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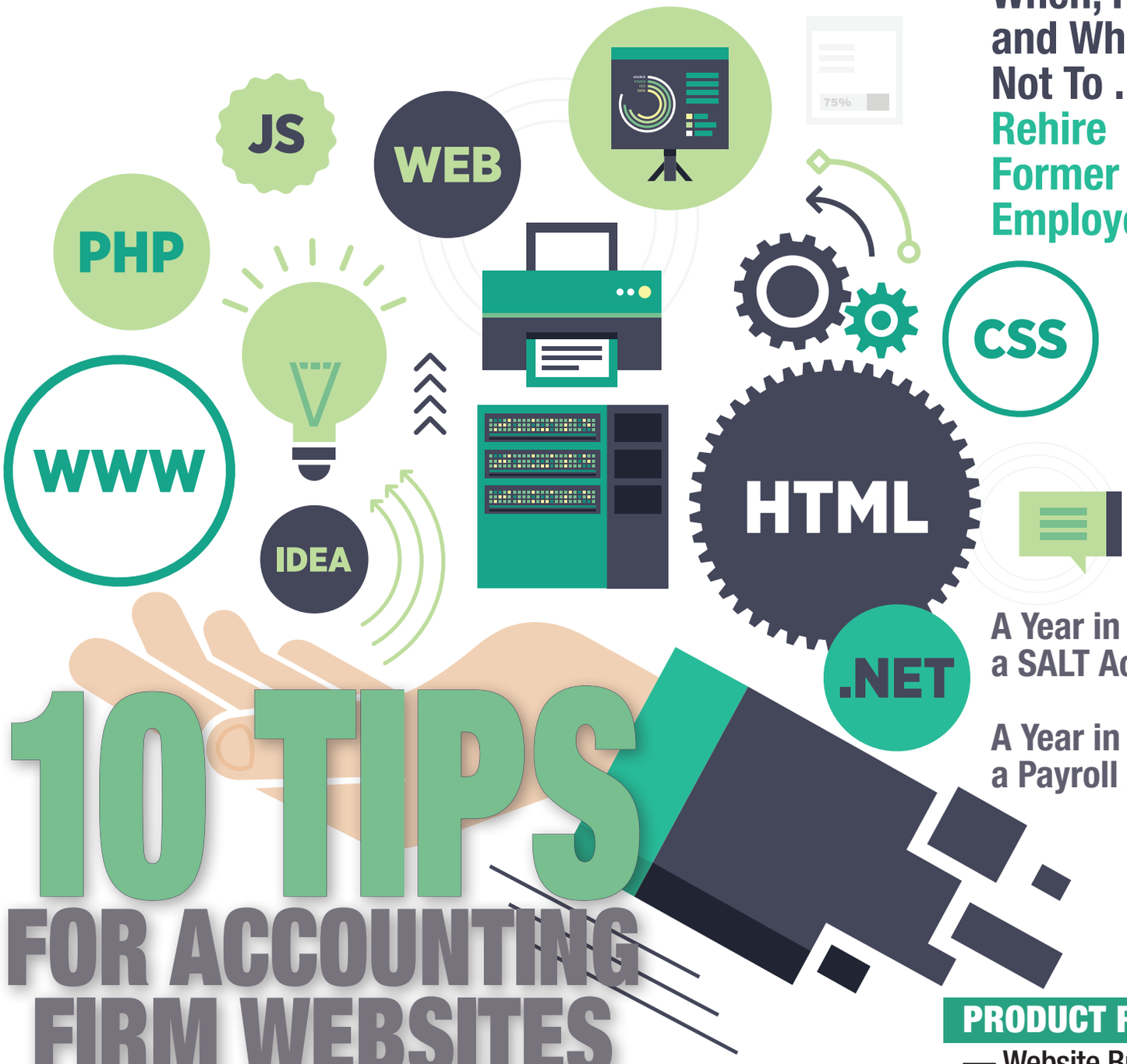
CPA Practice Advisor

EDITION

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

How We Can Empower Female Accountants Who Want It All

When, How, and When Not To ... Rehire Former Employees



10 TIPS FOR ACCOUNTING FIRM WEBSITES

A Year in the Life of a SALT Accountant

A Year in the Life of a Payroll Accountant

PRODUCT REVIEW:

— Website Builders for Accounting Firms

CPAPracticeAdvisor.com

July 2016
VOLUME 26, NUMBER 6

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CPA Practice Advisor
VOLUME 26, NUMBER 6
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www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/directory

5 Tips & Tools for Accounting Firm Marketing
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12229534

Audits & Notices: Representing a Client Before the IRS
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12229585

By Gail Perry, CPA, Editor-In-Chief

New York Show Focuses on CPA Relevance

The tone at July's New York Accounting Show & Conference reflected a concern in the accounting profession about the commoditization of services and what CPAs will do when computers have taken over much of the day-to-day work. It appears an actual fear of irrelevancy hasn't set in, although there are rumblings that this is coming. After all, it's one thing to advance your practice by using tools that make your job easier and that leave you with more day at the end of your day. It's another thing to stay awake at night worrying that your clients will no longer need you because they can just buy the software themselves.

There's been talk in accounting circles for years about the importance of being someone clients can turn to for insights into how their businesses run and explanations of what all the numbers mean. This isn't new. More than 15 years ago, David Maister, in his acclaimed book, *The Trusted Advisor*, warned of the tenuousness of having only a transactional view of clients instead of a relationship view.

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 "Idiot's Guide to Introductory Accounting") 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.

Think about how many of your clients connect with you only once a year. How many do you not see at all? I myself have a tax practice where a few clients send me their data and I never even meet with them in person. How easy would it be for someone else to step in and take my place? Whoosh. That fast.

So it seems that relevance is the issue of the day. Are you worth your salt? Say we reach that time, in the very near future, when all of the number crunching is automatic. When what you're selling is no longer financial statements and tax returns. Don't think your everyday client is going to pay for you to point to the numbers and say, "Yep, those numbers are correct. Here's my bill."

Did you catch the flaw in the above statement? What we're selling should never be nor should it ever have been financial statements and tax returns. If that's what you're doing, then congratulations for having gotten this far and having built a base of clients who want that. I don't mean to sound, well, mean, but it's really time to take another look at your practice.

Two sessions at the New York show really drove this home for me. Amy Vetter, global vice president of education and head of accounting USA at Xero teed us up with a session on how not shying away from technology and instead embracing all the cool tools that are out there will position a CPA firm to attract the best talent - and by best talent we don't mean data entry people. The best colleagues you can find will be those who can empathize with your clients, see the real picture, and make the best recommendations for success.

It's going to be those touchy feely Millennials who want to leave the office for yoga at 2 in the afternoon. The ones who realize that the things in life that make you you actually are important.

Joe Woodard, CEO of Woodard Events and Woodard Consulting, followed up with a moving session on how the numbers are just the beginning of the story and it takes an experienced accountant to tell the rest of the story, to not wait for the financial statements that come in months after the year-end but to look at the numbers as they are right now, and then actually see the people behind the numbers who are putting their heart and soul into their business, and make the connection.

Give yourself some credit for having mastered the art of accounting and get busy reminding yourself, and your clients, of the value of your knowledge - the human side, if you will, of the numbers.●

— Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief
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Change for Change Sake? Or ROI?

For some of your organizations, this is the time you are upgrading to Windows 10 and the latest Office 2016. For others, you have decided to stand pat with your Windows 7 and Office 2010 implementation. Part of my purpose in writing this column month after month is to help you see a safe way to implement technology as well as selecting one of the best ways.

A phrase you may have heard me use publicly is that there are dozens of right ways to implement technology and hundreds of wrong ways. The final decision is always yours, since you know the person with the gold creates the rules. In other columns we have discussed aligning business strategies and tactics with IT strategy and tactics. However, a harder number to come by is an accurate Return on Investment (ROI) since the ROI can include soft, intangible numbers. Some would argue that only "hard" numbers should be included, and these certainly should take the forefront in your ROI model. If the hard ROI numbers exceed the costs, and the IT project fits your strategy, then it generally makes sense to proceed if you have the people resources, time and training plan to succeed.

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

What should be considered in the calculations made?

Remember that there are a few key ideas behind what we are going to discuss:

1. That you have a technology plan and budget. Our latest National CPA Firm Survey data indicates that only 14% of CPA firms have an IT budget. Firms "spend what is needed" which may or may not be true.
2. That each project should have an estimated return. Understand that some projects are dependent on other projects. For example, it is hard to implement eSignature if you don't have your paperless project pretty far along.
3. That you don't have to implement the latest technology to be successful. However, you won't gain significant competitive advantage if you are a technology laggard.
4. That not every technology is for you.

However, you need to have an open mind to consider if something can work. I'd illustrate this with the belief that SaaS products like QuickBooks Online won't work for your clients. Is it you, or is it your clients that you are worried about? Are the features sufficient to get the job done? What about QuickBooks Online annual costs versus QuickBooks Desktop hosting annual recurring costs?

Finally, your ROI model should have not only the hard costs but the soft costs illustrated. Just as important, when the project is completed, you should have a post project review to see how accurate your estimates were and learn why there are any discrepancies. This exercise should help make you more accurate at forecasting in the future. As noted above, it is far better for hard cost benefits to carry a project, but soft costs and benefits are important, too. For example, technologies like the Internet and mobile smartphones are pervasive at this time.

What did you perceive as the benefits to implementing these technologies? Did you understand them before you made the investment? What if a technology like workflow can save you time, improve client deliverable experience, and reduce errors? How do you measure the value of those items? We prefer to make an estimate of the time savings assigning a dollar value, placing a value on the client experience, and assigning a potential savings to the reduction of errors. You must be cautious not to overestimate. Most important, doing the ROI exercise helps you think more about why you are implementing the technology.

What should a project ROI model look like?

Complex ROI models are available, but for most projects, you can make simple estimations in a spreadsheet. You may have very complex configurations or quotes supporting these numbers. These can be summarized

By Randy Johnston

from supporting sheets or simply plugged into your model. We suggest the following components always exist:

- Hardware costs
- Software costs
- Training costs
- Initial implementation fees
- Recurring annual hard costs
- Recurring annual soft benefits

The replacement of two scanners is illustrated in the table below. We are happy to provide this template to you.

Note that there are subtotals that show total hard costs, soft costs and an overall project ROI. If there were multiple ways to solve a technical problem, you could have multiple ROI models or have a model that compares these numbers side by side. For example, if you are considering Microsoft Office 365 versus an Open License model, you would want the costs and benefits of each approach. You may want to portray the costs of in-house IT, managed services and hosted options.

Project ROI Calculation	7/18/2016
Name of Project: Scanner upgrade	
Projected benefit	$7,645.75
Number of Users: 9	
Loaded Partner/manager rate	$ 166.25
Loaded Admin rate	$ 33.25
Expected Life: 7 years	
Implementation timeframe: 2 weeks	
Business or IT objective met: Improve paperless quality	
Expected benefits:	
Reduced time used in the scanning process	
Cleaner, more usable scans	
Initial Expenditures	
Hardware	$2,200.00
Software	1,500.00
Training	1,000.00
Time lost during implementation	299.25
Implementation fees	800.00
Total Initial Outlay	$5,799.25
Hard Cost Reductions (Annual)	
Labor no longer needed	$8,645.00
Maintenance reduction	1,000.00
Total Reduced Costs Annually	$9,645.00
Benefits over project life	$67,515.00
Hard ROI ()=good	$(3,845.75)
Recurring Annual Costs	
Annual Maintenance	$500.00
Replacement supplies	500.00
Software Licensing	-
Total Recurring Annual costs	$1,000.00
Costs over project life	$ 7,000.00
Soft Benefits (Annual)	
Client Value	$1,000.00
Time savings/year	2,600.00
Error reductions	1,200.00
Total Soft Benefits Annually	$4,800.00
Benefits over project life	$33,600.00
Estimated Project ROI year one	$7,645.75
Estimated Project ROI other years	$13,445.00
Estimated Project ROI over project	$88,315.75

Some cautions and common errors

Remember that any model is just that: a model. It is not a guarantee of success nor will you always remember to consider all factors. It is a common error to overlook key issues or items. However, the model does help you think through each project and justify or deny the project on its merits. Remember that a good owner manager sometimes has to "just decide" to implement a project because it is the right strategic thing to do. However, we know a number of decisions are simply made emotionally without any model. For example, how do you justify the car that you drive?

Another common error is over estimating the soft ROI. Be realistic in your estimates. You may learn over time that you have a tendency to overestimate or underestimate. After doing the post project analysis, look at the numbers and actual results, assuming that the factors can be measured. As an example here, there has been a trend to "throw away the time sheet". If you did that, how much time was saved by not keeping time? How was this time used? Some of these types of analysis are impossible with the financial information of many firms.

Flat rate value billing may simply be a pricing strategy that had little to do with wasted time during firm operations and you won't be able to do an accurate post project ROI analysis. We frequently see overly optimistic benefits of working anywhere, anytime, any device (AAA) without factoring in the issue of running more slowly. We also see too much or too little value placed on working remotely. However, remember that these estimates are yours, and you need to objectively review these numbers after implementation.

> REMEMBER THAT ANY MODEL IS JUST THAT: A MODEL. IT IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS NOR WILL YOU ALWAYS REMEMBER TO CONSIDER ALL FACTORS. IT IS A COMMON ERROR TO OVERLOOK KEY ISSUES OR ITEMS.

One last common error: never believe a vendor's ROI model. You can and should adapt their numbers to your model, but we recommend consistency year after year so you know your estimates are correct. We believe a number of technology initiatives have been implemented with false ROI expectations. You can use this model to estimate the ROI on any existing recurring IT cost and have a pretty good idea where you are getting a reasonable return and where you are not. However, be prepared if you do this exercise, because some of the numbers may not be too pleasant.

On the other hand, it may be hard for you to see the soft benefits of a deployed technology because you are used to the way it works. We frequently see perceived cloud benefits because local implementation was done so poorly. Likewise, we frequently see perceived local installation benefits because recurring costs tend to be lower. ●

By Sandi Leyva, CPA

TEN TIPS for Accounting Firm Websites

No matter how web designs change over time or what tools come out to produce them, you can count on these ten hard truths. If you're willing to accept them, you'll get the most out of your website and you'll avoid making rookie mistakes.

1 Your webmaster is not a marketing strategist.

Your webmaster may be a really great tech person or a fantastic artist, but it's seldom that they know how to market as well. The primary purpose of a website should be to market, so it's essential to be careful when you select a webmaster. The biggest mistake I see is accounting firms spending a fortune on their site designed by someone who doesn't understand our industry.

2 "I need a website" Is not enough of a need.

Your website should have a business purpose. Do you want it to be a lead generator? A brochure? A convenience for customer service? The purpose of your website should be tied with your marketing and sales cycle as well. If you have a face-to-face sale, how can you site support and shorten the cycle? Can you close leads online? Do you expect to? These are the questions to ask yourself and to discuss with your webmaster or marketing director.

3 Pretty does not equal profitable.

I've worked with hundreds of clients on their website. Just because it's pretty doesn't mean it will be effective. Many times, there's an inverse relationship.

4 Confused buyers don't buy.

The more content you have that is superfluous to your goals, the more confused and lost your buyer will be.

5 Lost leads and money down the drain.

If you want to get leads from your site, the first thing you need to do is make sure your leads don't go in spam. I can't tell you how many clients I've seen that get leads from their site but never get the form-generated emails because their spam filters are too tight.

6 It's about your client.

Your website design should appeal, first and foremost, to your client (not you). If your client is vastly different from you, that can be hard to swallow.

7 You have about two seconds.

If your visitor can't figure out what you sell or what the best thing about your firm is in two seconds, they're gone. Don't bury your best traits three clicks down; put them front and center on the home page. And make sure we know you're a CPA firm and not a law firm.

8 Your website is part of your marketing plan.

A great website should be an integrated part of an overall marketing strategy that includes fresh content, lead capture, customer service, and sales content. If it sits alone as an island, your site will not be very effective.

9 A negative emotional connection works.

I apologize to all the positive people out there. When a prospect comes to you with a large problem, they are much more likely to act quickly to get out of their business "pain." Connect with that pain, let them know there's a solution, and let them know you're their only solution. That works best. No pain, no sale. The connecting to the pain is what requires the negative approach. "Are you suffering from unbalanced books?" works better than "Bookkeeping Services."

10 Never, ever let someone else register your domain for you.

I can't tell you how many horror stories I've lived through with lost passwords, inaccessible domains, and bankrupt webmasters that registered a domain for a client, and the client has no way to get in touch with them. Learn how to do this yourself. Insist on keeping your domain in your very own account and print and store the access credentials in a safe place. Make sure you mark your calendar at renewal time and pay attention to the email you get from ICANN.

And here's a bonus:

Bonus: Once you get your site live, do not cross it off your to-do list.

Unfortunately you have a brand new project and that's helping prospects find your site. Two ongoing to-do's include updating your site for fresh content and marketing it in a variety of ways so the optimum number of people find it. ●

Sandi Leyva, CPA, CMA, MBA, and founder of Accountant's Accelerator, has helped thousands of accountants earn more, work less, and serve their clients better through her innovative coaching and training services.

Building the Right Website Takes Tools

By Mary Girsch-Bock

Researchers at the Missouri University of Science and Technology have determined that it takes less than a second for a person to form an initial opinion about a website. Today, you only have one chance to make a good first impression with your website, an impression that will engage visitors and encourage them to remain on your website. In fact, marketing experts have agreed on one thing, every business, even a very small business should have a website; but that it's better to not have a website at all than to offer visitors a sub-standard experience on your website.

What does your website look like?

In website design, as in so many other things, less is more. A simply designed website will likely have a higher conversion rate just because no one likes confusion and clutter. Spending precious browsing minutes trying to figure out where to click to find information will likely result in that visitor moving on to the next website.

Another thing to avoid is slow load times. While patience may be a virtue, even the most patient person will become frustrated waiting for a website to load. Make it easy for users to get into your website, not harder. And once they're in, make it easy for them to navigate through the system. Large navigation tabs and a common sense structure may not seem exciting, but they'll likely ensure that visitors will stay on your website longer than 30 seconds.

You'll also want to make sure that you provide an easily accessible list of services that you provide, and a way for those interested to get in touch with you. Online appointment forms and 'request more information' options on your website are a stress free way for users to get in touch with your firm, growing your firm in the process.

A client portal is another feature that is vital for accounting firms. The ability to safely and securely exchange documents will make your life and your client's life a lot easier.

While everyone does not blog, more accounting firms are finding the value in creating a blog for current and potential clients. While tools such as financial and tax information should be part of any accounting firm's website, blogging adds a personal touch to a firm, and offers clients the opportunity to get to know you and your firm a little better.

I'll ask again: What does your website look like?

The web-building products reviewed in this issue are designed specifically for accounting firms, with most offering common tools such as financial reports, newsletter capability, and calculators. They were grouped into two groups, with six products rated based on very similar feature capabilities. Those products are:

- **Accounting and Financial Site Builder from Tenenz**
- **Accountants World Website Relief from Accountants World**
- **CCH Site Builder from CCH Wolters Kluwer**
- **CPA Site Solutions**
- **GetNetSet for Accounting Firms**
- **Web Builder CS from Thomson Reuters**

We also looked at solutions from **CPAsites.com** and **Build Your Firm**, but they were not rated in the same way as the other products. This is because they offer website design and editing options, and various full-service options not available with other traditional website builder solutions.

Before deciding on a web-building product, it's important to determine how much time and energy you or your staff has to design a website. Do you want to be 'hands-on,' or do you prefer that someone else do the work? Does your firm constantly update web content, or do the pages remain fairly static? Are you comfortable using a template design or would you prefer to have a custom look to your website? Of course, for many firms, pricing levels need to be considered as well.

Most of the vendors offer potential users a free trial to try out the product, explore the templates available and see if the product is a good fit.

While web-building products are not new, they certainly are not the same product from even five years ago. If it's been a while since you looked at web-building products, you owe it to yourself to take another look. Chances are you'll have that sleek website running a lot sooner than you might imagine.

Mary Girsch-Bock

Mary Girsch-Bock previously worked as an accountant and is now a writer specializing in business, human resources and tech issues. She can be reached at mary.girschbock@cpapracticeadvisor.com

	EASE OF USE	TEMPLATES/ CUSTOMIZATION	AUTOMATED CONTENT	MARKETING/SEO/ CLIENT TOOLS	HELP/ SUPPORT	OVERALL RATING
AccountantsWorld Website Relief	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★½
CCH SiteBuilder - Wolters Kluwer	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★½
CPASiteSolutions	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
GetNetSet	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★½
Tenenz AFSB	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★½
Thomson Reuters – WebBuilder CS	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

AccountantsWorld Website Relief

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225635

BEST FIT

Website Relief is well suited for accounting firms of all sizes that currently utilize Accountants World's Power Practice Suite of applications. The product can be used as a stand-alone product as well.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Excellent integration with AccountantsWorld Power Practice Suite
- Users can create an unlimited number of web pages
- Contains integrated blog capability
- Offers excellent marketing and SEO tools

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Product does not have an integrated tax-preparation system available

SUMMARY & PRICING

An excellent solution for those using AccountantsWorld applications, Website Relief is currently priced at $595 per year, if paid annually. Monthly pricing is also available at $59 per month. The product also offers a money-back guarantee if the subscription is cancelled within the first 30 days of service.

www.accountantsworld.com

Build Your Firm Accounting Website Packages

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225638

BEST FIT

Build Your Firm offers custom designed websites exclusively for accounting firms. A complete marketing program for accountants and CPAs, Build Your Firm is well suited to firms of any size.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Website creation is part of the marketing program offered by Build Your Firm that accountants can take advantage of
- A custom newsletter option allows firms to send different newsletters to different clients
- Product offers a secure file-sharing option
- An online payment processing portal is available

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Additional services can be costly

SUMMARY & PRICING

Build Your Website is available in three different plans: Premier, Niche, and Custom. The Premier version does not have a setup fee, but the Niche version has a one-time setup fee, as does the Custom site. Both the Niche and the Custom websites feature custom slider images, and the Custom version offers firm branding and up to 35 pages of content. Each plan is available in either Professional or Platinum hosting levels. The Professional hosting is priced at $83.33 monthly, and the Platinum version is $99.95 per month.

Build Your Firm offers professional CPAs and accountants a complete platform of related marketing tools designed to increase clients and revenues, with Build Your Firm Website only one component of the package. Build Your Firm offers a Free Info Kit as well as a 60 day free trial for their website product.

Websites.buildyourfirm.com

CCH Site Builder - Wolters Kluwer Tax and Accounting

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225640

BEST FIT

The product is well suited for small to mid-sized accounting firms that currently or plan to utilize Wolters Kluwer products. An additional benefit is the use of the CCH Axcess Portal, which can be embedded into any Wolters Kluwer website for client file sharing.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Offers an excellent selection of accounting and tax related tools and articles for clients
- Product is easily customizable and offers a good selection of styles and templates
- Quick product setup allows a website to be created and live quickly
- Offers solid integration with other CCH Axcess products to extend product functionality

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Product does not offer blogging capability

SUMMARY & PRICING

CCH Site Builder is an excellent choice for small to mid-sized accounting firms. Available as a stand-alone product, users already or planning to use other Wolters Kluwer products will reap additional benefits. CCH Site Builder is available in both basic and standard editions, with users able to subscribe to additional services such as CCH eContent at an additional cost. CCH Site Builder starts at $785 annually.

www.cchwebsites.com

CPAsites.com

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225640

BEST FIT

CPAsites is well suited for accounting firms of any size that desire a built-from-scratch design that is managed offsite.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Every website is custom designed; with no two sites alike
- The product is scalable, with 4 subscription levels available
- All website articles are written by CPAs

POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES

- Website changes can only be made by CPAsites

SUMMARY & PRICING

Mentioned earlier, CPAsites is available in four versions. The Platinum level provides complete website management services, is available for $150 per month. The Gold level subscription is $85 per month, the Silver level is $50 per month, and the bronze level is $300 per year. With flexible subscription options, and a custom design, CPAsites is an excellent solution for the firm that wants to stand out from the crowd at a reasonable price.

CPAsites.com

CPA Site Solutions

2016 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIT

CPA Site Solutions is an excellent option for accounting firms of all sizes that are in need of a professionally designed website that can be easily edited when needed.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Up to 250 templates available for users to choose from
- Three editions of the product are available
- The system offers an extensive selection of professionally prepared website content
- CPA Site Solutions includes blog options

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Add-on tools and extra features can drive up the monthly cost

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225649

SUMMARY & PRICING

The designs can be easily customized by CPA Site Solutions webmasters, with firms telling webmasters the what changes they need. With an extensive selection of templates and scalable pricing, CPA Site Solutions is well suited to accounting firms of just about any size. The Silver edition of CPA Site Solutions is priced at $52.50 per month; the Gold version is $72.50, and the Platinum version is $99.50. No contract is required, and users can pay month-to-month if they desire. Other services such additional SEO Optimization and Social Media Marketing are available at additional cost.

www.cpasites.com

GetNetSet Websites for Accounting Firms

2016 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIT

GetNetSet is available in three editions, which include the Representer edition, which is ideal for very small firms, and includes up to seven website pages. The Representer edition does not offer a client portal or dedicated email addresses. The Retainer edition offers users an unlimited number of webpages as well as a client portal and online payment options. Firms using this version will also receive 10 email addresses which utilize the firm domain. The Recruiter edition offers all of the same features found in the Retainer version along with additional storage options and better SEO tools.

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225650

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Well suited for even the smallest accounting firm
- Product is scalable, with three editions available
- Website design is included in the monthly fee
- Users can opt to make changes themselves or use GetNetSet personnel to make all changes

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Product offers no integration with tax or accounting products at this time

SUMMARY & PRICING

GetNetSet is a scalable product, available in three editions. Representer is priced at $29 per month, Retainer at $49, and Recruiter at $99 per month, all with free 30-day trial periods and no setup fees or long-term contracts.

www.getnetset.com

Thomson Reuters Web Builder CS

2016 OVERALL RATING

BEST FIT

Firms that currently or plan to use CS Professional's Suite of applications in their practice.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- Product offers solid integration with CS Professional Suite
- Good selection of automated web content is offered
- Easy editing tools are available for users to utilize
- Good selection of tools available to assist new users

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Product may not be used to its full capacity if not used with other CS Professional Suite applications

SUMMARY & PRICING

Thomson Reuters Web Builder CS is an excellent choice for accounting and tax firms already using CS Professional Suite products. Users can choose to design their own website or let Web Builder CS personnel build the site for them, and editing web information is easy. Standard website designs are included in the subscription cost, which is $70.00 per month. For those wanting a more custom design, enhanced template designs are an additional $400, and a custom design with animation will run an additional $2,500. Additional email addresses and storage are available as well, and users can opt to pay monthly, with no long term contract required.

Cs.thomsonreuters.com/web-builder

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225654

Tenenz Accounting and Financial Site Builder AFSB

2016 OVERALL RATING
4.5

BEST FIT

Accounting and Financial Site Builder (AFSB) from Tenenz is a good fit for small to mid-sized accounting firms that want an easy-to-use product that also offers good customization capability at an easily affordable price.

PRODUCT STRENGTHS

- User-friendly product offers a variety of user tools for quick website customization
- Over 50 templates are available for users to choose from
- Product contains over 200 professional images, or users can upload and use custom images
- Free newsletter service is included for up to 250 clients

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Blog capability not included in the product. But if you have a blog tool you like, it can easily be plugged into the AFSB open platform.

SUMMARY & PRICING

AFSB from Tenenz offers small to mid-sized firms the luxury of a custom website without the cost. The product offers excellent customization capability, and over 50 website templates to choose from, and users can add personalized touches such as logos and other firm branding materials. Subscriptions start at $25.99 per month when paid annually, or users can choose to pay month-to-month, with subscription pricing running $32.99 per month. There are no setup fees, and new users also receive an initial 60-day free trial, with no credit card needed.

AFSB also offers other services, available at an additional cost, including website customization, search engine optimization, and newsletter distribution for more than 250 clients.

Read the full review and see expanded ratings for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12225656

AFSB™ ACCOUNTING & FINANCIAL SITE BUILDER

www.afsb.net

SPONSORED CONTENT

FIRST-HAND

Easy-to-Build Website Keeps Tax Pro And Her Clients Connected

Kathy Benjamin has been a bookkeeper for several years, working in-house in a variety of roles for small and mid-sized businesses in central Texas. About five years ago, she decided it was time to start her own practice, KBen Services. The firm, which offers tax compliance, payroll, bookkeeping, financials and notary services, is located in Gatesville, Texas, on the northern side of the Fort Hood Army base.

The firm serves mostly smaller businesses, including Sch. Cs, partnerships and S-Corps, along with a sizable client base of individual tax returns, many from the active and retired military community in the area. To meet the needs of her clients, she often travels to their locations, she says, and this keeps her really busy during busy season. But as a sole practitioner, even the non-tax focused times of year can have her running around so much that she only makes it into her actual office a couple days a week.

While Kathy expects to hire an office manager later this year, she has come to rely on technologies to help her keep up with client needs and provide service, even while she's on the road. When she first started her practice, she tried a traditional do-it-yourself website service, but says that building websites is not why she got into bookkeeping. Then she found the Accounting and Financial Site Builder (AFSB) system from Tenenz.

"I'm not a programmer or a website designer," she said. "But AFSB makes it easy to lay things out and add information, and helps me have a completely professional website without having to know all the website. If you can use Word, you can use their website editor. Plus it provides tools for me and my clients, and even allows clients to securely send me files." The built-in PayPal integration also lets her firm accept online payments from clients.

The AFSB system (www.afsb.net) is designed specifically for accounting and tax professionals, with easy-to-use templates that help these pros design a client-friendly website that includes more than 50 financial calculators, personalized website address and email addresses, and client portals. The portals let clients securely share sensitive tax and financial files with their accountant, and can also be used by the professional to send things, such as finalized tax returns and financials, to clients. Accounting pros who use the AFSB website system also get a 15 percent discount on other products and services from Tenenz, such as brochures, checks, envelopes, marketing materials, organizers, tax folders and forms.

Websites built with AFSB also include a client tax organizer, an interactive map and contact form for gathering information. Support staff are on hand to help setup and maintain websites. Firms can get a 60-day free trial of AFSB, after which the system costs as little as $25.99 per month.

Kathy says these features have been extremely useful, especially when she's away from the office. AFSB also includes a monthly, ready-to-send client newsletter that includes financial news, tips and business guidance, all written by professionals, and that can be shared using the built-in email marketing system or on social media. The newsletter is automatically updated to the firm's website. Additional firm marketing tools are also built in, including

"AFSB has everything a tax preparer needs, including the client portal, calculators, and the monthly newsletter, which I send out to clients and have on my website."

Learn more at www.afsb.net.

READ THE 2016 REVIEW OF AFSB Website System for Accountants

Are Your Firm's And Clients' Social Media Policies Legal?

By Richard D. Alaniz

Most employers prefer that employees not discuss their wages with people they know. They definitely prefer that employees not complain about their pay on Twitter. So when a Chipotle employee at a Haverford, Pa., restaurant did exactly that, the company asked him to delete the posts. Eventually, the company fired the worker. However, earlier this year an administrative law judge with the National Labor Relations Board ("NLRB") ordered that the employee be rehired and held that the company's social media policy violated the National Labor Relations Act ("NLRA").

The situation began when a Chipotle crew member took to Twitter to vent about his job. In January 2015, he tweeted several times to complain about working on snow days. The employee also used Twitter to express his dissatisfaction about crew members' hourly pay rate of $8.50. Soon after, a supervisor told the crew member that the tweets violated the company's social media policy that prohibited employees from making disparaging and false statements about Chipotle. The employee took the posts down, but was fired several weeks later for organizing a petition claiming that workers weren't getting their required breaks.

After the crew member was fired, the Pennsylvania Workers Organizing Committee filed an unfair labor practice charge on his behalf. The NLRB's general counsel then filed a complaint against the company for its social media policy and for firing the employee.

In her March ruling, Administrative Law Judge Susan A. Flynn ruled against the company, claiming the employee's rights to tweet were protected under the NLRA. "Having determined that [the employee]'s tweets satisfy both prongs of the analysis—they were protected concerted activity and were for the purpose of mutual aid or protection—I further find that the Respondent's request that [the employee] delete those tweets was unlawful, although no discipline was imposed on him," the ruling noted.

The crew member is among the nearly two-thirds of American adults who use social networking sites, according to the Pew Research Center. As the number of people using social media to vent about problems grows, companies have become more vigilant about monitoring their online reputations. That includes wanting to make sure that their own employees don't mock or insult them on Facebook, Twitter, and other sites. However, in recent years, the NLRB has regularly ruled that employees have the right to complain and even insult their employers online, as long as doing so constitutes "protected activity." When developing policies around how workers can talk about their workplaces on social media, companies must be careful that they don't violate federal laws.

Social Media Policies and the NLRA

While it may seem like a stretch that employees have a legal right to bash their employers on social media, the NLRA protects the right of employees to engage in "protected concerted activities," such as group action to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions, and to engage in union activities and support a union. Section 7 of the NLRA guarantees employees "the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection." Section 8(a)(1) of the NLRA makes it an unfair labor practice for an employer "to interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed in Section 7."

The NLRB began receiving charges in its regional offices related to employer social media policies in 2010. In March 2015, NLRB General Counsel Richard F. Griffin, Jr. released a report, "Report of the General Counsel Concerning Employer Rules," that looked at issues in employee handbooks that could be "reasonably construed" as having a chilling effect on employees' Section 7 activity. The 30-page report compares legal and illegal handbook rules, and analyzes, as an example, the handbook rules of a large employer that the general counsel found unlawful.

The NLRB Faces Criticism

The Chipotle case is just one of many where the NLRB ruled that employees were allowed to criticize their employers online because they were exercising their Section 7 rights. In another high profile case involving a worker at Pier Sixty in New York, the NLRB found that an employee had a right to post a profane rant about his manager and his manager's family on Facebook, since the message involved a bid for unionization, along with a complaint about alleged workplace abuse.

That case began in 2011, when Pier Sixty workers began considering unionizing, in part because they felt they were being treated disrespectfully. Two days before a unionization election in October 2011, an assistant banquet director criticized employees for talking among themselves during an event. One of the workers was upset by the manager's comments and responded by using his mobile phone to post a Facebook message that read: "Bob is such a NASTY MOTHER F***** don't know how to talk to people!!!!!! F*** his mother and his entire f****** family!!!! What a LOSER!!!! Vote YES for the UNION!!!!!!!" The post was visible to the employee's Facebook friends, including 10 of his coworkers.

The day after Pier Sixty employees voted to unionize, the employee deleted his post. About two weeks later, the company fired the employee for violating company policy, based on the Facebook posts.

An NLRB administrative law judge initially sided with the employee. On March 31, 2015, the NLRB affirmed the ruling, voting 2-1 that the worker had been wrongly fired. "Although we do not condone [the employee's] use of obscene and vulgar language in his online statements about his manager, we agree with the judge that the particular facts and circumstances presented in this case weigh in favor of finding that [the employee's] conduct did not lose the Act's protection," read the decision by NLRB Chairman Mark Gaston Pearce and Member Lauren McFerran.

Rulings like these have raised alarms at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which recently blasted the NLRB's approach to handbook policies, including social media, in a report entitled "Theater of the Absurd: The NLRB Takes on the Employee Handbook."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

SMB Owners Fret Over Finding, Keeping and Growing Top Talent

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

Small and mid-sized businesses added 63,000 jobs in April and 173,000 in May, according to ADP, but many business owners and managers find that their most talented staff – finding, nurturing, and keeping them – is one of their most challenging concerns. When the firm is highly-dependent on professionals, such as accountants, that concern can grown even more.

The results of the fourth annual ADP Midsized Business Owners Study shows that nearly half of those surveyed said they are extremely or very concerned about "the quality of the available workforce." And less than one fifth said they think their business has the right resources and internal HR processes to find new talent, grow and retain them.

Key findings in the survey showed business management has differences in confidence when it comes to finding, keeping and managing staff:

- About 15 percent of those surveyed said they are totally confident they have the tools to find the best talent. One of their top concerns is not knowing how to post to multiple job boards from one place. Some reported a lack of internal talent for open positions. They also said they don't have the tools to reach more passive job seekers who may be exceptionally qualified.
- Slightly more (16 percent) of those surveyed said they are confident they have the resources to keep and grow their best staff talent. Many of those surveyed said they need convenient tools that can help them create employee development plans, and also manage them.
- About 18 percent of those surveyed said they are sure they have the tools needed to effectively manage their workforce.

While more than half of those surveyed said employee engagement is important to the success of a business, more than 40 percent said their business was not performing as well in this area, and they were concerned about their capabilities with employee engagement. The survey showed the most important engagement strategies cited were managing performance and compensation, and setting goals.

Fortunately, very few of the mid-sized business owners surveyed think they do a bad job of managing their workforce. However, barely half of them said they think they're doing very well, or extremely well at managing their talent.

Further good news: Even with their self-criticism on staff management, more than 40 percent said their business had increased its total employees during the past year and that they expect to increase hiring this year, as well.

The small and mid-sized business owners also sounded off on red tape headaches: 41 percent said that government regulations were their top concern. About 25 percent said they were confident in their organization's compliance and understanding of all ACA regulations. ●

5 TIPS TO RETAIN TOP EMPLOYEES

- Recognize and reward good work.
- Promote a culture of openness and honesty.
- Offer opportunities to advance, and encourage professional learning.
- Use teams to strengthen relationships and foster unity.
- Allow responsible remote work.

How We Can EMPOWER FEMALE ACCOUNTANTS Who Want It All

By Amy Vetter, CPA.CITP, CGMA

Can women do it all? Depending on who you ask, you'll likely get a variety of different answers. But regardless of where you fall on this question, when you consider that 57 percent of women participate in the labor force, the question should actually be, "How do we support women who have determined that they can have a family and continue their career aspirations?"

Based on my years of experience balancing two children, owning a small business and working in the accounting space, I've learned a few lessons along the way that have helped me answer this question.

Know your breaking point

Despite all the amazing work we're already accomplishing, many women often (wrongly) feel that they aren't excelling, both in their professional or personal lives. It's therefore critically important that you periodically take stock of all that you are doing so that you don't tip overboard.

Start by making sure you have blocked out the time you need for your family and for your own health and wellness. If you aren't getting it, speak up! Bring your family into the fold and have an open and honest conversation about what you need to stay grounded. As a working mom, having these types of conversations has allowed me to involve my children and husband in my career and, in turn, earn their support. At the same time, this two-way dialogue helps me to understand their wants and needs.

But the conversation can't stop at home. Women need to be transparent in the workplace, especially in accounting where per diem work is common. For example, if you have an arrangement with your employer that you only work 20 hours, be strong in that agreement. If clients email you on your day off or partners call you about certain files, don't overlook this. Talk with your employer about whether you'll be taking an additional day off or if you will be paid extra. You won't know until you ask.

Identify supportive peers within your business

Having a few friends at work can make stressful days easier, especially during busy times like tax season. But to truly thrive, women need more than a friend, they need a supportive network.

What comprises a supportive network? I recently attended a lecture at the CalCPA Women's Leadership Forum by Joanne Cleaver of Wilson-Taylor Associates. As Joanne explained, a supportive network begins with a mentor. A mentor is someone who is with you in the trenches and who can provide emotional support when things get tough.

A supportive network also mandates a coach, otherwise known as someone who can give you professional feedback. Whether offering suggestions on how to improve a presentation or tips for better wrapping your arms around a complicated technical skill, a coach provides honest and constructive criticism that helps you grow as a professional.

The third component of a supportive network is a sponsor. Typically, a professional sponsor is a senior executive willing to root for you at the management level and will help identify opportunities to advance your career. A career sponsor, as well as a mentor or coach, doesn't necessarily have to be another woman. Rather, the sponsor just needs to be someone who believes in you as a professional.

Find an outside peer group

Women in the accounting profession are fortunate in that there are a variety of professional organizations in the industry that are committed to supporting women in the workplace. The American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants (AWSCPA), for instance, offers resources for all stages of an accounting career. The AICPA's Women in the Profession portal offers live events and webinars, as well as a variety of other tools and information, to help with the retention and advancement of women in accounting. Based on your location, many state CPA societies and industry-agnostic organizations also sponsor women-lead councils or forums that can provide resources.

Regardless of the organization, it's not enough just to join. Rather, you need to actively engage in these organizations in order to reap the benefits. Attend lectures. Participate in networking events. Go to conferences. Only then will you be able to build a supportive network and a safe space where you can test ideas and collaborate together.

One size does not fit all

There is no cookie cutter female accountant. We're all unique and have our own goals and aspirations. So whatever they might be, it's important to understand the power of advocating for yourself, arming yourself with the appropriate resources and knowing that you have a team of female professionals who have your back. ●

Amy Vetter, CPA.CITP, CGMA (@AmyVetterCPA) is Xero's Global Vice President, Education & Head of Accounting, USA.

By Jon Baron

3 TAX TIPS FOR MILLENNIALS

How to Overcome the Fear

f there's one thing we all have in common, it's that no one enjoys filing taxes. But, according to recent studies, millennials feel particularly anxious about the annual process.

A recent online study by NerdWallet and Harris Poll found that of more than 1,600 U.S. adults, 80% of taxpayers ages 18-34 who filed taxes last year and planned to file this year say they're fearful about some aspect of preparing their taxes. That's the highest of any age group. These fears include making a mistake (22%), not getting the biggest possible refund (17%) or paying too much in taxes (13%).

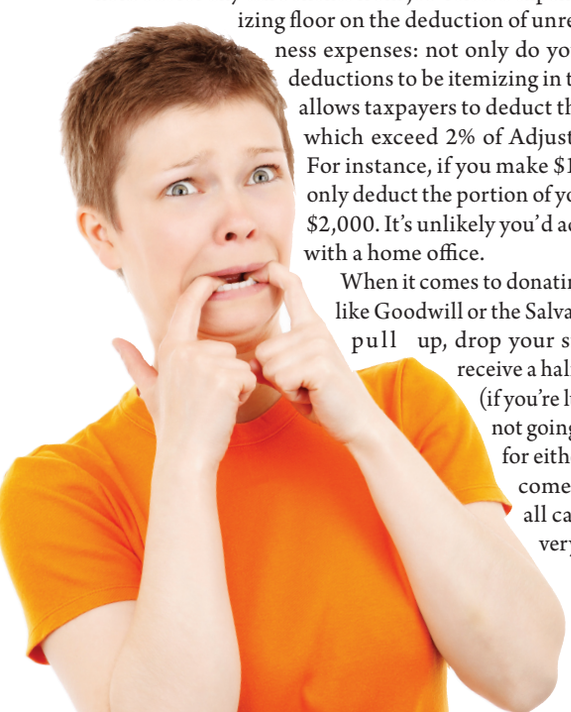
As Benjamin Franklin famously said, there are only two certainties in life: death and taxes. So, if you're a millennial who is not exactly comfortable when it comes to filing your taxes (or you know one with this fear), here are a few tips to boost both knowledge and confidence when tax time rolls around.

1. Keep records of expenses, qualifying deductions and donations.

To stay organized and alleviate fears of overpayment come tax time, use an online financial account aggregator to classify and tag all your transactions throughout the course of the year as they're incurred. This is particularly important if you're an independent contractor or freelancer. Being able to search and filter for these items at year-end is an enormous time-saver.

It is also helpful to take pictures of any tax-related receipts and tag them immediately after scanning so that they're searchable and filterable at year-end. Better yet, seek out a solution that can perform OCR on your receipts to add or suggest tags based on the vendor. If you're unsure as to what receipts might be relevant to your taxes, the IRS has a handy overview of credits and deductions available to individual taxpayers.

Note that if you're a wage earner (W-2) with a considerable income, don't hold out for any tax benefits from job-related expenses. The IRS puts a patronizing floor on the deduction of unreimbursed employee business expenses: not only do you have to have enough in deductions to be itemizing in the first place, the IRS only allows taxpayers to deduct the portion of any expenses which exceed 2% of Adjusted Gross Income (AGI). For instance, if you make $100,000 annually, you can only deduct the portion of your expenses which exceed $2,000. It's unlikely you'd accrue more than that, even with a home office.



When it comes to donating non-cash items to places like Goodwill or the Salvation Army, you'll generally pull up, drop your stuff off, and immediately receive a half-filled out slip of some sort (if you're lucky). But know that this is not going to be enough information for either you or your tax preparer come filing season. In almost all cases (with the exception of very large donations, like cars) these charitable organizations place the responsibility on you, the donor, to assess the value of each of the items you donate. It's this value assessment that will serve as the basis of your tax deduction later. As a best practice, take a picture of everything you donate right before you donate it, then take a picture of whatever written slip or other documentation you receive once you drop-off your goods. Finally, tag both with meaningful information immediately, including your estimated valuation at the time.

2. Understand your withholding amount.

Don't buy the hype: receiving a tax refund is not a good thing. Retailers don't help with the wave of targeted advertising that comes every spring, inviting taxpayers to spend their refund one way or another. Unfortunately, too many millennials don't have a true notion of just how much money is being withheld from each one of their paychecks, and therefore see tax refunds as a windfall, rather than the reality: a return of the money they overpaid needlessly, effectively floating the government an interest-free loan. Working with a tax professional, you can target a more specific withholding amount and/or estimated payment schedule, so you can see the benefits of larger paychecks year-round, instead. Self-employed individuals can also benefit through online bookkeeping and expense tracking, as they can more closely target (at a moment's notice) appropriate estimated payments on a quarterly basis.

If you get married during the year, don't forget to change your withholding at the beginning of the year. The IRS only cares about your marital status on the very last day of the year, which dictates your filing status for that entire tax year. The general rule is for the spouse earning the higher income to claim the maximum number of allowances (generally one for each spouse, and another for each dependent child) leaving the other spouse to claim zero allowances. Note that accountants can calculate far more precise recommendations in most cases. Many spouses enter into a marriage each claiming a single allowance with their respective employers and if they don't change that, they end up under-withheld when it comes time to file—sometimes yielding a considerable balance due. Therefore, if you know you're going to get married during the course of a given year (or more sadly, divorced), make sure to notify your payroll department with any withholding changes on January 1st.

3. Hire a tax professional.

With do-it-yourself tax preparations services abound, it might be tempting to file on your own. But, if you have a more complex financial situation (marriage, kids, self-employment, investments, etc.), it is by far and away worth it to hire a professional. For more information on why; check out It Doesn't Take a Genius to Understand the Need for Tax Professionals.

And if you're a tax professional looking for tips on working with millennials, keep an eye out for my next blog post on three ways you can better reach the millennial population.

Jon Baron joined the Tax & Accounting business of Thomson Reuters in 1992. Prior to his current position as Managing Director of the Professional segment, Jon held the positions of President of Professional Software & Services, and Vice President of Development, where he was responsible for the design and development of all Professional products and services. Jon has three decades of technology development and management experience. Jon holds a BBA in Accounting from Siena College and an MBA from Boston University.

When, How, and When Not To ...

REHIRE FORMER EMPLOYEES

By Paul McDonald

History repeats itself, and sometimes so does hiring. When it comes to talent management, many employers consider rehiring former workers. In fact, a recent Robert Half survey shows 98 percent of human resources managers said they would likely rehire an ex-employee.

Why are companies so eager to bring back "boomerang" staff?

Why it's good to rehire

In the public accounting sector, the demand for skilled talent can mean fewer accomplished candidates available and a lengthy hiring process. This is especially the case for professionals with in-demand skills, certifications and years of experience.

Bringing back former employees can shorten the time it takes to vet candidates, as you already know much of their work history and fit with your corporate culture. As a "known quantity," you reduce the chances of making a bad hire. Additionally, boomerang employees are likely already familiar with your firm's processes and technologies, meaning they can start contributing sooner.

The downside to rehiring

There are many advantages to bringing back former employees, but it's not without risks. For one, while most HR managers wouldn't hesitate to rehire, employees don't always feel the same way. In the above survey, only 48 percent of workers reported they would consider coming back.

This finding suggests that many workers leave an employer for reasons of dissatisfaction, and a rehire would place them in the same situation. Perhaps they didn't get along with their manager or coworkers, or they didn't see a viable in-house career path. If such sources of discontentment remain unchanged, the risk is the former employee will soon leave again.

How to rehire

In the hiring process, treat former workers like other job candidates.

- **Evaluate why they left.** When rehiring, consider only those workers who left the company on amicable terms and for "good" reasons. These terms and reasons could include downsizing in the event of a merger, or their moving away for a spouse's job but then returning to the area. Whenever possible, review their exit interview to verify they had positive feelings about your firm when they left. It should go without saying to not consider former employees who were terminated or asked to resign.
- **Conduct an interview.** Even though you may be well-acquainted with boomerang employees, don't skip the formal interview process. The longer the interval between the departure and possible rehire, the more important it is to go in-depth during the discussion. Here are some questions for former staff seeking to return:
  - Why did you decide to apply here again/agree to an interview?
  - What were your favorite aspects of working at this firm? Least favorite parts?
  - What skills or expertise did you pick up in the years you were away?
  - What would you bring to this position other candidates would not?
- **Check their references.** This process shouldn't take very long since your firm is on the reference list. However, you should cover all your bases, just in case. Avoid letting your familiarity with them goad you into shortcutting this step. Along the lines of contacting references, conduct a background check if it's your firm's policy to do so.

Tips for future rehires

Rehiring past employees is a sound recruitment strategy. As such, lay the groundwork with people leaving your organization on amicable terms for a possible return:

- **Conduct an exit interview.** This final meeting is more than a formality. The human resources department — and you — can gain valuable information into why top performers leave, and devise better strategies for employee retention.
- **Build a bridge.** When a star performer leaves your company on good terms, keep the door open. Let them know you valued their contribution and would be happy to see them apply for open positions in the future.
- **Stay in touch.** Connect with departing employees on LinkedIn or other means, which could ease their re-entry in case they seek to come back. Also, when your firm has an opening, preferably one with a shinier job title and higher salary, send them an email and a link to the job posting, and tell them you'd like to work with them again.

Rehiring is a valuable strategy, especially when current market conditions make it difficult to land experienced accountants. As long as you do your due diligence, you'll maximize your chances of making a strong hire.

Paul McDonald is senior executive director at international staffing firm Robert Half. He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace and career management topics. Over the course of more than 30 years in the recruiting field, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.

QuickBooks Connect 2016:

Connecting Accountants, Small Businesses, the Self-Employed and Developers

In a few short months, accounting professionals, small business owners, self-employed individuals and developers will gather at one of the largest accounting industry events for three days of learning and networking. Intuit's third annual QuickBooks Connect, taking place from October 24-26, 2016 in San Jose, features an exciting schedule designed to help accountants take their clients and their Firms of the Future to the next level.

"Our big focus continues to be around equipping accountants with what they need to thrive and become a Firm of the Future. At QuickBooks Connect, we've set the stage for a truly unique experience with lots of opportunities for attendees to connect with each other, learn more about QuickBooks, obtain or renew their QuickBooks certification and receive continuing education credits – all of which are included in the price of admission," said Jim McGinnis, vice president and leader, accountant segment, Intuit.

Similar to the QuickBooks Connect held in previous years, the agenda starts with two developer-focused events: the 100k Small Business App Showdown and the QuickBooks Connect Hackathon, both taking place on the weekend prior to the main conference. The 100k Small Business App Showdown pits QuickBooks apps – who have opted into the contest and published on the QuickBooks App Store – against each other for a chance at the $100k Grand Prize. The winner is determined by social media engagement and voting, and attendees can participate by supporting their favorite apps. The Hackathon will focus on creating innovative solutions for small business challenges by using current technology. Multiple prizes will be awarded to the winners in the Hackathon categories.

Following the Hackathon, QuickBooks Connect will include a special Accountant Day full of certification trainings, workshops and more. The conference then kicks off with its Main Day of keynote speakers and breakout tracks, and concludes the following day with the Finale. There are also more than 40 sessions tailored for accounting professionals that provide actionable steps and information to become a Firm of the Future. While attendees can continue to expect what they've come to know and love from previous events, this year's QuickBooks Connect will also incorporate a couple of notable changes.

"This year, we're focused on making the sessions as actionable as possible," said McGinnis. "Our agenda is built upon four core themes: Grow, Run, Manage and Connect. Each session will be centered on what attendees actually want to learn and offer practical content that can be implemented to propel accountants to become Firms of the Future. We're also providing more opportunities for accountants to connect with and learn from small businesses and developers."

The main idea behind QuickBooks Connect is to provide one big event for accountants, small business owners, self-employed individuals and developers to network in one place – something that is hard to do with a session-packed agenda. So this year, there will be fewer concurrent sessions and more time and space for attendees to interact with each other.

"We make it a point to outdo ourselves each year and make every QuickBooks Connect bigger and better than the last," said McGinnis. "We've heard that accountants appreciate the step-by-step instructions to take their firm into the future, but they also want time to interact with the speakers and other attendees. We want our attendees to walk away with the connections and resources needed to take their firms and businesses to the next level. So, we're spreading things out and giving more space to connect with each other."

Intuit doesn't just want to facilitate connections within the conference walls. The company is also dedicated to creating various meetup and touchpoints for small businesses and accountants in the surrounding area. The agenda includes a welcome dinner for accountants on the first day and an evening celebration to close out the Main Day's events.

Intuit continues to put a lot of thought and effort into building up QuickBooks Connect, exploring relevant hot topics such as value-priced billing, the right apps to run your practice and changes to QuickBooks products. As always, the event will also feature engaging main stage speakers and experts who are ready to deliver valuable insights and advice. This year, attendees can look forward to hearing from bestselling author, Malcolm Gladwell, as well as Shaquille O' Neal, entrepreneur, philanthropist and media personality, member of the NBA's Hall of Fame, and 15-time NBA All-Star player. Past speakers have included Oprah Winfrey, Martha Stewart, Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Arianna Huffington, Robert Herjavec, Jessica Alba and Bill Rancic. Additional names will be announced in the weeks leading up to the conference.

"We're really proud that we have – and will continue to have – a lot of amazing main stage speakers who can speak not just to accountants, but also to developers and small business owners due to the sheer depth of their experience. These are bona fide entrepreneurs and business owners, and they understand what our attendees are going through," said McGinnis.

Jim McGinnis, VP and Leader, Intuit Accountant Segment

Those interested in registering for QuickBooks Connect have two passes to choose from: the Accountant 3-Day Pass for $599 or the Main Day + Pass for $299. Early-Bird Pricing is available through July 31 for both passes for $399 and $99, respectively. Breakfast, lunch, food during receptions and beverages are included with each event pass. In addition, Intuit is subsidizing the cost of several hotels next to the San Jose Convention Center, the location of QuickBooks Connect, to make it even more affordable for those coming from outside the area. More information can be found at the QuickBooks Connect website (https://qbcon2016.com/).

"The future is already here - it's just not evenly distributed," said McGinnis. "That's the main take away from the conference: everyone can be a Firm of the Future and QuickBooks Connect is a wonderful opportunity where everyone can learn and grow their business."

New Fiscal Year Brings Sales Tax Changes Across the Country

By Gail Cole

"TO IMPROVE IS TO CHANGE; TO BE PERFECT IS TO CHANGE OFTEN." ~ WINSTON CHURCHILL

Following Churchill's logic, sales tax rates, rules and regulations must be the very embodiment of perfection. Boy, do they change.

They change when states and local tax jurisdictions (counties, municipalities, special districts) need more tax revenue. They change when there's a revenue surplus. They change in response to pressure from lobbyists, public opinion, or technological innovations. Sometimes, it seems, they change with the tides or the seasons.

There have been a number of red-letter changes to date in 2016, most notably with respect to state sales tax rates, eliminating exemptions, and remote sales tax laws. More are sure to follow during the second half of the year.

Show me the money

Who doesn't need more revenue? Not Louisiana and South Dakota. Lawmakers in both states decided to increase their state sales tax and use tax rates earlier this year. The Louisiana rate went up by 1% on April 1, and the South Dakota rate increased by 0.5% on June 1. There's been talk of increasing the state rate in Oklahoma, as well, but the governor is opposed to the idea.

Tax that online shopping spree

Tired of waiting for federal lawmakers to move on the Marketplace Fairness Act, Online Sales Tax Simplification Act, or Remote Transactions Parity Act, state legislators are taking matters into their own hands. So far in 2016:

- Alabama imposed new requirements for out-of-state sellers; Amazon started collecting South Carolina sales tax (January)
- A federal court determined Colorado's use tax notification requirements are legal, and Amazon began collecting Colorado sales and use tax (February)
- Louisiana started taxing remote sales, and Amazon banished Louisiana residents from its Associates Program (April)
- South Dakota started taxing certain remote sales (May)
- Vermont made plans to penalize noncollecting remote vendors who don't comply with the state's use tax notification requirements (June)

Legal battles are already brewing over both the Alabama and South Dakota laws. More are sure to follow, and this is exactly what the states want: a path to the United States Supreme Court and a challenge to the status quo.

Mix it up

Most states (46 out of 50) start their new fiscal year on July 1. This is therefore the time that states tend to take up new policies or kiss old ones goodbye. Local sales and use tax rate changes are always numerous, as well.

In 2016, rate changes reign. Local sales and use tax rate changes will occur in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, and West Virginia. Annexations in Texas could also trigger tax rate changes.

Other tax rate changes also take effect on July 1. These include fuel taxes, lodgings taxes, and telecommunications taxes:

- California (fuel)
- Florida (communications services)
- Georgia (fuel)
- Illinois (telecommunications)
- Oregon (lodging)
- Utah (fuel)
- Wyoming (prepaid wireless)

On the horizon

Anything could happen during the second half of 2016: federal legislators could decide to vote on a remote sales tax bill; Puerto Rico could resurrect the VAT; Arizona could (again) change the way it taxes fine art sold at auctions and galleries; Louisiana could decide to repeal the suspension of some exemptions; the governor of New York could sign the bill that permanently exempts feminine hygiene products from sales tax; other cities could follow Philadelphia's lead and impose a tax on soft drinks; and West Virginia could broaden or increase sales tax. This being sales tax, any number of changes could also crop up.

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

The Secret Lives of Accountants

By Gail Cole

Accountants are often described as capable, trustworthy, and good with figures, and they are. But they are also much, much, more.

Over the centuries, accountants have been fashionistas, inventors, and spies. They fight crime, write books, and uphold the law. The more one learns about accountants, the more surprises one uncovers. Secret lives, indeed.

When Leonardo da Vinci painted The Last Supper, mathematician and accountant Luca Paciola was by his side — as a friend and advisor on perspective. Yet the 15th century Venetian, known as the Father of Accounting, is most revered for creating the double entry system of bookkeeping (the significance of which perhaps only those in the industry can fully appreciate).

It was accountant Matthaus Shwarz who created the first known book of fashion. His unique work of art depicts more than 40 years of his life and clothing, portraying what he wore during pivotal events such as his wedding and the death of his father, as well as daily life at work and at play. The man took fashion as seriously as he did his career — as head accountant for one of the most prestigious banking families in 16th century Germany.

Today, accountants include among their ranks rock stars, actors, politicians, and reporters. Both Robert Plant and Mick Jagger briefly studied accounting before taking the stage; Gibby Haynes was named Accounting Student of the Year and worked as an auditor before fronting the Butthole Surfers; and that smooth saxophonist Kenny G? He graduated magna cum laude in accounting.

But the study of accountancy is not just a stepping stone to rock-and-roll fame — accountants are also entrepreneurs and inventors. It was an accountant (Phil Knight) who founded Nike, and an accountant who founded The Home Depot. And that bubble gum you loved to chew in your youth? You can thank an accountant for it.

Had it not been for "the complexity and lunacy" of the tax law he studied, author John Grisham might today be writing suspenseful tales of tax accountants, not trial lawyers. Were it not for the small army of accountants who tally the ballots, we'd never have an Oscar winner. And think of the crimes that would go unsolved without the special agent accountants who constitute approximately 15% of the FBI force.

No dreary bean counters, these.

Even before there was a numeric system, accountants were hard at work keeping track of our stuff. They were there at the beginning of commerce, as evidenced by Egyptian bone shard labels (5,300 B.C.) tracking inventory, and they've been at it ever since. Knowing our inputs, what we have, and our outputs seems to be as essential to human nature as breathing and eating. Without that knowledge, we'd be lost. Without accountants, that knowledge would be lost — or even worse, disorganized and wrong.

So seek out an accountant today. Shake his or her hand. And as you do, imagine the secret life that accountant might lead.

Sales Tax Nexus Checklist

- ☐ Do I operate my business in this state (even from home)?
- ☐ Do I have an employee in this state?
- ☐ Do I have an affiliate in state?
- ☐ Do I have a sales rep, independent contractor or other agent in state?
- ☐ Do I store my products in state?
- ☐ Are my products distributed from a distribution center in this state?
- ☐ Did I attend a craft fair, exhibition or trade show in this state?
- ☐ Do I work with a drop shipper located in this state?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have sales tax nexus in that state.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

The Chamber accused the NLRB of changing in recent years. "Rather than serving as an impartial referee, it has become dominated by a decidedly pro-union majority . . . this majority, along with the Board's appointed General Counsel, have pursued a one-sided agenda at the expense of employers and workers. One particular way the NLRB's majority has transformed the agency is through adopting a wildly expansive reading of the NLRA's protections in order to undermine sensible and widespread workplace policies. Through a series of decisions and official guidance, the NLRB has undertaken a campaign to outlaw heretofore uncontroversial rules found in employee handbooks and in employers' social media policies—rules that employers maintain for a variety of legitimate business reasons."

The 43-page report lays out numerous cases that demonstrate the "sweeping impact of the NLRB's increasingly biased, and some would say irrational, policy agenda," according to the Chamber.

Next Steps

With these recent decisions by the NLRB, companies need to be very careful when crafting their social media policies. While companies don't want their own employees destroying the reputation of those who sign their paychecks, in implementing policies employers should try to avoid running into trouble with the NLRB. To achieve that, companies can take several steps:

• **Review current social media policies**
Companies should look closely at their current social media policies in light of recent NLRB rulings. This should be done in close consultation with in-house counsel, the HR department, and outside counsel who understand the issues at stake. Social media policies should reflect that comments about wages, working conditions, and unions have different protections than other types of complaints. (See www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/blog/11251206.)

• **Use specific language**
The NLRB has raised red flags over many social media policies for being too vague. In response, companies should try to craft policies that are as specific as possible. For example, generally banning profanity in social media posts that relate to the company may get an employer into trouble, as Pier Sixty found; but tying inappropriate behavior on social media posts to discriminatory or harassing behavior has been approved by the NLRB.

• **Discipline carefully**
Most importantly, when companies become aware of potentially problematic social media posts by employees, they should proceed very carefully with disciplinary actions. It's important to consult with HR and attorneys to ensure that posts aren't protected under the NLRA.

In recent years, the NLRB has reviewed dozens of social media policies. And the agency has often ruled against employers, even when workers have publicly insulted and disparaged their employers online. Companies need to understand the issues involved and work closely with experts in order to make sure their social media policies don't result in regulatory actions. ●

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By Jim Boomer, CPA.CITP

Does Your Firm Have Technical DEBT?

In 1992, Ward Cunningham introduced a simple concept to the international software development community. The inventor of the wiki, Cunningham discussed how releasing a software program with code that is not well tested is like going into (technical) debt. The customers would see a functioning product, but the ability to update the program, adapt to new change and do so efficiently were compromised because of short term solutions that cut corners.

Technical debt is now a common term in the software development industry. Companies spend money assessing, controlling and "paying down" their technical debt in order to keep their products agile enough to compete in an environment where slow to market or slow to adapt can mean the death of the company. Or, to put it in other terms, not paying down your technical debt can lead to technical bankruptcy.

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Technical Debt in the Accounting Profession

Technical debt is a highly specialized term in many circles. However, I believe the concept has broad business and technology implications in the accounting profession. If you don't think you are in technical debt (or aren't sure), let's take a quick test.

- How many versions of QuickBooks do you support?
- How many applications do you run that are no longer on support contracts or updated regularly?
- In your firm, how many different "standard desktop" setups are there? This includes the main computer, monitors, etc. that are on a typical desk. Write down vendor, model, operating system, size of monitors and other descriptors in a matrix. See how many different variants you come up with.
- If you sat for 3 minutes, how many items could you list that are "that's just the way it is" steps in your normal work processes?

What does technical debt mean to me?

The results of the test above will give you a score of sorts. Lower is better, and if it's high, then you may have one or more technical debts in place. The point of this exercise is to show you that there are places in your firm where you've made choices that are like Cunningham's description: a choice that is a shortcut. During the change that created the shortcut, not all of the questions and loose ends were addressed (or even known), resulting in a cost to maintain and an even higher cost to fix.

The issue with technical debt, like any debt, is that it accrues interest and must be paid off before a new "purchase" can be made. In many firms, the cost of the technical debt comes at the expense of innovation at either the technology or firm level. The resources for maintaining a large technical debt cannot be used for anything else. If you have a strong break/fix culture, or have a lot of fires that come out of nowhere, you are in a high technical debt situation.

How do I assess my technical debt, and what should I do with that information?

Regular review of all areas of technology and process as they relate to service lines will uncover your technical debts. The best way to uncover debt in existing systems is to do process reviews, either using Lean Six Sigma or another methodology. In doing so, you will discover areas of repetition, inefficiency or undocumented workarounds that highlight technical debts.

Once documented, you must look at each debt as an area of high potential. Finger pointing or defending debt can only lead to situations where that debt could default, leaving you in a panicked situation and with little preparation to deal with the resulting problems.

Make sure that mistakes are used to find technical debt, and that the outcome is paying that debt down. Look past the "we've always done it this way" to see how much a stale process is actually costing you to maintain. Also, realize that a new system or application will not solve technical debts unless the debts being put into the new system are paid off. Vendor changes are a great time to assess and fix old debts, and as the new system rolls out, a way to acknowledge and deal with new debts incurred by the change.

Going forward, make sure you proactively keep track of technical debts. Decide on a regular basis what debts you will pay down, and make sure that you track new debts as they are incurred. This method of continuous improvement will improve your baseline of operations and allow your firm to adapt quickly to change demands, new niche development, and improved quality of service. Making you more successful and future ready.

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