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CPA Practice Advisor

VOLUME 25, NUMBER 10

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm



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MOST POWERFUL
WOMEN
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Women and Accounting

When I interviewed at Deloitte, my first accounting job after finishing school, I met with a woman who was a manager in the firm. She told me that what she really wanted to do as a child was be a major league baseball player, but since having a woman in that role was likely never going to happen in her lifetime, she decided on accounting because she was good with numbers. She didn't get to play baseball, but she still got to play on the boys' team. Accounting was a man's profession then, and, many will argue, still is.

I've lost count of how many conversations I've had with people who are trying to change attitudes toward

women from within accounting firms. People who are looking for more tolerance, work/life blend, equalized pay, better opportunities for advancement - the list is long. What strikes me about these conversations is that those who seek change are going to the men, the alleged leaders in the profession, and saying, "We want this," "You need to do this," "Please consider these changes."

What I would really like to see are more women who stop asking and start doing - women who are unhappy with

conditions at their firm starting their own firm. Grow your own company from the ground up, make it so perfect and attractive to other women that they will clamor to join you, and you will get the best candidates, attract the best clients, provide the best services, achieve the best reputation. When will we see a top 10 accounting firm comprised mainly of women, leading, following, learning, engaging, providing the best services, and being recognized as a leader in the profession?

This month we honor the women who are standing out among us, the Most Powerful Women in the Accounting Profession, and, while we could argue that the women who stand out in this profession are everywhere and too numerous to count, even though we're in the business of counting, there are certain characteristics that make these particular women standouts among the standouts.

You'll see, for example, women who have forged new territory and created jobs and roles where none previously existed, women who are leading the charge in directions never before pursued, women who spend their nights and weekends on planes and in hotel rooms so they can speak and be heard, women who tirelessly commit themselves to causes and challenges and dreams so that the accounting profession and those it touches will be better for their efforts.

The leadership, expertise, experience, humanity, charisma, creativity, and power of this group is exceptional and overwhelming, and I for one can't wait to see what the future holds for all of us as a result of these women being among us. ●

— Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief
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WHAT I WOULD REALLY
LIKE TO SEE ARE MORE
WOMEN WHO STOP
ASKING AND START
DOING - WOMEN WHO
ARE UNHAPPY WITH
CONDITIONS AT THEIR
FIRM STARTING THEIR
OWN FIRM.



Gail is the Editor-in-Chief of CPA Practice Advisor and a CPA. She is the author of over 30 books (including "Mint.com for Dummies" and "QuickBooks 2014 on Demand") and she maintains a small tax practice. She earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from Indiana University and studied accounting at Illinois State University before starting her professional career at Deloitte. Gail is the former publisher and editor-in-chief at AccountingWEB and is a former columnist for the Indianapolis Star newspaper.



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Avalara
Making sales tax less taxing

By Randy Johnston

Another Year, New Opportunities



If you are a regular reader of this column, we've had a number of years together of making technology work for the accounting profession. You are on the front lines of making the technology work for you and your clients, and the teams at both my Network Management Group, Inc. (NMGI) and K2 Enterprises businesses get to help influence and create how technologies work and are made. At this time of year, I frequently look back and plan forward for both business and my personal life. I'm reminded of the phrase by Abraham Lincoln, "The best way to predict your future is to create it."



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

This quote has been attributed to other people such as Dennis Gabor, the inventor of the hologram, Alan Kay from Atari reflecting on his time at the Xerox PARC center during the time of the creation of the truly personal computer, and of course Peter Drucker, the famed management consultant. Whomever came up with the phrase, the idea is solid, and we have spent many columns working on creating the future.

Back To The Future!

Notable changes are ahead in our future. We have just passed the "future" date that Marty McFly targeted with the DeLorean in Back to the Future II, and I have enjoyed immensely seeing the entire trilogy with my wife again this year as well as noting the significance of the creative team of Robert Zemeckis, Bob Gale and others for ideas

depicted that have become reality 30 years later. I know I can't do as well predicting 30 years from now, 10 years from now or possibly even next year, but several technologies are available now, are used every day, are becoming possible and will influence our practice of accounting:

- **SOFTWARE**

- » Broad acceptance of Windows 10
- » New Microsoft Office features with Office 2016
- » Continued evolution of software from publishers
- » More capability in browser based software such as Microsoft Office Online applications
- » Quality of software changing

- **INTEGRATION**

- » Automation of bank feeds, tax data and accumulation of audit data
- » Increased attacks on our systems with traditional protection not as effective
- » Integration of applications becoming more transparent and common

- **GREATER ENVIRONMENT AND BUSINESS CLIMATE**

- » Focus on specific areas possible because of technology reach
- » Regulatory environment becoming more complex
- » Pundits trying to influence perception
- » Value distorted with recurring costs more common, some large, some small

- **HARDWARE**

- » Use of the smartphone as a portable personal computer, although the "PC" is "not dead yet."
- » Hardware coming with more advanced features standard, such as

solid state drives and touch

- » Higher speed wired and wireless communication
- » Greater use of wearables, robotics and other automation

For some of you the list above that includes software, integration, greater environment and hardware (SIGH) makes you do just that. You are exhausted from the changes and don't want any more. Others of you embrace change and enjoy the opportunities that these changes make possible. Consider the following acronym of HOPE:

- **HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

- » Clients want more
- » Team members
- » You want to improve your own situation for yourself and your family

- **OPPORTUNITY**

- » Help others
- » Work remotely at your own pace on any device, or not (AAA=anywhere, anytime, any device)
- » Things are possible that have never been available before

- **PERPETUAL**

- » Every day brings something new
- » If you don't grow, you die
- » Change will happen whether we want it, like it, or not

- **EFFECT**

- » All things can be used for good or bad
- » It is easy, pleasant and profitable to help others
- » You can choose how you feel and how you act

Technology and Personal Choices

While you reflect on your own

FROM THE TRENCHES

future, remember (or go back and review) some of the strategies we have discussed in prior columns. Look at your business strategy and tactics to develop your technology strategy and tactics. Look for client needs and fulfill them. Don't choose what everyone else is doing. Choose what is best for you and your clients. It is OK not to be bleeding edge, and it is less profitable to be lagging edge. Use traditional techniques like SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, idea clustering as well as other strategies to generate ideas.

It is OK to be lazy and use other people's ideas. It is also great to be efficient and use technology to automatically complete work, but you don't have to give it away based on the hours no longer required to complete the task. A number of my friends in the profession are promoting this idea with value billing. Keep a warehouse of good ideas, but try to keep most ideas in a framework that fit your business strategy, and remember that you don't have to execute every idea. In fact, you'll have greater success focusing on fewer ideas. Remember that simplicity is good. Sometimes the quickest and cheapest way to evaluate a technology is to buy it, try it and give it away using a sandbox technique. Sandboxing is where you try the technology for a real business purpose in a limited environment to see that it really works.

SANDBOXING IS WHERE YOU TRY THE TECHNOLOGY FOR A REAL BUSINESS PURPOSE IN A LIMITED ENVIRONMENT TO SEE THAT IT REALLY WORKS.

Speaking of sandboxes, I learned from my good friend, Dr. Bob Spencer, that even when a technique or technology is still working, if everyone else is doing the same thing, choose and learn a new technique or technology. In other words, "if the sandbox is full, go play in another sandbox." Sometimes it is OK to be evolutionary, but at other times you have to choose to be revolutionary.

Many people have a garage where one more thing was put in the garage until it becomes cluttered. Sometimes you have to empty the garage, put back the things that are valuable and dispose of the rest. It might be the right time to do this for your office, your practice and your home.

Born At The Right Time?

I have written columns in this style before reflecting on the good times of the past and the possibilities of the future. I reflect on friends and clients that have passed away, those who are still with us but in poor health or those who have retired and are active in new pursuits like my former K2 partners, Will Fleenor or Alan Salmon.

I am grateful for the many things I have learned from others, and get a great deal of personal pleasure and satisfaction from helping you. However, I'm fortunate to recognize that an even better time can be ahead and a new friend I have not made yet will

greet me at a seminar, a restaurant, at worship, on a train or plane. Sometimes I wonder if I wasn't born a century too late or too early, but then I'm reminded over and over that we seem to be at a particular time and place for reasons that we can't explain.

We have the opportunity to meet new friends and maintain old ones throughout life. As an old girl scout



"Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude."

— Zig Ziglar

song goes "Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver, and the other gold."

Like many of you, I had the pleasure of meeting Zig Ziglar, who used or crafted many sayings which seem to hold true. One I particularly enjoy is "Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude." I know many people with greater aptitude. Likewise, I know many with a different attitude. Recent studies seem to show that as people age, their attitude remains much the same as it was by age 30. You can either be "as young as you feel" and "never grow up," or you can choose to be like the character Max Goldman portrayed by Walter Matthau in Grumpy Old Men.

In prior years' public presentations as well as this column, I have quoted the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus, who considered himself a pioneer of wisdom, "The only thing that is constant is change." He has another saying that represents the torrent of change we experience in technology: "No man ever steps in the same river twice." Constant change represents constant opportunity.

At this point I'm on the sidelines cheering for you to have clarity in creating your own version of the future. If you need me to enter the game with you, I'm pretty easy to find. Many hands make for light work, and I'm happy to share the yoke with you. May the coming year and many more beyond give you blessings beyond measure. ●

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Time & Billing Systems Help Maximize Firm Productivity and Profitability

By Mary Girsch-Bock

While many accounting firms are moving toward value based pricing models, aka flat-fee, managing time and measuring efficiency will always be a critical process for professional services firms and, of course, firms will always need a centralized system for managing their client invoicing processes. As such, time and billing software can be a critical management tool for accounting and tax firms.

Even when billing on a flat-fee model, tracking staff time gives the management of a firm essential information on firm, including staff and group productivity, the appropriateness of the rates that are being charged, and which services are the most or least profitable.

There are several options on the market that help solve for these two issues: Tracking time (for either billing or productivity assessment), and clients billing. There are also systems much more deeply focused on firm workflow and engagement management, which we separate as practice management systems. See our 2015 reviews of these programs.

From a tactical perspective, generating client invoices and managing and analyzing productivity requires several key functions, primarily:

- Time and expense data entry,
- Management of independent and related engagements or projects for each client,
- Accounts receivables management functions, and
- Reporting and the ability to invoice via multiple methods such as progress, by budget, periodically or by other factors.

The security and integrity of client and firm data is also paramount, which means effective time and billing systems must also include multi-level user access rights

that restrict user access to specific clients or features.

Our review criteria for these applications are broken down into six basic categories:

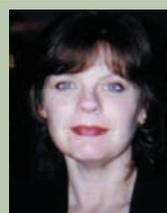
- Basic system functions,
- Time tracking capabilities,
- Invoicing functions,
- Management features,
- Integration and data management, and
- Help and Support

While pretty much all accounting systems allow for some data entry and invoicing, a true time and billing program offers greater benefit and management functions. Unbilled time and expenses and WIPs (work in process items) lose their value as they age, as the realization of collection of those invoices decreases, which can lead to wasted time and effort. In that way, the effectiveness of a time and billing solution can be measured by comparing the aging of unbilled time and expenses before and after selecting a solution.

A time and billing solution should also work the way you work with clients. If you are providing services in the cloud, you should be able to e-mail invoices to clients or provide them via a client portal. Additionally, some time and billing systems can process invoices against retainers on hand, and many firms now use EFT processes to automatically bill client bank accounts for recurring monthly payroll and book-keeping fees. Firms considering a new time and billing system should verify that the system not only supports the feature, but should also ensure that it supports the



other solutions in use by the firm. ●



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

	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS	TIME TRACKING CAPABILITIES	INVOICING FUNCTIONS	MANAGEMENT FEATURES	INTEGRATION/DATA MANAGEMENT	HELP/SUPPORT	OVERALL RATING
AccountantsWorld	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BigTime	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Bill4Time	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BillQuick	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Chrometa	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
ImagineTime	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
TPS	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

TIME & BILLING SYSTEMS

AccountantsWorld Practice Relief

2015
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

Accounting firms that need the flexibility of a web-based time and billing solution and are already using other AccountantsWorld applications.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS:

- Product offers excellent integration with applications in AccountantsWorld Power Practice Suite

- Web-based, the product is available from anywhere with an Internet connection
- Product provides firms with a comprehensive analysis of the practice, including client profitability and billing inefficiencies

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- While useful as a stand-alone

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12141954

product, features and functionality increase when used with the Power Practice Suite of applications

Available as a stand-alone product, Practice Relief truly shines when used with Power Practice, also from AccountantsWorld.

Practice Relief is currently priced at \$49 per month, or \$495 per year for any number of users and clients.

www.AccountantsWorld.com

SUMMARY & PRICING

Practice Relief, from AccountantsWorld offers small to mid-sized firms the ability to enter time and billing information and process invoices from just about anywhere.

BigTime Time and Billing Software

2015
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

BigTime is well suited for growing professional services firms including accounting firms. Completely cloud-based, BigTime offers excellent integration with QuickBooks and Lacerte Tax.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Product interface is easily navigated and offers a streamlined timesheet entry process
- Product dashboards provide access

to vital data such as pending invoices and active tasks in an easy-to-read format

- One-click invoicing simplifies the billing process
- Designated an official Intuit integrated application, BigTime offers seamless integration with all versions of QuickBooks

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- May not be suitable for large firms

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12141940

with more complex billing needs

per user per month. Each of the versions offer time tracking, QuickBooks integration, unlimited times, a custom report wizard, and mobile access by smartphone or tablet, with the number of features increasing with the cost per month. A free trial is available for all versions of the product, and does not require a credit card to access.

www.BigTime.com

SUMMARY & PRICING

BigTime is available in four versions, making it suitable for small to mid-sized accounting firms, as well as others offering professional services. The Lite version is free, and supports two system users. The Express version is \$5.60 per user per month. The Pro version is \$16.00 per user per month, and the Enterprise version is \$19.20

FIRST-HAND

How A CPA Firm Increased Its Productivity BigTime

When Darrell Layman first started his tax practice in the rural town of Cuba, Missouri, the technologies in use by accounting firms and other professionals looked a bit different than those that today's firms have come to rely upon. In the early 1980s, few firms had personal computers, of course, and all client services resulted in paper-based documents that were either mailed to the IRS or stored in the firm's file cabinets.

However, Darrell could see some of the potential that new technologies would have, and how they would help him compete not only against other accountants in the area, but also how they would help him improve productivity and provide clients with better service.

In the three-plus decades since, he has built his practice, Lyman CPA (www.darrelllaymancpa.com), by following the development of technologies for accountants and has adopted many of the proven best-practices of highly successful firms across the country. In doing so, he has built a Next Generation Accounting Firm that may be based in rural Missouri, but has clients nationwide and around the world. The firm includes a variety of client services ranging from tax planning and preparation, to small business accounting, payroll and business consulting.

At the core of his practice, he has implemented the comprehensive time management system from BigTime Software that helps to not only manage client engagements, but also integrates with virtually all of the other technologies his firm uses for client service. This cloud-based system ties all of these core processes together, providing Darrell and his team with access to important client data and resulting in a single database that eliminates the headaches of redundant data entry.

FINDING THE RIGHT SYSTEM

Over the years, Darrell had tried many practice management systems from different vendors, but even the systems from so-called integrated suites ended up being less productive and effective for his firm. "They just didn't offer the integration we needed, and data often had to be entered several times in different places," he said.

He started using BigTime three years ago when it was offered by Intuit for accountants using the Lacerte tax system. The product is now independent of that company, but continues to offer tight integration with that and other professional tax programs. The system includes dashboards for managing activities, powerful filtering tools, and strong reporting functions.

Darrell says that BigTime's integration with other programs is also a key factor in boosting his productivity. "BigTime's primary purpose is managing time



and measuring productivity across the firm," he says, but we also use it heavily for engagement tracking, and the system directly integrates with Office 365, automatically creating new contacts and logs when we work on client engagements."

The mobile app for BigTime is also a valuable tool, he notes, making it easy for him to look up information whether he's in the office or not, and giving him and his staff easy-to-use timers for logging their work.

"BigTime's integration saves us a lot of time and effort, and the system keeps me on top of workflow by making it easy to see what needs to be done today, this week, or further out. This gives us the edge we need to be more productive and profitable, and gives our clients the results they expect."

Visit www.BigTime.net.

CPA Practice
Advisor

TIME & BILLING SYSTEMS

Bill4Time

2015
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

BEST FIT

Professional firms that want cloud-based time and expense management for time and expense tracking and billing, along with mobile apps that simplify daily use.

STRENGTHS

- Integration with QuickBooks, Outlook and Google
- Apps for Apple and Android devices

- Online payment acceptance
- Management at the client, project and activities level
- Features for accounting and legal firms

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- No accruals management

SUMMARY & PRICING

Bill4Time is a user-friendly web-based time and expense management

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12141971

system that provides additional project and engagement tracking functions. The system integrates with QuickBooks and Outlook, and streamlines online payment acceptance.

The system is available in three general versions, with pricing starting at \$15 per month for the Solo version which supports up to two users with 100 clients, 100 projects and 2GB of cloud data

storage. The Pro version is \$30 per month, with unlimited clients and projects, and 10GB storage, plus additional import and coversheet options. The Enterprise version is \$75 per month, with unlimited clients, projects and cloud storage, plus additional reporting, data import and custom invoice template options.

www.Bill4Time.com

BillQuick

2015
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

BillQuick, from BQE Software, is a good fit for small to mid-sized accounting and other professional firms that need to track Time & Expense Billing, Project Management, and Accounting information.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- BillQuick is scalable, with three editions available
- The product integrates with popular accounting software including QuickBooks, Sage 50, and AccountEdge
- Multiple timers are available that

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12141957

can be run concurrently

- Product tracks employee overtime and paid time off
- Mobile app is available for remote time entry

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Additional product training may be necessary for some offices

SUMMARY & PRICING

BillQuick offers an excellent time and billing solution to accounting firms, as well as other industries. The Professional Online version of BillQuick is \$19.95 per user per month. The Enterprise version is \$24.95. The installed version of BillQuick runs 14.95 per user per month, with pricing for the Pro and Enterprise levels available upon request.

www.BillQuick.com

Bulletproof Time Billing

Accurate Time & Expense Tracking
Efficient Billing & Invoicing
Simple, yet Freakishly Powerful



 **bill4time**

Be invincible. Get a free 30-day trial at www.bill4time.com.
Read a review of Bill4Time in this issue.

Chrometa Time and Billing Software

BEST FIT

Chrometa is a good fit for small to mid-sized accounting firms as well as other types of businesses. Chrometa offers 'passive timekeeping,' which differs from the other type of time and billing functionality typically found in other similar products.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- The product offers good integration with other applications
- Great solution for firms that have trouble recording time on a consistent basis
- Mobile apps are available for both PC and Apple devices
- Requires no work interruption, logging all time as well as document access and email time

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- While offering excellent time tracking capabilities, direct invoicing in the system is limited

SUMMARY & PRICING

Designed exclusively for time tracking, Chrometa offers an excellent solution to firms that need to find a more efficient way to track time. An excellent solution for those that chronically forget to log time or turn on a time, Chrometa will track all time and activity on a device. Chrometa is currently available in three versions: Startup, which works on a single device and is \$12.00 per month, the Basic version supports two devices and runs \$19.00 per month, and the Plus version supports three devices and runs \$29.00 per month.

www.Chrometa.com

2015
OVERALL
RATING

4.5

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12141963

TIME & BILLING SYSTEMS

ImagineTime - Time and Billing

2015
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

Designed primarily for both accounting and law firms, ImagineTime is a complete Practice Management Solution offering time management, complete billing capability, and solid reporting options. ImagineTime is available as either a desktop version, or as an online version hosted by ImagineTime.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS:

- Product uses a ribbon-style menu similar to Microsoft Office for easy system navigation
- ImagineTime integrates with several popular applications including Lacerte, Drake, ATX, ProSeries, and QuickBooks
- Product easily support multiple system users
- Syncs with Microsoft Outlook

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12141984

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- ImagineTime just came out with an Android mobile app, but does not currently offer an Apple app

SUMMARY & PRICING

ImagineTime offers excellent time and billing functionality, as well as solid invoicing and reporting capability. Pricing for the desktop version

of ImagineTime starts at \$295 for a single user. ImagineTime Cloud starts at \$25.00 per user per month. Optional modules including Finish Line, Add-On Workflow, and Calendar and Contact Management are available at an additional cost.

www.ImagineTime.com

TPS Time & Billing Software

2015
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

TPS is a good fit for accounting firms of all sizes that are looking for intuitive software that can streamline the time and billing function. TPS also contains a host of custom-designed features that allow firms to create a custom solution for their situation.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Product offers an intuitive user interface that is designed with accountants in mind
- TPS offers solid integration with both QuickBooks and Microsoft Office applications
- Mobile app allows users to log time from mobile devices

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12141932

- Offers excellent invoice customization capability

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Not currently available as a web-based product

SUMMARY & PRICING

TPS offers accounting firms of all

sizes and excellent time and billing management system. TPS is currently priced at \$399.00 for a single user. Firms can purchase additional user licenses for \$189.00 each.

www.TPSsoftware.com

FIRST-HAND

Comprehensive Practice and Workflow Management for Tax Season — and Beyond

SPONSORED CONTENT

Finding the right practice management solution can be challenging especially after an acquisition, as was the case when Maryland-based Faragalla & Associates' founder, Albert Faragalla, CPA, purchased the accounting practice owned by Karen Smith Racicot (who stayed on as a senior manager) in 2014. In addition to trying to sync firm culture, staff, and clients, the overall management of the firm including workflow and operational tasks must be addressed in any acquisition—and with so many practice management options to consider, finding the right solution can be a daunting task.

TWO FIRMS, TWO DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Albert and Karen had dramatically different approaches to workflow and practice management in their firms. He used basic spreadsheets to track client projects which was inefficient and hard to manage. She used a robust practice management system which was too complex. When the two firms came together, they both agreed that Faragalla & Associates needed a solution that would meet the needs of the resulting entity, which now has 15 employees and 1,000 clients.

Equipped with a list of must-have criteria, Albert and Karen started to vet solutions. "At the top of our list was a database-driven solution that was compre-

hensive without being more than we really needed to handle our workflow," said Karen. "When we looked at TaxWorkFlow, it was evident that the system was very intuitive and would meet our needs, and then some—with very powerful workflow, client and document management and storage capabilities. The ability to set up recurring projects and to change information once a project was assigned was also really important to us. We use TaxWorkFlow for recurring and non-recurring engagements."

AN INTEGRATED AND AFFORDABLE SOLUTION

At only \$1,000 per year including unlimited users and unlimited support, TaxWorkFlow meets another very important criterion for any firm—price. The system incorporates all aspects of a practice management solution: robust and fully customizable workflow, client relationship management, staff management, document management and storage, a time and billing module as well as an email campaign module and a client portal.

The platform, which was developed by CPA Jonathan Medows, is designed to offer the most customization and control possible in a streamlined and intuitive interface. TaxWorkFlow even allows users to select local or cloud-based data storage protected by the programs extensive security safeguards.

TaxWorkFlow integrates with QuickBooks and has

a built-in dashboard which Karen says has been "huge" for her in terms of being able to see the big picture view of the firm's workflow. "Previously, I would have to run a report to get a full synopsis of where we stood in terms of staff capacity and client work. Now I can simply look at the dashboard and know in a glance. It's a big time savings."

FULL STEAM AHEAD TOWARD TAX SEASON

Although TaxWorkFlow is a very comprehensive system, Karen says it is much easier to use and isn't overwhelming. "It's been a very smooth implementation and I attribute a lot of that to the responsiveness and receptiveness of TaxWorkFlow's support team. They helped us set up the system to fit the needs of our firm and when we have an idea about what we'd like to be able to do with the platform, we can actually talk to the program developers who are enthusiastic about incorporating our suggestions."

When asked about facing tax season using a new practice management and workflow tool, Karen is confident that with TaxWorkFlow their firm is ready to handle whatever comes their way. "I feel like our firm is moving forward and that nothing is going to be falling through the cracks when things get really busy," she said. "And TaxWorkFlow is a big part of that."

Visit www.TaxWorkFlow.com.

CPA Practice
Advisor

TALKING TECHNOLOGY:

5 Ways to Keep Your Accounting Team Up to Date

By Paul McDonald

There's no shortage of challenges in the realm of accounting. But according to a recent Robert Half Management Resources survey, what really keeps accounting and finance professionals awake at night is staying current with changing technology.

It's not hard to see why. Technology is critical for achieving key goals: maintaining operational efficiencies, containing costs and staying within new regulatory guidelines. That means managers need to make sure their accounting and finance staff are comfortable with the software they use and make the most of the platforms' functionalities.

It's a tall order. But here are five strategies you can use to keep your staff up to date.

1) Provide periodic in-house training. Schedule monthly or quarterly training sessions, and get the dates on everyone's calendar. These regular workshops will give your team an automatic, consistent update on key technology issues.

Take a comprehensive view when assessing the types of programs your employees need. You can survey staff to see where they feel they need the most coaching, or additional information on hot technology topics, but don't stop there. Take into consider-

ation feedback from regulatory bodies on needed proficiencies and areas with potential skills gaps, and check in with your network for insights on what's hot in the marketplace. In addition, you could bring in current vendors to discuss best practices for using their tools.

2) Encourage intergenerational mentoring. Along with traditional top-down mentorships, businesses see the wisdom of reverse mentoring. This bottom-up approach gives middle- and upper-level management a chance to learn from first- and second-year professionals. It can be a mutually beneficial arrangement, where Boomers and Gen Xers instruct Millennials and Gen Yers, exchanging ideas on public accounting, client relations and technology.

3) Promote industry courses and events. Professional associations and technology providers offer a host of educational



seminars all year long. Yet sometimes these opportunities go to waste because employees don't feel they can afford the time involved. As a manager, you need to create a climate where employees can attend conferences and workshops that will enhance their technology skills. When you create next year's budget, consider bumping up the allotment for travel and training programs.

4) Work with a consultant. Sometimes it's best to get an outside view. Consultants can help full-time staff with new technology, such as upgraded audit tools or tax software.

5) Offer tuition reimbursement. Accountants at all levels often want to continue their education and advance their career. Consider helping your staff with the cost of outside courses or attaining a certification. Then offer some flexibility to help them fit classes in with their work. In return, those professionals can help boost the technological savvy of your entire staff.

Keeping up with technology requires time and resources, but the effort can be worth it for your team. They'll be properly trained to make the most of rapidly evolving software and systems, so they can do their best work. ●



Paul McDonald is senior executive director with Robert Half, the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. Over the course of his 30-year career with the company, he has spoken extensively on employment and management issues based on his work with thousands of companies and job seekers.

Intuit Strives to Eliminate Double Work for Accountants with Trial Balance within QuickBooks Online Accountant

Tax season remains one of the busiest times for accounting professionals. They spend a considerable amount of time cleaning up books at the end of the year, manually entering data and preparing returns for clients. Most of the data entry accounting professionals perform already exists in their books and they are entering the same data multiple times. Recognizing this, Intuit has developed Trial Balance within QuickBooks Online Accountant, designed to help eliminate manual data import, export and entry work.

The release of Trial Balance follows last year's introduction of Books-To-Tax and will simplify and streamline year-end book cleanup and tax preparation for accountants by accelerating the year-end review process, safeguarding accountants' work and eliminating manual data entry.

"On average, accountants spend about five-and-a-half hours checking for errors, working in multiple apps and performing manual data entry. Last year, Books-to-Tax saved accountants an average of one hour per client during the tax season. But that wasn't enough. With Trial Balance, our goal is to save a target of two-and-a-half hours per client," said Tom Palfreyman, Intuit product line manager, QuickBooks Online Accountant.

Trial Balance, which is only accessible to accountants, was designed to sit on top of QuickBooks Online Accountant, giving users one-click access to the data and information they need. One of the first things users will notice is a new trial balance column. New users will be prompted to start a new

review. Once Trial Balance has been set up, you can always access it with one click by selecting "Review."

Features within Trial Balance include an Activity Timeline, the capability to create notes, document attachments and Intuit Tax Online integration. Once a review has been started, the Activity Timeline shows client and accountant activities that impact the client's balance, and will alert users to any changes that have been made since the last time Trial Balance was accessed. Accountants

can also view year-over-year variances and quickly identify any adjustments that need to be made. Any adjustment and reclassification activity will be displayed in the Trial Balance view, accessible at any time. Trial Balance will also place an automatic date and time stamp on completed reviews, along with the name of the user that completed the review. Any work that is performed will be saved to the review and can be accessed later by the user or others within the firm. All notes, attach-

ments and the Trial Balance worksheet will be saved under one login.

QuickBooks Online integrates into Intuit Tax Online and tax mappings allow users to access chart data from tax destinations within Intuit Tax. The software uses the terminology found on the tax forms, eliminating confusion and making it easier to complete the forms. Users can edit tax lines within the software and even select transactions to map to the tax return. Accountants can choose to post data directly to clients' tax returns or removed mapped transactions.

Additionally, any existing tax returns will be automatically detected and users can choose to bring forward balances from the previous year's return. The data will auto-populate into the new tax return. Once the tax return has been prepared, users can review the return for accuracy and completeness before filing within the program.

Trial Balance is available now for free to all QuickBooks Online Accountant customers through the QuickBooks Online Accountant Client Dashboard. Additional abilities, such as exporting to Excel or zip files, will be rolled out soon. Non-paying customers are able to use Trial Balance as many times as they want for free before filing tax returns. However, users will need to sign up for Intuit Tax Online to take advantage of the filing feature. QuickBooks Online Accountant customers will be able to file two free business income tax returns and five free individual returns using the trial balance feature. ●

Account	Type	2015 BALANCE	2014 BALANCE	2015 ACTIVITY	%	2014 ACTIVITY	2015 BALANCE	2014 BALANCE	2015 ACTIVITY
Checking	Bank	5,000.00	5,000.00	2,000.00	40%	300.00	7,000.00	5,000.00	2,000.00
Mortgage	Bank	10,000.00	10,000.00	1,000.00	10%	500.00	11,000.00	10,000.00	1,000.00
Accounts Receivable	Accounts Receivable	2,000.00	2,000.00	1,000.00	50%	500.00	3,000.00	2,000.00	1,000.00
Accounts Payable	Accounts Payable	1,000.00	1,000.00	500.00	50%	250.00	1,500.00	1,000.00	500.00
Retained Earnings	Equity	80,000.00	80,000.00	1,000.00	1%	500.00	81,000.00	80,000.00	1,000.00
Common Stock	Equity	10,000.00	10,000.00	0.00	0%	0.00	10,000.00	10,000.00	0.00
Other Equity	Equity	0.00	0.00	0.00	0%	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTAL		100,000.00	100,000.00	3,500.00		1,300.00	103,500.00	100,000.00	3,500.00

2015 MOST POWERFUL WOMEN

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor



FlemingPhotoStudio.com

The winners who were present to accept their awards - from left to right: Geni Whitehouse, Jennifer Warawa, Kristy Short, Bonnie Ruszczyk, Misty Megia, Stacy Kildal, Sandy Leyva, Loretta Doon, Shayna Chapman, Dawn Brolin and Sharada Bhansali

The leaders of the accounting profession come from every direction: small and large firms, consultants, technology vendors, educators, public officials and thought leaders. As women accounting professionals continue to increase their influence in profession, their role as leaders is becoming even more clear, as they help guide the profession, their peers and their firms into the future.

Each year, *CPA Practice Advisor* recognizes women professionals who have had the most impact on the profession, whether through day-to-day client service as a partner or senior member of an accounting

practice, or by mentoring and guiding others. Nominations were open to the public on *CPA Practice Advisor's* website www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com, and the final selection of this year's recipients was

determined by the publication's editorial staff and advisory board.

"These women are raising the bar for men and women alike in the accounting profession," said Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief of *CPA Practice Advisor*. "Not satisfied to go to work each day and merely do their jobs, these women are holding down multiple positions, donating their time, innovating, mentoring, speaking, writing. They are leaders in the best sense of the word. This community of women is climbing to the heights of the profession while keeping one foot in the trenches and one hand out to those wish to join them. There is an overwhelming sense of servant leadership among

these women - leaders who are succeeding by elevating those around them. It is an honor to present these awards."

The awards were announced and presented at The Sleeter Group's 2015 accounting solutions conference, SleeterCon, held November 16 through 19 in Las Vegas.

"Women are increasingly assuming positions of authority and emerging as the foremost leaders in the accounting profession, within accounting firms, consulting groups and at technology vendors," said Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor of *CPA Practice Advisor*. "The accomplishments of this year's Most Powerful Women, as well as

IN ACCOUNTING ANNOUNCED

their contributions to the profession and their local communities, are an inspiration to young professionals, women and men, as they aspire to great heights in the accounting field.”

The 2015 Most Powerful Women in Accounting are:

- Joanne Barry, CAE - New York Society of CPAs
- Sharada Bhansali - AccountantsWorld
- Dawn Brolin, CPA, MSA - Powerful Accounting

- Shayna Chapman, CPA.CITP, CGMA - ShaynaCo LLC
- Susan Coffey, CPA, CGMA - AICPA
- Gale Crosley, CPA.CGMA - Crosley+Company
- Loretta Doon, CPA - California Society of CPAs / CalCPA Education Foundation
- Cindy Fornelli - Center for Audit Quality
- Sally Glick, MBA - Sobel & Company, LLC
- Melissa Hooley, CPA, CGMA - Anton Collins Mitchell, LLP

- Rita Keller - Keller Advisors, LLC
- Stacy Kildal - Kildal Services, LLC
- Sandy Leyva, CPA, CMA - Accountants Accelerator
- Teresa Mackintosh, CPA - Wolters Kluwer, CCH U.S.
- Misty Megia - The Sleeter Group
- Monika Miles - Miles Consulting Group
- Edi Osbourne, CSPM, CPVA, CPBA - Mentor Plus
- Sabrina Parsons - Palo Alto Software
- Jean Rakich - Thomson Reuters
- Jean Rogers - Sustainability

- Accounting Standards Board
- Bonnie Rusczyk - BBR Marketing
- Kristy Short, Ed.D - RootWorks 360 LLC, rwc360 LLC
- Jennifer Warawa - Sage
- Geni Whitehouse, CPA.CITP, CSPM - Even A Nerd, LLC
- Sandra Wiley, PHR, SPHR - Boomer Consulting
- Jennifer Wilson - Convergence Coaching, LLC ●



Joanne Barry, CAE



Susan Coffey, CPA, CGMA



Sally Glick, MBA



Sandy Leyva, CPA, CMA



Monika Miles



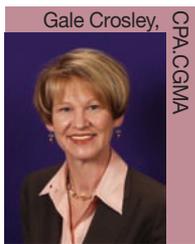
Jean Rakich



Jennifer Warawa



Sharada Bhansali



Gale Crosley, CPA, CGMA



Melissa Hooley, CPA, CGMA



Teresa Mackintosh, CPA



Edi Osbourne, CSPM, CPVA, CPBA



Jean Rogers



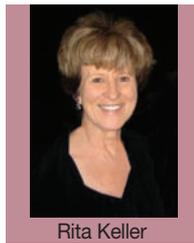
Geni Whitehouse, CPA.CITP, CSPM



Dawn Brolin, CPA, MSA



Loretta Doon, CPA



Rita Keller

MOST POWERFUL WOMEN 2015

THE NOMINATION PERIOD FOR NEXT YEAR'S AWARDS WILL OPEN IN MAY 2016.



Bonnie Rusczyk



Sandra Wiley, PHR, SPHR



Shayna Chapman, CPA.CITP, CGMA



Cindy Fornelli



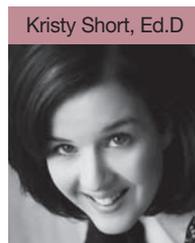
Stacy Kildal



Misty Megia



Sabrina Parsons



Kristy Short, Ed.D



Jennifer Wilson

Expense Management

By Gail Perry, CPA, Editor-in-Chief

How do you manage your expenses? Is it chaotic? Haphazard? Are there are receipts all over your desk and falling out of pockets and handbags? Have you ever lost a receipt? Have you ever forgotten to report an expense and then discover the receipt many months later? Do you have employees depending on you for reimbursement? Do you yearn for a better, easier way to track expenses, prepare expense reports, process reimbursements? Maybe we can help...!

Most of the apps below coordinate with a variety of accounting software programs, produce expense reports, operate in the cloud, and work on multiple platforms. This isn't a review, so we're not providing all of the nitty gritty details here, and the features on these programs are constantly improving anyway, so what we say today might seem incomplete a month or two from now. This is just a list to get you started - know that no matter what your expense management needs are, we can guarantee there is an app that will take away your stress and ease your burden.

CONCUR: Take pictures of your receipts, and then create expense reports right within the app. The Concur suite includes travel management apps as well, so check out all of their products.

EXPENSIFY: Scan, email, take pictures of your receipts, enter cash expenses easily, record mileage with a built-in GPS tracker, collect credit card transactions.

XPENDITURE: Store all of your receipts in a secure cloud environment; match receipts to credit card statements; reconcile with bank and credit card reports; generate expense reports; manage everything through a user dashboard.

RECEIPT BANK: Scan and convert all of your receipts into usable information with no data entry. Use

the Practice Platform to gain full visibility as to what bills, receipts, transactions need to be processed in a given day.

ZOHO EXPENSE: Import from credit cards, track mileage, study expense analytics, scan receipts, use multi-currency features - completely avoid the manual entry of expenses.

ABACUS: Reconcile credit cards

and automate expense reimbursement in real time without the need for expense reports.

SHOEBOXED: Receipt and mileage tracker, receipt verification service, create expense reports and accounting entries.

EXPENSEBOT: Take photos of receipts, track mileage, prepare expense reports, check charges on

your credit card. Their website mentions that your staff will be happier and morale will be higher if you use their product!

Looking for more apps, more details? Here are some recent reviews by groups we love that will lead you to more in-depth analysis:

Small Business Trends 27 Solutions for Time and Expense Tracking: <http://smallbiztrends.com/2015/11/time-and-expense-tracking-apps.html>

ZDNet Best Expense Tracking Apps: <http://www.zdnet.com/article/best-expense-tracking-apps-for-iphone-android-and-windows-phone/>

GetApp.com Expense Management App Reviews: <https://www.getapp.com/finance-accounting-software/expenses-management/#getrank> ●





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— Bernice Geldenberg
ROZEL & HAYKIN CPA, PC, New York

"My processing time decreased by over 50%."

— Corry Riley, Brookville, PA

"I have more than doubled my payroll billing in just two years."

— Kristi Dolan, Lynchburg, VA

Highest Rated! ★★★★★

4 Years Running, CPA Practice Advisor

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PR

Payroll Relief®

by AccountantsWorld®

The payroll system for professionalsSM

Tax Research Systems Provide Vital Intelligence

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

The American income tax system is complicated, which is a positive for tax professionals, after all. If it were simple, few people would pay to have their taxes prepared by a professional. Unfortunately, this silver lining is accompanied by the immense and dark cloud of the tax code that seems to get even more complex each year, with the addition of endless add-ons and patches, credits and deductions.

For firms with fairly simple, “retail” tax clients, almost any professional tax system can satisfy their tax preparation needs, since most include the basic rules and line-by-line instructions for the forms they prepare. But as clients get more complex, as their income comes from more diverse sources, and as their work and family lives necessitate more deductions and credits, the more their tax professional needs access to not only the basic instructions, but also analysis from tax and legal experts, news sources to keep abreast of tax changes, and access to federal, state and even international tax codes and treaties.

It is at this point that tax becomes a profession, not just a commoditized service. After all, the most experienced tax professional knows that he or she doesn't know everything and can't possibly memorize the Internal Revenue Code or state taxation laws, so having the expertise to know where to look for the answers becomes imperative.

About 10 years ago, most tax research systems moved to the internet, transitioning from the old-school libraries of tax code books, into web-based services that give tax professionals resources they never could have had before. Initially, those online tax research systems focused primarily on just providing source material (tax code) and analysis from legal experts. Since then, they have been greatly enhanced to include integration with client tax returns, allowing preparers to drill down directly from a form into instructions, code and even court cases.

The tax research systems reviewed here also offer collaboration tools, letting professionals attach research documents to client returns, while also offering tools annotate and add notes, and even share



the materials with their peers via email, message or social media. More importantly, these systems offer dynamic content that is updated when Congress or the states make changes or allow provisions to expire, and when court rulings affect application of tax treatments.

Taxation is no longer a once-a-year engagement, at least not for clients with more than a couple of W-2s and 1099s. Complex and high net worth clients require strategic tax planning, which in turn requires their professional to stay on top of changes as they occur and even beforehand, as an anticipatory approach.

There are now only three major web-based tax research systems that are designed for professionals and, quite honestly, the systems have grown so comprehensive and offer extensive productivity tools that they are the best of the breed. The primary differenti-

ating factors among them are in layout, mobile tools, workflow styles and design, and firms should explore which works best for them.



Isaac M. O'Bannon,
Managing Editor

Isaac M. O'Bannon is the managing editor and digital content manager for CPA Practice Advisor (www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com), drawing on nearly two decades of experience covering the areas of professional accounting, taxation, business productivity and consumer technologies.

	BASIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS	CONTENT	CUSTOMIZATION	INTEGRATION/IMPORT/EXPORT	HELP/SUPPORT	OVERALL RATING
BNA Tax & Accounting Center & Financial Resource Center	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Wolters Kluwer CCH IntelliConnect Tax Research	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Thomson Reuters Checkpoint Research Platform	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

BNA Tax & Accounting Center and Financial Resource Center

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12145127

2015
OVERALL
RATING

4.75

BEST FIT

Accounting and tax firms that want full tax and accounting research along with expert analysis, and the optional ability to integrate this content into the some third-party tax products.

STRENGTHS

- Mobile app for access to news & commentary, tax and accounting research and analysis.
- Content written by tax experts, lawyers, practitioners and educators.
- Drill down access, plus user-

friendly Fast Answers' Q&A format.

- Deep federal and state resource libraries.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- The BNA Tax & Accounting Center does not offer built-in highlighting or annotation functions.

Bloomberg BNA offers a broad collection of research materials, expert news, commentary and analysis covering U.S., state and international taxation, estate law, accounting and other legal subjects.

The BNA Tax & Accounting Center and Financial Resource Center, and the free app (iPhone, iPad and Android) that is available for BNA subscribers, offers a unified platform for searching and accessing these libraries. Earlier this year, new search features were added, including "Go Links" and "Go Pages," which help tax professionals more quickly access key tax subjects, summaries and IR code sections.

SUMMARY & PRICING

BNA offers one of the most com-

prehensive tax and legal libraries available, with extensive expert analysis, news and commentary, access to primary sources at federal, state and international levels, and an assortment of practice tools for tax firms. Pricing starts at about \$1,000 and depends on the number of licensed users and the specific content that is subscribed to.

www.BNASoftware.com

IntelliConnect Tax Research

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12145119

2015
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

IntelliConnect is a web-based tax and accounting system from Wolters Kluwer designed to integrate with CCH Access Document, Access Tax and ProSystem fx Tax, or as a stand-alone as a tax research system, providing primary source and analysis libraries for federal, state and international taxation, as well as business, financial and estate planning. The system also offers a variety of intuitive productivity tools, and a mobile app is available for iPad, iPhone, Android and Kindle devices.

STRENGTHS

- Tight integration with tax and

document management systems offers easy drill-down access to research content.

- Excellent mobile app, with access to research content, including tax news and alerts, charts and rate tables, and the ability to email and save materials to customized research folders.
- The system includes tools to highlight or annotate research content, or to convert it to PDF, email it to colleagues or even share via social media.
- The recently-added IntelliConnect Browser Search utility makes it easy to search across the IntelliConnect system and the

internet at the same time. The Browser Search feature was a finalist in the 2015 *CPA Practice Advisor* Innovation Awards.

Wolters Kluwer is a global provider of tax and accounting research and materials to professionals. Through IntelliConnect, users have access to a flexible web-based or mobile-enhanced research platform that offers full document editing, highlighting and annotation, a voice navigation and news reading feature, and exceptional customization options. Additional productivity-boosting research tools include the Browser Search function, Quick Answers, and CCH Smart Charts.

SUMMARY & PRICING

The CCH IntelliConnect tax and accounting research platform offers a vast collection of libraries, along with tools and resources that further enhance the research system and help firms be more productive. The system offers tight integration with CCH-branded tax and document management systems, including CCH Access and ProSystem fx. Pricing depends on the numbers of users and the libraries that are subscribed to, with options starting at about \$200 and up. The mobile app is free for subscribers.

www.CCHGroup.com

Thomson Reuters Checkpoint Research Platform

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12145124

2015
OVERALL
RATING

5

BEST FIT

Because of integration features, Checkpoint is best suited to firms using the professional tax and firm management systems available from Thomson Reuters. However, the comprehensive tax and accounting research solution can be a powerful tool for firms using any tax package.

STRENGTHS

- Checkpoint offers extensive libraries for tax, accounting, business valuation, finance, international trade, payroll, pensions and benefits research, as well as strong practice manage-

ment tools.

- The system includes robust search options, including the new Intuitive Search feature that can adapt to a user's preferences. The program also includes a feature called "Return to Your Previous Research" that can take a user back to their last search.
- The Time Tracking utility in Checkpoint can be used to easily track time spent on research, whether for billing or productivity measurement purposes, for which the system can generate billing and project reports.

- A zip-code based feature lets users search for zone-based client tax credits by their location.

Thomson Reuters' Checkpoint is a professional online accounting and tax research system providing a large library of primary source materials for federal and state, guidance, news and practice tools, along with strong customization features and search options. The system is frequently updated, and has recently been enhanced with resources covering health reform, changes to global tax compliance, and New York's corporate tax overhaul.

SUMMARY & PRICING

Checkpoint offers exceptional customization options and integration with Thomson Reuters' tax and accounting products, providing deep research functions and content that includes expert analysis on tax, audit, payroll, business valuation, finance and international trade. Pricing for Checkpoint is subscription-based, and depends on the number of users and the sources being subscribed to. Research modules start around \$150.

<http://tax.Thomson-Reuters.com>

New Clarity on Worker Classification

By Tom Breedlove

Determining worker classification (employee vs. independent contractor) is one of the most misunderstood topics in the household employment industry. Rarely a week goes by without us getting a call from a family who's dealing with an expensive mistake caused by a misunderstanding about worker classification. It's usually a variation of one of the misconceptions below:

Misconception #1. Worker classification is a matter of choice. "I'd like to give my caregiver a 1099 because it seems easier than a W-2."

Misconception #2. Part-time workers are not employees. "If she only works for me part-time, then she's more of a free agent and, therefore, an independent contractor."

Misconception #3. It's okay if she agrees to it. "I put it in our contract and she perfectly fine with it, so that makes it legal."

Misconception #4. Control vs. the right to control. "I don't watch over her and tell her what to do, so I don't control her work."

Many commercial employers struggle with the concept of worker classification, so it's not surprising that busy families (who don't do this for a living) might need help in this

area. Part of the confusion certainly rests with the IRS test of control, which most lay people would probably argue is ambiguous to the point that reasonable people could easily reach different conclusions.

To provide clarity, the Department of Labor recently weighed in on this topic and provided some additional guidance – new factors to help employers distinguish between an employee and an independent contractor. If it wasn't already obvious that the IRS and DOL would like to drastically reduce the number of independent contractors in order to create a level playing field for employers, the new guidance should make it abundantly clear.

The new DOL guidance focused on six new factors, but two of them really stood out for domestic workers – economic dependence



and permanence.

- **Permanence** refers to the structure of the job. A household employee takes a job with the understanding that they'll work for the family for the foreseeable future. The job goes on into perpetuity – until an unknown time in the future when she either quits on her own or the family decides to discontinue the relationship. An independent contractor, on the other hand, generally has a pre-defined task that lasts for a finite period of time.

- **Economic dependence** is exactly what it sounds like. A worker is considered an employee if a significant portion of their income comes from a single source because they are then economically dependent on that source for their financial well-being. This holds true for most nannies, senior caregivers, personal assistants, and other household employees

because they rarely have time to work for more than a few families. An independent contractor has a diversified client base – if one client falls through, they are not materially affected because they can, in theory, simply acquire another customer.

When taken in conjunction with the balance of the factors, most employment experts agree that the overwhelming majority of domestic workers are legally considered to be employees of the family for whom they work. (For years, we have been petitioning the IRS using Form SS-8 to get formal worker classification rulings on behalf of families. In virtually all cases, the workers were deemed to be an employee and not an independent contractor. The recent DOL guidance narrows the independent contractor designation even more).



**IT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOUR FAMILIES
TO UNDERSTAND THE NEW STRICTER GUIDELINES FOR
WORKER CLASSIFICATION – AND TO REALIZE THAT
MISCLASSIFICATION IS CONSIDERED TAX EVASION AND
CARRIES SIGNIFICANT PENALTIES AND PROBLEMS.**



It's important for your families to understand the new stricter guidelines for worker classification – and to realize that misclassification is considered tax evasion and carries significant penalties and problems.

In addition to being illegal for the family, independent contractor classification is also more expensive for the employee (since she has to pay twice as much in Social Security and Medicare taxes) and denies her crucial benefits like unemployment

insurance.

As we get closer to peak tax season, remember that families may have misconceptions about worker classification – and, if left to their own devices, they may make an expensive mistake in this area. We strongly advise all families to address worker classification and all the other payroll, tax and labor law issues that may come into play *at the time of hire*. Waiting until “tax time” usually results in numerous payroll,

tax and labor law mistakes that add considerable expense. The old saying “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” definitely applies here. ●

Tom Breedlove is Director of Care.com HomePay, Powered by Breedlove. The company is 100% focused on household employment and has invested in tools and resources to help household employers make sure they are compliant. www.myHomePay.com.

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How to Build Your Brand

By Taija Sparkman, Assistant Editor

December is a perfect time to think about your company's brand and how you will improve that brand in the year ahead. Building a brand is important for every business. The business's brand is at the core of who they are and it's how customers relate to businesses. The same is true for your payroll practice. Your brand will resonate with current clients and attract new ones. It tells them who you are and what your value is as a payroll practitioner.

Your brand is more than just your logo and tagline. It's the personality that is emulated in your business practices and working style. It encompasses any visual or design elements you use in your communications, as well as any trademarked material.

Your payroll staff are going to be the main promoters of your brand. They are the faces of your practice and the units used to measure whether your practice is living up to its brand and promises. It's important that you and your staff understand this and work to be consistent

in every client and prospect interaction. This might mean asking staff to include certain phrases in their email signature, or to make a habit to provide a non-payroll service every time they meet with a client. For example, some practices might make it a habit to welcome new and current clients to their office with fresh coffee and light refreshments. Others might choose to refer to their clients as business partners. These are simple and subtle gestures, but they work to reinforce your brand messaging.

Make sure that your practice's website and social media accounts are consistent with the messaging appearing in other places, such as printed brochures. Do not try to misrepresent your practice or be something you're not. This will hurt your credibility as a payroll expert. Also, if employees are allowed to

post on public forums under your practice's name, review guidelines of acceptable messaging. You don't want an ill-thought out tweet or status to reflect negatively on your firm.

Consistency is also an issue. Avoid sending conflicting messages, such as advocating both for and against online payroll services. Likewise, if you and/or your practice only use social media to discuss payroll-related topics, you do not want someone on your staff posting about presidential elections from the practice's account.

Lastly, as your practice grows and changes, consider if your brand image has shifted and if any marketing materials need to be updated to reflect this as well. ●



Growing Your Business by Asking Your Clients for Referrals

By Taija Sparkman, Assistant Editor

As you prepare for the end of the year, a business growth plan is surely in the cards for your payroll business. And, a key component of any growth plan is obtaining new clients. While there are many ways to gain new clients, the most effective way is through customer referrals.

Studies have shown that people are more likely to connect with a vendor that has been recommended by family or friends. The same is true for your payroll practice. Small business owners are more likely to sign up for your services if they have been recommended by someone they trust.

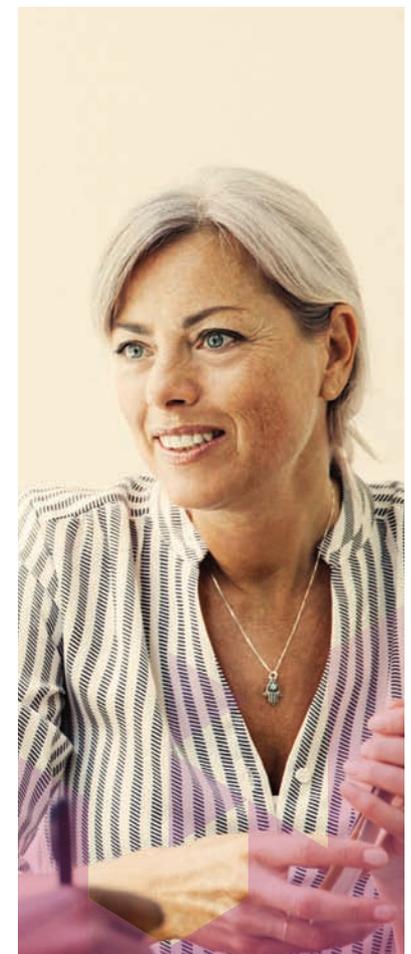
Unsolicited referrals are nice, but they usually are too infrequent to generate the buzz and business that your payroll practice needs to grow successfully. Instead, you'll want to

consider asking your current clients for referrals. Many times, your clients will be happy with your service but not recommend it because they simply aren't aware of others' payroll needs.

Before you ask clients to recommend other small businesses to you, think about the type of companies that you want to work with. If you operate within a certain niche, you'll want to make sure you communicate this to your clients when you ask for the referral.

Your business growth plan should include the following key pieces:

- A good time to approach clients may be at the end of a regular meeting. Ask if they know of any businesses that could benefit from your payroll services.
 - Another way to ask for referrals is indirectly through your email signature. Including a line or two telling clients you value their business and would appreciate their referrals not only reminds them that your practice depends on their word-of-mouth to an extent, it also removes the pressure from them to make any promises to you on the spot.
 - Consider hosting an open house and inviting your current clients to bring along their friends and business partners. This will create an informal environment for others to get to know you and your practice and could serve as a great ice breaker and introduction prior to your first meeting with any referred clients.
 - Formal referral programs are a great way to incentivize your clients. Essentially, you offer clients a discount on payroll services for referring a friend, family member or business partner to your practice. You could offer a percentage off future services for every referral a client submits or a specific dollar amount. You might even consider extending the discount to the referred client as a way to get them to try out your practice.
- Once you've asked your clients for referrals, be sure to acknowledge every time they send a new client your way. One simple way is to ask new clients how they heard about your payroll practice and send a quick "Thank You" note or gift to any clients that have referred new business to you. ●



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Three Trends that Will Transform Your Accounting Practice in 2016

By Dave Lechleitner

For CPA and accounting firms, the bar for client service has been raised. Clients expect to receive business advice beyond the traditional financial review and write-up from their accountants. They are looking for trusted advisors who not only check the financial figures and balance books, but also proactively add value to the business's overarching, strategic goals. In fact, according to a recent study conducted by Exact, 45 percent of accounting firms are now focusing on the quality of this business advice in an effort to stay competitive and relevant in their industry.

In order to meet these evolving pressures, CPA and accounting firms should begin the process of evolving their approach to meet this changing client dynamic. Though it's impossible to add more hours to the day, or days to the week, accountants can leverage new and emerging technologies to offer updated services, introduce alternative revenue models and provide the required levels of personal attention clients are demanding.

Here are the top three trends that will allow CPA and accounting firms to transform their businesses and exceed client expectations in 2016:

1. New ways of engaging

Accounting firms are beginning to feel pressure from their clients to engage in new and different ways. In fact, recent research results have indicated that, 75 percent of clients are looking for new accounting firms because they don't think their current firm is as engaged as they should be. Because accounting firms need to embrace online collaboration, they need

real-time insight. By collaborating online, everyone involved in a project can work on the same data at the same time, wherever they are located. In addition to saving time, many accounting and CPA firms are embracing online collaboration to streamline processes, through the use of apps, thus enhancing productivity among employees and cutting costs.

2. Increase in outsourcing at accounting firms

While traditional accounting practices such as analyzing financial data, computing taxes and developing and maintaining budgets are key to a successful business, there are many other duties that set the traditional accountant apart from the rest. For that reason, many companies are outsourcing typical accounting tasks to allow their employees to focus on analyzing their clients' business data and becoming vertical experts in their respective fields. This extra attention and analysis



transforms a traditional accountant into a business advisor and takes customer service to the next level by developing strong counsel-focused relationships.

3. The continued rise of the cloud

Accounting firms and their clients are increasingly moving their business operations to the cloud. Doing so not only allows both parties to access data anytime and from anywhere, but also eliminates the need for installing and updating programs, as well as any up-front investments in hardware or server space. The cloud also allows users to integrate systems with other online software and services such as banking software, which saves time

and reduces errors by removing the need to copy data. To top it off, data is stored in one highly protected, specialized data center, so it's as safe -- and often safer -- as it would be stored on-premise. Though the security of the cloud was once a concern for accounting professionals, it has recently transformed into a security benefit.

Accounting and CPA firms face a myriad of challenges when it comes to expanding into a more advisory-focused role. Embracing technology, particularly moving business operations to the cloud, frees up accountants to be the true advisor that clients are searching for today. Client expectations continue to evolve, and embracing new technologies means any CPA or accounting firm can evolve too. ●

Dave Lechleitner is principal of product marketing for Exact Online. He is responsible for product marketing, market analysis and go-to market strategies for North America. He recently presented at SleeterCon, the accounting industry's largest national conference, at the Bellagio Las Vegas.



2016

EXECUTIVE PREDICTIONS & YEAR IN REVIEW 2015

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

Are you a forward thinker? Is your firm prepared for the technology, legal and societal changes coming in the years ahead? How about your staff?

While some changes cannot be predicted or prepared for, many of the advances in the tax and accounting space are already happening. Technologies are making firms and professionals more productive than ever before. At the same time, changes in client expectations are driving additional changes in the way firms provide service, as well as the very services they provide.

Your firm needs to be nimble, but it doesn't need to be "bleeding edge" just for the sake of being on top of the latest trends. But proven technologies that can improve your productivity must become a staple in your practice, or

you will enjoy the same fate as the 8-track tape and the ZIP-drive.

Of course, determining which technologies are simply fads (or short-lived trends) and which offer true productivity-boosting benefit to your firm is a challenge. The real visionaries and forward thinkers are professionals who've successfully adapted new technologies in their practices and the technology experts who develop those innovative technologies, putting their own time, effort, money and names on the line to help tax and accounting professionals be more productive and profitable in their practices. In this Executive Predictions section, several technology leaders offer their views on what the current year has taught us and what we can expect in the near future.

2016

EXECUTIVE PREDICTIONS & YEAR IN REVIEW 2015

Today, it's easier to make your practice thrive than ever before.

That's not really a prediction - it's a fact.

The cloud is about to transform two core services - accounting and payroll - and that paradigm shift is going to create tremendous opportunities for forward-thinking accountants like you. The scope of these opportunities is amazing. The cloud offers numerous highly-effective and easy ways to revamp every aspect of your practice - from getting new clients and enhancing client relationships to streamlining your processes and saving you time - to help you grow your practice. But the most important impact of the cloud is you can make your practice 20-40% more profitable without adding a single new client or requiring any additional staff!

Let me give you an overview of how we, at AccountantsWorld, make this happen:

Over the past few decades, accountants have lost control of accounting and payroll services. Payroll services have been dominated by payroll services bureaus, and virtually all of the accounting solutions that accountants have used - desktop or cloud - have been DIY (Do-It-Yourself) accounting systems that were created for small businesses. These systems limit accountants' ability to take their practices to the next level.

To solve this problem, we have taken an entirely different approach. We've created professional accounting and payroll solutions exclusively for accountants, giving accountants the kind of control over these core services that they never had in the past... and that control does the magic.

You can customize Accounting Power for each client, giving them access only to the functions they can perform, to drastically reduce the client errors that are your big time wasters.

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Last but not least, using our fully integrated cloud suite - the Power Practice System that includes Accounting Power, Payroll Relief, After-the-Fact Payroll, our document management

About AccountantsWorld

At AccountantsWorld, we **Put Accountants First**. Our focus is supporting accountants and revitalizing the accounting profession to make accounting practices more rewarding and profitable. Unlike most solution providers to accountants, we never sell any product or services directly to accountants' clients or compete with them.

To help accountants capitalize on the billions of dollars' worth of opportunities created by the cloud, we've created a complete suite of seven highly innovative breakthrough cloud solutions for accountants that are changing the landscape of two core services—payroll and accounting. These solutions put accountants back in the driver's seat, regaining control of client accounting while working collaboratively with their clients. Our new model benefits both accountants and their clients, enabling accountants to better serve their clients while raising their own practices' bottom line. Visit AccountantsWorld.com to learn more.

system, client portal, and more - you can offer complete accounting services easily and more cost-effectively than ever before possible. With our solutions, your staff can now do what your clients' staff does - only faster, easier, and better, and without ever leaving your office. Your firm can now perform all of these functions for your client: paying bills, entering transactions, bookkeeping, handling trial balance work, preparing financial statements, monitoring cash flow and important business drivers, processing live payroll, managing payroll compliance, budgets, and projections, and much more at about the same cost as the client currently spends. Clients will be delighted to off-load these "burdensome" tasks to you so they can focus on growing their businesses, and you can generate lot more revenue and profits from those clients. It's a win-win for both you and your clients.

Knowing these facts, wouldn't you agree that it's much easier to make your practice thrive today than ever before? ♦

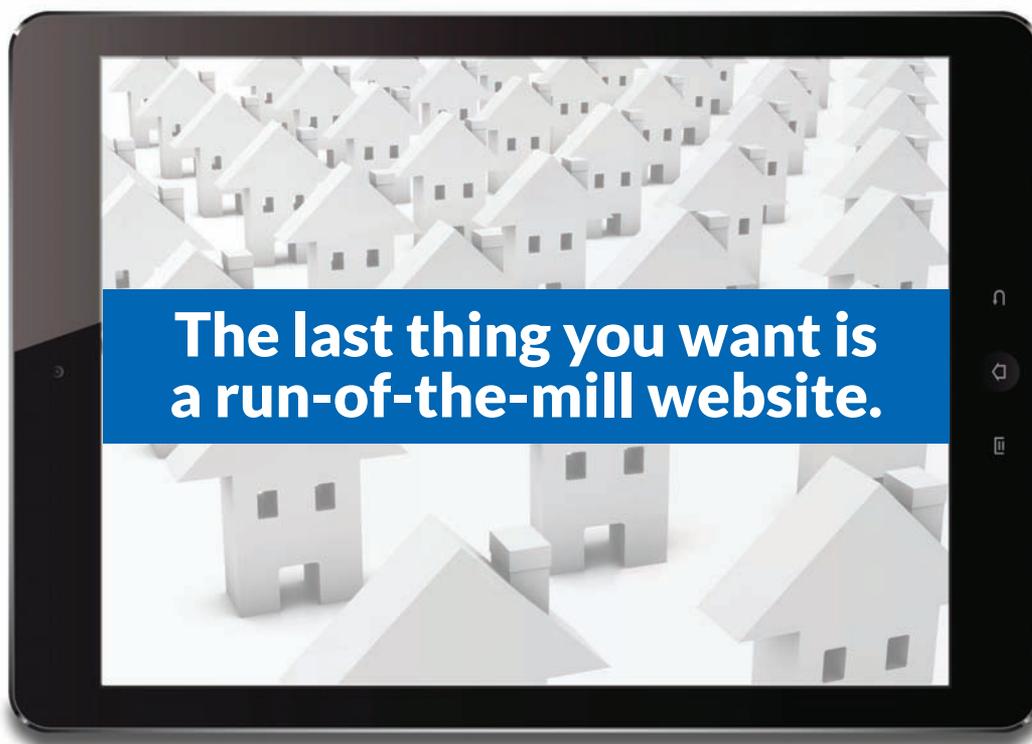
The founders of AccountantsWorld, Chandra Bhansali and his wife Sharada Bhansali, had a thriving tax software business. In 2003 they sold it to Thomson Reuters (then Thomson). To the surprise of everyone they did not retire, but instead worked harder than before. Why?

Because way back then they realized the Internet would completely transform two core services—accounting and payroll. They focused their resources on developing cloud solutions for accountants to harness and profit from the cloud. Today, as a result of their efforts and the tremendous contributions of the AccountantsWorld team, AccountantsWorld is a leader in providing cloud solutions for accountants.

The Bhansalis are the only husband-wife team to make the list of "The 100 Most Influential People in Accounting" by Accounting Today. Sharada is also consistently recognized as one of "The Most Powerful Women in Accounting" by CPA Practice Advisor.



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2016

EXECUTIVE PREDICTIONS & YEAR IN REVIEW 2015

Q&A with Jim McGinnis, Vice President, Accountant Segment, Intuit

What are the trends impacting the accounting industry today?

There are four major trends disrupting the accounting industry. As a result of these trends, accounting professionals, now more than ever, have the opportunity to move away from compliance work and instead provide ongoing, strategic advice to their clients.

The first trend is the cloud, which provides a single source of truth, eliminates data entry and creates the opportunity to build a global client list.

The second trend is the power of data. The ability to uncover trends and insights from data can help an accounting professional identify opportunities for growth and ensure long-term success for their small business clients.

The third is mobile. The computer has moved from the desktop to the palm of our hand and is now moving to watches and automobiles. Clients have come to expect anytime, anywhere access to their data across multiple devices.

The final trend, social, not only provides unprecedented reach in terms of prospective clients, it also places those prospective customers in the driver's seat. Before contacting you, they read about you and your business on your website, research customer reviews on Yelp and scan your Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn profiles.

How do these trends translate into how accounting professionals run and manage their practices?

These trends translate into 3 key areas to help accounting professionals evolve their practices into firms of the future.

The first is getting online. Accounting professionals must transition to online accounting technologies in order to gain more efficiencies and better serve clients. By 2020, we estimate that 80% of small businesses will be using online accounting software. If accountants and book-

keepers aren't using these online technologies, those small businesses will do business with an accounting professional who does.

Second, accounting professionals need to become trusted advisors to their small business clients. The availability of insights through data and the efficiencies through the integration of data across online technologies present opportunities for accounting professionals to eliminate hourly billing and instead bill their clients a flat monthly fee that represents the value of the work provided.

Third, accounting professionals need to get connected. Prospective clients want to first find you online to understand the services you provide. Your website is your new lobby. You need to create and maintain a social presence, highlighting your expertise and experience via your Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn profiles.

How is Intuit helping accounting professionals transform their practices into Firms of the Future?

Get on the Cloud. Inspired by our accounting partners, we offer QuickBooks Online Accountant for free, including the all new Trial Balance, designed to help reduce or eliminate manual data import, export and entry work to help accounting professionals save 5.3 hours on average. Additionally, apps and the data that integrates between these products increase time savings and efficiencies.

Become Trusted Advisors. As a trusted advisor, accounting professionals improve clients' financial lives with valuable advice and guidance. Intuit provides QuickBooks Online wholesale billing to clients available from QuickBooks Online Accountant, so firms can bundle services in easy-to-buy service packages, which leads to closer, more transparent client relationships.

Get Connected. A professional looking website and a presence on social media gives accounting professionals unprecedented reach and helps them

connect with existing clients and prospects to further grow their practice. Intuit has integrated Find-a-ProAdvisor directly within QuickBooks Online and improved listings so ProAdvisors can more accurately describe their expertise, thus making it easier for the almost 700,000 unique small business owners each year to find them.

If we were to look 3-5 years into the future, what are the trends that will transform our industry tomorrow?

Accounting firms of the future will never have to enter data because everything is connected and data flows seamlessly across applications and tools. As a result, accounting professionals will not just use online accounting software but manage their practice online, end-to-end.

Anytime, anywhere access will transition from mobile phones and tablets to wearables like watches and into our automobiles. This online world without borders will continue to create a global client base. This will result in accounting professionals becoming more specialized in the industries they serve. This deep verticalization will become a key differentiator in a competitive, global market.

Finally, connections and communication with and between others will be made through communities such as Slack rather than email. This will enable benchmarking throughout the industry and the broader implementation of best practices to better serve clients and manage accounting practices.

With so many trends affecting the accounting industry, is there anything that will remain the same?

Intuit will still be grounded in the mission defined by Scott Cook when he founded the company: to improve our customers' financial lives so profoundly... they can't imagine going back to the old way. Intuit will continue to be committed and focused on helping accountants be more productive and save time, so they thrive as they improve the lives of their small business clients. And finally, the role of the accounting professional won't go away. Small businesses are more successful when they are connected to an accounting professional; and Intuit's commitment to find ways to connect small businesses to accounting professionals will remain a priority. ♦

Jim McGinnis is the leader of Intuit's Accountant Segment 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 Segment continues to serve as a center of excellence for Intuit's worldwide efforts with accountants.

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.



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Chad Ridner, winner of the 2015 Intuit® Firm of the Future Contest

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Sales Tax 2016: What Can We Expect in the New Year?

By Gail Cole

Like every New Year, 2016 will bring many sales tax changes. Rates will decrease or increase, there'll be new product taxability rules, exemptions will expire or take effect, and there will be reporting changes. The only thing certain when it comes to sales tax is that change happens. And it often happens without much warning.

The coming of a New Year is a time to reflect on the past — what went well and what you wish you'd done differently. It's a time for resolutions. This new year, have no regrets when it comes to sales tax. Resolve to streamline your sales tax compliance. You'll find that it's easier than losing weight.

Resolution: Streamline sales tax compliance.

Rates. Nearly a dozen states, including Illinois and Maine and Minnesota, have announced local sales tax rate changes for 2016. More will come as January 1 approaches. In addition, there is talk of increasing the state sales tax rate in both Oklahoma and Florida. State departments of revenue often — but don't always — announce rate changes in time for businesses to account for them. However, in tricky home rule states like Colorado and Louisiana, local governments may not notify state revenue departments of such changes in a timely manner, or at all.

Resolution: Be sure you have a reliable system in place to manage sales tax rate changes.

Product taxability. Businesses also need to account for changes in product taxability. Sales tax can be expanded to services or slapped onto previously exempt tangible personal property.

States generally announce changes in time for sellers to account for them, yet, unfortunately, that's not always the case. For example, on June 30, 2015, Governor Jay Inslee of Washington signed legislation reforming the regulation and taxation of the marijuana market. It took effect the following day.

Product taxability coming in 2016 includes the following:

- Martial arts classes and many other physical fitness services will become subject to sales tax in Washington State
- North Carolina will extend sales tax to installation, maintenance and repair services
- Retail sales of prepaid wireless communications access will become subject to retail sales tax in Wyoming
- The list of foods considered to be prepared food (and taxable) will be expanded in Homer, Alaska

Resolution: Successfully process changes in product taxability and do it quickly.

Exemptions. Changing sales tax exemptions are also a bear, whether at the state or local level. While many, like the exemption for gun safety devices recently approved by the Michigan Senate, make headlines, many others slip into law virtually unnoticed.

Some exemption changes under



consideration or set to take effect in 2016 include the following:

- California's partial tax exemptions will decrease
- Florida's exemption for college textbooks is set to expire but its manufacturing exemption may be extended
- Iowa's machinery and equipment sales tax exemption may be expanded
- North Carolina will provide a sales tax exemption for electricity used in qualifying datacenters
- Senior sales tax exemptions will be scaled back in Juneau, Alaska

Resolution: Have a fail-safe solution to managing sales tax exemptions and exemption and reseller certificates.

Reporting. Last to be considered here (but certainly not the last issue sellers will confront) are changes to the way sales tax is reported. Some of the changes planned for 2016 include:

- New reporting requirements for exempt entities in Alabama (this is a big deal)

- New reporting requirements for sales of consumable vapor products in Alabama
- Colorado will stop mailing sales and use tax forms to businesses

Resolution: Get reporting and filing right.

Be ready. Sales tax changes are coming in 2016. There will be new rates, product taxability rules, exemptions and filing requirements, and the onus is on you — the seller — to comply with those changes. Failure to do so can lead to negative audit findings, penalties, interest, and a whole lot of hassle. So what's your plan?

Resolution: Make sales tax less taxing with Avalara AvaTax! ●

Gail Cole is a sales tax expert with a penchant for digging through the depths of BOE sites and discovering and reporting rate changes across the country.

How to Prepare for a Sales Tax Exemption Certificate Audit in 9 Steps

By Silvia Aguirre

Are you concerned that your company isn't as ready for a sales tax audit as it could be? Would you like to ensure you're as prepared as possible?

Are you thoroughly documenting every sales tax exemption?

Exemption certificates are easy to overlook. Surveys show that nearly half of accounting and tax professionals expect an auditor to find missing certificates during an audit. Many companies spend so much time figuring out *when* to collect sales tax that they overlook *what* to collect when a customer is exempt.

In this post, we'll walk you through the top nine steps you can take with your exemption certificates to ensure your company is audit-ready.

First, Evaluate Your Current Process

A few preliminary steps will give you a better understanding of exemption certificate requirements in your state and make it easier to fine-tune your current process.

1. KNOW WHEN TO COLLECT A CERTIFICATE

Is your company collecting certificates from the right customers at the right times? Do your credit departments and salespeople know which forms to provide when customers claim they're exempt? Are certificates properly integrated with your website for online sales?

If not, grab a cup of coffee (plus a few to share) and head down the hall for some casual conversations about certificates with your internal team. Find out how they currently collect valid certificates and discuss what you can do to ease the process. (Not sure what to say? Stay tuned! We'll be sharing tips on when to collect certificates next.)

2. ENSURE YOU'RE COLLECTING THE CORRECT CERTIFICATES

Anyone can verbally claim they're exempt from paying sales tax. But if you

don't have accurate and up-to-date documentation to support those claims, your company will be liable for unpaid taxes in the event of an audit.

This can get very expensive, very quickly.

To prevent unnecessary fees, make it easy for your customers to find and correctly complete the most up-to-date certificates for your state. The laws governing collection of exemption certificates vary by jurisdiction. Stay up-to-date on these changes and make sure you know when nexus impacts which certificates your company needs to collect.

(Quick Tip: If you're not sure where to begin, Avalara offers CertExpress, which includes a free online certificate library for every state.)

3. COMB THROUGH YOUR EXISTING STOCKPILE

Over time, paper-filled metal filing cabinets and digital storage folders can overflow, mixing new certificates with outdated ones. This can make it difficult to locate the documents you need for an auditor.

For this reason, it's important to inventory how many exemption certificates you currently have and how much they're worth.

Then get ready for the next series of audit prep steps:

Conduct Your Own Internal Audit

When was the last time you took a good, hard look at your existing collection of certificates? Even if you have a piece of paper, it may not be exactly what you'll need during an audit.

4. CATALOGUE CURRENT CERTIFICATES

How many of your certificates are up-to-date and fully verified? If you're lucky, this will be the biggest pile or

fattest folder. If not, you'll need to set aside more time for the next several steps.

5. INVENTORY THE INCOMPLETEES

How many certificates are missing data? Often, all it takes is one small oversight—an overlooked field, a forgotten signature—to incur hefty fines in an audit.

Keep any incomplete records in a separate pile or folder for easy access as you organize. You'll need to follow up with these customers to complete their records.

6. RECORD EXPIRATION DATES

How many certificates are expiring this month? Next month? Next quarter? How long a customer's certificate remains valid will depend on your jurisdiction. In many states, they need to be renewed every five years. In others, it's three. And there are some states where certain certificates never expire.

To avoid confusion in the event of an audit, you'll need to track all those dates and have a plan in place for following up with your customers. Staying ahead of deadlines and providing customers with ample time to submit new certificates will reduce your risk of missing certificates in the event of an audit.

(Quick Tip: Don't wait too long to update inaccurate, incomplete or expiring certificates. While many auditors will offer a grace period, you're out of luck if a customer has ceased operations.)

Make a Plan

If those first six steps sound like a lot of work, it's because they are. But get a good system in place today and you'll

spend far less time weeding through files and folders in the future.

7. FOLLOW UP

How will you follow up with customers whose certificates are missing information? When will you reach out to a customer whose certificate is expiring soon?

Unless you want to devote weekly work hours to this, you'll need templates, alerts, automated emails and more. If your business works with a small number of tax exempt customers, some simple spreadsheets and business software may suffice. But if you work with dozens or hundreds of tax-exempt customers, you can save a lot of time and money with an all-in-one tool designed to handle these tasks.

8. SYSTEMATIZE YOUR COLLECTIONS PROCESS

As you catalogue, categorize and correct your current collection of exemption certificates, ensure they're all easily searchable and accessible. Since you don't know which certificates an auditor will request, you'll need a system that lets you quickly comb through all your records at once to extract the right ones.

9. PLAN AHEAD

As you work through each step, decide how you will update and maintain records in the future. The more you can automate, the easier it will become over time!

(Quick Tip: If you're not using automation software or services, make sure your team is regularly reading up on the latest changes to relevant tax laws.)

Sales tax compliance is a complex business, but it *is* possible to achieve without losing your mind. Take it one step at a time to avoid being overwhelmed and, most importantly, develop a system that will be easy to maintain in the long run. ●

Silvia Aguirre is the co-founder of Avalara CertCapture. She's a former tax auditor-turned-accountant with a passion for helping businesses achieve 100% compliance.

Awesome Applications for

2016

By Doug Sleeter

The Sleeter Group's Awesome Application Awards Program is designed to recognize quality software solutions available in the SMB accounting software marketplace.

For the 2016 awards, in addition to our traditional Awesome Applications, we've added a new category called the "Saavy Startup Award." This category includes new products from younger, smaller companies that we believe will delight customers for many years to come.

The selection process included voting from the community and our expert panel. Community votes accounted for 40% of the final selections and the expert panel accounted for 60% of the overall score. The 2016 Awesome Application committee members include: Stacey Byrne, CPA;

Charlie Russell; Debra Kilsheimer; Donny Shimamoto, CPA.CITP; and Kacee Johnson.

For more information about the awards, visit www.sleeter.com/awesomeapps



Bill.com Mobile App
www.bill.com

Bill.com solves the end-to-end AP and AR automation issues that nearly every business needs. This

cloud-based solution has previously thrice been recognized with an Awesome Application award. But this year, Bill.com revamped their mobile app with a native iOS solution that impressed both the voting audience and the committee.

Bill.com for iPhone provides a simple and secure way to review, approve or deny, and pay bills.



Expensify
www.expensify.com

Travel and Expense tracking is a

pain for companies all over the world. Expensify solves this problem with a mobile app that provides digital receipt capture, automated expense report creation, routing for approvals, and electronic reimbursement to employees and contractors.

Expensify received the second most votes from the community and also got high marks from several committee members.

HandiFox

www.handifox.com

HandiFox is a QuickBooks add-on that automates inventory, sales, and supply chain management. This app hits a home run by allowing mobile devices to manage nearly all of the inventory, warehousing, and fulfillment functions that streamline product-based business processes.

HandiFox handles Purchase Orders, Sales Orders, Invoices, and Stock Transfers. In the warehouse, users can receive items, perform physical inventory counts, and manage the pick/pack/ship functions, all from a mobile device. In the field, users can create sales orders, deliver items, capture signatures, and print invoices.



Receipt Bank

www.receipt-bank.com

Receipt Bank blew our committee away this year. They've developed both a great product and a great global team who deeply understand the importance of digital documents and zero entry solutions in small business.

Receipt Bank is a bookkeeping productivity tool designed to give visibility to the bookkeeping function wherever that bookkeeping takes place. By capturing documents in digital form and storing those documents with accounting transactions, Receipt Bank automates a big piece of the process that is crucial to streamlining accounting solutions.





Receipt Bank provides multiple document submission methods including smart phone app, dedicated email addresses and scan and upload. Receipt Bank then extracts key data from ALL source documents associated with the payables function - supplier bills, corporate and individual receipts, credit notes - and converts that data into transactions. It then sends the transaction data and an image of the source document directly to the accounting software. Receipt Bank supports QuickBooks Online and Xero.

RedTeam

www.redteamsoftware.com

Construction accounting has some of the most challenging processes in small business. With contracts, job costing, subcontractors, estimating, scheduling, and work in progress reporting, this is one of the hardest businesses to get the whole system working efficiently. But RedTeam really delivers. Both the audience voting and the committee ranked RedTeam very high in the Awesome Application line up for 2016.

RedTeam connects directly to QuickBooks Online, and offers construction accounting features for Contractors, including management of Prime Contracts, Change Orders, AIA-style Progress Billing, Time-

keeping, Field Expense Reporting, Company Credit Cards, Subcontracts, Purchase Orders, Open Commit-

ments, Job Cost Reporting, Estimated Cost at Complete, Revenue, Cash Flow and Work in Progress.

For the small contractor who wants to streamline their entire business management and accounting system, RedTeam should definitely be considered.

TSheets Time Tracker

www.tsheets.com

TSheets shined again this year with



the voting audience and the committee. The depth of integrations and top notch support combined to make TSheets an Awesome winner for the 2nd year in a row.

TSheets Time Tracking is a cloud-based, mobile timesheet management solution that directly integrates with QuickBooks (Online and Desktop) as well as Square POS, Gusto (formerly ZenPayroll), Results CRM, and more. It includes rich features for employee time entry, zero-entry time entries using start and stop timers. Once timesheets are captured, TSheets routes them to management for review/approval and submission to payroll.

workato

Workato

www.workato.com

We've been talking about "chunkification of the business process" for several years. This trend away from all-in-one solutions to a collection of best-of-breed apps that allow each business to have the best solution for each business process is really taking hold across the entire market. But the downside of chunkification is that, without integration, we're left with "islands of data," trapped in each of the chunks. What to do?

Connecting apps together is a daunting task if you plan to have "useful" data at each point in your "chunkified" system and if you want real-time information to help management run the business.

Workato, a stand-out Awesome Application winner, provides powerful yet simple integration platforms for integrating QuickBooks Online, Xero, FreshBooks, TSheets, NetSuite, Intacct, Bill.com with 70+ other cloud applications to automate businesses.

On the Workato platform, you can build robust yet flexible integration flows, also known as recipes. Recipes are a set of steps that describe how your apps work with each other. For example, when there's a new customer is created in

QuickBooks, it triggers an action to create a new account in Salesforce.

When a recipe is active, data is moved automatically whenever the trigger event is detected. It runs in the background until you manually stop your recipe.



17 Hats

www.17hats.com

Every business faces some of the same basic challenges when it comes to streamlining the core processes of everyday business. Beyond the accounting pieces, every company has to deal with email, calendaring, time tracking, invoicing, and project management. And for most small businesses, the concept of bring all of these functions together into a unified office management solution is beyond their dreams. So they just deal with each of these tasks as separate, non-integrated pieces of the company information systems.

17 Hats is a new startup with an impressive vision of how businesses should be managed. This app automates contacts, emails, projects, calendars, timesheets, invoices, and workflows to provide a unified

business management solution for virtually any business.



AccountingSuite

www.accountingsuite.com

AccountingSuite is an all-in-one business application that combines Accounting, Cloud Banking, Order Management, Advanced Inventory, Project and Time Tracking into one cloud-driven platform.

This application provides a deep and broad set of modules not found in many cloud accounting products, which makes it best suited for the growing product-based business that expects to need more core features now or in the near future. Real-time inventory, assemblies, order and back order management, margin control, and flexible reporting makes AccountingSuite a Saavy Startup that is worth a look for your small and growing clients.

Fundbox

www.fundbox.com

Fundbox is a cash flow optimization tool that leverages Big Data analytics, engineering and predictive modeling that is transforming a massive pain point for small businesses. Fundbox provides small business owners with Credit-as-a-Service, embedded directly into their accounting software. This allows them to instantly clear outstanding invoices and render cash flow gaps obsolete without disrupting workflow. The company has created a new type of



FEATURE

solution for small businesses, one that offers a way to streamline cash flow without burdening a business with bloated loans that are irrelevant to their actual financial needs.

Hubdoc

www.hubdoc.com



Hubdoc helps you organize all of your financial docs in one place. Through its deep integration with QuickBooks Online and Xero,

Hubdoc turns your documents (and their data) into transactions in your accounting with source documents attached.

Another standout winner this year that impressed every one of the committee members, this company and product is definitely worth a look for those looking to take documents to the cloud and experience more zero-entry bliss. ●



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

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It's Time To Smarten Up Your Conference Room

Conference rooms in firms across the country are getting makeovers. Is your meeting space up-to-date with the latest technology to ensure effective meetings? As more and more firms are either renovating their existing office space or moving altogether, the conference room seems to be a focal point for installing the latest and greatest technology.



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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Lose the Projector & Screen

Although projector and screen setups are still quite prevalent in conference rooms across the country, we are seeing an increasing number of flat panel displays taking the place of this arrangement. Even though HD projectors are increasing in functionality and decreasing in price, the same is happening with flat panels. Why not consolidate the points of failure and number of connections required? This is an easy way to impress your clients, employees and recruits.

A few firms are looking to take it even a step further with smart collaboration screens such as the Microsoft Surface Hub (shipping January 2016) or the Mondopad from InFocus. These touch-enabled screens offer smart and easy video conferencing, white boarding, data sharing and more.

Lose the Wires

Whether it's an office or a meeting room, wires have been an eyesore and significant effort has been



dedicated toward hiding them as much as possible. Wouldn't it be great if you could eliminate at least some of these wires? Now you can with wireless presentation technologies like ClickShare by BARCO, Miracast and Steelcase Virtual Puck. These solutions allow you to connect a USB dongle to a computer or multiple computers and share a screen at the push of a button. No more unplugging, passing the cable and plugging back in. We saw the BARCO system in action at ClarkNuber earlier this year and it was very impressive – not to mention easy.

Add some Video

I've been beating the video conferencing drum for some time now but too many firms still haven't given it a try. While there are certainly circumstances that call for a true face-to-face meeting, most can be just as effective through video conferencing. Even those firms that have invested in video conferencing in their conference rooms are seeing limited use because the setup is too complex or the remote attendees can't see people's faces.

Robots Join the Meeting

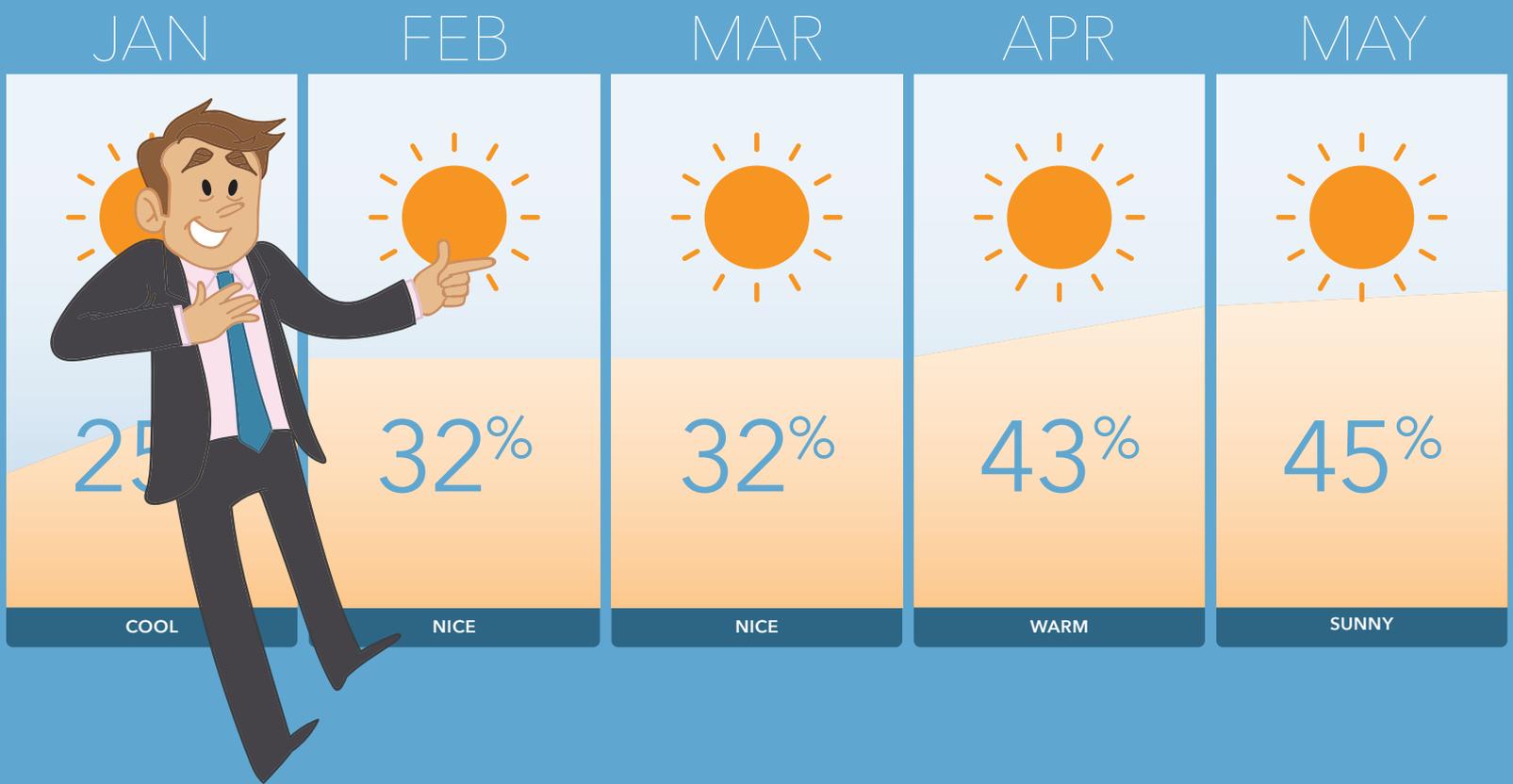
If you find talking to a stationary display isn't satisfactorily replicating a face-to-face discussion, you can always add the ability for remote employees to move around the room. This is being done through telepresence robots which essentially put a video display on wheels. Tools such as the BeamPro and Beam+ from Suitable Technologies or the Double from Double Robotics

provide a physical presence to those that can't be there in person. I'll admit, I found this one a little weird at first but after hearing first-hand accounts of the benefits, it makes more sense. With static displays you are dependent on the angle of the camera but with these technologies you can turn and face the person you are interacting with, thus replicating the experience of face-to-face conversation much better. These technologies are still in the early adopter stage but will likely grow in acceptance alongside the expansion of the remote workforce.

Reservation Systems

Now imagine the demand you'll create for your meeting spaces if you adopt even one of the technologies, let alone all of them. You'll surely need to manage reservations in an orderly manner and once again, there are technologies for that. Providers like Condeco, Steelcase and Asure offer workspace scheduling solutions that seamlessly integrate with Microsoft Exchange and/or Google Calendar. These providers also offer a solution for the ever growing challenge of effective utilization of overall office space through hoteling kiosks and software. While hoteling has been the norm in the Big Four for years, it's finally starting to gain interest in all sizes of firms.

Your conference room is the primary meeting spot for your team as well as a sought after location for client meetings. Doesn't it deserve a little investment to make sure it's the best it can be? Plenty of firms across the country think so and I'd encourage you to adopt the same mentality. ●



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