

NSA Practice Advisor

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VOLUME 28
NUMBER 9

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm



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Survival Tips for Fall Busy Season

YOU'VE HAD THOSE days (weeks, months...), right? When the deadlines are crashing in like waves on the shore, and every time you open your email or listen to your voice mail there's another urgent request to add to your never-ending to-do list, and your family and friends seem to need you more than ever during those times, and the things that you actually *want* to do in your life are so far out of sight that you actually start rethinking your whole career. If you're a tax accountant, you can be pretty sure those scenarios will hit right around the big mid-month filing deadlines.

What can you do to keep yourself going, coast through the deadlines, keep your colleagues satisfied and your family and friends happy, and maintain some semblance of the self you want to be?

The most common answer, the one we all wrestle with, is – don't bother me now, I'm swamped and I chose this life so I have to push myself and persevere and drag through the nights with limited sleep and somehow come out the other end having given everything I can to everyone but myself.

Actually, I'm not sure I can help with this, because I'm there right now myself, but here goes.

■ Don't beat yourself up for not being able to keep up with everything. Choose what's most pressing and put those things at the top of your

list, and deal with the rest when you can.

- Allow yourself to take pride in the things that you are doing well.
- Get out that organizer or scheduling app or paper to-do list – whatever works best for you – and schedule each day as accurately as possible, so that as new urgent requests come in, you'll be able to slot them in to particular times.
- Try to keep the piles to a minimum. Even if you're not finished with a project, put it away when you're ready to stop working on it, and then get it out again when you are ready to return to the project. That should help keep your worktable and/or desk somewhat less cluttered.
- Before you end each day, take an extra minute or two to remove



everything from your desk that doesn't belong there.

- Light a candle while you work, or open the window if you have one. The additional scents will remind you that there is life outside your office.
- At some point during your day, close your door if you have an office, or

go someplace where you can be alone, just for 15 minutes, and take a break.

- Meditate. Try one of the anti-anxiety/calming apps we recommend, www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12299983, take a power nap, or read something not related to your work. Even if it means you work 15 minutes later into the day/night, you'll feel better about it.
- Try to exercise. Try taking a quick walk around the office or outside. Can't leave the office? Keep hand weights under your desk, learn stretching exercises you can do in the office.
- Remember priorities. Don't turn your back on family emergencies because there is lots of work to do. Ask for help from your co-workers if the stress is getting to be too much. ■

— Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief

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THE WHY AND HOW OF

BOTS FOR ACCOUNTING FIRMS

ENGAGEMENT WITH CLIENTS and leveraging your brand is done easier and made stronger with bots. This emerging technology has promise today and in the future. While applying some bot technology may be more technically difficult without outside assistance, others are ready-to-implement with little tech assistance needed. Further, we don't expect vendors to have canned bot applications broadly available for the practice of accounting, although one of our favorite examples is a robotic bookkeeper that has been written to reduce bookkeeping functions by automating repetitive tasks.

Some bots communicate with other users of internet-based services, via instant messaging (IM), Internet Relay Chat (IRC), or another web interface such as Facebook bots and Twitterbots. The history of social botting can be traced back to Alan Turing in the 1950s and his vision of designing sets of instructional code that passes the Turing test. From 1964 to 1966, ELIZA, a natural language processing computer program created by Joseph Weizenbaum

operated as a simple bot and was able to perform simple, although "mechanical" interactions with users. A number of companies have taken advantage of the interactive tool Slack and added a number of bots that have been created to augment the capability of Slack.

Like all the emerging technologies we have covered in these emerging technology columns, bots has pros and cons.

On the positive side:

■ Bots are a software application that

runs automated tasks (scripts) over the Internet

■ Bots perform tasks that are both simple and structurally repetitive, at a much higher rate than would be possible for a human alone

■ Some bots are "good" – e.g. search engine spiders – while others can be used to launch malicious and harsh attacks, most notably, in political campaigns

On the down side:

■ The most widely used anti-bot technique is the use of CAPTCHA,

which is a form of Turing test used to distinguish between a human user and a less-sophisticated AI-powered bot. You've probably done this where you have to match all the pictures of bridges or all the pictures containing a flower or a sign to validate your login to a website.

■ Security can be questionable with the wrong authoring tool set

■ Interruption by the bot could be an aggravation rather than a help
And there are clearly some risks,

with some bots being particularly bad:

- Spambots that harvest email addresses from contact pages
- Downloader programs consuming bandwidth by downloading entire websites
- Website scrapers that grab the content of websites and re-use it without permission on automatically generated doorway pages
- Viruses and worms
- DDoS attacks
- Botnets, zombie computers, etc.

WHY

Some bots (and for that matter progressive web apps...which need to be covered in another article!) are replacing the apps that we have grown accustomed to on our mobile phones, tablets, computer and websites. There are many reasons why this is happening: users like messenger apps, users are getting tired of apps, bots are more human than apps, bots are simpler and faster than apps, bots are cheaper, brands want bots and frankly bots are great!

Bots: are able to take orders (1-800-Flowers, Pizza Express, Taco-Bot), provide information on request (Skyscanner), provide personalized tips (Sephora, H&M), provide Real-time updates (Bank of America), lead users through purchases (Spring), enable users to print documents (HP), and connect with real doctors (HealthTap).

Developers are finding that integrating with bots provides them new capabilities with less effort. Examples here include: Amazon Lex, Facebook Messenger bot builders, a bot connection for Office 365 Outlook. Further, you can build your own Slack bot in five minutes – see Zapier Blog.

WHAT?

Chatbot platforms vary widely. DataMonsters has a comparative ChatBot Table

(<https://bit.ly/2vcqenU>) that compares 25 mostly free Chatbot platforms. You can choose proprietary suites with bots, among them are: ChattyPeople, MEOKAY, Smooch, Botsify, Beep Boop, Chatfuel, Facebook Messenger Platform, Telegram Bots, BotKit and FlowXO.

For more information about building bots, consider the following references:

- <https://dev.botframework.com/>
- <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/289788>
- <https://zapier.com/blog/how-to-build-chat-bot/>

In addition, the following will provide more introduction into the world of bots:

- Agent-based model (for bot's theory and background)
- BotList index of bots
- Botnet
- Brilliant Bots for Slack
- Comparison of Internet Relay Chat bots
- Facebook bots
- IRC bot
- Social bot
- Software agent
- Spambot
- Twitterbot
- UBot Studio
- Votebots
- Wikipedia:bots

HOW?

So how do the bots approach work? Explaining bots is a lot like explaining apps. "There's an app for that," could easily become "there's a bot for that." Bots are used to buy up good seats for concerts, particularly by ticket brokers who resell the tickets. Bots are often used in Massively Multiplayer Online role playing games to farm for resources that would otherwise take significant time or effort to obtain; this is a concern for most online in-game economies. Bots are also used to increase views for YouTube videos to show "popularity" and improve

ranking. Bots are used to increase traffic counts on analytics reporting to extract money from advertisers, which has been shown to be as high as 54%. Bots may be used on internet forums to automatically post inflammatory or nonsensical posts to disrupt the forum and anger users.

What does this mean to the practice of accounting and to accountants? We have several working examples available:

- Hilton Connie
- Sage Pegg
- Zoho Ask Zia – will retrieve accounting data based on request
- Botkeeper – the first robotic bookkeeper using AI and ML
- SlickPie – MagicBot A.I. – automated receipt data entry tool (bot) as part of their free accounting and invoicing
- Thousands of Slack bots

phones started to arrive, bots have been around before smartphone apps and are gaining momentum with more cloud-based services guaranteeing them a bright future. While bots have been used for malicious and illegal activities, many are used for good. One of your biggest risks is that the bot development platform that you select may harvest valuable information from your client information, and most of you probably don't want that. The simple advice here is don't use that tool! However, this harvesting disclosure is often buried in a license agreement you haven't read. For bots, you need to make sure someone has read the fine print initially, and every time a license agreement is updated. If you don't think there are consequences, simply think Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. We've tried to give you enough

Here's a summary of what you need to know about bots:

Key Information	TECHNOLOGY: Bots
Why is the new technology better?	Engagement with brand and community is stronger supported by cloud resources like AI and ML
How can you do this today?	Chatfuel, FlowXO, Gubshup, Reply.ai, and wit.ai
Risks	Security backdoors, aggravation of clients
Where/when to use	When questions and answers are routine
How much?	Most tools are free or low cost, and bots are less expensive to develop than apps
When expected in mainstream	Arriving now, more sophisticated in two years
Displaced technology or service	Mobile apps and low-level customer service reps
Other resources	<i>Accounting Today, CPA Practice Advisor</i>

Implementing bots can take repetitive work and make it easier. Bots can assist with routine tasks that are part of our daily workflows.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Bots are here to stay. Just like you learned about apps when smart-

background that you can understand some of the fundamentals of the bots opportunity. How can you use bots for both business and personal productivity gains? ■

THE CLOUD:

Streamlining Workflow and Automation

By Chandra Bhansali, Ph.D.

This month's focus is on cloud accounting - what you need to know within your own firm as well as information that will be helpful to you in guiding your clients. In addition to information about best practices to make your practice more profitable, this issue includes a special cloud section starting on page 22, featuring the most notable companies offering cloud solutions to accountants.

THE ADVENT OF PCs made performing computations tremendously fast and easy. But a major limitation of the desktop was that it lacked capabilities for streamlining the primary processes involved in accounting and payroll. That limitation made offering bookkeeping and payroll services very cumbersome and inefficient. That's why most accountants today refrain from offering these services.

The cloud has finally changed that. It enables accountants to streamline the workflow involved in these services. That's why tens of thousands of accountants who did not previously offer payroll services are now offering highly profitable payroll services. Client accounting services (CAS), which involve transaction processing and bookkeeping, has become a fast-growing practice area, precisely because of the level of automation and workflow capabilities made possible by the cloud and other technologies.

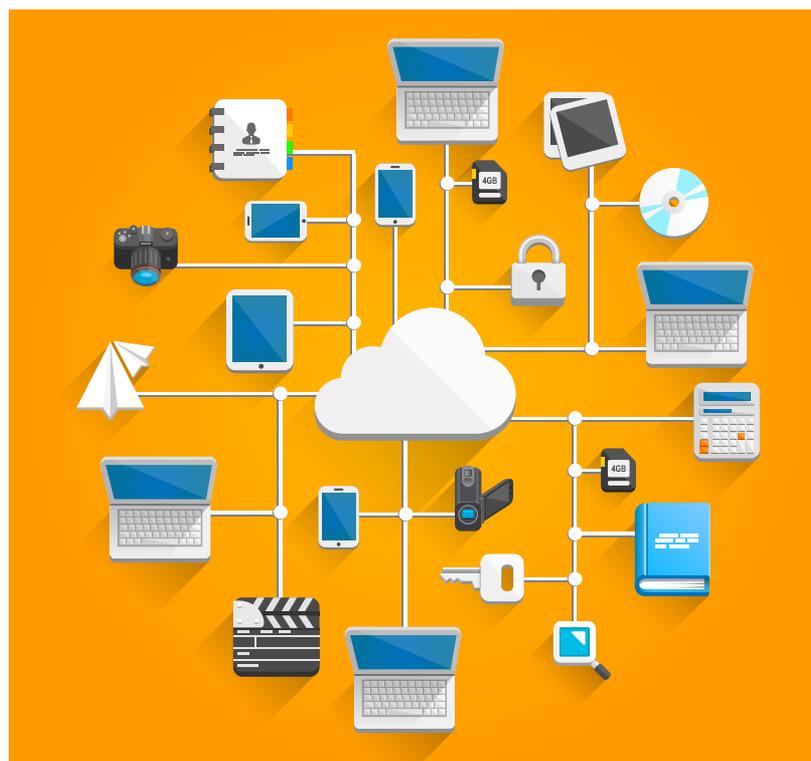
With a desktop system, bill payment and bookkeeping for a substantial number of clients is a daunting task. Getting invoices and source material, entering data, and printing and mailing checks are labor-intensive tasks. There is no easy way to have the client approve payments. Offering outsourced CFO services is virtually impossible, or its scope is very limited. But with the right cloud solutions, accountants can overcome all these problems and make offering CAS easier and much more profitable.

As an example of how accountants might leverage the cloud's capabilities, clients can just scan or take a snapshot of invoices to be paid using an app. Those images go into a document stor-

age system, where an optical character recognition (OCR) system picks up the images of those invoices. OCR is not perfect yet, but advanced cloud systems can parse important data like vendor name, invoice amount, etc. with increased accuracy. Invoices

where the system is 100% confident about accuracy would be automatically entered into the accounting system. Remaining invoices can be routed for manual confirmation. This process can reduce data entry time by 60 to 70 percent, industry-wide. Once invoices have been entered, they can be sent to a business manager to decide which invoices should be paid fully, partly, or later. Once staff gets client approval, they can pay hundreds of invoices for a number of clients with a few mouse clicks using digital checks.

Continued on page 15



You, Your Clients, And the Cloud

By Robert Israch

ANYONE STILL SKEPTICAL about the importance and viability of cloud software in business probably should consider a line of work that doesn't involve business. The promise of the cloud (and all its various nomenclatures: "SaaS," "web," etc.) is here and it's fully baked. While there may be legacy businesses that have invested in on-premise accounting or ERP software, any client serious about growth should be on the cloud, and any other would benefit from moving to it.

CLOUD ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE IS SUPERIOR

Superior? In every way. Cloud accounting software does not require major IT infrastructure or management, is automatically updated with new functionality on-the-fly, and can be accessed 24x7 from any desktop or mobile device. This makes it far superior to an accounting package on a forgotten ten-year-old Windows XP computer in the backroom.

Most SaaS offerings are highly integrated with other areas of the business, and can be built out modularly to adapt to any business model. For smaller companies, Quickbooks and FreshBooks provide affordable options that can enable basic GL processes. For growing mid-size companies, Intacct, NetSuite, and Xero provide extensive configurability and enterprise features without the "enter-price." They also maintain an ecosystem of partners that enable varied functions to retain the value from any subscription investment.

Cloud accounting software is also designed to be easier to use. Gone are the cryptic control-key combinations (e.g. those keyboard templates that indicated what each function key did). Every user interaction is limited to clicks (or taps on mobile) and typing. If you can order a product on Amazon, you can navigate the simplicity of a modern cloud accounting package.

There are improvements being made to even the most mundane areas of accounting, such as machine-learning applied to supplier invoice processing and supplier payments, to the most promising areas, such as supply chain finance and early payments. Cloud software is constantly translating best practices into software automation. New features – which are delivered at a rapid pace – are also data-driven, based on how customers use the system. On-premise solutions cannot keep up with that innovation cycle.

MYTH-BUSTING THE SECURITY QUESTION

The lingering fear of the cloud is that someone will hack into the account and steal information. While that may be a risk, there are ways to reduce exposure, such as multi-factor authentication, password expiration policies, and limiting failed login attempts. It's important to ask: just how secure is that on-premise accounting package? If it offers any password protection, is the password on a sticky note attached to the monitor or simply "123456"?

The bigger risk regardless of software is the illegitimate use from within the organization, such as committing payment fraud. For that, any determined embezzler can steal and write checks or access the bank



portal. For example, a decent cloud accounts payable solution is fully integrated to disbursement accounts, enabling role-based access to limit what can be approved, what areas are confidential, and what payments can be made. Cloud solutions can also require multiple approval rules before funds are released. Thanks to detailed audit trails of all activity, cloud accounting systems make it hard to hide anything. It becomes the system of record. And if you're managing the account for a client, you can administer and lockdown the system from anywhere.

To prevent loss of data, cloud solutions that have passed SSAE 16 SOC compliance and ISAE 3402 Type II certifications adhere to a myriad of controls and procedures around data encryption, backup, and disaster recovery. On the other hand, if your client's on-premise software is running on a system that isn't backed up, they are one hard drive failure - or spilled coffee cup - away from losing every transaction record ever.

One other peace-of-mind benefit: cloud software feature support teams. They're often more aware of issues than their customers and can proactively deal with them, sometimes

deploying a fix overnight. Software is only one piece of the offering. It's also a service that has to work like a utility.

ALL ABOUT THE VALUE

As a CPA with multiple clients, the cloud offers another unique value: the ability to work on client books from anywhere rather than going door-to-door. Some accounting solutions feature "multi-entity" support so that discrete business units (or clients) can be centrally managed. That gives you more time to expand your practice or time to deliver more valuable consultation beyond just bookkeeping.

The client gets a real-time view of where their business is at – what bills are due, what's been paid, what receipts have come in – in the most frictionless way possible. And what is the point of accounting after all? It's not for auditors. It's to understand the health of the business. Cloud accounting software is a subscription to competency. ■

Rob Israch is the Chief Marketing Officer at Tipalti, a cloud-based supplier of payment automation solutions. Previously, Rob held positions at NetSuite, Intuit QuickBooks and GE Capital.

CPA Practice Advisor Announces the “40

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

EACH YEAR, *CPA Practice Advisor* recognizes professionals who are under 40, and are emerging as the future leaders in the profession, as well as those leading the development of technology that serves the profession.

The **40 Under 40 Awards** spotlight the top practicing public accountants, educators and thought leaders who are improving their profession by visibly and incrementally changing the accounting profession through their exemplary leadership, their innovative thinking, their collaborative efforts to provide unity to the profession across the generations, and their community outreach which extends the visibility of the profession outside the workplace.

The **20 Under 40 Vendor Superstars** program similarly honors those who are leading the way in developing the constantly evolving technology and firm processes that allow practitioners to be more productive, efficient and profitable as they build practices that will endure and thrive.

“We are fortunate to be surrounded by so many young professionals who are sharing their ideas, skills, and enthusiasm with the goal of making the accounting profession a better place. Change is occurring rapidly in our profession and this year’s award winners are embracing and welcoming the changes,” said Editor-in-Chief Gail Perry, CPA. “They are strong, dedicated, spirited leaders and we are proud to recognize these professionals as the 2018 ‘40 Under 40 in the Accounting Profession’ and the ‘20 Under 40 Vendor Superstars.’”

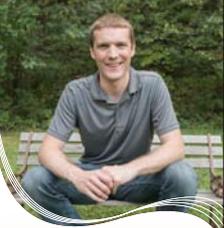
This year’s 40 Under 40 Honorees will join other young accounting leaders at the Young Leaders Accounting Think Tank in Indianapolis October 16-18 for round table discussions exploring emerging trends and issues that will affect the profession in the coming years.

Visit www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12426039 to learn more about this year’s winners, their careers, their passions, and the traits that have led us to call them the future of the profession. ■

40 UNDER 40

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<p>GREGORY K. COLE II Owner and CFO</p>  <p><i>Dixon Financial Service</i> A Division of American Tax Company VP, Cole & Cole Enterprises, Inc.</p>	<p>LINDSEY CURLEY CPA, CGMA</p>  <p>Senior Manager, Firm Services <i>AICPA</i></p>	<p>JASON DESHAYES CPA, CGMA</p>  <p>Senior Manager, Firm Services <i>AICPA</i></p>	<p>ROD DOOLEY CPA, PFS, CFF</p>  <p>Partner, <i>Dooley and Company, LLC</i></p>

Under 40” and “20 Under 40” for 2018

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<p>KENNETH J. HEALY CPA</p>  <p>Principal Diversified Financial Solutions, PC</p>	<p>CATHY ICONIS CPA</p>  <p>CEO Iconis Group / QBOchat</p>	<p>CALEB L. JENKINS EA, COP</p>  <p>Leader of Client Accounting Services RLJ Financial Services, Inc.</p>	<p>TIM JIPPING CPA, CGMA</p>  <p>Sr. Manager Plante Moran</p>	<p>ROB KESTER CPA, ABV, CFF</p>  <p>Principal Blue & Co., LLC CPAs/Advisors</p>	<p>ELIZABETH PITTELKOW KITTNER CPA, CTP, CGMA, DTM</p>  <p>Controller Litera Microsystems</p>	<p>JO ANN M. KOONTZ CPA, J.D.</p>  <p>Founder, Koontz & Associates (law firm) Founder, Koontz & Parkin CPAs, PLLC (accounting firm)</p>
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20NTY UNDER 40RTY SUPERSTARS

*Helping Shape
The Profession
From the Outside*

<p>ELIZABETH ADAMS CPA</p>  <p>Digital Strategy Leader <i>Links Advisory</i></p>	<p>KURT AVARELL J.D.</p>  <p>CEO & Founder <i>Canopy</i></p>	<p>CHRISTINE BOECKEL J.D., LL.M.</p>  <p>Editorial Director, State Tax <i>Bloomberg Tax</i></p>	<p>KEVIN BONG</p>  <p>Co-Founder and COO <i>AuditFile, Inc.</i></p>	<p>STEVEN BONG</p>  <p>CEO <i>AuditFile</i></p>	<p>MARK S. BROOKS MBA</p>  <p>Associate Director Innovation & Strategic Partnerships <i>AICPA</i></p>	<p>ARIANNA CAMPBELL LSS Black Belt</p>  <p>Director <i>Boomer Consulting, Inc.</i></p>
TIE! THESE BROTHERS COUNT AS ONE!						
<p>SARAH DOBEK</p>  <p>President and Founder <i>Inovautus Consulting</i></p>	<p>MATTHEW "DONNY" DONALDSON</p>  <p>Head of Channel Sales <i>Expensify</i></p>	<p>ARTHUR GARCIA MBA</p>  <p>Director, National Account - Americas <i>Xero</i></p>	<p>DAMIEN GREATHEAD MBA</p>  <p>VP, Global Accountants' Programs <i>Receipt Bank</i></p>	<p>ZEB HARDY</p>  <p>Director of Software Development <i>Wolters Kluwer Tax & Accounting US</i></p>	<p>WILLIAM G. HILL MBA</p>  <p>Manager, Training, Consulting & Implementation Services <i>Thomson Reuters</i></p>	<p>DUSTIN HOSTETLER Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt</p>  <p>Chief Innovation Officer, Shareholder <i>Boomer Consulting</i></p>
<p>JORDAN KLEINSMITH PMC-IV</p>  <p>Pragmatic Marketing Certified for Product Management Director of Innovation <i>Thomson Reuters</i></p>	<p>MEGAN D. LEWCZYK CPA, MAcc</p>  <p>COO <i>Yaeger CPA Review</i></p>	<p>JEREMY MILO J.D., LL.M.</p>  <p>Manager, Client Escalation & Success <i>Bloomberg Tax</i></p>	<p>ARIEGE MISHERGHI</p>  <p>Leader, Accountant Segment, Small Business Self Employed <i>Intuit QuickBooks</i></p>	<p>MELISSA A. OAKS J.D., LL.M.</p>  <p>Managing Editor <i>Thomson Reuters</i></p>	<p>DANIEL VIDAL MS</p>  <p>Head of Business Development <i>Expensify</i></p>	<p>MIKE WHITMIRE CPA (Inactive)</p>  <p>CEO & Founder <i>FloQast</i></p>

First Impressions Matter

YEARS AGO, A client's first impression of your firm likely took place in the lobby or reception area of your firm. Today, most people will visit your website long before they visit your office. Is your website up to the task?

The truth is, the average website visit is less than one minute in length, with users typically deciding in that time frame whether or not to explore the website further. In fact, the decision to stay on a website is typically decided within the first 10 seconds on the site: not a lot of time to make that good first impression. Users cite slow loading time, a confusing layout, and information overload as some of the reasons why they leave a website.

So, what can you do to increase visitor traffic and more importantly, get those visitors to stay on your website and perhaps engage with your firm?

- Create great content relevant to your firm in an easy-to-read format. If web visitors are unsure what to read first, they'll likely not read anything at all. Make it easy for them to stay.
- Change it up. Visitors want to see something new on your site. If it

looks stagnant and unchanged from year to year, there is no incentive for them to return.

- Create an offer that gets visitors engaged. A free financial newsletter, a free consultation, a free eBook to download – everyone likes free things. And the longer they remain on your site, the greater chance that they'll request further interaction, or even make an appointment.
- Offer a way for visitors to remain engaged, such as a blog or the option to follow your firm on Facebook or Twitter.
- Make sure your website is mobile friendly. People under 35 in particular are likely to access your website from their smartphone or tablet. Make

sure it's optimally designed for them as well.

If all of this sounds a little overwhelming, the good news is that there are a variety of products available that make it easy to create and manage your website. To make your life a little easier, we've reviewed several in this issue including:

- CCH Site Builder from Wolters Kluwer
- CPA Site Solutions
- Integer from Tenenz
- Web Builder CS from Thomson Reuters
- Website Relief from AccountantsWorld

While the products above offer a do-it-yourself approach, there are also custom website builders who specialize in building websites for accountants and CPAs. While not rated, nor included in the features chart below, these products are worth a second look if you want to farm out the entire website creation process. These products include:

- Build Your Firm Accounting Website Packages
- CPASites
- GetNetSet Websites for Accounting Firms

Either option offers advantages and disadvantages, so you'll have to make the decision for yourself whether you have the time and/or the manpower to create and maintain a website in-house, or whether a custom option would work best.

Today, a website is a must. Fortunately, there are products and services available to ensure that your website is engaging, informative, and professional in appearance. ■

Mary Girsch-Bock specializes in business and technology issues and is the author of several HR handbooks, training manuals, and other publications. She can be reached at mary.girschbock@cpapracticeadvisor.com

MULTIPLE TEMPLATES AVAILABLE DEFAULT PAGES INCLUDED AUTOMATED CONTENT AVAILABLE DOMAIN MANAGEMENT & BRANDED EMAILS MAKE-IN-HOUSE CHANGES ADD BANNERS, SLIDES & ANIMATION CUSTOM DESIGN OPTIONS SEO & MARKETING ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS (PORTALS, BLOGS) SOCIAL MEDIA OPTIONS SUPPORT OPTIONS

DO-IT-YOURSELF											
ACCOUNTANTSWORLD WEBSITE RELIEF	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CCH SITE BUILDER	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X*	X	X
CPA SITE SOLUTIONS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
INTEGER (FORMERLY AFSB)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X**	X	X	X
WEB BUILDER CS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ALL INCLUSIVE											
BUILD YOUR FIRM		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
CPASITES		X	X		X**	X	X	X	X	X	X
GETNETSET	X	X	X		X**	X	X	X	X	X	X

*ADDITIONAL MODULE REQUIRED
**LIMITED

ALL INCLUSIVE

Build Your Firm Accounting Website Packages

<http://websites.buildyourfirm.com>

Build Your Firm Accounting Website Packages offers a variety of web building solutions for accounting firms of any size. Build Your Firm offers three different types of website plans: the Premier Plan, the Niche Plan, and the Custom Plan, which is best suited

for mid-sized to larger firms that are looking for a completely customized website.

The Premier plan does not charge a setup fee, so monthly hosting is the only charge firms would pay. The Niche plan is for firms that specialize

in a particular niche, with setup fees starting at \$500.

The Custom plan is the most comprehensive, with a setup charge of \$1,750. Professional level hosting starts at \$83.33 per month, Platinum Level hosting costs \$99.95 per month, and Platinum Plus hosting

★ **4.5** 2018 OVERALL RATING

costs \$299.95 per month.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428968

REVIEW: WEBSITE BUILDERS

ALL INCLUSIVE

CPAsites

CPAsites.com

CPAsites is a good option for accounting firms of any size that wish to outsource website creation, design and maintenance. CPAsites offers built-from-scratch websites that are designed for accounting firms, with custom design and maintenance free, with users only

paying for a monthly subscription. There are four subscription levels to choose from, with each level offering different options depending on the level of subscription chosen.

Offering flexible subscription terms and custom designed websites, CPAsites is available in several options. A

Platinum level subscription includes all service options including a client newsletter, a client portal, SEO, financial calculators, and one hour of edits and/or updates each month, and runs \$150 per month. Gold, Silver, and Bronze subscription levels are also available, with users choosing the options they

★ **4.75** 2018 OVERALL RATING

wish to include in their subscription.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428961

GetNetSet Websites for Accounting Firms

www.getnetset.com

GetNetSet offers custom website creation specifically for accounting professionals, and is best suited for small to mid-sized firms. Those interested have their choice of three product plans: Representer, which is for very small firms and offers 7 web pages; the Retainer plan, which includes

an unlimited number of pages and a client portal; and the Recruiter plan, which offers all of the options available in the other two versions along with advanced SEO capability and expanded storage options.

All three versions offer search engine optimization (SEO) features including Custom META Keywords,

Custom URLs, Automatic 301 Redirection, and Custom Header Tags. The Retainer and Recruiter versions offer Personal SEO Analysis, Keyword Research, and Monthly Search Reports and integration with marketing applications such as Constant Contact, iContact, and MailChimp. The Recruiter version also integrates with

★ **5** 2018 OVERALL RATING

Google Analytics and Google Adwords. All versions of the product also link to popular social media networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428960

AccountantsWorld Website Relief

www.accountantsworld.com

Website Relief is part of the AccountantsWorld suite of applications designed for accounting professionals, and is a good fit for small to mid-sized accounting firms that use other AccountantsWorld applications.

Website Relief can also be used as a stand-alone website design application if desired.

Website Relief is designed to integrate with other AccountantsWorld applications including Accounting Power, Cloud Cabinet, Directory List-

ing, Practice Relief, and After-the-Fact Payroll. Sign up forms for company newsletters can also be displayed on the website, and users can easily create a blog that can be placed on the website. Currently, Website Relief is available for \$595.00 per year, and

★ **4.75** 2018 OVERALL RATING

includes a money back guarantee if users cancel within the first 30 days.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428967

DO-IT-YOURSELF

CCH Site Builder

www.cchwebsites.com

CCH Site Builder from Wolters Kluwer is best suited for small to mid-sized accounting firms that use other CCH/Wolters Kluwer applications. Site

Builder can be utilized as a stand-alone website solution if desired.

Those interested in CCH Site Builder can request a free 30-day trial of the application to try out prior to

purchasing. CCH Site Builder will provide a quote to those interested in the application. A long list of add-on options are available to purchase if desired.

★ **4.5** 2018 OVERALL RATING

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428962

CPA Site Solutions

www.cpasitesolutions.com

CPA Site Solutions is well suited for accounting firms of any size, offering scalable website design and hosting solutions. CPA Site Solutions currently

offers four plans, with complete web design included in all plans.

CPA Site Solutions four plan options are: Silver, which is priced at \$58.50 per month, Gold, which is \$79.50, Platinum,

which is \$105.50, and Diamond, which is \$139 per month. No long-term contract is required, and a 60-day free trial is available.

★ **5** 2018 OVERALL RATING

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428966

Integer Accounting and Tax Websites

www.getinteger.net

Integer from Tenenz is a good fit for small to mid-sized accounting firms that are looking for easy website creation and good marketing options. The product has expanded its offer-

ings in the past year, with three plans available: Essentials, Marketing Starter, and Marketing Pro. All plans offer more than 125 firm website templates and the ability to add an unlimited number of pages to any website.

Pricing is as follow: Essentials, which is \$32.99 a month; Marketing Starter, which is \$62.95 per month; and Marketing Pro, which is \$89.95 a month. Those interested in Integer can request a product demo by signing up

★ **4.5** 2018 OVERALL RATING

on the Integer website.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428973

Web Builder CS

<http://cs.thomsonreuters.com/web-builder>

Web Builder CS is a good fit for firms of any size that use Thomson Reuters/CS Professional Suite applications, though the product can also be used as a stand-alone web building tool if desired.

Web Builder CS is offered with both standard and enhanced template

options as well as a custom design option. Standard template design is available at no cost, and is included in the \$70.00 monthly subscription fee. The system integrates with Google Analytics, blogs, social media, portals and online payment acceptance systems.

Additional options available include an enhanced template design, which runs \$475, custom design, which is \$1,500, and custom design with animation, which is \$2,500. Custom logo design is also available for \$825, and domain registration costs \$35 per year.

A free 30-day trial is available for those that wish interested in trying out

★ **4.75** 2018 OVERALL RATING

Web Builder CS prior to purchasing.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428964

Continued from page 8



THE CLOUD:

Streamlining Workflow and Automation

This eliminates the laborious task of printing and mailing invoices. Systems that provide dashboards can also give visual insight into the stages of all of the clients' invoices. This streamlines the workflow and makes it easy to manage even a substantial CAS practice.

The cloud has transformed accounting by streamlining workflow and automating tasks at unprecedented levels. The cloud enables us to achieve similar levels of productivity gains in payroll processing, turning it into a highly profitable service.

When payroll is processed on a desktop system, clients fill in the time sheets and typically fax them to the accounting firm. Someone at the accounting firm enters that data into the payroll system, which calculates all tax liabilities. A third-party system is typically used for direct deposit, so

the staff has to initiate that process. The frequency of tax payments is different for different clients. In fact, the tax payment frequency for the same client could be different for federal, state and local taxes. If the firm has, for example, 50 clients, then keeping track of that and initiating tax payments can become a nightmare.

It also becomes highly stressful as the penalties for missing a tax payment could be very steep. Printing and mailing of paychecks, payroll reports, W-2's and 1099's is a labor-intensive task. All that made offering payroll processing an "all pain, little gain" in the desktop era.

The cloud has also completely transformed payroll processing. Advanced professional cloud-based payroll systems automate and simplify most of the processes.

For example, instead of clients

faxing time sheets, the system generates a customized Excel spreadsheet with employee names. Employer staff completes the spreadsheet, and that data goes directly into the payroll system. Another option is to give client access to the system to enter data. In both cases, data entry is completely eliminated in the office. Once the data is in the system and approved by either the accounting firm or the employer, with one click of a mouse the direct deposit, all tax deposits, and e-filing of the tax forms are automatically scheduled by the system. Accountants never have to worry about any of that. They may even place paychecks and payroll reports into a client portal, from which a client can download and print those in their office, thus eliminating any printing and mailing of paychecks and reports in the office. Employees can also access their pay stubs at any

time from their employee portals.

Cloud computing enables the execution of processes that involve different systems located at different locations. The cloud system can seamlessly interact with accountants' clients, all different banks, and federal, state and local agencies. This was simply not possible with the desktop. This capability has transformed payroll processing and turned the tables in accountants' favor.

The benefits of the cloud are numerous, but automation and streamlined workflow are two of the most important for accounting firms. It is essential for professional accountants to make the most of these capabilities to boost their practices.

Dr. Chandra Bhansali is the co-founder and CEO of AccountantsWorld.



From Paper to Portals

THERE ARE FEW industries as paper-driven as accounting. W-2s, 1099s, bank statements, and other tax related documents all start out as paper documents. The ability to import some of these items electronically has helped reduce paper loads, but the biggest impact to accountants and CPAs has been the advent of the portal.

Designed to simplify the sharing of documents between accounting firms and their clients, portals can offer a variety of features and functions including document storage, e-signature capability, as well as most importantly, the ability for clients to easily upload relevant documents directly to the portal. This allows staff at the firm to easily access them.

In turn, accountants can then share completed tax returns safely and securely with their clients, with clients able in many cases to electronically sign the completed documents and return them to their CPA, all through the portal. Portals also allow firms to share larger files or confidential emails and other correspondence securely, without the need for further encryption.

Portals also work to increase office productivity, eliminating the need to copy and file mounds of client paperwork, while eliminating the issue of lost or misplaced documents and worse, the time-consuming process of trying to locate those documents.

Portals also make it much easier on your clients. No longer do they need to schedule an appointment to come into the office to sign completed tax returns and other documents. Instead, they are able to access the documents at their leisure, sign them electronically, and return them to your office, without the need to travel in order to do so.

In this issue, we reviewed several client portals, with many of these portals designed specifically for the needs of accounting professionals.

The products reviewed in this month's issue are:

- AccountantsWorld Cloud Cabinet Client Portals
- CCH Axxess Portal
- Citrix Share File
- SmartVault
- Thomson Reuters NetClient CS

A features chart is also included in the review which displays some of the more important features typically found in a portal.

It may be helpful to decide exactly what features you desire in a portal.



If you offer payroll services to your clients, you will want to have a portal available where clients and their employees can easily access payroll information, upload W-4s and access pay stubs.

If you prepare tax returns, you'll likely want a portal that offers bi-directional capability, so both you and your clients can upload and download documents directly from the portal. Asking and answering these questions will make it much easier to find the portal likely to work best in your firm. Conveniently, all of the products reviewed in this issue offer a free trial, making the selection process even easier.

Not just for large accounting firms,

firms of any size can use a portal to make their lives much easier, while also keeping their clients happy in the process. ■

Mary Girsch-Bock specializes in business and technology issues and is the author of several HR handbooks, training manuals, and other publications. She can be reached at mary.girschbock@cpapracticeadvisor.com



	MOBILE APPS AVAILABLE	CUSTOMIZATION/BRANDING CAPABILITY	USER INTERFACE OPTIONS	SUPPORTS LARGE FILES-10+GB	SUPPORTS MULTIPLE FILE TYPES	BI-DIRECTIONAL CAPABILITY	SECURITY AND ENCRYPTION	INTEGRATION WITH VENDOR MODULES	INTEGRATION WITH OTHER APPLICATIONS	SUPPORTS ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES	TRAINING AND SUPPORT
ACCOUNTANTSWORLD		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
CCH AXCESS PORTAL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CITRIX SHARE FILE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
NET CLIENT CS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SMARTVAULT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

CCH Access Portal

www.cchgroup.com

CCH Access Portal can be a useful addition to accounting firms of any size. The portal can be utilized as a stand-alone application or used in conjunction with other CCH Access and ProSystem fx applications for increased

functionality and integration.

CCH Access Portal can be invaluable for firms that want a secure method to exchange files with clients. CCH Access Portal also provides excellent document storage capability, allowing both firm users and clients to

easily access both current and historical documents at any time.

CCH Access Portal provides custom pricing for each accounting firm, with costs generally starting at around \$700 per year.

★ 5 2018
OVERALL
RATING

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
12428955](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428955)

Citrix ShareFile

www.sharefile.com

Citrix ShareFile is a comprehensive application designed for businesses including accounting firms of any size. Along with secure file sharing, ShareFile also offers cloud storage capability, secure email capability, and the ability to handle files of any size.

Citrix ShareFile offers four plans. The Personal plan costs \$16 per month and offers one employee account. The Team plan is \$60 per month, with five employee accounts included, along with the option to purchase more. The Business plan is \$100 per month and includes five employee accounts, and

unlimited storage, with users able to add additional accounts if necessary. There is also a Virtual Data Room which provides advanced level security and controls, and is a good option for businesses sharing sensitive data. Users can choose to sign up for a free trial of any of the plans if desired.

★ 4.75 2018
OVERALL
RATING

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
12428957](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428957)

Cloud Cabinet Client Portals

www.accountantsworld.com

Cloud Cabinet from AccountantsWorld offers complete document management capability as well as unlimited client portals. Well suited for small to mid-sized accounting firms that are using other AccountantsWorld applications, Cloud Cabinet can also be used as a stand-alone document manage-

ment and client portal solution.

The Payroll Relief portals serve as a method to provide payroll clients and their employees with access to payroll related data such as pay stubs and W2s.

Cloud Cabinet is currently priced at \$595 per year for any number of firm users. Base storage with Cloud Cabinet

is 5GB, with users able to purchase additional storage if desired.

Payroll Relief costs \$1,495 for the first year, with price-per-check or price per payroll options available as well. Both Cloud Cabinet and Payroll Relief are included in AccountantsWorld Accounting Power, which costs \$2,195 annually or \$220 per month.

★ 4.75 2018
OVERALL
RATING

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
12428958](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428958)

NetClient CS Portals

<http://cs.thomsonreuters.com>

NetClient CS Portals, part of the NetClient CS Suite from Thomson Reuters, is a good fit for accounting firms of any size that currently use other NetClient CS Suite applications. Designed to be used with other NetClient CS applications, NetClient CS Portals offers accounting firms a secure way to share

documents with their clients.

NetClient CS Portals includes up to 1,000 portals, making it easy to create a portal for all clients, if desired. The portal is customizable, so firms can brand the portal using a personalized logo and color schemes if desired. Users can also provide custom access levels, so clients that are provided payroll

or other services can access payroll and related data using the portal. The portal is accessible via a firm's website, with clients able to access the portal using the login and password information provided to them by the firm. Once they log into the portal, clients can change their password for added security.

★ 4.75 2018
OVERALL
RATING

Pricing available directly from Thomson Reuters, with all add-on modules priced separately.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
12428959](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428959)

SmartVault

www.smartvault.com

SmartVault offers online document storage, branded client portals, and secure file sharing capability. SmartVault is best suited for small to mid-sized businesses and accounting firms that use QuickBooks or Quick-

Books Online, Xero, or Intuit Lacerte applications.

SmartVault offers a free 30-day trial prior to purchasing, with users able to sign up for the free trial from the SmartVault website. SmartVault's versions for firms include the Tax Prep

Only version at \$30 per user per month, or Accounting Pro for full service firms, for \$40 per user per month, which also includes 500 GB of storage and unlimited guests. For larger firms, an Enterprise Plan is available, with pricing available upon request.

★ 5 2018
OVERALL
RATING

Read the full review
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House and Home

EVERYBODY'S GOT TO live somewhere, and once there, we've got all kinds of issues to deal with including security, renovation, repairs, maintenance, design, and so on. If you haven't settled yet, then there's the additional issue of home searching. No matter what you need home-wise, we've got you covered with a collection of apps! We surveyed members of the *CPA Practice Advisor* community to find out what home-related apps they like to use, and here's what we discovered.

Jeffrey Moskowitz, CPA, partner at CohnReznick, says **Houzz** is, "a great house & home app! This app allows you to view various ideas within one's home in terms of layout, design and much more. It is very easy to use and a great tool for those who are looking to renovate within their home."

Another vote for Houzz comes from **Richard Roppa-Roberts**, owner of Quasar Cowboy Consulting. "For home design and ideas, I use **Houzz**. It covers it all - great ideas for whatever theme or design style you love, you can view your rooms in 3D with pictures of actual furniture or design ideas, and you can get sucked into all the design ideas very quickly. The first time I picked up the app, I used it for six straight hours ignoring all other sensory input around me. Five stars from me for sure."

Christine Boeckel, deputy editorial director, state tax at Bloomberg Tax, told us, "For interior design and decoration I peruse the **HGTV** suite (TV,

mobile site, app). I love the before and after shots for renovations and tips for transitioning your space between different seasons. For home repairs and maintenance I do my shopping via the websites for **Home Depot** and **Lowe's**, and occasionally **Amazon.com** if needed for a rare item. In terms of pulling off a DIY project, I have found in more than a couple instances it has been most helpful to go directly to the manufacturers' website to review their instructional videos."

"My family got a **Nest** thermostat this year - I love the Nest app!," said **Blake Oliver**, senior product marketing manager at FloQast. "One of the best features is that it automatically adjusts to save energy based on your location. That means my wife and I don't have to remember to change the temperature when we leave the house. It's a small thing that has turned into a big convenience and saves us money, too."

Kacee Johnson, founder/CEO of Blue Ocean Principles, agrees. "I use **Nest** for home security. I like not only the video feature but the ability to talk through the camera at visitors to my door (or my dogs that are on the couch!)"

Mark Brooks, associate director of innovation & strategic partnerships at the AICPA, recommends **Thumbtack**. "It's a great app to help you find and get bids from service providers like plumbers, cleaners, landscapers, etc."

Randy Johnston, executive vice president and owner at K2 Enterprises and CEO of Network Management Group, Inc., introduced us to **ColorSnap** by Sherwin Williams. "This app lets you match colors and recommends the appropriate paint color in the Sherwin Williams line." Johnston joined the others who recommend Houzz. "It's augmented reality house design ideas. This app lets you see the furniture you intend to buy and place in your living spaces."

Looking for new digs? **Damien Greathead**, vice president of business development, North American, for Receipt Bank, shared his recommendation for **RadPad**. "When I first moved to DC I would explore the neighborhoods to find which ones I liked, would then open the app to see rental availability and prices in the area."

Whether you're renting or buying, be sure to take a look at **Zillow**. "I'm a huge Zillow fan," said **Melisa Galasso**, owner of Galasso Learning Solutions. "I sometimes even use it when on vacation to get pricing estimates for homes in the area!"

"Apartment searching in San Francisco can drive a person crazy, so when I recently moved I used **PadMapper** to find a place in the neighborhoods I liked. It made it incredibly simple to find the place that I ultimately picked out and moved into!" said **Matt Donaldson**, head of channel sales for Expensify.

Sandra Wiley, president of Boomer Consulting, uses **Wayfair** - "It's the best place ever to order items for the home," and **Room Planner** - "It helps me see new ways to move things around without actually moving until I'm ready."

Jackie Meyer, owner, Meyer Tax Consulting, recommends **Modsy** interior design. "Snap some pics, take some measurements, then they do the rest to give you several fab chic designs of your room at only a few hundred versus thousands." ■



TAX REFORM *and How it Affects You and Your Clients*

WHEN THE TAX Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) was signed into law in December 2017, the tax and accounting community was abuzz with speculation on how the new law would impact not only tax year 2018, but tax practices in general. Today, we're almost one year into discussing and analyzing the new law and discovering how it impacts your practice and how you can best advise your clients.

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Let's start with tax preparation – and that's where Intuit ProConnect, first and foremost, has your back, specifically with its Tax Reform Resource Center, a single source for tools, training and analysis to help you and your clients prepare for changes resulting from the new tax bill.

Intuit teams are also working directly with the IRS and U.S. Treasury; all products will be up to date for next tax season, so you can file with complete confidence with Intuit ProConnect Tax Online, Lacerte® and ProSeries®. Intuit ProConnect will also offer extended Care hours in season, so you get the answers you need, and credentialed CPAs and EAs on staff are building tools into tax year 2018 products to help you and your clients clearly understand the impacts of tax reform.

WHY TAX REFORM COULD BE A BOON FOR YOUR PRACTICE

Knowing as much as you can about tax reform is good for two reasons. First, you can build on the relationships you have with your clients (and prospects) by educating them about their tax filings and situations. Second, you can add to your own bottom line; there are many provisions in the tax bill that could serve as additional focuses for your practice. The largest

tax reform in 30 years presents a great opportunity to transform your practice and increase your value as a trusted advisor to your clients — by shifting to become a proactive tax planner rather than a reactive tax compliance practitioner.

MOST IMPORTANT CHANGES FOR TAX YEAR 2018 ... AND BEYOND

There are more fine points in the tax bill than can be included in this article; however, here are some of the more important changes or modifications you'll want to know about.

WHAT ARE NEW BIG BENEFITS TO THE TAX CODE?

The tax reform bill lowers tax rates for many families and eases the impact of the alternative minimum tax. For most taxpayers, the biggest changes revolve around deductions; the standard deduction is nearly doubled. For a married couple filing jointly, for example, the standard deduction will jump from \$12,700 to \$24,000.

Additionally, the child tax credit is expanded significantly, doubling from \$1,000 to \$2,000, and the first \$1,400 is refundable, meaning a taxpayer could see a refund even when a tax liability does not exist. The bill also creates a \$500 credit for other qualifying dependents besides a taxpayer's own kids.

The bill also eliminates the penalty for not having health insurance beginning in 2019 and on your clients' 2019 tax return filed in 2020. This is often referred to as the individual mandate.

On the corporate side, the big news is the creation of a single tax rate of 21 percent, replacing the previous tiered rate structure that had a top rate of 35 percent. The bill also eliminates the corporate alternative minimum tax. In addition, pass-through entities such as sole proprietorships (self-employed, contractors, freelancers and business of one), S corporations or partnerships that enable their recipients to declare their incomes on their personal returns will gain a new 20 percent deduction on their Qualified Business Income. There are limits to this benefit, and the IRS will be providing additional guidance on how the new rules will work.

Finally, the bill raises the maximum Section 179 expense that can be deducted from the current \$510,000 to \$1,000,000 and increases bonus depreciation from 50% to 100%, which allows small businesses to deduct the full purchase price of qualifying equipment and/or software purchased or financed during the tax year.

REDUCED OR ELIMINATED PROVISIONS

Another big change is the elimination of the personal and dependent exemption – a \$4,050 per person tax break in 2017 that could especially affect larger families. A number of itemized deductions are either reduced or eliminated entirely.

In addition, the new bill limits the amount of state and local property, income, and sales taxes that can be deducted to \$10,000. In the past,

these taxes have generally been fully tax deductible – something that may affect people living in high-tax states. Also, the deductible interest from **new** mortgages is limited to home mortgages of up to \$750,000 – down from \$1,000,000 under current law. There will be no change for homeowners with existing mortgages that were taken out to buy a home.

For businesses, the bill limits the business interest deduction to 30 percent of income (excluding depreciation), however, small businesses with gross receipts averaging under \$25 million for the prior three years are exempt from the business interest limit.

TAX REFORM BOOT CAMP VIRTUAL CONFERENCE: OCT. 18, 2018

Learn more about how tax reform impacts your practice – from your home or office – for free. Register (<https://intuit.me/2xBX5Fp>) to join the Intuit ProConnect Tax Online team and other tax experts to find out how to take your business to the next level – from tax preparation to proactive tax strategy and client financial advisement.

In addition to the Boot Camp, plan to visit the Intuit exhibit booths at QuickBooks Connect 2018 (www.quickbooksconnect.com), Nov. 5-7, 2018; meet product managers and specialists for Intuit ProConnect Tax Online, Lacerte, ProSeries and QuickBooks® Online to learn more about how you and your clients can win with Tax Reform.

Got questions? Contact us online at <https://proconnect.intuit.com> for more information. ■

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The Supremes, Wayfair, and Taxes: What Startups Need to Know

By Anjum Tunuli

ON JUNE 21, 2018 the Supreme Court ruled that South Dakota can tax out-of-state companies for internet sales made to its residents. The judgment in *South Dakota v. Wayfair, Inc., Overstock.com, and Newegg Inc.* is a major change from the state of play for the past two and a half decades.

WHAT IS SOUTH DAKOTA VERSUS WAYFAIR ABOUT?

In a nutshell, it's about revenue, specifically all the sales tax revenue South Dakota was missing out on from internet sales. The first time the Supreme Court took this issue on, in the 1992 case of *North Dakota versus Quill Corp.*, the Court ruled that states could only require sellers to pay sales

taxes if the companies were based in their state or maintained a "physical-presence" — think property, people, or some other physical connection — there. This rule allowed out-of-state companies selling online to avoid paying state sales taxes, benefitting their cash flow and giving them a pricing advantage over in-state companies that did have to pay sales taxes.

Last year, South Dakota sued Wayfair, Overstock, and Newegg to get

them to pay taxes on sales they make to customers in the state. It argued that though none of the companies are based in South Dakota, the thing that should really matter is the amount of sales they make to in-state customers. South Dakota claimed that by not paying the state's sales taxes, the companies hurt its bottom line and "brick-and-mortar retailers."

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Many states are likely to move quickly to impose taxes (some already have). But it could take time for things to play out. For the moment, the Supreme Court's decision applies only to South Dakota's tax on internet retailers. And South Dakota's law applies only to retailers generating at least \$100,000 in annual sales or 200 transactions a year in the state. Still, based on this major change, we expect several things to happen.

THREE IMPLICATIONS FOR STARTUPS AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Most states will follow South Dakota's lead, drafting laws to impose taxes on remote/online retailers. Laws that are too broad will almost certainly be challenged in court, and some will

probably get shot down. In general, expect the long arm of the taxman to stretch further, with states (and localities) looking to increase their tax revenue by using South Dakota's law as a model. We expect:

- Compliance costs to increase for small businesses and startups
- Companies to need help planning for taxes and navigating tax compliance and reporting requirements in multiple jurisdictions
- Competitive dynamics could shift as out-of-state sellers lose an advantage over in-state ones

HOW TO GET READY

Now that you know about the changes, getting systems in place to make sure you are set to meet your reporting and payment obligations, manage cash flow, and avoid penalties for non-compliance is key. If you're not already working with an outsourced CFO, building a relationship with a firm that has worked with businesses similar to yours can offer so much more than just blocking and tackling. Whether it's managing your tax compliance, helping develop your financial infrastructure, or working with you on strategic planning, an outsourced CFO can provide the necessary expertise to help you get a handle on the essentials and set you up for success. ■

Anjum Tunuli is Early Growth Financial Services' (EGFS) Chief Tax Officer. An accomplished tax executive, with over fifteen years of experience, he works with successful small to mid-sized companies and their owners. www.earlygrowthfinancialservices.com



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3 Questions to Ask When Deciding Which 'Cloud' is Right for Your Firm

There are a number of different types of clouds, but the three most common for accounting firms include Public, Private and Hybrid solutions. All cloud deployment models offer benefits, so you'll need to determine which cloud matches the needs of your firm best.

First, let's evaluate the different types of clouds.

- **PUBLIC:** A public cloud is a standard cloud computing model in which a service provider makes resources, such as applications and storage, available to the general public over the internet. Public cloud services typically allow a large number of users from many different firms to share the same infrastructure.
- **PRIVATE:** A private cloud is a type of cloud computing that delivers the cloud advantages including scalability and self-service, but through a proprietary architecture. A private cloud is dedicated to a single organization.
- **HYBRID:** A hybrid cloud environment uses a mix of on-premises, private cloud and public cloud services with orchestration between two platforms.

In order to help you determine which cloud is right for your firm, here is a list of questions your firm can ask itself as you migrate to the cloud:

1. HOW MANY OFFICES DO WE HAVE? – Maybe your firm has just

one office – That's OK! Or, maybe your firm is ready to expand into multiple locations – Go you! One thing is certain, however, in order to meet IT Disaster Recovery requirements for Payment Care Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS), it's imperative to store back-ups in a secure, preferably off-site, location. On the contrary, your firm may want to downsize and remove all IT from in-house, potentially limiting the number of offices, or floors, your firm has. In either case, a private cloud or hybrid cloud may be best for your firm in this situation.

2. HOW OLD IS OUR SERVER INFRASTRUCTURE? – “As the workload on servers continue to increase,

replacing ageing hardware becomes a commercial imperative,” David Howell wrote in a Tech Radar article. “IT managers can expect servers that are more than five years-old to have about a third more downtime than new hardware.” Outdated infrastructure can cost your firm several days of downtime each year, which is why Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) have become increasingly more popular amongst firms of all sizes. On the other hand, upgrading and purchasing new server infrastructure every five years can be a burden on your wallet. A private cloud or a hybrid cloud could save your firm from hav-

ing to spend thousands of dollars on new infrastructure and several days a year from dreaded downtime.

3. DO EMPLOYEES WORK OUTSIDE OF THE OFFICE? – Ac-

ording to the Latest Telecommuting Statistics, regular work-at-home has grown by 115 percent since 2005 and 3.7 million employees now work from home at least half the time. Desktop as a Service (DaaS) offers serious benefits to a mobile attorney or accountant. A public, private or hybrid cloud are all solid candidates for working remotely.

To learn more about which cloud is right for you, visit www.abacusnext.com.

ALESSANDRA LEZAMA

Building technology companies is in Alessandra's DNA, as she has led transformational changes as CEO of three previous companies. Since joining Abacus in 2013, she has propelled the business from a \$5 million on-prem legal case management software offering to the fully integrated technology suite it is today. Alessandra has driven the company through this transformative shift at an industry-focused pace, taking advantage of the company's 30-plus years of experience and evolving its products into a mature, robust portfolio.



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Q: How can accountants manage their practices more efficiently in the cloud?

A. For most accountants, there are a ton of moving pieces – with different clients, staffers, deadlines and deliverables, it can be difficult to ensure everything stays on track and nothing falls through the cracks. Leveraging cloud technologies can greatly help accountants manage their practice more efficiently and eliminate the fear of missed deadlines or forgotten deliverables. Foremost, it allows accountants to check in on project status from anywhere – whether a laptop in the office, a tablet while running errands, or a smartphone at a child's soccer game. Working in the cloud means accountants have online access to all the tools they need to manage their firm's and clients' work, saving time and becoming more efficient along the way.

Q: How can accounting professionals make the transition to the cloud and what advice would you give those making the transition?

A. Making the transition to the cloud and embracing new technology innovations is crucial to becoming a true Firm of the Future. These firms are bold, innovative and recognize that embracing technologies will drive them to succeed and grow. Increasingly, small businesses are expecting that their accounting professionals will be online (80% of SMBs expect to be using online accounting software by 2020), and while the transition can be daunting, it's necessary. My number one piece of advice to accountants making the move is to not be intimidated. Understand that moving to the cloud is not going to happen overnight. It is a gradual process that will take some time. Start by understanding the strengths of your firm, the goals of your clients, and setting clear expectations and guidelines about the process. This will make the transition much smoother for all parties.

Q: I hear a lot about Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence as it relates to the cloud. How can these technologies help accountants better serve clients?

A. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) aren't new technologies. Both are embedded into our daily lives already through tools

like auto correct on our mobile phone and email spam filters. Within the accounting industry, AI and ML are having a significant impact. AI and ML technologies can automate certain processes or tasks and eliminate low value work (i.e. data entry), which increases productivity and efficiencies that give accountants more time to provide clients with higher value, strategic insights and counsel.

What's crucial to note, however, is while AI and ML are making significant strides, the human element remains vital. While ML and AI can classify data, recognize images or patterns and predict a likely result, humans are still required to explain what these insights mean and help their clients take action in order to prosper and grow.

Q: There's a lot of information about apps. What are the benefits of using cloud-based apps and how can I choose what is right for my clients?

A. According to our research, 68 percent of small businesses use an average of four apps to help manage their business. Apps can help small businesses and accountants customize and personalize QuickBooks for each individual small business client, streamlining data and expanding capabilities, doing everything from helping clients manage inventory, to tracking their employees' time to expense management.

There are now 590 published apps specifically designed to work with QuickBooks Online in the QuickBooks Apps Store (www.apps.com). The Apps tab within QuickBooks Online Accountant (QBOA) is a wonderful tool that empowers accountants to easily identify relevant apps for their clients and add them directly to their clients' QuickBooks Online, as well as their own firm. Recently, the Apps tab was refreshed for accountants, making it even easier for them to find the best "right-for-me" apps for their firms and clients. In addition to smaller apps, Intuit also has an open platform approach and connects with mega platforms used by many small businesses including Amazon, PayPal, Square and ADP.

Q: How can accountants use cloud technology to take advantage of global market opportunities?

A. We know that accounting Firms of the Future are no longer competing for clients locally,

but globally, and with 89 percent of small businesses being more successful when they work with an accountant, making it easier for small businesses to find an accountant is a priority.

This is why Intuit has the Find-a-ProAdvisor website, where more than 1M small businesses look for an accountant each year. The marketplace, available to small businesses both directly within QuickBooks Online and through the standalone Find-a-ProAdvisor global websites, better presents the information small businesses most want to see, in a mobile-responsive design, that allows them to find their perfect QuickBooks ProAdvisor match, anytime and anywhere. All QuickBooks ProAdvisors with an active QuickBooks Certification are eligible for a free listing on the Find-a-ProAdvisor marketplace. Their profile pages include content fields such as social page links, years in business, and languages spoken, allowing them to market themselves to prospective clients.

Q: Where can I get more information on how I can better serve my clients in the cloud with QuickBooks Online Accountant?

A. Visit <https://quickbooks.intuit.com/accountants/> for more information.

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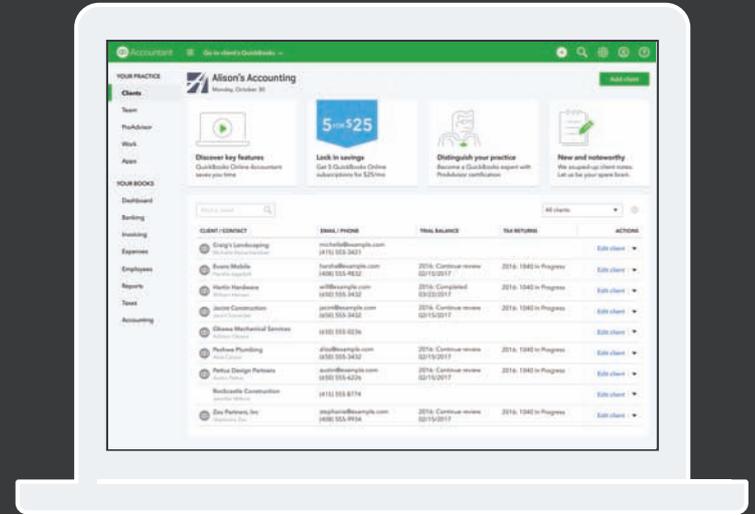
Ariège Misherghi leads the Accountant Segment within Intuit's Small Business Self-Employed Group. Misherghi is responsible for driving the overall business strategy, development and delivery of Intuit's professional accounting products and services. She is focused on helping accountants around the world grow, better manage their practices and transition into the role of strategic advisor for their clients. Her team is responsible for QuickBooks Online Accountant (QBOA) and the QuickBooks ProAdvisor Program.

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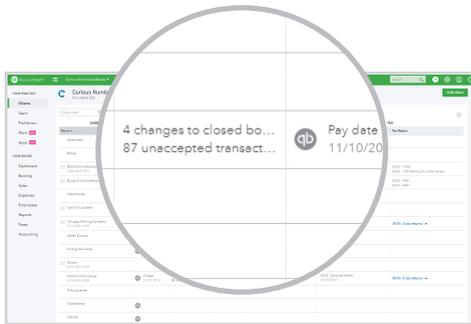
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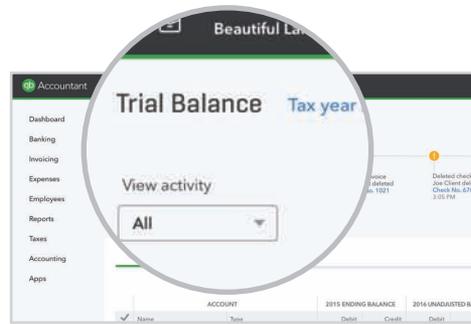
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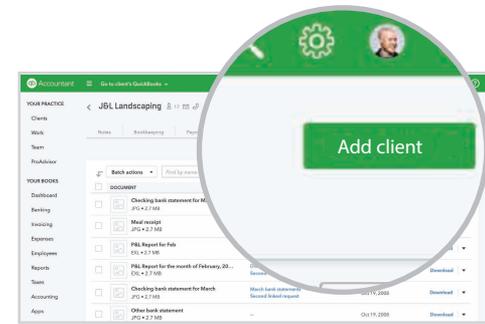
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THE POWER OF HUMAN IN ACCOUNTING:

Why The Accounting Industry Will Always Be Powered By People

At Xero, we don't believe that AI and machine learning will ever replace the need for an accountant.

We are at an inflection point – advances in tech are profoundly altering the economic and social order. This presents both positive opportunities and potential pitfalls. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning systems are revolutionizing the way we work – they're already saving us valuable hours in our day by automating routine and repetitive tasks.

It's no secret, however, that accounting is frequently held up as one of the industries most likely to be negatively impacted by AI and automation. A recent McKinsey study suggested that by 2030, as many as 800 million jobs could be lost worldwide to automation, and large amounts of labor could be displaced in accounting, and back-office transaction processing.

At this critical juncture, technology companies have a distinct responsibility to build platforms that are a force for good. At Xero, we don't believe that AI and machine learning will ever replace the need for an accountant. In fact, we are using advances in AI and machine learning to amplify the impact accountants can have.

It's because we believe in the power of human technology. That means taking advantage of the latest advances in technology, while ensuring the priority is on enabling the unique things that only human interactions can deliver.

Our 'human technology' approach will always prioritize the role accountants play as the most trusted advisor to small businesses. It's because we know that accountants are crucial to the success of small businesses and our economy.

Only half of U.S. small businesses survive past year five. Our internal data shows that 85% of small businesses using Xero make it past the five-year mark, and those who are connected to an account

grow net profit 23% faster. More than a decade ago, Xero was founded because we saw a better way for accountants, bookkeepers and small business owners to collaborate – on one shared general ledger in the cloud. Today, we are using technology like AI and machine learning to build a platform that enables accountants to work even more closely with their small business clients – further increasing their odds of success.



xero.com

The journey to taking your practice online is like a marathon. Like any marathon, with the right training and the right support, you can make it to the finish line. Rather than building one-size-fits-all software for your practice and treating you like just another number, Xero's human technology approach means everything we build is designed to adapt to your needs wherever you are on the journey – and we'll be there at every step along the way. We are expanding our partnership support, by accelerating more people with technical and relationship skills into local communities, to help you develop a long-term plan and succeed.

It's people that power Xero. When you join Xero, you become part of a community of accountants and bookkeepers who want to do business more beautifully. By combining the power of our products, platform and people – we're setting you up for success today and into the future.

BEN RICHMOND

Xero, VP Business Growth - Americas

Ben is a Chartered Accountant who started his career in New Zealand in a large regional accounting practice. Following this, he worked for New Zealand's largest telecommunications company, before joining Xero in 2013. Today, he sits on Xero's Americas leadership team – leading all of Xero's growth channels based out of Colorado.

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– James
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How to Attract – and Keep – Top Performers in Accounting

IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE hiring market, many public accounting firms are finding it harder than ever to attract and retain high-performing professionals. Is it because they're not paying enough? Not entirely. Of course employees want to be fairly compensated for their skills and expertise, but they're also after the things that money can't buy, according to a recent Accountemps survey. These are the top three factors — besides salary — workers tend to look for in a job offer:

- **Vacation time** — Professionals surveyed most commonly put a high value on paid time off (PTO). Accountants understand the importance of a balanced life. Occasionally unplugging from work is essential for health, happiness and long-term productivity.
- **Organizational culture — Coming in a close second** was corporate culture. Professionals want to be part of a firm with values similar to their own. Top performers understand that even if a job pays well, they'll feel less than fulfilled if they aren't in sync with their boss and colleagues.
- **Career advancement potential** — Respondents also prioritized their professional future. Top performers consider what positions they could aspire to, as well as whether an employer is likely to offer the development and training to get them there.

TIPS FOR ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TOP ACCOUNTING TALENT

High demand for specialized skills puts experienced accountants in the driver's seat. Your short-listed candidates are scrutinizing *everything* — not only the starting salary, benefits and bonus structure, but also the perks and their future quality of life. And remember, you're likely not the

only one trying to land that amazing accountant, auditor or analyst.

So how can you recruit the workers you need and keep them happy in their jobs? Here are five tips:

1. Offer competitive wages. While salary isn't the only consideration for job seekers, low pay can be seen as a warning to candidates your firm doesn't value its employees. Use a trusted resource, like the 2019 Robert Half Salary Guide for Accounting and Finance Professionals, to make sure your offer meets or — better yet — exceeds industry standards. But don't stop there. Benchmark salaries every year so that top performers' compensation remains competitive.

2. Get creative with perks. The majority of firms offer similar benefits packages. Differentiate what you provide with the little extras workers crave. For example, go all out to thank your team after tax season. Make summer schedules more relaxed and casual. Throw an epic holiday party, including surprise gifts. Be sure to mention these enticing perks during the recruitment process and deliver updates on them to current staff.

3. Negotiate non-wage benefits. Not every accounting firm can compete with the largest companies when it comes to compensation. But

where smaller employers can come out ahead is workplace flexibility. Top performers may be persuaded to sign on if you offer additional PTO, telecommuting days, a compressed workweek or Friday afternoons off during non-peak months.

4. Shape your organizational culture. To keep turnover low, you may need to take a more active

role to a vibrant work environment.

5. Discuss career paths. Don't leave top performers in the dark about their future with the firm. This may mean improving your communication with staff. Hold regular discussions about work-related goals, professional development and technical training. Give workers opportunities to take on different challenges and accept new



role in monitoring and nurturing your corporate culture. A supportive work environment tells job seekers and employees alike that you respect everybody. Keep your team motivated with meaningful work, and make sure they understand how they contribute to the company's mission. Team-building exercises, staff outings and mentoring programs help colleagues build positive relationships and contrib-

responsibilities. And when the time is right, promote them to the next rung on the career ladder.

It's difficult enough to hire and retain top talent in times of extremely low unemployment. Don't make your job harder than it has to be. When you offer today's workers what they want, you reap the rewards of easier recruitment and a lower turnover rate. ■

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BUILDING A WORLD CLASS MARKETING CULTURE PART 3:

Rhythm and Habits

By Kristy Short, Ed.D

“EIGHTY PERCENT OF life is just showing up.” That Woody Allen quote may be an oversimplification, but it’s also insightful. Like anything in life, if you want to get traction with marketing, you need to develop habits of consistency. A big part of marketing is just being there—being visible and keeping a steady presence with your audience.

On the tax side of business, the purchase cycle is regular and seasonal, which makes the marketing rhythm easy to figure out. But when it comes to attracting weekly and monthly clients, the purchase cycle is irregular. It depends on complex variables, and once you sign an engagement, it could be for a lifetime. In other words, selling your business services isn’t like selling breakfast cereal and oil changes on a clear, regular purchase cycle.

The path to your new client relationships is built over time. It’s based on your communication and your ability to establish beliefs of trust, dependability and business acumen—an endeavor that calls for frequent and consistent content marketing.

As we’ve discussed in the past, content marketing is offering useful information to people, dressed up in your brand. As best-selling author and social media guru Jay Baer says, “It’s marketing so useful, people would actually pay a few bucks for it.”

Good content is the fuel for keeping your social media channels humming on a steady basis with helpful, shareable information. And

you can extend content marketing into other creative channels as well, such as educational seminars.

The cumulative effect is to establish your brand as a voice of credibility and earn valuable share of mind among people who may find themselves in need of services, if not tomorrow, perhaps a couple of years down the road. Like Woody Allen said, it’s mostly about showing up. Keeping up a presence on a reasonably consistent basis is important. You may not see immediate gratification or even be able to directly tie your content publication to specific new business, but it’s an important part of the overall marketing mix. It’s your voice in the big, wide world.

So what do you say with that voice and how often?

How do you come up with good content presented in a good cadence? Here are a few tips:

- **Daily or semi-weekly:** Try short, “snackable” social media posts on a daily basis or twice weekly. These can be tweets or status updates sharing relevant news stories from around the web or simply documenting interesting things happening around the office. Use



these touchpoints to show the human side of your firm and give them a sense of your culture. This can help when it comes to recruiting good staff, too!

- **Monthly:** Got a blog? A monthly rhythm is a good pace for a firm partner or leader to sound off on a relevant topic and offer good, practical advice for readers.
- **Quarterly or Biannually:** Take your content offline and go face-to-face with your audience. Design and host an educational seminar for small businesses about a timely aspect of financial strategy or management. You can double-up your efforts by live streaming your event on social media. And, of course, you should use your social channels to promote the event in advance, as well.
- **Seasonally:** Ingrain your brand in the life of the community with sponsorships, whether it’s the arts, athletics, education, charity... put your money where your heart is and make your brand’s voice a part it. Get your staff involved with

volunteer support, and you’ll have more firm activity to document on social media, as well. Ask everyone on your team to make suggestions on what causes to adopt, and make it an organic part of your firm culture.

These are a few good, basic habits you can adopt to keep your brand’s voice heard during the long, complex process of earning a new business client. Just remember that it’s not about instant gratification—the seeds you plant today may take a few years to germinate. Keep them watered and nurtured with regular content marketing. Make these good habits central to your firm’s marketing culture to continue the journey to world-class. ■

Kristy Short, Ed.D, is Chief Communications Officer and a partner at Rootworks—the profession’s leading membership-based education organization dedicated to helping accounting professionals find a better way of run their firms. Learn more at rootworks.com.



This is part 3 of a series on firm culture. See part one at www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12421307, and part two at www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12424914.

Benefits of Using a Hosting System

I'M STILL SURPRISED when I find a software product that does not offer cloud access. Today, with remote working options more common than ever, it's imperative that employees have access to their desktop applications, no matter where they are.

The same goes for employers. Imagine being in a meeting, only to discover that you don't have access to certain documents, there is no one in the office to get them to you, and your potential client is ready to end the meeting if the documents are not produced.

That is why application hosting is so important. And while many business owners remain loyal to the on-premise product deployment option, there is no reason why that product cannot be accessed remotely, if necessary. After all, that's what hosting providers do. They provide access to desktop applications that traditionally cannot be accessed via the cloud. But instead of installing the application on your own computer, the applications are installed on the remote desktop. You are then provided with access to that desktop, which functions as if it were your own. This process eliminates the need to have costly hardware and equipment, while also ensuring that you'll be able to use the software applications you desire. It's important to note that not every application can be hosted on the cloud, but the majority can.

Using a hosting provider offers a lot of benefits, including the following:

- Reduction in necessary IT staff and costly hardware applications. The product is installed on the remote desktop, so any support issues would be handled either by the software vendor or by the hosting provider.
- Anytime/anywhere access means you can access data, run reports, and look up information at all hours of the day or night.
- Reliability. While many people are happy with SaaS software delivery, hosting services go one step further, typically guaranteeing uptime percentages. In the case where the servers are down, users are typically given a credit.
- Product updates are automatic, so you'll always have access to the latest version.
- Security is top-notch, with multiple data centers typically running applications, with bank-level encryption employed for protecting data at all times.

In this issue, we reviewed five application hosting providers. The products vary in size and scope, with some products simply offering



QuickBooks Desktop hosting, while others can host multiple applications and even create a custom server for users if desired. The products reviewed include:

- Cetrom CPA Cloud
- Cloudnine Realtime
- Cloudvara
- Right Networks
- Xcentric

We have included a chart that offers a quick summary of common features found in each of the hosting applications, making it much easier to narrow down your choices. If your firm or your client is looking to access

their applications from anywhere without the responsibility of installation or maintenance, application hosting may be the perfect solution. ■

Mary Girsch-Bock specializes in business and technology issues and is the author of several HR handbooks, training manuals, and other publications.

She can be reached at mary.girschbock@cpapracticeadvisor.com



	HIGH UPTIME GUARANTEE	SECURITY OPTIONS	MULTIPLE DATA CENTERS	MOBILE CAPABILITY	MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS HOSTED	HOSTS CPA/ACCOUNTING APPLICATIONS	SUPPORTS MULTIPLE SYSTEM USERS	ADDITIONAL SERVICES OFFERED	SUPPORT OPTIONS
CETROM	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CLOUDNINE REALTIME	*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CLOUDVARA	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
RIGHT NETWORKS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
XCENTRIC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

*NOT SPECIFIED

Cetrom CPA Cloud

www.cetrom.net

Cetrom is an application hosting provider that is well suited for accounting firms, along with other types of businesses, including nonprofits and travel management businesses. Cetrom offers easy access to hosted applications from

any type of device including desktop, laptop, smart phones and tablets.

Along with standard application hosting, Cetrom also offers hosted email services that allow users to access their Outlook email from any location using the device of their choice.

Cetrom creates a custom platform for each customer, with pricing customized depending on programs hosted and other services purchased, and options to purchase services in addition to hosting, including email service, virtual remote desktop service, a file sharing

★ **5** 2018
OVERALL
RATING

option, and a hybrid cloud computing option.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428954

Cloudnine Realtime

www.cloudninerealttime.com

Acquired by AbacusNext in early 2017, Cloudnine Realtime is a scalable application that is well suited for accounting firms of any size, and is also a good solution for other types of businesses that need application hosting. Cloudnine Realtime has been the winner of The CPA Practice Advisor's Reader's Choice

Award for Outsourced Technology Services from 2012 through 2017.

The Pro edition of Cloudnine is a good fit for smaller businesses with 1-2 users, and can host 1-3 applications. The Pro Plus Plan is designed for up to 25 users and can host between 3-7 applications. The Premier Plan is for larger businesses or accounting firms

that have up to 500 users, and need 8-15 applications hosted. Very large businesses can subscribe to the Enterprise Plan, which is designed for more than 500 users and can host an unlimited number of applications. Cloudnine Realtime pricing is completely customized for each user, with interested parties able to obtain a quote from the website.

★ **5** 2018
OVERALL
RATING

There is also a free trial available that can be downloaded from the website.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428949

Cloudvara

www.Cloudvara.com

Cloudvara is well suited for accounting and legal firms, as well as other types of businesses looking for QuickBooks and other application hosting capability. Cloudvara specializes in QuickBooks hosting and is an Authorized Standard QuickBooks Host. Legal, accounting,

and tax software hosting is also available, with hosting services available world-wide.

Pricing for Cloudvara drops as the number of users and applications goes up. The Starter Cloud is designed for 1-3 users and can host up to 3 applications, and costs \$42 per user per month. Busi-

ness Cloud is designed for 4-10 system users and up to 5 applications, and costs \$38 per user per month. Finally, Professional Cloud is for more than 10 users and up to 10 applications and costs \$33 per user per month. Enterprise Cloud and Private Cloud options are also available, with pricing available directly

★ **4.5** 2018
OVERALL
RATING

from Cloudvara. A 15-day trial period of Cloudvara is available.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428946

Right Networks Hosting

www.Rightnetworks.com

Right Networks Hosting is designed for CPA firms, accounting firms, and small businesses. Specializing in QuickBooks hosting, Right Networks can host more than 150 applications on the cloud. Right Networks is scalable, with three

editions of hosting available to choose from: QuickBooks Desktop Cloud, Business Cloud, and Application Cloud, with users able to easily scale up to the next version when needed.

The QuickBooks Cloud plan is \$50 per user per month; the Business Cloud plan is \$59.99 per user per month and

includes QuickBooks hosting and Microsoft Excel, along with connectivity with online applications such as Expensify, Bill.com Sync., and T-Sheets. The Application Cloud plan is \$69.99 per user per month and includes all of the options available on the first two plans along with additional storage and Microsoft

★ **4.75** 2018
OVERALL
RATING

Office 2013 hosting. All plans include 24/7/365 customer support.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428948

Xcentric

www.Xcentric.com

Xcentric, purchased by Right Networks in late 2017, which is also reviewed in this issue, is designed specifically for accounting firms. Redesigned since last reviewed, Xcentric has made custom hosting options for accounting professionals its focus, while QuickBooks

hosting has been relegated to Right Networks, though Xcentric can also host QuickBooks Desktop applications if desired. Xcentric currently offers two plans, with both offering hosting for an unlimited number of applications.

Xcentric is a good hosting option for accounting firms of any size. The prod-

uct offers scalable solutions, with two hosting plans available: Cloud Pro, which offers up to 10 GB in storage per user and Cloud Premier, which ups storage space to 20 GB per user. Users can also opt to add Cloud+ to either plan for increased server and workstation security. Both Pro and Premium plans include a 100 GB

★ **4.75** 2018
OVERALL
RATING

mailbox per person through Microsoft 365, three years of backup accessibility, and 24/7 emergency support.

Read the full review for this product online at: www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428951

Each month we explore the advantages and intricacies of developing and growing a niche practice.

This month we're examining what it takes to serve the niche of accounting for political campaigns.

RESOURCES FOR THE POLITICS ACCOUNTANT

- How to Help Elect CPAs to Public Office
<https://bit.ly/2pzC8GQ>
- Opening a Bank Account for a Political Campaign
<https://bit.ly/2DqI9PH>
- WE Political Accounting & Compliance
<http://wepacca.com/category/blog/>

9-Step Marketing Process to Gain Political Clients

By Becky Livingston

AS WE HEAD into mid-term elections, you might be wondering how you can attract politicians to your practice? Like them, you must campaign for their attention, with the right message that meets their needs when they want them met.

Here are some tips you can use to increase the awareness of your brand in politician's minds.

Begin by developing a multi-prong marketing strategy that includes online marketing, social media, email efforts, and in-person activity. This is not a strategy that works overnight. It takes time, diligence, a great deal of effort.

TARGET MARKET

Take a deep dive defining to whom you want to market your services. Also, evaluate your current customer base—could they help you in this effort, or could they leave because of it? Why do they buy your services? Are there common characteristics between them and the target market you're trying to reach (e.g., age, income, ethnicity, location, pain points, terminology, gender, family, etc.)? Who are your

competitors targeting? Is there a niche within the market where you could focus your efforts, e.g., cause, gender, location, party, years of experience, etc.? Also, consider the target's psychographics, such as personality, attitudes, values, interests, hobbies, lifestyles, and behavior. Do they align with our firm's mission and values?

WHAT'S YOUR MARKETING MESSAGE?

Break it down in to four parts:

- **Tagline/headline** – “The politician's accountant of choice.”
- **Slogan** – “Accounting for Endless Possibilities.”
- **Positioning statement** – “For local and state politicians, [firm name] is an accounting and tax firm that helps you focus on the task at hand while coloring within the lines.”

- **Description** – “We work alongside local and state politicians to identify and adhere to relevant tax and accounting regulations through the campaign process and beyond.”

SOCIAL MEDIA

Hashtags are prevalent across most social media platforms. How can you use them to your advantage to gain the prospects you want? Research your target markets' campaigns to see what hashtags they are using; research dominate political hashtags on your social media platform of choice, for example, a term might be more powerful on Twitter than it is on YouTube. Use tools like Google+/Explore and Hashtagify.me to find relevant terms in your target market's industry (not your own) and their relevance score by social media platform.

Now that you have hashtags, you'll need creative for each platform where you'll be posting content. Keep in mind, you're going to post only on platforms your target market is using, for example



Accounting for Political Contributions

By Gail Perry, CPA, Editor-In-Chief

WE SCOURED THE Federal Election Commission website to find relevant information for accountants who are working with political candidates and campaigns. The following material is excerpted from published reports of the Federal Election Commission.

- Every person who receives contributions for a political campaign must forward them to the treasurer of the candidate's authorized committee within 10 days of receipt. The date of receipt is the date the person acting as a conduit obtains possession of a contribution.
- A person receiving contributions for a campaign must also forward the recordkeeping information along with the contributions.
- If a contribution is small (\$50 or less), such as cash contributions at a fundraiser, it is acceptable to keep records of the name of the event, the date and the total amount of contributions received on each day of the event.
- For contributions exceeding \$50, records must include amount, date of receipt, contributor's name and mailing address.
- Political committees are required to maintain either a full-size photocopy or digital image of each check or written instrument by which a contribution of more than \$50 is made.
- For each contribution that exceeds \$200, either by itself or when added to the contributor's previous contributions made during the same calendar year, in addition to the above required records, the saved information must include occupation and employer of the contributor.
- If, before the primary election, a campaign receives contributions designated for the general election, it must use an acceptable accounting method to distinguish between primary contributions and general election contributions. Acceptable accounting methods include:
 - Designating separate accounts for each election; or
 - Establishing separate books and records for each election.
- The committee's records must demonstrate that, prior to the primary election, recorded cash-on-hand was at all times greater than or equal to the sum of general election contributions received minus the

Please note that contributions to authorized committees are aggregated on a calendar-year basis for recordkeeping purposes, but they are aggregated on a per-election basis for purposes of monitoring contribution limits, and on an election-cycle basis for reporting purposes.

Building Your Niche Practice is sponsored by Intuit QuickBooks.



Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, rather than LinkedIn. There are many free tools that provide pre-defined image-posting sizes for each platform along with templates. When choosing images, consider business images with groups of people versus one person, images that resonate with the candidate's values/causes, and images that stir emotion, like family, healthcare, retirement, and military, etc.

Content posting can be tricky. Consider when your target market might be online most often – early mornings, evenings, and maybe midday. Facebook posts can be reused throughout the month, while Instagram posts should be reused less often. Twitter posts require more maintenance and could be done multiple times a day over a period of weeks/months.

Also, if you're considering an informational video for your practice, post it directly on Facebook rather than linking it to your firm's YouTube channel. It will get more visibility than if you just post a link from another platform.

ONLINE ADVERTISING

If your firm is not listed on Google or Bing's free business pages, that's a first step. Next, consider your marketing budget. How much are you willing to spend over a period of months to draw in clients? Rather than spending money on search ads, consider graphical or video ads placed on politically- and geographically-focused websites for your target market; it's called managed placements on Google Ads. They are just as budget-friendly as text ads, but often have more impact and better return on investment. Lastly, social media ads can also be effective when targeting specific audiences.

TRADITIONAL EFFORTS

In addition to your online efforts, traditional efforts, can also increase your brand and draw in leads. Consider a postcard or email campaign that is very targeted with a link to a trackable call to action. For example, send a message about an event you're sponsoring. In it include a link to a website landing page that has a short, registration form. If the link is memorable and

short, it's more likely to be clicked, e.g., "Register now, before we're sold out! <https://FirmName.com/SaveMySeat>." In-person presentations can also be very effective.

CREATING A PROCESS

The process takes a good deal of time, effort, energy, and sometimes money. You're in this for the long haul, so start from the end goal.

- When is the campaign season in high gear? Back up from that date by at least six to nine months or more.
- Create a project plan outlining what is being done, by whom, the message, delivery mechanism, and launch. Also remember to build in review time and measurement.
- Include time to meet people. All of the online activity you can muster may not have the same impact as meeting someone face to face.
- Develop a good amount of content to share socially, including quotes, images, tip sheets, Q&As, videos, podcasts, interviews, infographics, and more.
- Update website SEO keywords on

specific landing pages for the political audience.

- Split test marketing campaigns so you know what's working and what needs to be adjusted or ditched.
- Identify new opportunities and decide if you should leverage them, e.g., radio or television talk shows, speaking events, political rallies, trending topics, etc.
- Take time to review successes and failures along the way and decide if you should continue with the current plan or adjust it.
- Track incoming leads to identify where they are coming from. You can also gain insights from social media and website analytics tools.

The silver thread that ties all of this together is the pain point. What problems are you helping politicians to solve? How are you helping them to solve them? When you answer those two questions, you are well on your way to attracting new clients. ■

Becky is the President and CEO of Penheel Marketing, a boutique marketing firm specializing in social media and digital marketing for CPAs.

sum of general election disbursements made.

- If an individual who has contributed more than \$200 during the election cycle fails to provide the required recordkeeping information (i.e., name, mailing address, occupation and employer), the committee must be able to show that it made "best efforts" to obtain, maintain and report that information.
 - o To demonstrate "best efforts," the committee must be able to show that it requested the information – first, in the solicitation materials that prompted the contribution and, second, if the information is not obtained, in a follow-up request.

POSSIBLY ILLEGAL CONTRIBUTIONS

When a committee has reason to

question the legality of a contribution, it has specific time frames in which to clarify whether the contribution is permissible. While investigating a contribution, the committee must keep a written record noting the basis of concern for each deposited contribution which:

- Requires a written redesignation and/or reattribution from the contributor; or
- Requires confirmation that it is not from a prohibited source. Prohibited sources include: Corporations, including nonprofit corporations (although funds from a corporate separate segregated fund are permissible); Labor organizations (although funds from a separate segregated fund are permissible); Federal government contractors; Foreign nationals; Contributions in the name of another.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Registered candidate committees are required to file reports with the Federal Election Commission. Form 3, Report of Receipts and Disbursements, is required to be filed quarterly on April 15, July 15, October 15, and January 31 of the following year.

- When a committee files its first report, it must include all receipts and disbursements that occurred before registration. This includes any receipts and disbursements made during the "testing the waters" (or exploratory) period. The coverage period of the first report should be adjusted to date back to the beginning of the committee's financial activity.
- In addition, in election years, committees of candidates in the general election (as opposed to primary election) must file a pre-election and a

post-election report.

- o The pre-election report is due 12 days before the election and covers the first day of the current reporting quarter up to the 20th day before the election.
- o The post-election report is due 30 days after the general election and covers the period from the close of the previous report filed through 20 days after the election.
- Committees must continue to file quarterly reports even if their candidate retires, withdraws, loses the primary or otherwise drops out of the race before the general election. Generally, committees must continue to file reports until the committee completes the termination process. This process involves filing a final Form 3 and checking the "Termination Report" option. ■

Small Business Optimism Hits New Highs

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

Small business optimism is at an all-time high in a new study.

The latest quarterly Wells Fargo/Gallup Small Business Index, which measures small business optimism, had an overall Index score of 118, 12 percentage points higher than last quarter and the highest level in the survey's 15-year history. The current Index score was driven by high indicators from small business owners on their overall financial situation, cash flow and ability to obtain credit. The news comes as the U.S. economy grew 4.1 percent in the second quarter, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, outperforming an average growth rate of 2.3 percent from the fourth quarter of 2012 to the first quarter of 2018.

"Small business owners continue to feel confident about their business' current and future financial situation as the economy continues to show positive growth," said Andy Rowe, Wells Fargo head of Customer Segments. "We are hopeful the unprecedented optimism among business owners will translate into an increase in business investments, and more Main Street small business growth."

POSITIVE FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Confidence in the economy was reflected in small business owner attitudes about their current and future financial situation. In the July Wells Fargo/Gallup Small Business Index, 78 percent of small business owners reported their financial situation today is very or somewhat good, and 84 percent of business owners said they expect their financial situation will be very or somewhat good a year from now.

In addition, both current and projected future cash flow were key drivers of small business optimism, with

69 percent classifying their cash flow over the past 12 months as very or somewhat or good, an increase of 6 percentage points from the previous quarter and the highest reading in the history of the survey. Over the next year, 77 percent expect their cash flow to be very or somewhat good.

Small business owners also reported on their ability to obtain credit when they need it, with 49 percent saying they expect it will be very or somewhat easy to obtain credit over the next 12 months. That's up five percentage points over last quarter and the highest reading on this measure since 2007.

Even as optimism soared, small business owners' sentiment about their company revenues remained relatively consistent with the previous quarter. About half of respondents said their revenues increased over the last 12 months, and 61 percent said they expect company revenues will increase over the next 12 months.

CHALLENGES IN HIRING AND RETAINING STAFF REMAIN

For the second consecutive quarter, survey respondents said hiring and retaining staff was their top challenge, at 18 percent. It could remain a challenge in the year ahead, as 35 percent of firms said they expect an increase in the number of jobs at their company in the next year. Other top challenges cited by business owners include taxes (9 percent) and attracting new business (9 percent), which have been consistently reported among the top issues of small business owners. ■

Continued online at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/12428988

THIS MONTH'S TOP SMALL BUSINESS SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- How Companies Can Get Creativity Right and Wrong. **Harvard Business Review.** <https://bit.ly/2xne2TN>
- 3 Rules to Setting Goals for Your Business. **Inc. BrandView.** <https://bit.ly/2pm5k41>
- 8 Podcasts by Boss Women. **Entrepreneur.** <https://bit.ly/2NlChfj>
- 10 Expert Tips to Creating Repeat Business. **SmallBizTrends.** <https://bit.ly/2QJdl4>
- Sole Proprietor vs. Single-Member LLC. **SCORE Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2DaVwDj>

LATEST SMALL BUSINESS NEWS

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11 Reasons Now is a Good Time to Start an Ecommerce Business. The online market is expected to grow 56% by 2020, with other traditional markets only expected to experience 2% overall growth. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429330

68% of Small Businesses Lack a Disaster Plan. Hurricane Florence recently dealt a harsh blow to the East Coast, yet most small businesses don't have a plan for if the storms affect them. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429207

Sales Tax Exemptions: Collect the Tax or Get the Doc. For every taxable transaction making its way through the marketplace, somebody should be collecting sales tax. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12428983

Colleges and Students Embrace Entrepreneurship Courses. The 2008 recession turned a lot of students toward entrepreneurship as they watched their parents lose jobs they held for decades. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12428065



BRIAN F. TANKERSLEY

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Five Challenges Faced by CPA Firms and Possible Strategies to Address Them

ACCOUNTING FIRMS FACE challenges today which are more formidable than those faced in previous generations. With margins shrinking, competition increasing, constant technology and security challenges, as well as the twin threats of artificial intelligence and offshore labor threatening a race to the bottom on price, today's firms must be better than those in previous generations just to survive.

I've reviewed the data from technology surveys like the Accounting Firm Operations and Technology Survey and have thought about my experiences with CPA firms over the last 40 years, and have identified five challenges faced by CPA firms, as well as some strategies to make those challenges more manageable. The five challenges I've chosen to focus on are:

- Staying informed about current technology
- Attracting new clients
- Cybersecurity and data privacy
- Workflow and efficiency
- Getting clients to use the firm's technology

STAYING INFORMED ABOUT CURRENT TECHNOLOGY

- Attend seminars, technology conferences, and webinars from your state CPA society and other professional associations your firm uses like CPA firm associations.
- Read industry trade publications like *AccountingWeb*, *CPA Practice Advisor*, *Accounting Today*, *Insightful Accountant*, *The Journal of Accountancy*, and your state CPA society's newsletters and magazines. Almost all the industry publications have monthly columns and special issues which highlight current trends and practices in accounting firm technology.
- Follow technology thought leaders on social media platforms like LinkedIn and Twitter including

Randy Johnston (@RPJohnston), Val Steed (@ValSteed), Brian Tankersley (@BFTCPA) as well as your vendors so you can know what's coming and be ready for the changes which are coming for your firm and its clients.

- Run a contest for your staff for the best productivity tips and publish them into a wiki.
- Attend webinars and events from software vendors and hosting companies covering current accounting firm technology trends and practices.

ATTRACTING NEW CLIENTS

- According to the Accounting Firm Operations and Technology Survey, one of the most popular ways to attract new clients is to ask for referrals from other clients and other professionals. If you don't ask your clients, they are much less likely to make referrals – so make sure that you and your staff tell your clients that you appreciate them and ask for the referrals.
- Write articles for your local newspaper, a blog, and your social media accounts. Focus on sharing things which can lead to engagements for you – in your preferred industries. For example, if you do business income tax work for trucking companies, post articles about state, federal, and local tax changes which affect your clients and prospects, as well as changes in fuel excise tax rules and regulations affecting the trucking industry.

- Have and use a sales process, a CRM system, and sales training for all senior associates, managers, and partners. Give part of performance-based bonuses for professionals based on the individual and the firm achieving their goals for new client retention in key industries.
- Community networking, firm website, and social networking are all marginally more popular with large firms (50+ employees) as opposed to firms with fewer than 50 staff – possibly because those firms have someone who does marketing for the firm and has the managers/partners create content to share online and push SEO and social engagement.

CYBERSECURITY AND DATA PRIVACY

- Cybersecurity is the breakout issue for knowledge professionals in our time. Keeping confidential data private is harder than ever, and accountants are now regularly targeted by hackers looking to harvest data from our networks.
- As we move to the cloud, we must be more aware of security issues, as anyone can connect to our cloud services as us from anywhere – so security no-no's like using the same password everywhere by anyone in the firm can cause catastrophic issues.
- Know your legal and regulatory compliance requirements. If you don't know the rules, you can't expect to be successful complying

with those unknown rules.

- Develop, implement, test, and maintain critical items like security policies, an incident response plan, and a business continuity plan before they are needed. If you haven't tested your incident response plans and your business continuity plans, they aren't ready.
- Consider a five-point plan to address security challenges: assess status, fix deficiencies, train staff, buy cyberinsurance, and continuously monitor.
- If you have any doubts about your client's security or backup procedures, consider using hosted QuickBooks or hosted desktops from an experienced Intuit certified hosting company with multiple data centers like AceCloudHosting.com.

WORKFLOW AND EFFICIENCY

- The road to efficiency goes through standardized processes which are modeled, monitored, measured, and managed. It's not about the partner's desire to have staples in the center rather than the left corner or the right corner – it's about whether that's important to the client and how much time is spent providing them with that option and complying with the request. ■

Continued online at
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THE PROS AND CONS: Biweekly vs. Semimonthly Payroll

By Rachel Blakely-Gray

DECIDING ON A pay frequency for a small business is an important decision. Pay frequency determines how often the business must process payroll and when employees receive their paychecks. There are four common pay period options, including weekly, biweekly, semimonthly, and monthly. Two popular, yet easily confused, pay periods are biweekly and semimonthly. Knowing the difference between biweekly vs. semimonthly payroll can prevent financial setbacks, keep the business legally compliant, and more.

Biweekly and semimonthly can be confusing because, with either system, employees generally receive two payments per month. However, there's more to these pay periods than meets the eye.

receive the same amount of money and owe the same amount of taxes, regardless of which payment frequency you use.

PAYDAY

Another difference between semimonthly vs. biweekly pay is what day of the week you run payroll and which day employees receive their paychecks. If the payroll is run biweekly, employees receive their wages the same day each pay period. For example, employees will be consistently paid every other Friday, so the payroll is run on the same day each pay period. With semimonthly payroll, the employees are paid on specific dates, such as the 15th and last weekday of each month. As a result, the days of the week will differ: An employee might get paid on a Friday and Tuesday.

POPULARITY

Biweekly payroll is the most popular payment option. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 36.5% of employees are paid biweekly. On the other hand, only 19.8% of employees are paid using the semimonthly payroll frequency.

CHOOSING BETWEEN SEMI-MONTHLY VS. BIWEEKLY PAYROLL

Deciding between biweekly vs. semi-

monthly payroll can be a difficult decision, especially because federal pay laws state that businesses must keep the same frequency throughout the year. Before choosing, keep in mind that states regulate how often employees must be paid and some states may not allow certain pay frequencies. Businesses should check with their state before choosing how often to run payroll.

CONS OF RUNNING A SEMI-MONTHLY PAYROLL

First, consider how many employees there are and which ones are hourly or salaried. Running a semimonthly payroll for hourly employees is more difficult and confusing than doing so for salaried employees, especially when workers earn overtime pay. To combat this, it may be beneficial to process payroll semimonthly for salaried employees and biweekly for hourly workers.

The lack of consistency with semimonthly payroll can also be a turnoff for some businesses and employees. Since payroll will be processed on a different day of the week, the person running payroll could lose track of that responsibility. Also, employees might not be sure which day they get paid. Running semimonthly payroll can be particularly difficult to track when weekends and holidays come into play. If payday falls on a holiday or weekend, payroll will either need to be paid in advance or delayed through the weekend or holiday, adding another

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Rachel Blakely-Gray is a writer for Patriot Software, a provider of payroll and human resources management solutions for small businesses.

	Biweekly	Semimonthly
Number of Paychecks Per Year	26	24
Paycheck Amounts	Lower	Higher
Payday	Consistent	Inconsistent
Percentage of Employees Paid Via This Method	36.5%	19.8%

NUMBER OF PAYCHECKS PER YEAR

With a biweekly pay schedule, there are two months in the year where employees receive three paychecks. Employees who are paid semimonthly always receive two paychecks per month. Companies that run payroll with a biweekly frequency issue a total of 26 paychecks per year. Companies that use semimonthly pay give employees 24 paychecks per year.

PAYCHECK AMOUNTS

Because the payroll is processed fewer times for semimonthly frequencies than biweekly, employees' paychecks will be greater. Biweekly paychecks will be for less money, but employees will receive the two additional paychecks to make up the difference.

Let's say an employee makes \$42,000.00 per year. If they are paid biweekly, their gross wages would be approximately \$1,615.38 every other week (\$42,000.00 / 26). If they are paid semimonthly, their gross wages would be \$1,750.00 (\$42,000.00 / 24). Over the course of a year, the employee will

A Year in the Life of a
PAYROLL Accountant
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The Case for a 4-Day Workweek

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

NEARLY HALF (45 percent) of full-time workers say it should take less than five hours each day to do their job if they worked uninterrupted, while three out of four employees (72 percent) would work four days or less per week if pay remained constant. Yet, 71 percent of employees also say work interferes with their personal life. That's according to a global survey of nearly 3,000 employees across eight countries conducted by The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated,

THE CASE FOR A FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK?

If pay remained constant, one-third of global workers say their ideal workweek would last four days (34 percent), while 20 percent said they would work three days a week. One in four global employees (28 percent) are content with the standard five-day workweek. Full-time workers in Canada (59 percent), Australia (47 percent), and the U.S. (40 percent) feel strongest about having a four-day workweek, while U.K. employees desire a three-day workweek the most (26 percent).

India leads the way as the hardest-working country, with a whopping 69 percent of full-time employees saying they would still work five days a week even if they had the option to work fewer days for the same pay. Mexico was the second-highest at 43 percent of workers, followed by the U.S. at 27 percent. The U.K. (16 percent), France (17 percent), and Australia (19 percent) are the least content with the standard five-day workweek.

One-third of employees (35 percent) would take a 20 percent pay-cut to work one day less per week. However, those numbers vary greatly by country, as 50 percent of workers in Mexico, 43 percent in India, and 42 percent in France would take that arrangement compared with only 29 percent in Canada and 24 percent in the U.S.

Nearly nine in 10 employees (86 percent) say they lose time each day on work-specific tasks unrelated to their core job, with 41 percent of full-time employees wasting more than an hour a day on these extraneous activities. Additionally, 40 percent of employees say

they lose an hour-plus each day on administrative tasks that do not drive value for their organization.

When asked what they spend the majority of their workday doing, individual contributors (56 percent) and people managers (28 percent) both listed servicing customers/patients/students as their top task.

The next highest-rated daily tasks for individual contributors include collaborating with co-workers (42 percent), administrative work (35 percent), manual labor (33 percent), and responding to emails (31 percent), while people managers list attending meetings (27 percent), administrative work (27 percent), collaborating with co-workers (26 percent), and responding to emails (26 percent) as the top ways they

spend their workday.

"The biggest takeaway of this research isn't that we should move to a shorter workweek or that we need a time machine to get all our work done, said Joyce Maroney, executive director of the Workforce Institute at Kronos. "It's clear that employees want to work and do well by their employers, and many roles require people to be present or on call during specific hours to get the job done – such as teachers, nurses, retail associates, plant workers, delivery drivers, and nearly all customer-facing roles. Organizations must help their people eliminate distractions, inefficiencies, and administrative work to enable them to work at full capacity. This will create more time to innovate, collaborate, develop skills and relationships, and serve customers while opening the door to creative scheduling options, including the coveted four-day workweek." ■



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Top 10 Signs of Tax Data Theft

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

Tax professionals need to be alert to the subtle signs of data theft. Cybercriminals often leave few signs of their burglary until the fraudulent tax returns are filed and clients are harmed. This is one more reason tax professionals should use strong security protections to prevent data theft from occurring.

In its series, "Protect Your Clients; Protect Yourself: Tax Security 101," the IRS is highlighting security issues for tax pros. While the IRS and its Security Summit partners are making progress against tax-related identity theft, cybercriminals continue to evolve, and data thefts at tax professionals' offices are on the rise.

Here are the top 10 warning signs that a tax pro or his or her office may have experienced a data theft:

- 1 Client e-filed returns begin to be rejected because returns with their Social Security numbers were already filed;
- 2 Clients who haven't filed tax returns begin to receive taxpayer authentication letters (5071C, 4883C, 5747C) from the IRS;
- 3 Clients who haven't filed tax returns receive refunds;
- 4 Clients receive tax transcripts that they did not request;
- 5 Clients who created an IRS online services account receive an IRS notice that their account was accessed or IRS emails stating their account has been disabled. Or clients unexpectedly receive an IRS notice that an IRS online account was created in their names;
- 6 The number of returns filed with the tax professional's Electronic Filing Identification Number (EFIN) exceeds the number of clients;
- 7 Tax professionals or clients responding to emails that the firm did not send;

8 Network computers running slower than normal;

9 Computer cursors moving or changing numbers without touching the keyboard;

10 Network computers locking out employees. IRS systems will only accept one unique Social Security Number, so taxpayers often discover they are a victim when they attempt to e-file and their tax return is rejected because the SSN has already been used. If the IRS identifies a return that could be an identity theft return it will send a letter to the taxpayer asking them to contact the agency. The IRS will never cold call or email a taxpayer.

Earlier this year, tax-savvy cybercriminals stole taxpayer data from a series of tax professionals nationwide, immediately filing fraudulent returns before the tax professionals were aware of the robbery. The crimes were first reported to the IRS by taxpayers who unexpectedly received refunds in their bank accounts. The crooks, posing as IRS contractors, tried calling the taxpayers to get them to forward the fraudulent refund to their accounts.

Identity thieves sometimes try to leverage the stolen data by using taxpayer information to access the Get Transcript system. Taxpayers who receive transcripts by mail but did not order them are sometimes victims of this approach. Get Transcript Online is protected by a robust, two-factor authentication process. But crooks may still try to use stolen identities to try to create Get Transcript accounts, which results in the IRS disabling the account and sending the taxpayer a letter.

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THIS MONTH'S TOP TAX SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- Congress Pushes Forward With Tax Reform 2.0. **Kelly Phillips Erb via Forbes.**
<https://bit.ly/2ODplhc>
- Are There More Twists to Come in Online Sales Tax Saga? **Thomson Reuters Blog.**
<https://tmsnr.rs/2wMS2AN>
- IRS Updates 402(f) Notice Safe Harbor Language. **Wolters Kluwer Blog.**
<https://bit.ly/2xxkEhF>
- 3 Tips for Diversifying Tax Workforce. **Bloomberg Tax Blog.**
<https://bit.ly/2so7Yan>
- Do You Know these 3 Types of Tax Clients? **AICPA Insights Blog.**
<https://bit.ly/2NTQuzp>

LATEST TAX NEWS

IRS Offers Relief to Hurricane Florence Victims. Hurricane Florence victims have until Jan. 31, 2019, to file certain individual and business tax returns and make certain tax payments.
www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429974

AICPA Says Taxpayers Need Option to Direct Section 965 Overpayments. Taxpayers should have ability to direct application of overpayments resulting from their combined 2017 estimated taxes and 2017 extension payments.
www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12430510

Tax Leaders Plan to Embrace Innovation. Harnessing benefits of new technologies and increasing reporting and compliance requirements for tax reform are among the major challenges they face in the next 12 months.
www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429781

What Tax Pros Should Do in Case of Data Theft. The IRS can help stop fraudulent tax returns being filed in clients' names, which otherwise might delay legitimate tax refunds.
www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429573

IRS Warns of Hurricane Florence Charity Scams. Criminals and scammers try to take advantage of the generosity of taxpayers who want to help victims of major disasters.
www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12430480

Report Forecasts Increase to Tax Brackets in 2019. Report calculates inflation adjustments to next year's individual income tax brackets, standard deduction amounts, and other annually-adjusted figures.
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MILLENNIALS' OUTLOOK ON WORK

In general, millennials' view of work is also different from what employers have traditionally experienced. Most have not held any job before or during college. While, like most others, they want interesting jobs with good pay and benefits, their priority is a work-life balance. Many critics of millennials view this as lacking a work ethic. Often, one of the first questions millennials ask in a job interview is how much time off they will receive and when it can be utilized. Many employers have vacation policies that permit new employees to accrue but not use vacation time until the completion of one year. To help address the time-off concern of millennials, and to help attract them in the first place, numerous employers have begun to adjust their vacation or paid-time off (PTO) policies to make at least a portion of accrued vacation days available in the first year of employment. Most include a six-month waiting period before such days can be used. Similarly, in the area of attractive benefits, employers are increasingly providing health club memberships as part of their health care plan.

Those who simply think millennials are lazy would miss key aspects about many millennials. Almost 27% of millennials are self-employed, and many have business interests aside from their main job. They tend to favor on-line business ventures that are extensions of their technology-

Meeting the Millennial Challenge

MILLENNIALS, GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED to be those born between 1981 and 1999, have become the largest age group in today's workforce. This is understandable since there are an estimated 92 million of them – the largest generation in our country's history. They are unique in a number of ways. More than one-third (1/3) of them continue to live at home with their parents. In fact, one recent study found that more of them live with their parents than with a spouse. In addition, fewer of them own a home than any similar age group in recent history. But it is not just homes that they don't buy. They are also reluctant to buy cars. They are content to use Uber and be more a part of the sharing economy. In addition, over 90% of millennials use coupons for everyday purchases. However, consistent with their technology-driven lifestyle, they use digital coupons rather than paper.

driven lifestyle. According to some surveys, approximately 15 percent of millennials make an average of \$1,000 or more each month from side hustles and 38 percent make some money from the gig economy at least once every month.



Millennials are always looking for better opportunities. Recent studies also confirm that on average, millennials move from one job to another every sixteen (16) months to two years, often for nothing more than a slight increase in job benefits. Unlike earlier college graduates, they are not looking for long-term employment, job security, or a career with a particular employer. This frequent and early departure can only exacerbate the employee turnover problem that affects so many employers today. Of equal concern is

the fact that they often leave just as the investment in their training and job familiarity should be starting to pay off for the employer.

APPEALING TO MILLENNIAL WORKERS

One of the challenges for employers is providing the type of work environment for millennials that takes advantage of their strengths. They are accustomed to working in teams and work well with diverse co-workers. Most participated in team sports or school-related activities where the diversity of participants was a given. Having grown up with PCs, I-Pads, smart phones, email and texting, they are focused on electronic communication and social-media. Studies have shown that more than 80% of millennials sleep with their cellphones on their beds and text more than they talk on those same cellphones. In fact, because they are so electronically connected 24/7, some have referred to them as "the workaholic generation," although the time spent with their devices is clearly not all job-related. They keep busy with their electronic devices long after they have left the workplace and check their text messages and emails as soon as they wake up. They never unplug. However, a good deal of this activity is mostly related to their social media contacts

with friends and family.

Recent studies have also found that when evaluating a potential job, the availability of working remotely is a major plus in millennial's decision-making. If the job duties can be performed electronically, which is true of many jobs today, it could be a perfect fit. Working from home or their favorite Starbucks can be effective if adequate management controls are in place. Permitting them to work when and where they like can be an incentive as long as they are delivering results. An increasing number of companies are offering flexible work schedules in an effort to attract and keep millennials. Many millennials would like to be their own boss. With the many distractions that come with the Internet, especially social media, proper monitoring which is not personally invasive is important. However, because of the challenges in monitoring remote work, many employers merely rely upon the employee to exercise good judgement and complete the assigned work in a timely manner. Procedures for measuring their performance can be put in place, but the potential for abuse by a less-than-conscientious employee is obvious.

Continued on page 46

3 Steps to Narrow the Gender Gap in Finance

By Eman Goubran, CPA

The focus on male hiring has taken a shift. In recent years we've witnessed heightened attention to gender-based issues, with movements across almost every industry imaginable to make the workplace a fair and equal environment for all individuals. The finance industry is no different – women, joined by their male colleagues, are advocating to close the gender gap and bring diversity to the finance function.

According to the World Economic Forum's global gender gap report, "Female talent remains one of the most under-utilized business resources." It may take another 217 years to close the economic gender gap globally if we remain at the current pace of equality. Nearly a century since International Women's Day was first observed, we still find that some of the top companies are paying their women half as much as men. A major contributing factor to this disparity is that there is a much higher contingent of men than women in senior roles. In some industries, like finance, this is especially clear.

General Motors recently announced its new female CFO and now occupies a rare place boasting a female CFO and CEO. Only 23 companies in the Fortune 500 have a female CEO and Hershey is the only other company on that list that has women in both CEO and CFO slots. Perhaps if more women rise to hold senior roles, we'll start to see a reduction in pay disparity.

The role of finance is already in a period of dense transformation. CFOs are evolving from traditional number crunching to serving as strategic partners to their CEOs and boards, while also adopting advanced technologies as part of the increasingly intelligent enterprise. It's important to take advantage of this transformative time and ensure that while we're focused on upskilling the profession, we bring women along for the ride.

INSPIRING YOUNG WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION

Gender diversity is good for the bottom line. Credit Suisse found that companies where women make up at least 15 percent of senior managers had more than 50 percent higher profitability than those where female representation was less than 10 percent. So how do we entice more women to enter the profession and eventually penetrate the upper echelon of finance? It all starts with education. The PEW Research Center found that the academic achievement of U.S. students still lag behind their peers in many other countries. This is especially true in math, where the United States ranks 38th out of 71 countries. It's critical that youth have a solid understanding of math, as well as the financial literacy to promote fiscal responsibility of their own wealth. Without a strong foundation to build upon, the battle to encourage young women to pursue careers in finance is lost before it's begun. The earlier we can help students feel proficient in finance, the wider their career opportunities will be down the road. In fact, it was my own high school accounting class that ignited my passion for finance and set me on the path to become a CFO.

CULTIVATING AN UNBIASED CORPORATE CULTURE

There is peer-reviewed evidence that, when women do have the relevant academic and technology skills, unconscious biases can influence their peers' recognition of their capabilities. While gender bias is most often thought of as scenarios where women are assumed to be weak, emotional or unqualified, there are many forms of unconscious bias. For example, the very way financial job descriptions are written, key words may resonate more with men than with women because they are being written by/for a male audience. This small inflection in tone could be the difference between a woman being excited or uncomfortable about pursuing a job opening in finance.

Continue reading at

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THIS MONTH'S TOP ACCOUNTING & AUDITING SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- 3 Ways an Outsourced CFO Can Help Businesses Grow. **CMP Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2MkaTIW>
- Inspiring the Next Generation of CPAs. **AICPA Insights Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2QGjQQI>
- 5 Myths that May Prevent CFOs from Benefiting from the Cloud. **CFOThoughtLeader Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2poQsBD>
- Big Data and Machine Learning Won't Save Us From Another Financial Crisis. **Harvard Business Review Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2xosLhl>
- Confidence in Auditors Tapers in 2018. **Compliance Week.** <https://bit.ly/2xmX6wU>

LATEST A & A NEWS

Outsourced CFO Engagements: A Risk/Reward Perspective. Outsourced CFO work can be a lucrative practice area.

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429832

Certify Grows International Presence with Captio Acquisition. Certify's decision to purchase Captio is the latest move in a concerted effort by the company to grow its presence outside North America.

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12430505

Bill.com Now Offers International Business Payments. U.S. firms and their clients in can now pay vendors in nearly 40 countries.

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New Bloomberg Tax Leased Assets Solution. The system classifies and tracks operating and finance leases across multiple years, computes complex right-of-use liability amounts, automates workflow, and integrates with ERP systems.

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Why Your Firm's Business Development Efforts Fail

MY GUESS IS your firm, like almost all in the country, has a plan in place where you will reward your employees (non-partners) with a cash bonus for new business brought into the firm. I will also guess that, once again, like almost all firms in the country, this plan has failed to generate substantial new business or motivate any of your people, including your millennial emerging leaders.

Now that we have identified the problem, let's take a step back, think about what you are trying to accomplish and most importantly, why your current plan isn't working.

GOAL:

Every firm needs to attract new clients and most firms in the country tend to have one partner who seems to have a natural gift of bringing in new clients. That person is your rainmaker. Everyone else at the firm maintains a client relationship and then makes sure the work gets done. Like most firms, you want to get more people involved in bringing in new clients. Once again, statistically speaking, your current rainmaker is getting close to 65 and coming up on retirement and you are worried how you will replace this skill.

As a partner group, you come up with the idea to offer a new business cash reward as motivation for employees to bring in new work, as this is what would motivate you and it requires the least amount of your time. After all, now that you are a partner, you get paid if the firm makes money, but you don't see anything directly tied to new work coming in the door, so you would love this deal.

As a partner group, you are really excited and happy with this plan and roll it out to the firm with much fanfare and excitement. You are confident that once your people hear about this cash bonus, they will run right out of the office and bring in work immediately.

Sadly, this isn't what happens,

and nothing changes. Some people still bring in a few clients, and now they get a little bonus for it, while for most, nothing changes.

So, where did we go wrong? After all, the plan makes sense to the partner group, and you are doing what every firm in the country is doing.

INCORRECT ASSUMPTION NUMBER 1:

As a partner at the firm, getting a cash bonus for bringing in new work is appealing to you, but did you stop to think if this idea is appealing to the current workforce who will be receiving the bonus?

Guess what? Millennials are not motivated by money! You need to motivate your target audience not the partner group.

INCORRECT ASSUMPTION NUMBER 2:

You assume that the people in your office who are not bringing in new work, are not motivated. The reason these people are not bringing in new work has nothing to do with motivation or money. It has everything to do with skill and lack of skill. Some people are born with a natural skill set that translates into selling, but most accountants are not born with that skill set.

You need to teach your people how to sell. You can provide all the financial rewards you want, but what you need to do is actually provide training to your people on how to achieve these goals.



INCORRECT ASSUMPTION NUMBER 3:

You assume that your people have additional time to spend bringing in this new work. According to industry leading compensation expert, Allan Koltin, you need to put everyone to use at their best skill set. This means people who can find new business, should focus on finding new business. Those who can maintain and grow client relationships, should focus on that. Finally, those who can grind out the client work, should focus on this area.

I've never seen a partner who brought in substantial business have as many billable hours as a partner who grinds out the work. How can a manager, who you are budgeting to have 1,500 chargeable hours, be expected to have the additional time to go out and bring in more work, simply because you offered them a bonus?

Billable hours should be reduced accordingly to allow the employee time to go out and bring in new business. However, keep in mind, for some people this should not be their focus, no matter the cash reward.

Before we go any further, it is important to stop and cover one basic and often overlooked principle. Every person at your firm, from the managing partner to the administrative

assistant, needs to be an ambassador for your firm with every person they come into contact with daily. This does not require a cash bonus, this should be part of their job function. Your employees should remember that each person they interact with outside of work is a potential customer or referral source. It is their job to make sure everyone knows what amazing work your firm does.

THE FIX:

- Identify the people whose personalities align with being a rainmaker. They should possess emotional intelligence, passion, and creativity.
- Provide this team the proper training to be able to network, follow up with leads, and then close the deals.
- Reduce their current billable hour goal, and carve out time for them to spend attaining new business.

When it comes to motivating your people to bring in new clients, stop the broken cycle. It is time for a change and time to start seeing some results. Make the change at your firm in these three areas of your new client bonus, and you will be amazed at the results. ■

Why Accounting Firms Should Niche in the **Medical Cannabis Industry** *By Richard Roppa*

In case you haven't noticed yet, the medical marijuana industry is growing fast. No matter your position on the medical and recreational use of marijuana stands, you should be paying attention to the explosive growth and needs of this industry because... the times they are a changin'.

All medical marijuana growers and dispensaries have very specific accounting requirements and are in need of qualified accountants and bookkeepers to help them stay compliant as well as stay on top of their cash flow, inventory management, and point-of-sale just to name a few areas of operations.

As of August 2018, there are 31 legal medical marijuana states in the United States plus the territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. Now, that's over half of the amount of states in the US that have loosened previously tight regulations over this medicinal plant. There are 9 states where marijuana is legal for recreational use.

What exactly does this mean to Accountants and Bookkeepers?

- There's a very strong and growing niche that has formed before our eyes.
- There are "riches in the niches", as they say, and with "more dispensaries in Colorado than Starbucks, McDonald's, and 7-Eleven's combined," it's safe to say that there is no lack of clientele here.
- There's an increase in demand for qualified accountants and bookkeepers that understand this industry's nuances and needs.

Defining a niche positions your firm as the expert and "go-to" resource for clients. It also opens the door to important collaborations with fellow industry leaders. When clients need accounting help, which they all do, you'll be top of mind as the industry specialist.

Niching also comes with the advantage of partnering with apps and software developers to better serve your clients. So, instead of having to learn 10 or more various industry apps, you can specialize in, let's say, 3. You'll not only save hours of

research and learning time, but you'll be able to offer clients great prices on these apps while possibly earning affiliate income through partnerships.

If you support this industry and choose not to explore it as a niche, you may be missing out on a big opportunity for the growth of your firm!

So, you're interested in the medical marijuana industry, but where do you start?

- First, gather your resources! The National Cannabis Industry Association is the go-to for advocacy, education, and community resources. www.thecannabisindustry.org
- Ganjapreneur is your source for industry news, resources, and insights. www.ganjapreneur.com
- FindLaw has compiled a nice list of states and their requirements to open and operate a dispensary. <https://bit.ly/2xC1tnU>
- Next, reach out to other accounting firms that have specialized in this niche and get to know them. They'll be a valuable resource to you as you start. <https://bit.ly/2N0hTLs>
- Finally, begin with one dispensary and dive in! Hands-on experience is always the best way to learn and refine those skills. Or, you can start by learning directly from MJBizCon here. www.green-flower.com

The statistics are out there... the marijuana industry is not going anywhere. As Lester Black of *The Stranger* says, "If 2012 was the year we punched a hole in the green ceiling, 2018 will be the year that whatever remains of that ceiling is burned to ash like a freshly packed bowl."

Let's be ready for this industry's needs! They need you. Do you know fellow accountants and bookkeepers that could use the resources listed here? Share on social and let's connect!

What are your thoughts and concerns around niching for the marijuana industry? ■

Richard Roppa is the founder of Quasar Cowboy Consulting, where he helps accounting firms and their clients with technology, work-

THIS MONTH'S TOP FIRM MANAGEMENT SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- Who are the Most Influential People in Your Company? **Thomson Reuters Blog.** <https://tmsnrt.rs/2MMW5CU>
- How to Attract Millennial Clients. **Canopy Tax Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2pnvxyW>
- 4 Tips to Ramp Up for Fall Busy Season. **AICPA Insights Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2NrAjde>
- 5 Project Management Problems That Hurt Firms. **Wolters Kluwer Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2pnuRcM>
- Best Practices and Examples for Email Subject Lines. **Thomson Reuters Blog.** <https://tmsnrt.rs/2Q0elp3>

LATEST FIRM MANAGEMENT NEWS

AFWA Banes Hartke New President.

Karyn Hartke, CPA has been named the 2018-2019 National President of Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance (AFWA).

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429198

Convergence Coaching Announces Fall Graduates.

TLP participants develop new skills and behaviors to take their leadership to the next level, allowing them to take on new roles and responsibilities in their firms.

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12430483

K2 Enterprises Announces Quality Awards.

The K2 Quality Awards are in their seventeenth year and they are among the most well respected and longest standing awards in the accounting industry.

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Cloudy with a Chance of Desktop.

Intuit offers a conversion back to the desktop version so you can retain those old records and eliminate the recurring monthly fees.

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429570

Firm Differentiation.

How to Attract New Clients, and the Post-Wayfair Trusted Advisor Role.

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12428985

Do You Have a Disaster Recovery Plan?

Individuals, families and businesses begin getting ready for a disaster with a preparedness plan that includes key documents, lists of belongings and property.

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429203

The Shrinking “Lunch Hour”

By Isaac M. O’Bannon, Managing Editor

The lunch “hour” may be a concept of the past, new research from staffing firm OfficeTeam suggests. More than half of workers (56 percent) said their typical lunch break lasts 30 minutes or less. Among professionals in the 28 U.S. cities surveyed, those in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Miami take the longest lunches. Employees in Salt Lake City, Des Moines and Cincinnati have the shortest breaks.

What are workers doing at lunch, besides eating? Respondents said they most frequently surf the internet or social media (52 percent), followed by catching up on personal calls or emails (51 percent). That’s up from 27 percent and 25 percent, respectively, from a 2014 survey. Twenty-nine percent of professionals confessed to working during lunch.

View an infographic about lunch breaks at <https://bit.ly/2ONmpyV>. Data tables with breakdowns by age and gender are also available.

Workers were asked, “**What is the average length (in minutes) of your typical lunch break?**” Their responses:

0-10 minutes	7%	41-50 minutes	10%
11-20 minutes	8%	51-60 minutes	27%
21-30 minutes	41%	More than 60 minutes	3%
31-40 minutes	4%		100%

Workers were also asked, “**Aside from eating, which of the following activities do you usually engage in during your lunch break?**” Their responses:*

Surf the web/social media	52%
Catch up on personal calls/emails	51%
Socialize with coworkers	47%
Run errands	32%
Read	32%
Exercise/take a walk	30%
Work	29%

*Multiple responses permitted. Top responses shown.

“Even if only 30 minutes or less are available due to workloads or company guidelines, professionals should try to maximize lunch breaks to relax and recharge a bit,” said Brandi Britton, district president for OfficeTeam. “These days, people are quick to turn to their mobile devices to pass the time, but it can be a nice change of pace and good for relationship building to eat with colleagues.”

Additional findings:

- Workers ages 18 to 34 (60 percent) most often surf the web or social media during lunch, compared to those ages 35 to 54 (55 percent) and 55 and older (34 percent).
- Professionals in Phoenix, Boston and Washington, D.C., work the most on their lunch breaks.
- Employees in Miami, New York, Houston and San Diego most frequently socialize with colleagues during their breaks.
- San Francisco, Chicago and Cincinnati may be the most health-conscious, with the largest number of respondents who exercise or take a walk during lunchtime.

OfficeTeam offers five tips for workers to maximize lunch breaks:

- **Have a well-balanced meal.** Don’t skip what a midday break is intended for: eating. Choose nutritious foods that provide energy for the rest of the day.
- **Get to know colleagues.** Socializing with coworkers or managers over lunch can strengthen connections. Also, network with contacts from other departments.
- **Track professional goals.** Use the time to meet with your mentor to discuss career progress.
- **Step away from work.** Getting out and taking a real break can help you return to the office more productive. Try exercising or walking to clear your mind.
- **Take time for yourself.** Running errands or taking care of personal tasks during lunch can result in a shorter to-do list later. ■

THIS MONTH'S TOP PAYROLL SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- Hidden Costs of Payroll. 3 Fees to Watch Out For. **SurePayroll Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2MMVg23>
- 4 Payroll Features Every Small Business Owner Needs. **Insperty Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2xzav4f>
- When Do You Have to Pay for Employee Breaks? **Payroll Managing Inc. Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2MPadM2>
- What You Need to Know About Garnishments. **ADP RUN Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2QHbba>
- How to Solve Hiring in 8 Steps. **SwipeClock Blog.** <https://bit.ly/2PU68sb>

LATEST PAYROLL NEWS

Millennials Think It’s OK to Tap Home Equity for Household Bills. Twenty-four million U.S. homeowners believe it’s acceptable to use home equity to keep up with regular bills. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12430520

How Tax Reform Has Affected Small Business Hiring. Small businesses were expected to benefit from tax reform, hence the projected increase in hiring plans. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429783

Retirees Advised to Check Withholding on Pensions, Annuities. The tax reform law changed the way tax is calculated for most taxpayers including retirees. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12428910

Retailers Struggle to Find Seasonal Workers. Christmas has come early for workers hoping to score some extra money via a seasonal job this holiday period. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429973

Paychex Launches Learning Management System. 59% of HR leaders say it’s difficult to find and hire quality candidates because of the tightening labor market. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12428865

2019 Salary Guides Show Averages. The figures in the 2019 Salary Guide are based on national averages, compiled through Accounting Principals’ partnership with CareerBliss. www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12429205

Continued from page 41

Another way in which millennials are unique is their need for constant feedback. They are goal-oriented. More than 80% enjoy working as a team focused on a specific outcome. So if remote work is out of the question, you might consider a team approach in the workplace. Providing the team clear goals and regular updates on their progress helps obtain the maximum potential performance. Such an approach helps most workers, not just millennials, achieve their best irrespective of the industry or business. Part of the challenge is holding your managers and supervisors accountable for providing the regular and almost daily feedback and guidance that millennials desire that assures that they achieve the desired performance. But keep in mind that their view of the world does not always mesh with those of older generation managers. It may take some additional

effort with this group to confirm that they can effectively manage their millennial employees. They like being judged on their achievements and hate when they are not given fair treatment.

Millennials also wish to be treated as individuals rather than as a group, which is a reason why they are not prone to unionization. Generally, millennials dislike the idea of someone getting paid more based on their years of service with a company. They believe that the best employees should be paid the most regardless of how long the employee has been with an employer.

CONCLUSION

Given that they are likely to be the largest segment of our workforce for some time to come, it makes good business sense to learn to accommodate millennials and their unique perspectives. The extra effort that it takes is well worth it. ■

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IT Planning for Mergers & Acquisitions

I RECENTLY HAD the opportunity to moderate a panel discussion on best practices in mergers and acquisitions from an IT professional's perspective. Over the past several years, mergers and acquisitions have gone from an occasional event to an oft-used tool for firms looking to grow and firm owners looking to retire.

Despite this uptick in activity, too many firms consider IT to be an afterthought when it comes to M&A discussions, leading to a lack of IT planning that can result in significant challenges and expense. To ensure a successful merger or acquisition, the technology strengths and weaknesses of both firms need to be assessed and incorporated into forward planning. Here are some of the planning considerations for mergers and acquisitions in an accounting firm, and why you want to get your IT team involved sooner rather than later.

LICENSING

A common issue firms run into when acquiring a new firm is under-licensing. The firm being purchased may be completely under-licensed in certain software programs. Non-compliance can be costly in terms of fees and penalties – running into the tens of thousands of dollars in some cases. It can also cost the firm in terms of its ongoing relationships with vendors and outside entities. Those risks and costs should be factored into the deal,

but firm leaders are unlikely to be aware of these potential issues unless they get IT involved early in the due diligence process.

INTERNET

The firm you're acquiring has internet access, so it shouldn't be a problem getting the new office on your network, right? Think again. Most internet service providers require 90 days' notice to begin servicing a new location, and the actual installation can take longer than that. When you involve IT in the M&A process early, they can help you identify such deadlines and map out a detailed timeline for implementation.

CONTRACTS

Another task that IT can perform during the due diligence process is reviewing all technology

contracts and agreements for termination fees and other risks. The firm being acquired may move over to the acquiring firm's systems and software on day one or transfer contracts to the acquiring firm. Either way, contracts and agreements with all outside vendors and service providers need to be reviewed for transferability, assignment and termination clauses. Otherwise, termination fees can be an unwelcome surprise after the deal is signed.

RETENTION POLICIES

What are the record retention policies of the target firm and how do they compare to yours? A firm with tight retention policies may archive and erase emails after 30 to 180 days. The firm being acquired may not have procedures in place to save emails to client files and employees are accustomed to accessing emails in their inbox that are several years old. If both firms don't get on the same page about archiving emails on day one, this can be a nightmare in the event of litigation. IT can communicate retention policies to the firm being acquired and help them start implementing a better retention policy even before the deal is signed.

COMMUNICATIONS

Most firms prioritize communications – being able to communicate

via phone, email and messaging is often listed as a top priority for day one. Your IT team can help identify the messaging apps and other communication tools used by each party to the M&A event, whether it is used on-premises or in the cloud, and whether the firm will migrate to one standard or another. Failed or bumpy transitions to a new or shared messaging system can cause employee communication disruptions and negatively impact client service.

DOMAIN

A firm's web domain is its face to the world, so how will the websites of the two firms be handled? A merger or acquisition can cause turmoil, leading to uncertainty for clients and potential clients. A cohesive message and a well-planned domain change can help maintain communication with clients and ease concerns during a time of change.

M&A transactions present a number of challenges to an accounting firm. Getting IT involved early in the due diligence process can help your firm avoid surprises and manage M&A transactions effectively while maintaining business continuity. You'll dramatically reduce risks, disruptions and unforeseen costs with proper planning, and IT plays a vital role in the process. ■

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