, Get Sacked!

Risk mitigation when your practice is attacked is an economic consideration. What will breach reporting cost? What will recovery cost and time lost be? Although we are not likely to be terminated by our clients or our firm, even this type of loss is possible.

What can we do to minimize the possibility of identity theft, malware, viruses, and attack? By the way, whether you run a private cloud or use public cloud facilities, you have a risk of attack and theft. As you might surmise, the public cloud data centers have more sophisticated tools to watch for attacks, but their tools are marginally better at preventing attacks in the first place than properly maintained in-house IT equipment.

Attacks come from a number of sources: PDF files, email links, direct attacks from software and more. Although the amount of spam

is dropping and the protection from spam filters is increasing, the effectiveness of firewalls and anti-virus is decreasing. Further, the aggressiveness of the attackers is becoming much greater. In addition, with the United States being the second largest source of attacks according to an eWeek article, the threat is just as much from people around us as it is from overseas. My conclusion is fairly simple in this area, though: the bad guys are following the money.

With identification theft and security breaches reported almost daily, we are becoming desensitized to the risk and impact of a theft. With massive identity thefts like those reported in August 2014 of the Russian hackers accumulating 1.2 billion stolen user names and passwords and half a billion email addresses garnered from 420,000 sites, it is hard for us to imagine the size and scale of the theft.

Many of you probably have trouble recalling the October 2013 report of 153 million credentials being stolen from Adobe. These large scale thefts remind us of the importance of routinely changing our passwords and maintaining these credentials with some sort of password management tool.

Consider the Solutions

There are a number of strategies that must be followed by public cloud providers or on your own in-house network and private cloud. Even



though it is our belief that all firewalls and anti-virus products are becoming less effective as the hacker's tools become more sophisticated, you should be following current best practices for security to establish that your firm is making reasonable efforts to protect client data. The responsibility of protecting client data can't be transferred to another entity who is doing your hosting or your IT work.

Minimum Protection Includes:

FIREWALL WITH INTRUSION PROTECTION SERVICES – options include Cisco, SonicWall, WatchGuard and others.

ANTI-VIRUS THAT IS UPDATED REGULARLY – options include GFI Vipre, eSet, McAfee and others.

PASSWORD MANAGERS – options include Citrix Password manager, LastPass, RoboForms, Password Depot and others.

ENCRYPTION OF ALL DRIVES AND REMOVABLE MEDIA – options include Microsoft BitLocker, PGP and the built-in encryption in the Mac OS, which unfortunately is off by default.

SOFTWARE PATCHING POLICIES – patching software can be done manually or automated through products like Continuum, SolarWinds, Kaseya, Level Platforms, N-Able and others. Just as important is when you don't patch, for example servers and firmware during tax season.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS – Besides the technical products used above, you should consider additional protection for the firm.

SECURITY TRAINING – we have covered this in prior articles. If you'd like an outline for an in-house lunch and learn, consider the topics here: www.nmgi.com/tag/security/Randy



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By Randy Johnston

CYBER INSURANCE – consider if protection is needed beyond your firm’s base professional liability coverage. Options include: AON, Lloyd’s of London, Rhodes Risk Advisors and others.

POLICIES – the firm should have a variety of acceptable use, security and breach response policies. We can provide samples of these on request.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY DISASTER RECOVERY PLAN – all firms should have a plan, but few do. A BC/DR plan seems to be a something that is particularly easy to put off.

CURRENCY OF APPLICATIONS – older software, for example Windows XP and before and Office 2003 and before are no longer maintained by Microsoft. These products allow bad guys easier access to our systems.

REMOTE WORKERS – in the world of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) and working from client sites or homes,

how do we protect the systems from attacks started from authorized user’s infected computers?

SECURITY BREACH PREPARATION – what do you do to prepare? Is encryption sufficient?

The main concern for accounting firms is that if data is compromised, you would have a security breach reporting incident. Today, all but three states have security breach reporting laws. The chances are pretty good that you are doing busi-

ness with clients in more than one state. While I’m not an attorney and unable to render legal advice, if all workstations are protected with disk

encryption, and the server drives are by default encrypted with your virtualization software, under most security breach statutes, your firm should be exempt from reporting. In other words, since you have encryption active at the desktop and a level of protection at the server, you don’t have a reportable incident.

What To Do

You may want to give management teams some background on the aggressiveness and risks of attacks. For additional information, you may

aggressive. For example, the only way we know to protect against CryptoWall right now is to block all attachments at the firewall, and require clients to transfer files in and out of the firm via a portal such as ShareFile. From a practical viewpoint, this is not likely to happen. **If you are a system administrator or IT manager, we suggest that you: 1) review your anti-virus signature and setup weekly, 2) hold extra training for employees, 3) make a plan for what to do if infected.** This includes warning your users to plan on outages of 24-72 hours and that if they attempt to work again too soon that they are likely to re-infect their systems.

Consider what you believe to be the risks for your firm. Build a response plan. Remediate any short falls in your security, policies and procedures. Train your users to minimize the risks. And be safe out there! ●

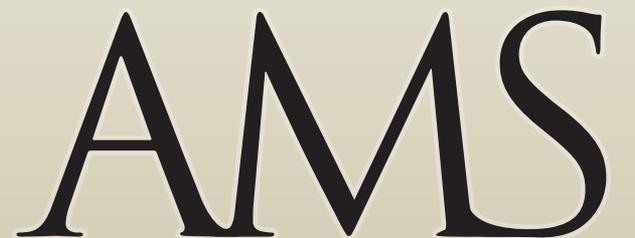
THE MAIN CONCERN FOR ACCOUNTING FIRMS IS THAT
IF DATA IS COMPROMISED, YOU WOULD HAVE A
SECURITY BREACH REPORTING INCIDENT.

want to review my blog post on security <http://tinyurl.com/Johnston-Security-Patriot>. Some attacks or infections are particularly

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Jerry Connor

Director of Product Management
Wolters Kluwer, CCH

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What benefits are firms looking for in the cloud?

Improved workflow efficiency remains a high priority for firms of all sizes. The key is identifying solutions that not only meet their specific needs, but that also integrate workflow functionality for streamlining firm processes — enabling them to 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. Firms are looking to gain efficiencies and reduce risk associated with maintaining data across disparate applications. This also means that firms can quickly adopt additional modules with minimal setup as client and staff data already exists.

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 just data. These common services are really just features and functions of the various modules such as storing documents, updating project status, starting a stopwatch to track time on projects, or 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, a clock can be automatically started 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 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?

CCH Access was built on a ‘service oriented architecture’ platform, so common data and services are not only shared across the platform, but 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-party vendors and customers. In fact, we are leveraging these same common services with Wolters Kluwer, 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 project status. These services also enable us to continue to build out functionality in the CCH Access™ app that our customers can access while they are on the go.

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

There are a couple of key focus 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 Wolters Kluwer, CCH can with its business partners. They email files, keep data on multiple devices and rely on Internet providers for their connectivity. As an added benefit, CCH Access provides ‘business continuity’ in the event of a catastrophe impacting their office.

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.



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Cloud Special Report

*Q&A with Jim McGinnis, Vice President,
Accountant and Advisor Group, Intuit*



Jim McGinnis

Vice President, Accountant
and Advisor Group

Jim McGinnis is the leader of Intuit's Accountant and Advisor Group and has led accountant teams since he joined Intuit in 2010 as Vice President of Marketing. His extensive marketing, general management and global experience has been invaluable as the Accountant and Advisor Group continues to serve as a center of excellence for Intuit's worldwide efforts with accountants.

Before joining Intuit, Jim was EVP and GM of Activision's \$400M Licensed Products Division, where he was responsible for videogames associated with blockbuster movies franchises such as Shrek, Transformers, James Bond and Spiderman. Previously, Jim led marketing for PepsiCo's Tropicana business, where he was responsible for the company's \$3B juice and juice drink portfolio, including the acquisition of Naked Juice in 2009.

Jim received his B.A. from Duke University and his MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management. He is a member of the Economic Club of Chicago, the Chicago Yacht Club, and leads the Duke Alumni Association in Dallas, TX. Jim is married and has two young sons, James and Charlie.

What is Intuit's commitment to helping accounting professionals succeed in the cloud?

Over the years, Intuit has evolved from providing singular solutions to offering a platform of online products and services that seamlessly integrate with each other. Working together, this integration creates amazing opportunities to solve important problems and pain points for accountants across their end-to-end workflow.

As the cloud moves from a "new" technology to a required commodity for accountants, it has helped improve client collaboration, allowing accountants to improve data collection and leverage electronic systems to help manage and execute work for their clients. Gone are the days of re-entering data into multiple programs. For example, we provide a connection between our QuickBooks Online Accountant product and Intuit Tax Online so there is a seamless integration between accounting and tax. This type of integration that creates a seamless, end-to-end workflow will only continue to improve and be offered across more online products, cutting down on the time it takes to do data entry.

How is the cloud changing the lives of accounting professionals and small businesses?

Accounting professionals now have the freedom to better serve clients anytime, anywhere.

The cloud has moved from being a "new" technology to a foundational element for accountants and small businesses. It has helped improve client collaboration, allowing accountants to improve data collection and data sharing, and enables them to respond more quickly to client needs via nearly any device: laptop, smartphone or tablet.

Intuit has been innovating in the cloud since 2001 when we first launched QuickBooks Online. This was long before "the cloud" meant anything more than the word you use to describe what you see in the sky. Our strategy is to continue to innovate and deliver awesome product experiences to accounting professionals in all the work they do to serve clients and to run their firms effectively and efficiently.

What are the current trends and adoption rates you are seeing in the cloud?

We're continuing to see a behavioral shift in accounting professionals when it comes to the use of cloud-based and mobile technologies. For example, many of those now entering the workforce have enjoyed nonstop connectivity most of their lives, from campuses with wireless networks to smartphones.

In addition, accounting professionals and their clients are increasingly looking to smartphones and tablets as necessary tools for managing the complex choreography of work and life. Accounting professionals and small businesses want to be able to leverage mobile devices to run their payroll, gain insights into their business's performance and manage their customers from one device on the go.

Regarding adoption, there are now more than 683,000 subscribers worldwide using QuickBooks Online. This translates into more than 1.7 million individuals, making QuickBooks Online the number one cloud accounting solution for small businesses. In addition, Intuit has reached an inflection point – for the first time ever, more new users joined QuickBooks Online than QuickBooks Desktop during Q4 of our Fiscal Year 2014 and accountants are loving it, too. The number of accountants with three or more QuickBooks Online clients has tripled.

It is clear small businesses are moving online and demanding services and support from their accountants that only online and mobile solutions can deliver. It is our job to make sure accountants can join them in the cloud and delight their clients.

How can today's accounting professional use the cloud to stay relevant and grow their practice?

By embracing mobile and online technologies that are available, accounting professionals can realize the time saving benefits of improved workflows and integration across products and third-party applications. In addition, accountants who stay current with technologies that offer time-saving benefits are able to focus more effort on strategies to help them and their clients succeed and grow.

Recently Intuit announced the availability of the new QuickBooks Online Advanced Certification. Tell us more about that.

We created the QuickBooks Online Advanced Certification to provide QuickBooks ProAdvisors the opportunity to increase their expertise so they in turn can help their clients get the most out of their QuickBooks software. This new advanced certification will help ProAdvisors further differentiate themselves as a QuickBooks Online expert to their current and prospective small business clients.

The exam won't be available until Nov. 5, but ProAdvisors can take the prep course and get access to the exam a full two weeks ahead of everyone else by coming to Intuit's QuickBooks Connect event, Oct. 21-23, in San Jose, CA.

The QuickBooks Online Advanced Certification course at QuickBooks Connect will be taught by Michelle Long, one of the most influential, well-known and respected accounting professionals in the industry. This course, held Tuesday, Oct. 21 from 2 -7 pm PT, is a blend of scenario-based situations and complex problem solving using QuickBooks Online. After attending the powerful new course, accounting professionals will be able to manage complex conversions to QuickBooks Online, handle in-depth customization of QuickBooks Online, train clients on the use of advanced features in QuickBooks Online, troubleshoot common data entry errors clients make when using QuickBooks Online and provide Advisory Services to those clients needing additional support. Registration for QuickBooks Connect is \$199 and Michelle's QBO Advanced Certification prep class is included in the registration cost. Register at <http://quickbooks.intuit.com/connect>.

What other improvements have you made recently to your online products?

In a report issued by Intuit and Emergent Research, "Small Business Success in the Cloud," by 2020, 78 percent of small businesses will be fully adapted to the cloud, up from 37 percent in 2014. To help prepare accounting professionals for this massive shift, we have made significant improvements to QuickBooks Online Accountant to help deliver even more value to their clients. The QuickBooks Online Accountant's new design helps accounting professionals be more efficient and save time when working with their client's data, gain better insights so they can make relevant actions quickly and let their expertise shine by providing business performance reports to their clients.

The new QuickBooks Online Accountant is equipped with tools to help accounting professionals save time and be more efficient. The new Single Client List provides accounting professionals with the ability to view and filter all their accounting and tax clients' books and returns in one click and easily switch accounts without logging out.

Additionally, we have made it easier for accounting professionals to collaborate with their employees by adding a Multi-User Access feature including different access permission levels. Managing multiple deadlines and staying on top of important activities has never been easier with Notes & Tasks, a personalized to-do list with reminders in one place.

QuickBooks Online Accountant's Wholesale Pricing, which enables you to sign-up a small business client for 50 percent off a QuickBooks Online subscription in perpetuity, makes it easy for accounting professionals to track subscriptions by receiving one single charge every month for all their QBO wholesale clients.

Also, built-in features, including payroll, payments and book-to-tax ensure employees are paid in minutes with instant paycheck creation and e-Pay and e-File payroll taxes, clients get paid faster and their QuickBooks data can be automatically mapped to tax lines right inside.

What advice can you provide accounting professionals looking to improve their usage of the cloud?

Start with one client. Put just one client on QuickBooks Online and see how it goes. Once you do and experience the benefits of working smarter and more efficiently, we're confident that you won't be able to imagine going back to the old way. Thirty-nine percent of new customers in the QuickBooks universe are online-only, a percentage that has grown rapidly in the past three years.

Like all technology advancements, the cloud will continue to evolve and change for the better. But it's moving quickly, so accounting firms need to begin to incorporate cloud solutions in their practices and firms to gain efficiencies and better serve their clients.

Still not convinced? Think about how often your clients interact with their other service providers on-the-go via their mobile devices. Or how often you use your mobile phone to do business and get questions answered. Ask yourself if your firm is part of that solution set and are you best meeting your clients' expectations.

On-the-go access, mobile collaboration, convenient and easy-to-use self-service tools are no longer "nice to have," they are crucial to delivering for your clients. We're here to help you make sure you don't get left behind.



Like all technology advancements, the cloud will continue to evolve and change for the better. But it's moving quickly, so accounting firms need to begin to incorporate cloud solutions in their practices and firms to gain efficiencies and better serve their clients.

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5 Technologies to Develop More Business for Your Firm

Every day, new technology services are being launched that help professional services firms better engage with prospects and clients in cost effective

ways. Filtering through all the possibilities and effectively leveraging the technologies is becoming key to firms' success. While not all inclusive, here are a few focus areas to maximize the impact of your business development efforts.

Client Referrals & Testimonials

When we ask people, "Who are your best sales people?," the first thought is the rainmaking partner or the business development professional in the firm. Clients don't often come up. Think of your clients as an extension of your sales & marketing team. The relationships they have with their colleagues



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.
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and peers are opportunities for your firm to grow your client base. Keep in mind that your business is not their business. Making referrals should not be expected to be at the top of their priority list. You must be intentional about asking for referrals. Here are some tools to help in this area.

- **NETPROMOTER** – both a loyalty metric and a discipline for using customer feedback to fuel profitable growth in your business. (www.net-promoter.com)
- **SKYPE/VODBURNER** – many of you have probably used Skype for video calls with family and friends. You may even use it with your clients. With the Vodburner plug-in for Skype, you can record video calls to capture client testimonials even when you are not in the same location. (www.skype.com, www.vodburner.com)

Branding & Design

For many firms, branding and design can be intimidating and resource-draining. Projects tend to become delayed and over budget. Branding and design effects lead generation and is vitally important to the image of the firm so this area can't be ignored. With advances in technology, the burden of these products can be minimized by leveraging crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing is commonly defined as "the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call." In other words, you bid out your projects to a

community of resources via the Internet completing projects quickly and cost effectively. Some of the leading platforms include:

- Crowdspring (www.crowdspring.com)
- 99Designs (www.99designs.com)
- Elance (www.elance.com)
- Zerys (www.zerys.com)

Social Media

Although social media has been around for years, too much focus has been given to marketing and not enough focus on how to leverage it for sales. With the improvements in social media over the last couple years, the idea of cold-calling is dead. By using the tools available on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, all of your "cold calls" can become "warm calls."

Customer Relationship Management

CRM has been a hot topic of discussion for some time now. Tools can range from simple to complex and success is determined more by process and behavioral changes than the technologies themselves. However, as Software-as-a-Service improves, so do the CRM tools. No longer are we limited to on premise, expensive, unwieldy CRM programs. CRM programs are becoming streamlined, effective, and affordable options for organizing and coordinating business development efforts. Below is a list of services to consider.

- Microsoft Dynamics CRM (<http://crm.dynamics.com>)
- LexisNexis Interaction (www.lexisnexis.com/intelligence/interaction.page)
- Salesforce (www.salesforce.com)
- Zoho CRM (www.zoho.com/crm)
- SugarCRM (www.sugarcrm.com)
- WorkETC (www.worketc.com)

Digital Messaging

In today's digital world, a website and email marketing strategy are critical to having your message and value propo-

sition heard by current and prospective clients. Too many firms still don't even have a website. And, a large number of those that do haven't given proper attention to their websites over the years. Through website building tools, you can have a great looking website for a fraction of the time and cost it used to require. Some of the leading platforms include:

- Wordpress (www.wordpress.com)
- Emochila (www.emochila.com)
- Squarespace (www.squarespace.com)
- Weebly (www.weebly.com)
- Wix (www.wix.com)
- Webs (www.webs.com)
- YourMembership (www.yourmembership.com)

Developing an email communication plan and schedule is also crucial to a well-rounded business development strategy. Despite the effects of spam, email marketing is still very effective for communicating with your clients and generating leads. Below are a few email marketing platforms that range from simplistic to robust.

- BizActions (www.bizactions.com)
- ClickDimensions (www.clickdimensions.com)
- SalesFUSION (www.salesfusion.com)
- Benchmark Email (www.benchmarkemail.com)
- Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com)
- Mail Chimp (www.mailchimp.com)

There is no shortage of technologies we can leverage to improve our business development efforts. Although many of the underlying principles are the same, business isn't developed the same way it was 5, 10, 20 years ago. Tools are becoming more powerful and more affordable every day. However, technology can't substitute the core business development skills we've relied upon in the past. You need to train your team on both the traditional concepts as well as the new age technologies to truly recognize success. This will allow your firm to continue to Think, Plan, Grow! ●

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