

# CPA Practice Advisor

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

MAY 2020

VOLUME 30  
NUMBER 4

**PLAN A**

PLAN B

PLAN C

PLAN D

PLAN E

THE MILLENNIAL  
ADVISOR

In Search of a  
New Normal

THE LEADERSHIP  
ADVISOR

How to Lead  
During a Crisis

BRIDGING THE GAP

3 Tips for  
Developing New  
Consultants

**PRODUCT REVIEWS:**  
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# ADAPTABILITY

is the Key to Business Continuity

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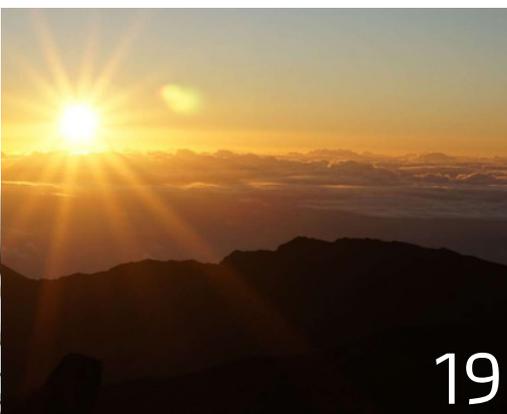


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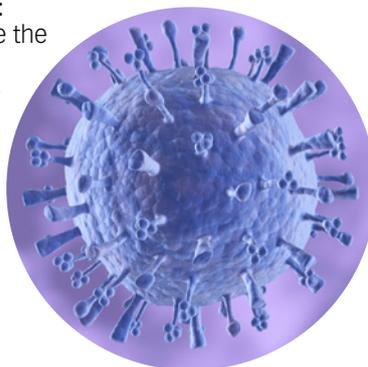
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## Staying in Touch

I FEEL EXCEPTIONALLY connected these days. In general, I always feel pretty tuned in between email and texts and social media and the constant bombardment of news alerts for which I cannot resist registering. Add a pandemic to that mix, and it seems I'm online almost every waking hour – not just doing my job which thankfully can be performed from home, but reading, watching, listening, chatting, staying connected with friends, family, colleagues and clients using video conferencing – immersing myself in all the information I can absorb from all over the world.

Juxtapose this with the sobering fact that 49.3% of the entire world's population does not use the internet (*Internetworldstats*, Q1, 2020). Add to this the (unknown number of) people who have access to the internet but are unable to comprehend

certain things. My mother-in-law, for example, can (sometimes) use the internet for email, but she only understands that the coronavirus is impacting her and her small retirement community and seems surprised every time we mention that people all over the world are suffering. Similarly, small children who are home from school or others who don't have a concept of the world outside their home area, may feel like it's just summer vacation, or may not have noticed any change at all. When you don't have a grasp of how far the world actually reaches, global events become small and even simple or nonexistent. There are those who may look to parents or caregivers with confusion, wondering when they can get together with their friends again,

as if nothing has changed outside their doorway.

The connectivity I feel, however, masks how blind I am to where we will all land when the pandemic becomes part of our history, something we can look back on instead of something we're looking through. When we experience a large weather event, such as a hurricane or a tornado or an ice storm, we understand the inherent devastation, we know that when the bad weather passes, we'll all get busy fixing and repairing and replacing and pushing ourselves back to some semblance of normal, as quickly as we can. We know what that normal looks like, and we have a pretty good idea of how to get there. With the coronavirus, however, I can't even see what the normal life will



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look like on the other side. How will we get there if we don't know where we're going?

And as advisors, how best can we help our clients when the future is murky to us? The silver lining is exactly the connectivity I've described above. If we can maintain the level of communication and information sharing that surrounds us as we make it through each day of this pandemic, continue to innovate, care, listen, empathize, and just plain muddle through together, and offer suggestions based on the body of knowledge we already have, the so-called new normal, which is a mystery to us now, might be able to unfold more gracefully with our guidance.

— Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief



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## Do You Have a Clear **Practice Management** Vision?

In these challenging times of pandemics and work-at-home, tools to manage the practice, team members, and workload help. Most firms report that advisory work has currently exploded while helping clients manage cash flow, apply for SBA and PPP loans, and dealing with the extraordinary move of changing the April 15 tax deadline to July 15. Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic will be the trigger event that shows how our firms can work in the “new normal.”

As our firms adjust to extraordinary client demand and the changing regulatory environment, we will need to consider the tools and techniques required to solve the

new problems at hand. While our vision of the future is never as clear as 20-20 hindsight, what is needed to run the “new normal,” work-at-home CPA firm?

### DEFINING THE FUTURE

What defines our future firm best? Some firms smugly declared that they were ready for work at home because they were hosting their applications or had implemented a private cloud. Unfortunately, they had not considered the impact work-at-home would have on all of their systems, communications, and support. On the other hand, partners discovered that work at home sometimes meant “not work” work at home. Team members who were self-starters continued to produce and, in many cases, had more work than ever to do. Other team members discovered ways to game the system, such as logging in, answering a few emails, and then heading off to take a shower or have breakfast before returning to their computer.

Additionally, some team members found that their home was ineffective to accommodate work-at-home. They didn’t have a comfortable chair to use for an eight- or sixteen-hour day. The kids and the dogs made too much noise to have a business call undistracted. Getting by on a smaller monitor at home didn’t work when this became the full-time setup. And the spare bedroom, basement, or closet wasn’t effective as a home office, without



Continued on page 25



# ADAPTABILI

is the Key to Business Continuity

AS THE COVID-19 pandemic continues its devastating spread across the globe, businesses in every industry are striving to weather unprecedented disruption and operational impacts. With no end to the coronavirus-fueled disruption in sight, companies are searching for ways to sustain business continuity while dealing with dramatic shifts in operational norms.

Major disasters like the coronavirus pandemic are fluid situations and, in order to make it through, companies must be able to adapt and change course as new information comes in and situations change. Clinging to established processes and comfort zones because that's the way the company has always done things will not help firms effectively manage the challenges they are currently facing.

Successfully coping with new operational norms requires companies to be agile and adaptable. A Sequoia Capital post on Medium underscored the importance of adaptability saying, "as Darwin surmised, those who survive are not the strongest or the most intelligent, but the most adaptable to change."

To survive in this new normal of economic turbulence and uncertainty, companies will need to adapt to new working paradigms, new ways of servicing clients and customers and new technology to improve processes.

### ADAPT TO NEW WORKING NORMS

As social distancing has become critical to helping slow the spread of the virus, more and more companies have shifted employees to remote working. For new remote working norms to be successful, company leaders and owners will need to adapt their management strategies to foster collaboration and productivity. They will also need to focus on forming teams that can function remotely and developing workflows that can be successfully executed away from the office. Meetings will need to be adapted to virtual gatherings and company leaders and managers will need to ensure employees have the tools and support they need to transition to remote work.

### ADAPT TO NEW WAYS OF SERVICING CLIENTS

Many professional service firms will also need to adapt the way they communicate with clients. Shifting this communication to digital channels such as video conferencing, messaging and email will help ensure the safety of both clients and employees.

With the uncertainty of the situation, firms will also need to increase the cadence of client communication. For example, accounting firms will need to keep clients updated on local, state and federal relief programs and policies. Firms will need to advise clients on the implications of any new programs to businesses and taxpayers as well as

help advise clients on how they can access relief resources that can help them survive.

### ADAPT PROCESSES WITH TECHNOLOGY

To help weather this crisis, companies will also need to adapt operational processes to become more efficient. As companies continue shifting to remote operations, technology can play a key role in keeping their businesses running.

Cloud technology can provide businesses with secure, anytime, anywhere access to information from any Internet-enabled device. Cloud software platforms, often mistakenly perceived as technology designed only for large enterprises, are becoming a fixture in a majority of business operations today to drive operational improvements. This technology can help companies save on infrastructure costs, gain flexibility to scale up or down with business conditions and eliminate the need to keep up with the latest versions of software.

Firms can leverage cloud-based accounting platforms to improve operational efficiency by automating many repetitive accounting, bookkeeping, and tax filing functions, speeding them up while delivering improved accuracy and efficiency. For professional service firms, automating these processes can free up time to provide more strategic counsel and services to clients.

These solutions also provide firms with the data and analytics they need to monitor the status of their company and quickly make decisions as the economic climate changes. For example, cloud-based accounting platforms can connect into bank account and credit card transactions to track expenses and cashflow, providing a clear picture of financial performance to better inform business strategy.

The economic fallout resulting from the coronavirus will test the ability of companies to adapt to a business climate that is changing daily. Companies that are agile enough to adapt to new working paradigms, new ways of servicing clients and new technology will successfully weather this crisis and become stronger and nimbler in navigating a post-COVID-19 future. ■

*Lil Roberts is CEO and Founder of Xendoo, a South Florida-based fintech company offering innovative online accounting and bookkeeping solutions, along with data-driven insights to small business owners. A South Florida native, Lil prides herself on building customer-centric companies that are built on teamwork, technology and integrity. A serial entrepreneur with a passion for small business, she is known as an innovator with an enviable ability to foresee market trends.*

# TY

By Lil Roberts

## Reduce Manual Data Entry

TODAY, EVEN THE smallest accounting firms could benefit from practice management software. Designed to help firms manage workflow, maintain steady communication with clients, and automate the entire time and billing process, practice management applications today can help firms manage clients proactively, while reducing the amount of manual data that needs to be entered.

Practice management applications also help managers better track employee time, ensure that tasks assigned are completed on a timely basis, and handle work in progress (WIP) billing, so you can bill today for work completed while billing for the rest at a later date.

While traditionally time and billing has been the backbone of most practice management applications, today, most practice management applications also include CRM, project management, and financial management modules as well, providing firms with an all-in-one solution that allows easy client management, time and billing, and complete integration with accounting applications. In many cases these applications also provide managers with vital information on employee productivity and efficiency so they are able to determine just how profitable a job or a client actually is.

In this issue, we took a look at several practice management applications that can certainly make your life, and the life of your employees, much easier. The products reviewed include: (click to read reviews)

- Canopy Practice Management
- Empire Suite from WSG
- OfficeTools Cloud/OfficeTools WorkSpace
- Thomson Reuters Practice CS
- Wolters Kluwer CCH Axcess Practice/ProSystem fx Practice
- Xero Practice Manager

Other solid practice management applications available include BQE Core and AccountantsWorld Practice Relief, which were recently reviewed in our Time & Billing reviews.

As always, we have included a handy chart that clearly displays some of the most important features available in practice management

applications. These features include:

- **Deployment options:** Is the application available on the cloud, as a SaaS application or as an on-premise application?
- **Mobile apps:** Does the application include a mobile app for both iOS and Android devices?
- **Time tracking methods:** Does the application include timesheet entry? Are timers available for immediate tracking? Can you track time from your cell phone?
- **Invoicing:** Invoicing may be one of the most important components in a practice management application. Does the product offer easy invoicing capability? Can you create custom invoices?
- **Dashboards:** Dashboards certainly make system navigation easier; providing you with details about your practice while providing a centralized location to navigate from. Does the application include dashboards?
- **Workflows:** For larger firms with more clients and more staff, having workflow solutions in place can help to ensure that project tasks are properly assigned.
- **Integration:** Integration can be an important component of any software



application you choose to purchase. Does the product you're interested in offer good integration options with the accounting software your firm currently uses?

Of course, some of these features are likely more important to you than others, which is why we've included them all in the chart.

Whether your firm has 10 clients, or 1,000, practice management software is a must. Check out the reviews in this issue, download a few product trials and see which practice management software application is right for your firm. ■

Mary Girsch-Bock is a freelance writer specializing in business and technology issues and is the author of her first book, several HR handbooks, training manuals, and other in-house publications. She can be reached at [mary.girschbock@cpaprac-ticeadvisor.com](mailto:mary.girschbock@cpaprac-ticeadvisor.com)

	Remote/Cloud Accessibility	Mobile Apps Available	Time & Expense Tracking	Automatic Timers	Billing & Invoicing	Dashboards	CRM	Workflows	Management Reports	Integration with Core Product	Integration with Other Applications	Help Support	2020 OVERALL RATING
CANOPY PRACTICE MANAGEMENT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	★4.5
EMPIRE SUITE FROM WSG	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	★4.75
OFFICETOOLS CLOUD/OFFICETOOLS WORKSPACE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	★5
THOMSON REUTERS PRACTICE CS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*	X	★5
WOLTERS KLUWER CCH AXCESS & PROSYSTEM FX	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*	X	★4.75
XERO PRACTICE MANAGER	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	★4.5

\*WITH VENDOR'S OWN PRODUCTS

# PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: REVIEW

## Canopy Practice Management

[www.canopytax.com](http://www.canopytax.com)

Designed for accounting firms of any size, Canopy offers complete project management, time and billing, document management, and client management capability. Canopy is completely cloud-based, so users can access the application from anywhere at any time.

Canopy currently offers two plans, with a third plan due to be released sometime in the summer of 2020, and all plans include an unlimited number of users.

Canopy also includes tax and portal mobile apps for both iOS and Android devices.

### STRENGTHS:

- Pricing includes unlimited users
- Client portal included at no extra cost
- Mobile app available

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Complete practice management only available in more expensive plan
- Limited reporting options

New features in Canopy for 2020 include a Deposits Dashboard, which provides a real-time view to all bank account balances and current cash flow. Also new is the option for clients to pay invoices in the client portal, storing payment information that can be used for future invoices. Users can also save and preview any email attachment and save tax forms directly to a client file for easy future access.

Canopy includes excellent CRM capability, with users able to track client communication and requests. A client portal is available for sharing tax forms, engagement letters, invoices, and other documents. In addition, users are able to create custom fields for tracking additional information.



2020 OVERALL RATING

4.5

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136857](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136857)

Pricing is based on the number of contacts: the Basic plan is \$894 per year for 200 contacts; the Standard plan is \$1,073 for the same number of contacts. Both plans include an unlimited number of users, the client portal, mobile app, document management, and invoicing, although time tracking or project management capability is only offered in the Standard plan.

## Empire Suite

[www.empiresuite.com](http://www.empiresuite.com)

Empire Suite is a cloud-based application that offers several seamlessly integrated solutions: Empire TIME, Empire EXPENSE, Empire CALENDAR, Empire RESOURCE, Empire AUTOMATED TAX SCHEDULING and Empire TIME OFF. All products are designed to work together to create a robust management solution. Empire Suite is best suited to larger businesses, but scalable to any size.

Empire Suite has added several new features since it was reviewed last, including PTO management

using any device, the ability to do resource scheduling at the activity level, the ability to create multiple

employee types, the addition of business intelligence reporting, and an enhanced project user interface. The other major addition is the availability of timers, which allows managers to track employee time, with employees also able to track time spent on a specific project.

Empire Suite's app Empire MOBILE is compatible with both iOS and Android devices, and it allows users to perform a variety of tasks including automatic downloading of credit card expenses for easy billing, tracking all assigned projects, the ability to track time and expense entries, and the ability to track mileage. Managers can access employee time and timer function directly from the mobile app, and time can be entered into Empire Suite when offline, with the data later syncing with the application once a connection



2020 OVERALL RATING

4.75

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136863](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136863)

has been restored. The mobile app is available in English, Spanish, and German languages, with more languages coming soon.

Empire Suite is better suited to firms with strong project management needs rather than the practice management needs of a CPA firm. A powerful, robust system, Empire Suite is optimally designed for enterprise level organizations that are looking for a centralized project management application that integrates with ERP accounting applications.

## OfficeTools Cloud and OfficeTools WorkSpace [www.officetools.com](http://www.officetools.com)

OfficeTools from AbacusNext offers two practice management solutions: OfficeTools Cloud and OfficeTools WorkSpace. OfficeTools Cloud combines CRM, project and due date tracking, time and billing, and document management into a single, cloud accessible application and is best suited for small to mid-sized firms that are looking for an all-in-one practice management solution. OfficeTools WorkSpace also includes a mobile app that supports both iOS and Android devices and also offers an optional client portal for easy communication with clients. For those that prefer

### STRENGTHS:

- Extremely easy to use
- Offers both cloud and on-premise deployment
- Includes a client portal

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Can be expensive for firms with multiple users

on-premise installation, OfficeTools WorkSpace can be installed on a local workstation or network or hosted in Abacus Private Cloud if desired.

The single screen user interface in WorkSpace offers easy access to all clients, with a client list displayed to the left of the screen while tabs at the top of the screen offer access to important tasks such as Calls, Schedule, Projects, Time, Billing, and the Documents option, for complete document management capability. The screen also displays a list of upcoming tasks, with estimated times to complete each task included.

OfficeTools Cloud is designed to make managing a practice easy, and it does this tremendously well. The



2020 OVERALL RATING

5

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136867](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136867)

browser based application allows users to access any task, client, or workflow from a single starting point, and all navigation screens are free of clutter and offer hyperlinks to other system areas. OfficeTools Cloud is currently priced starting at \$49 per month, billed annually, or \$59 per month when billed monthly.

# REVIEW: PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

## Thomson Reuters Practice CS

[www.thomsonreuters.com](http://www.thomsonreuters.com)

Thomson Reuters Practice CS is a standalone product that is suitable for accounting firms of all sizes,

however this product is part of the Thomson Reuters CS Professional Suite and firms using other Thomson Reuters applications will see the most productivity from the application. Practice CS offers a strong time and billing component, and includes complete firm, employee, and client management

capability. A mobile app that supports both iOS and Android smartphones and other devices includes a built-in timer for tracking time from any location.

Practice CS currently offers three deployment

options: SaaS, Virtual Office CS, which combines traditional licensing with SaaS Connectivity, and an On-Premise edition.

Practice CS offers staff, client, and firm dashboards for easy system navigation. The Practice CS firm dashboard includes an informative summary of WIP, AR balances, a billing summary, and key totals, with all dashboard data offering drill-down capability, enabling users to access a variety of originating documents. Users also have access to a variety of options using the tabs at the top of the screen, and a drop-down menu at the top of the screen is available for accessing various actions, tools, and help.

The Thomson Reuters support page offers excellent help and support tools from the Help and How-To



2020 OVERALL RATING

5

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136851](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136851)

### STRENGTHS:

- Good fit for firms of any size
- Excellent integration with other CS Professional Suite applications
- Offers three deployment options

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Limited integration with third-party applications

Center, where users can search for answers to specific questions. A user community is available, and users can contact help resources from any screen in the application. Both telephone and email support are available during regular business hours, and Thomson Reuters offers a variety of on-demand, web, and classroom training options.

Those interested can visit the website for additional information, view a demo, or request pricing information for their firm.

## CCH Access Practice Management & ProSystem fx Suite Practice Management

[www.cchgroup.com](http://www.cchgroup.com)

CCH Access Practice Management and ProSystem fx Suite's Practice Management both from CCH Group are

best suited for mid-sized or larger accounting firms that use other CCH applications.

CCH Access Practice Management is available on the cloud, while ProSystem fx Practice Management is an on-premise application, with both applications offering similar features and functionality, including complete time entry, AR management, CRM

capability, and solid reporting capability.

Both applications include customizable firm,

employee, project and client dashboards that provide users with access to information such as WIP, an accounts receivable summary, along with client, billing, and upcoming staffing needs. A new resources dashboard has recently been added, making it easier for managers to view available staff resources when assigned new projects or tasks. In addition, the resources dashboard includes forecasting capability, allowing managers to easily spot potential staffing issues and balance workload between staff appropriately.

The CCH Learning Center offers access to a variety of help options including informational videos, interactive webinars, and white papers. Even better, users have access to more than 350 self-study courses



2020 OVERALL RATING

4.75

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136854](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136854)

### STRENGTHS:

- Offers solid integration with other CCH applications
- Excellent reporting
- Intuitive data entry throughout both products

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Limited integration with third party applications
- Both applications perform better when used with other CCH products

that are available from the support center. Users can also access all help and support options from within CCH Access Practice or ProSystem fx Practice Management. FAQs and product guides are available from the support center, and users are able to access product updates from this location as well. Both applications offer telephone and email support options through the annual maintenance agreement.

Pricing for both applications is available upon request.

## Xero Practice Manager

[www.xero.com](http://www.xero.com)

Xero Practice Manager is designed to be used by accounting firms in conjunction with their clients'

use of Xero Online Accounting. Xero Practice Manager is cloud-based, with users able to access the application from any device at any time. Xero Practice Manager also includes a mobile app that is compatible with both iOS and Android devices, providing users with easy time entry capability as well as access to various management tools and resources.

Xero Practice Manager's dashboard is the main starting point for all system processes.

The dashboard displays a time summary for system users, a list of important dates, as well as a summary of jobs that need to be handled immediately. Users also have access to their weekly schedule, as well as links to enter time, create a new job, or access a current job.

Xero Practice Manager contains an excellent leads option, with users able to create leads, view the current status of any lead, as well as create quotes for any new lead.

Xero Practice Management offers firms a partner



2020 OVERALL RATING

4.5

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136844](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136844)

program that includes generous product discounts and free software to accounting firms with clients that are using or are interested in using Xero. Xero Practice Management is free for current Xero Partners that are at the Silver level or above, while those at lower levels (Partner and Bronze) will pay \$149 per month for access to the application.



**AMY VETTER, CPA, CITP, CGMA**  
Mindful Technologist &  
Keynote Speaker  
@AmyVetterCPA

## How to Lead During a Crisis

AT THIS POINT, there's no point in pretending that things are anywhere close to normal. The coronavirus crisis has touched all of our lives, changing the way businesses operate and altering the tax calendar itself. Firms everywhere are experiencing huge challenges, and not just those related to getting everyone on a Zoom call without a kiddo causing disruption or home wifi hitting the fritz. Small businesses are under threat right now, with uncertainty at an all-time high. In times like these, the right leadership can make all the difference.

When you get into a routine of business as usual, it's easy to rely on old-hat leadership tactics. A little affirmation here, a touch of directed feedback there, and you're all set. Well, we're no longer dealing with business as usual, and leadership styles need to change in kind. There's no playbook for dealing with how COVID-19 is changing the business landscape, so you'll need to look within, dig deep, and be the best leader you can be, both for your team members and your clients. I can't pretend to know all the answers, nobody can, but I can share some hard-won wisdom from dealing with previous tumultuous situations.

### BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT YOU KNOW (AND WHAT YOU DON'T).

Right now, the goalposts move every day. We simply do not know when it will be safe to go back to normal. There will likely be a long period of trial and error before society settles into a normal rhythm again. That level of uncertainty isn't great when you're in a leadership role and people want answers. But the absolute worst thing you can do right now is pretend that uncertainty doesn't exist.

"It's essential first to accept that perfection is impossible and the wrong thing to pursue," said executive coach Nihar Chhaya in a recent Forbes article. "You will undoubtedly say one thing that will change the next day, and others may criticize you for it. But don't

take it personally and don't worry about being right all the time."

If you are first honest about the fact you can't be certain, your team will be much more understanding about the variable nature of information. Business owners and those in leadership positions are masters of their domains, but only to an extent. In times like these, you know you can't control everything, and your team knows it too. There's no point in pretending otherwise.

### HAVE HARD CONVERSATIONS THE RIGHT WAY.

You've probably already heard a horror story about a conference call or Zoom webinar that featured a mass layoff executed with cold, impersonal precision. Needless to say,

you absolutely do not want to adopt this approach. No matter the size of your firm, you should be willing to engage in frank, empathetic dialog, even if it's difficult to do so. Trying to evade responsibility or conversation is a recipe for disaster.

Obviously, nobody wants to furlough or lay off team members. However, that undesirable outcome is already a fact of life for many businesses. If it has to happen, it should be done with compassion. If keeping people on simply isn't an option, you should at least be upfront with departing team members, offering whatever help you can while acknowledging your remorse. Most of all, you have to try to complete the exercise in the most human way possible, even while following

social-distancing measures. It may not be an easy task, but it's just the right thing to do.

### FIND A WAY TO BE POSITIVE

These are not easy times, but things will get better. On some days, you may have trouble believing that, but I promise you it's true. Remember to take time to focus on yourself, eat well, sleep, exercise, reflect, and find reasons to be joyful wherever you can. There's a lot to be fearful of and worried about with regards to the coronavirus, but there will be opportunity that comes from this important historical moment. We're all in it together, and it's up for leaders, in business and in all arenas of our life, to become our best selves. ■



## Apps to Survive the Pandemic

WHAT DOES A person or a business need during a pandemic and how can apps fill that need? We weren't sure ourselves, so we started searching. Here are the results of that search.

### PANDEMIC GAMES

There seems to be a lot of game playing going on as we're all confined to our living quarters. Beyond the traditional app games we might use as filler during our normal lives, there are plenty of games specifically geared toward helping us either find a way out of the pandemic or relive it over and over with a prize in mind. Here is a sampling:

- **Plague Inc.** (\$.99) is the game that encourages you to wipe out the world's population and let nothing stand in your way. The game has won many awards, and the reviews – not just from players but from major publications around the globe – are excellent for the gamesmanship, the challenge, and the quality of the product. (Note that earlier this year the Cyberspace Administration of China deemed the game illegal in China and it was removed from the Apple app store)
- **Pandemic The Board Game** (\$4.99) is the app based on the popular board game where, instead of killing everyone, your goal is to save the world from four deadly diseases. Reviews are mixed. There are multiple levels of difficulty.
- Not technically apps, this game and the next one are particularly interesting for their educational value. In the **Vax epidemic prevention game** you

have a chance to visualize how a disease spreads while you make the life and death decisions about who gets to die in order to save the largest group of population.

- **Just the Vax** is an educational and “fun way to learn about vaccines,” designed for children and disguised as a trivia game.

### COVID-19-SPECIFIC APPS

Whether you are concerned about your symptoms, want to know how many cases have been found in your area, or want to share your information with others, these apps can help you weather the pandemic:

- **COVID Control**, produced by Johns Hopkins University, provides an opportunity for you to anonymously report your temperature and COVID-related symptoms daily along with your zip code so that the potential of new outbreaks can be tracked.
- In conjunction with the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Apple has created its **Apple COVID-19** app which provides information and resources on identifying symptoms and better understanding the pandemic.
- **Healthlynked COVID-19 Tracker** allows you to report your symptoms in order to determine an

early diagnosis. This app can send a notification to your contacts so they can seek medical care if they have been in contact with you. The app reports the latest data from the World Health Organization and shows hot spots on a world map.

### LIVING UNDER LOCKDOWN APPS

We still need to carry on. If you are on lockdown, there is no shortage of food available. Whether you are in need of delivery/pickup options, how-to-cook lessons, home entertainment, or information on managing the overwhelmingness of all of this, these apps may come in handy.

- **Food delivery:** There is a plethora of apps designed to bring food to your doorstep. **GrubHub**, **DoorDash**, **UberEats**, **Seamless**, **Postmates**, and **Instacart** will pick up what you want and deliver it. Hours and destinations vary by location.
- **Learn how to cook:** You don't have to be a Top Chef to cook like one. There are live and on-demand videos available 24-7 to show you how to prepare meals, along with recipes and step-by-step instructions. Rather than getting overwhelmed with it all, try thinking about what you would order if only you could go out to your favorite restaurant, and then try recreating that at home (with the help of a food delivery service to get you the ingredients you need).
- **Others need food too.** You may have a full pantry, but many are struggling. The **FoodFinder** app shows you where to find food assistance programs in your area which you can use yourself, recommend to others, or to which you can provide donations so that they can carry on.
- **Stress/anxiety management:** We did an article on this topic three years ago – long before the pandemic occurred – now would be a good time to revisit these apps to help you get through the long days and nights. <https://www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12299983/>
- **Media streaming:** Fortunately, we live in the era of streaming, so whether you go directly to the television station websites or YouTube online, pay for services such as **HBO**, **Showtime**, **Amazon Prime**, **Netflix**, and **Hulu**, search for video content online, or even connect with your public library's free **Kanopy** service, there is plenty of video entertainment to last through this pandemic. ■



Now Available in QuickBooks Online Accountant:

# Month-End Review and Industry Benchmarks

YOU'RE ALWAYS LOOKING for tools and resources to help you work more efficiently and elevate your role as a trusted advisor. The two newest features in QuickBooks Online Accountant—month-end review and industry benchmarks—can help. Month-end review enables accountants to standardize the process and then uses automation to help deliver accurate books in less time and with more confidence. And industry benchmarks allow you to quickly gain expert-level insights in order to make actionable recommendations to your clients, providing a helpful resource during this unprecedented time.

Month-end review and industry benchmarks are currently available to all QuickBooks Online Accountant users in the United States as “open betas.” Intuit will continue to evolve the experience for both features, including rolling out additional enhancements and functionality to help save you time and better serve your clients.

## MONTH-END REVIEW

With month-end review, you'll have a simple, powerful platform to help create a more organized, consistent, and accurate process for closing your clients' books at the end of the month. At the same time, you'll get the tools you need to identify common client issues and hard-to-find anomalies.

Here are some of the biggest benefits of the new month-end review feature inside QuickBooks Online Accountant:

**More time.** Being able to easily identify common problems and difficult-to-spot issues can help save you time and allow you to bring your clients impactful solutions that were previously overlooked or identified too late. With month-end review, you can also quickly resolve transition

details with automatic flagging of missing data. New functionality that is expected to come this summer includes the ability to more accurately reconcile accounts through automatic detection of duplicate and outstanding data, and the ability to easily identify issues for further investigation through automatic identification of unexpected balances from period to period.

**More confidence.** Another big perk is having confidence that your clients' books are complete and accurate. In addition to step-by-step workflows, customizable client checklists allow you to track unique client processes, while task and reconciliation progress tracking helps you keep up with the month-end closing process.

**Streamline your firm.** Getting more done in less time is key for any practice. With month-end review, the end-of-month close is simplified and standardized across your team with consistent workflows and a final review checklist.

Month-end review is broken down into three steps: transaction review, account reconciliation, and final review. Here's a sample overview of how it will look inside the accountant toolbox (actual screen may vary), when logged into your clients' books:

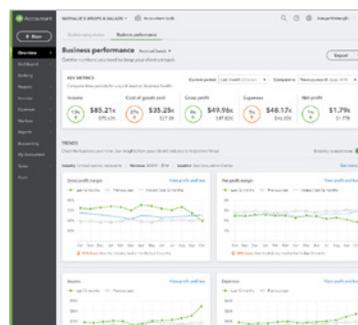
## INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

Industry benchmarks are part of the rapidly growing QuickBooks Online Accountant Business Performance Dashboard, which quickly assesses

able to provide recommendations based on actionable data that can help your clients to understand where they stand next to the competition based on available data. Specifically, you could help them make informed decisions by identifying areas for improvement through industry benchmarks across key metrics. On top of that, you can measure how clients are trending against their competition through period performance tracking.

**Save time.** Using the industry picker, you can quickly determine how clients compare to one another. Simply select your client's business type using the industry picker, and QuickBooks quickly and automatically compiles industry data from similar businesses in the same location and revenue range. Once selected, QuickBooks updates your data every month, so you don't need to search for the correct industry data or worry that your comparisons are out of date.

To access industry benchmarks within the Business Performance Dashboard, go into any of your clients' books and click on Business Performance Dashboard within the overview tab. Here is a snapshot:



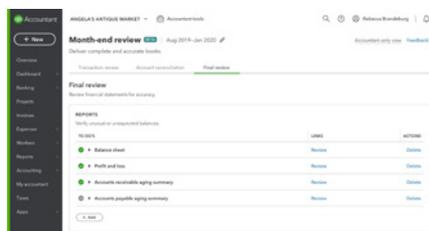
key performance indicators, and spots business trends to help you identify and share opportunities — that may be applied towards recovery and/or growth — for your clients.

With industry benchmarks, you can now bring expert-level industry insights to client advisory, enabling you to better identify areas for business improvement and set smarter goals. Based on the power of aggregated, anonymized QuickBooks data, you can compare your clients' business performance to similar businesses in their industry, in the same location and with similar revenue, to identify problems and opportunities, as well as focus and improve your clients' business outcomes.

To help ensure accuracy, the data used to generate benchmarks is pulled only from QuickBooks Online accounts that are attached to an accountant and where the books are regularly reconciled.

Here are several of the biggest benefits of industry benchmarks:

**Provide greater impact.** You are



## TRANSFORM YOUR PRACTICE

Taking your practice to the next level means that you must embrace change and find solutions to meet your clients' needs. With these new features in QuickBooks Online Accountant -- both available at no additional cost -- you'll have the tools and resources to help you on this path, making sure you provide your clients with excellent service.

Learn more at: <https://quickbooks.intuit.com/accountant>. ■

The ProAdvisor Spotlight is sponsored by



## More Than Tracking Products

IT MAY BE stating the obvious, but if you sell a product, you need to manage that product properly. That's where inventory management software comes in.

While most people view inventory management as the act of tracking products in and out of your warehouse, inventory management also does the following:

**Tracks sales across multiple warehouses and multiple supply chains.** It's difficult enough to track inventory levels in a single warehouse; try tracking inventory levels that are in multiple locations, or come from multiple suppliers. It's impossible, and even if you did manage to do a fairly decent job tracking your inventory levels, imagine the time it would take in order to do so.

**Notifies you when stock runs low.** Every retailer knows the nightmare of running low on stock, particularly stock that is in high demand. In this day of instant gratification, it's rare that someone is content to wait for a back-ordered item to come back into stock. Instead, they'll scour the Internet for someone who does have that item in stock – and buy it from them instead.

**Manages product levels intelligently.** It makes sense to stock more

of a popular product than one that only sells occasionally. Inventory management software can provide you with a handy list of your top sellers, along with your not-so-top sellers, so you can order accordingly.

**Scan items into inventory using a bar code scanner.** If you've been in the retail business for a while, you'll remember having to count your inventory manually, even when it was delivered. Now, with bar code scanning offered by many products, you can simply scan the code on the box, updating your inventory totals automatically.

**Manages equipment for service businesses.** If you run a service business, you know how hard it can be to keep track of where your assets are at all times. Inventory management software keeps track of all of your high-priced items, so you'll always know exactly where they are.

It isn't only retailers that need good inventory management software. Manufacturers also need to track parts, on an even more detailed level. After all, if just one of those parts is

out of stock, your entire production line could shut down immediately. Larger corporations also have a need to track office inventory such as employee computers or laptops.

The inventory management reviews included in this issue of *CPA Practice Advisor* range in scope and functionality, with some ideal for QuickBooks users, while others are suitable for businesses of any size that need to manage their inventory. The products included in this issue are:

- Acctivate
- AdvancePro
- Asset Panda
- EZOfficeInventory
- Fishbowl
- InFlow
- WASP Inventory
- Zoho Inventory

When reviewing these applications, we looked at a variety of features including deployment options available, mobile accessibility, barcode functionality, labeling features, kitting capability, asset tracking, and multiple pricing levels. We have also included a chart that highlights the features and functions found in each of the above applications.

As an added bonus, many of these applications offer a free trial, allowing you to get a feel for the application and



determine if it would be a fit for your business or your client.

If you or your client is in the business of selling products, be sure that you're managing one of your most important assets properly by investing in inventory management software today. ■

Mary Girsch-Bock is a freelance writer specializing in business and technology issues and is the author of her first book, several HR handbooks, training manuals, and other in-house publications. She can be reached at [mary.girschbock@cpapracticadvisor.com](mailto:mary.girschbock@cpapracticadvisor.com)



	Remote/Cloud Accessibility	Mobile Apps Available	Asset/Inventory Tracking	Serial # Tracking	Barcode Printing/Labeling	Item Images	Kitting Capability	Multiple Pricing Levels	Multiple Valuation Levels	Volume Pricing & Discounts	Inventory Reporting	Integration with Accounting Applications	Integration with POS & E-Commerce	Help & Support	2020 OVERALL RATING
ACCTIVATE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	★ 4.75
ADVANCEPRO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X*	X	★ 5
ASSET PANDA	X	X	X	X	X	X					X	X		X	★ 4.5
EZOFFICEINVENTORY	X	X	X		X	X					X			X	★ 4.5
FISHBOWL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	★ 5
INFLOW	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	★ 4.75
WASP INVENTORY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X			X	★ 4.5
ZOHO INVENTORY	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	★ 4.75

\* OPTIONAL MODULE

# INVENTORY MANAGEMENT: REVIEW

## Acctivate

<https://acctivate.com>

2020 OVERALL RATING

4.75

Read the full review for this product online at: [www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136562](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136562)

### STRENGTHS:

- Offers both on-premise and cloud deployment
- Seamless integration with QuickBooks Desktop and QuickBooks Online
- Numerous add-on modules available

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Only suitable for those using QuickBooks applications
- No telephone support available

Acctivate Inventory management software is designed to be used exclusively with QuickBooks Desktop and QuickBooks Online applications. Along with advanced inventory management capability, Acctivate also includes purchasing, customer service, and business management capability. Ideal for both retailers and distributors that currently use QuickBooks applications, Acctivate

offers the advanced inventory features missing from QuickBooks applications.

The latest version of Acctivate (Version 11) offers numerous system enhancements including the addition of window tabs that are designed to help keep better track of open windows. Another new feature is the addition of list windows, which provides access to customer, sales, products, transactions, and vendor lists, with a drop down tab directly below the menu bar. Acctivate has also enhanced the warehouse layout and added several order processing updates to the application as well.



## AdvancePro Supply Chain Management [www.advanceprotech.com](http://www.advanceprotech.com)

2020 OVERALL RATING

5

Read the full review for this product online at: [www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136564](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136564)

### STRENGTHS:

- QuickBooks Integration
- Unlimited technical support
- Excellent integration with e-Commerce applications

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Integration with other accounting applications is limited
- Setup may be time-consuming

AdvancePro Supply Chain Management is well-suited for larger manufacturing, distribution and wholesale businesses. AdvancePro offers seamless integration with QuickBooks Online and desktop, as well as shipping applications, and can be deployed as an on-premise application as well as accessed on the cloud. In addition, AdvancePro includes a mobile app for both iOS and Android smartphones.

AdvancePro offers a long list of core features including General System Management, Inventory Management, Warehouse Management, Order Management, Product Information, Pricing Management, Vendor Management, Bar Coding, Report Intelligence, Multiple Warehouse, Order Matrix, UPS/FedEx Integration, and Lot & Serial Numbers, with several other default features available in the core application. Premium modules available include Wireless Warehouse-AP Mobile and Web Services/e-Commerce.



## Asset Panda

[www.assetpanda.com](http://www.assetpanda.com)

2020 OVERALL RATING

4.5

Read the full review for this product online at: [www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136563](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136563)

### STRENGTHS:

- Easy to use
- Ability to configure charts in dashboard menu

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Not suitable for retail business or online sellers
- Not suitable for manufacturing
- No integration with outside shipping agencies
- Limited reporting functionality

Asset Panda is a cloud-based asset management application that is suitable for businesses of any size that have a high number of internal and company assets that need to be tracked and managed properly. This can be particularly important for businesses that deal with constant asset movement such as medical, IT, and tools and

equipment professions. Asset Panda also has a mobile app for iOS and Android devices that includes complete bar code scanning, mobile security, the ability to add assets via the mobile app, along with complete integration with the web application.

Asset Panda now includes a dashboard menu, where users can configure a variety of charts for their business, with the option to choose the asset types to be included.

Asset Panda is well-suited for businesses of any



## EZOfficeInventory

[EZOfficeInventory.com](http://EZOfficeInventory.com)

2020 OVERALL RATING

4.75

Read the full review for this product online at: [www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136560](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136560)

### STRENGTHS:

- Scalable, with four plans available
- Good for businesses of all sizes
- Integrates with Microsoft Excel

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- No kitting or manufacturing capability
- No integration with point of sale or e-commerce sites

EZOfficeInventory offers online asset tracking and inventory management and is a good fit for businesses with a large number of internal assets or inventory that needs to be tracked. EZAssetInventory is not a good fit for retailers or online sellers.

EZOfficeInventory is a scalable application, with four plans available, making it suitable for businesses of any

size. In addition, the application includes a features laden mobile app that is compatible with both iOS and Android smartphones and tablets.

New in EZOfficeInventory is the ability to create custom roles for system users, which restricts system features and functions by role.

EZOfficeInventory has four plans to choose from: Essential, which runs \$35 per month and supports unlimited users; Advanced, which runs \$45 per month; Premium, which runs \$50 per month; and an Enterprise plan with custom pricing. Plan pricing



is based on number of items managed; pricing levels above are based on managing 250 items. EZOfficeInventory also offers a free, 15-day subscription so those interested can try out the application prior to purchasing. All plans include the Inventory Management module, GPS, Mobile Apps, Depreciation, Reservations, and Reports and Analytics.

# REVIEW: INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

## Fishbowl Warehouse

### STRENGTHS:

- Integrates with QuickBooks and Xero
- Offers warehouse and manufacturing options
- Great integration with online selling platforms

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Outdated user interface
- Primarily sold as an on-premise solution

Fishbowl Warehouse is an on-premise inventory management application that is designed to seamlessly integrate with QuickBooks Desktop, QuickBooks Online, and Xero, though it can also be used as a stand-alone inventory management application if desired. Fishbowl is available in U.S. and Canadian editions, and offers both warehouse and manufacturing options. Better designed for those that manufacture

[www.fishbowlinventory.com](http://www.fishbowlinventory.com)

or distribute items, Fishbowl can also be used in both brick and mortar and online retail businesses.

Fishbowl Warehouse also includes a mobile app available that supports both iOS and Android devices, and those interested in online accessibility can use Fishbowl Hosted Services, which will host the product on their servers for easy online access.

Upon installation, users can choose the business type that they specialize in, choosing from manufacturing, distribution, service, warehousing, and asset management, as well as from various business types including online retail, government, retail, or wholesale.

2020 OVERALL RATING

5

Read the full review for this product online at:  
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136561](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136561)

Fishbowl offers a variety of add-on applications that can increase program functionality. Especially well-suited for retailers and manufacturers that are using QuickBooks Desktop, QuickBooks Online, or Xero, Fishbowl can also be used as a stand-alone application. Fishbowl currently offers a free, 14-day trial for those interested in trying out the application, with pricing available directly from Fishbowl.

## inFlow Inventory Software

### STRENGTHS:

- Scalable with multiple plans available
- Works for both brick and mortar and online sellers
- Integrates with QuickBooks Online

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Limited asset tracking capability
- Limited telephone support options available

inFlow Inventory is well-suited for retailers, distributors, and online merchants of any size. inFlow is available as a cloud application, although there is a basic version that can be installed on desktop systems if desired. inFlow is scalable, with four plans available, including an Enterprise plan that is ideal for larger businesses that

[www.inflowinventory.com](http://www.inflowinventory.com)

allows users to check inventory levels and also check products into and out of inventory using the barcode scanner that is included in the app. The mobile app is compatible with both iOS and Android devices. inFlow includes asset tracking capability once users create specific locations.

Designed for retail businesses and online merchants of all sizes, inFlow Inventory is scalable, with four plans available; Light, which runs \$71 per month and supports two users and up to 100 orders per month; Standard, which runs \$179 per month and supports up to five users and up to 500 orders

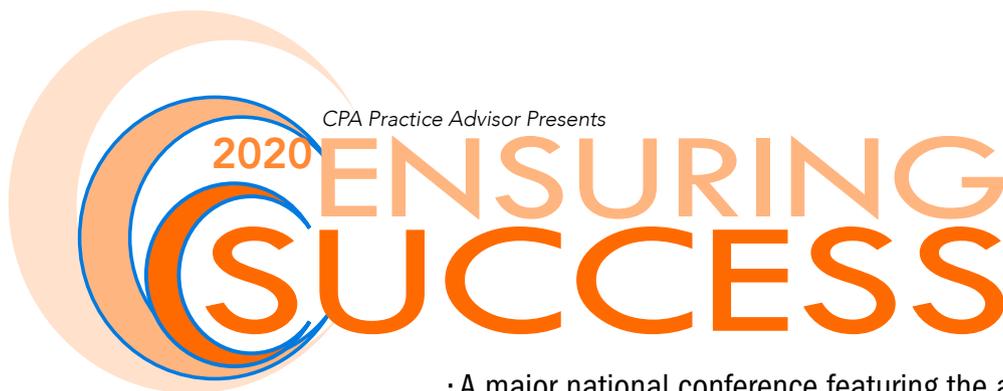
2020 OVERALL RATING

4.75

Read the full review for this product online at:  
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136558](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136558)

per month, as well as unlimited inventory locations; and Plus, which is \$359 per month and supports up to 10 users, up to 1,000 orders per month and also supports unlimited inventory locations. For very large retailers, inFlow offers an Enterprise plan, with details and pricing available directly from the vendor. All plans, except for the Enterprise plan offer a 14-day trial for those that wish to test drive the application.

need to manage inventory from multiple locations. inFlow Inventory also includes a mobile app that



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# INVENTORY MANAGEMENT: REVIEW

## WASP Inventory Cloud

### STRENGTHS:

- Integrates with other WASP applications
- Easy to set up
- Both on-premise and cloud applications available

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Not suited for online or e-Commerce platforms
- Limited integration with third-party applications

WASP Inventory Cloud from WASP Barcode Technologies is best suited for mid-size and larger retail businesses that are also looking for sales, purchasing, and production capability. WASP Inventory Cloud also offers an on-premise solution for those that prefer local installation, with

pre-bundled and built it yourself options offered. The application also includes a mobile app that is compat-

ible with both iOS and Android devices.

WASP Inventory Cloud has an intuitive user interface, with users able to easily add new inventory items. Tabs provide access to vendors, prices, locations, and attachments, where users can attach documents such as warranties, invoices, purchase orders, or photos.

WASP Inventory Cloud also includes warehouse management, stock room management, manufacturing process management, and consumables tracking.

WASP Inventory Cloud Complete pricing starts at \$3,495 and includes a mobile app for iOS and Android

[www.waspbarcode.com](http://www.waspbarcode.com)

### 2020 OVERALL RATING

4.5

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136556](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136556)

devices, with the Basic plan starting at \$595. For those who prefer an on-premise solution, the Inventory Cloud Complete on-premise plan is \$6,995, with the Basic plan starting at \$1,795. Those interested in any WASP application can request a demo directly from the vendor if desired.

## Zoho Inventory Management

### STRENGTHS:

- Complete integration with other Zoho applications
- Intuitive user interface
- Scalable, with 4 plans offered

### POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS:

- Does not handle asset tracking
- Limited integration with accounting applications

Zoho Inventory Management is part of Zoho's suite of applications that are designed for small to mid-sized businesses. Zoho Inventory is cloud-based, and it includes an app for both iOS and Android devices.

Along with inventory management, Zoho Inventory also offers warehouse management, multichannel selling, order

management, order fulfillment, and good reporting options, making it a great choice for retailers that sell

from a brick and mortar location as well as online. A great option for retailers who sell products on a global scale, Zoho Inventory is available in U.S., UK, Canadian, Australian, Indian, and Global editions.

Zoho Inventory is scalable, with four plans (including a free plan) available. Paid plans include Basic, which runs \$39 per organization per month, and supports up to two warehouse locations and up to 10 system users; Standard, which runs \$79 per month and supports up to five warehouse locations, and up to 15 users; and Professional, which currently runs \$199 per month and supports up to 10 warehouses

[www.zoho.com](http://www.zoho.com)

### 2020 OVERALL RATING

4.75

Read the full review for this product online at:

[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136557](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21136557)

and unlimited system users. All pricing is based on annual billing, with month-to-month options running slightly higher. Zoho also offers a free 14-day trial for those interested in learning more about the product.

Dec. 2 & 3

Register now at

[www.ensuringsuccess.com](http://www.ensuringsuccess.com)

CONFERENCE



## How to Leverage Chatbots in your Firm's Marketing By Becky Livingston

**IF YOU'RE WONDERING if your firm should create a chatbot, you're asking the wrong question. Rather, you should be asking, "When we create a chatbot, what do we want users to gain from using it?"**

Maybe you're even wondering how a chatbot can save your firm money, time, effort, or energy? No matter what your reason, consider these stats:

- 41% of people starting online chat conversations with businesses are C-level executives. (Drift)
- Chatbots can help businesses save on customer service costs by answering up to 80% of routine questions. (IBM)
- 67% of U.S. millennial internet users would purchase a product/service from brands using a chatbot. (eMarketer)

### WHAT CAN YOU USE A CHATBOT FOR AT YOUR FIRM? HERE ARE SEVEN SUGGESTIONS.

- Answer commonly-asked questions and to generate leads.
- Increase opportunity to gain market share.
- Save staff time, effort, and energy on simple tasks.
- Increase efficiency with a mobile site.
- Selling or promoting services.

- Marketing content through online channels.
- Quick access to the right products and services versus using a site search.

### HOW CAN IT BE USED IN COMBINATION WITH MARKETING?

When visitors come to your site, finding the solution to the problem they have may not seem intuitive, especially if the firm offers a lot of services. A chatbot can help to reduce confusion and to direct the visitor exactly where he/she needs to go.

Research for future content, services, and offerings can be identified by a bot. Let's say the people who use your chatbot click on a few questions a lot more than others. That data helps to inform your content-development cycle.

Lead generation is also a good use of bots. Bots can be programmed with lead-qualifying questions to determine where the customer is in the buying funnel. If that lead meets your criteria, you know if you should contact them, rather than spending time on all leads only to narrow the list down to a few good candidates.

Data collected from a bot can be used to personalize content for the user. A personalized bot could work in conjunction with your email system or website blog to display content in which that person has shown a prior interest.

Cross selling is also a popular chatbot function. But how would a firm use it? An example would be, if a visitor asked questions about inheritance tax, the bot could be programmed to provide a link to your financial planning

services or to lead-generation content they could download.

Defining your target market is sometimes difficult. Bots track demographic and psychographic data, which can in-turn be used in other marketing campaigns, such as social media and online advertising. It also informs you about other interests your frequent users have, which you could tie into your organic content and social media efforts.

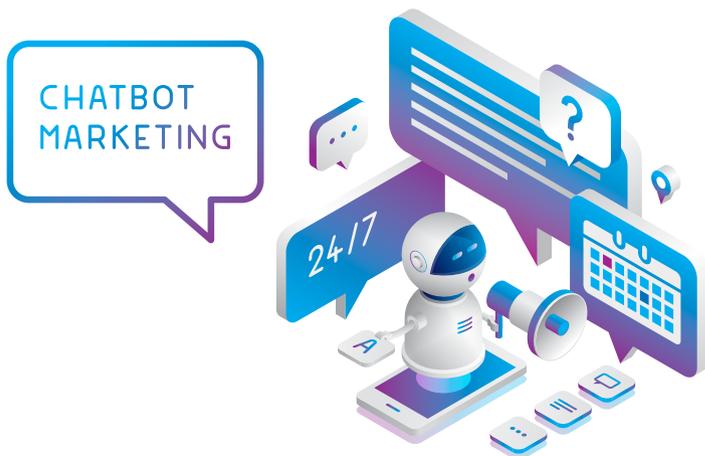
For example, the bot identifies an overwhelming number of people are interested in baseball. You could write a series of articles on some of the accounting and tax challenges professional baseball players have, including multi-state taxes, estate planning, bonuses, fines, and more.

Creating a chatbot can take months to develop. Begin the process by defining why you want one in the first place.

Once you know that, begin researching tools to help you reach your goals. To help, Ometrics researched dozens of tools in its "2020 Chatbot Platform Comparison Reviews." The article compares chatbot tools by type, platform, and fees, and then provides additional information about each.

If implementing a chatbot sounds like something you want to do, avoid the trap of doing it just to be on trend. Rather, define the business reason for doing it, align it with your business goals, identify its champion, and implement it with intent. Otherwise, it will just be a waste of time, effort, and money. ■

*Becky Livingston has more than 25 years' experience in marketing and technology in financial services and engineering firms. She is the President and CEO of Penheel Marketing, a boutique marketing firm specializing in social media and digital marketing for CPAs. In addition to being a marketing practitioner, Becky is also an adjunct professor, author, and speaker.*





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# In Search of a **NEW NORMAL**

**WHILE IT IS hard to get a consensus on just about anything today with all that is going on, we can agree that everything changed with COVID-19.**

In the blink of an eye, the lives of nearly every human being worldwide were disrupted at a speed and scale never before seen in the history of civilization.

As for our profession, you have no doubt read, heard and seen how disruption was coming. Your reactions may have ranged from a mild shrug to rabid agreement. But opinions varied on when disruption would arrive and truly impact our profession in ways that are meaningful and sustaining.

As I sit down to write this article, there is no doubt that we are getting a taste of disruption.

Now that accounting firms and finance departments of all shapes and sizes have been truly disrupted, it may be fitting to explore a path through this new uncharted territory.

We are working remotely, using video conferencing and online collaboration, relying upon electronic signatures and e-payments. We are operating nearly 100 percent virtually. At least for the time being, very few of us can wander down the hallway, print a balance sheet, see a change needed, then reprint it, and grab a new copy off the printer.

The workflow has changed. Our pace has changed. Everything about it feels different. The process, its energy, when and where we place our implied trust, and the steps to get things done.

We must embrace the future because it is sitting on our chest, we have no alternative. We can no longer

hold onto the past ways of doing things and have no option but to say goodbye to our dear old friend, "SALY."

## **OUT OF THE BLUE**

Disruption came like a meteor, in an instant, seemingly without warning. Were you able to keep working? Were you ready for the shift to a completely remote workforce? Were your customers able to collaborate in a seamless way?

Or did things come to a sudden halt? Was it bumpy? Were there lapses and dropped balls?

Whatever the initial experiences, the key now is how you will respond and carry forward. What is the path for your team and your organization?

The job now is to manage the disruption and evolve into a whole new level. The keys to finding success are to shift your mindset and embrace this change. It requires you to experiment with what works, while remembering that you need to keep breathing, to maintain a tempo that makes sense.

## **EMBRACE THE NEW NORMAL**

Take this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to embrace the disruption as an opportunity. Push your organization forward. Adapt and innovate.

After all, innovation is now a necessity. Think back to just three months ago. We could have a lengthy debate amongst accounting firm leaders on the uses and needs for portals

to conduct tax return deliveries. But overnight, the ability for many of us to deliver a return in person evaporated. Electronic delivery is now the only option.

What other changes have you been putting off that you may now embrace? So, instead of looking at recent events as a negative, view them—best as possible—as a form of blessings. You can innovate to bring your organization into the future.

Embrace this as the opportunity it is. Use this time of disruption to forge a new path and jumpstart your organize, customers and even your peers. Embrace the new, knowing that not everything works perfectly the first time. Iteration is part of the road to perfection.

## **EXPERIMENT**

The second thing to embrace is an experimental mindset. We have all been pushed into disruptive change, and most of us did not have a clear path forward for each new process.

Just because you deployed option A on Day 1, don't get locked into that process. As you drive a path forward, keep pushing to find a best practice. Continue to, evaluate each process. If it does not serve you or your stakeholders, if it is not optimal, why settle?

One of the hidden blessings is that you will find your customers and peers are much more accepting given what is going on around us. You have a "get out of jail free card" to

change how you operate. Leverage this opportunity to land upon the right solution for the future.

## **BREATHE**

Most importantly, as our days often feel chaotic and out of control, we must remember to care for ourselves. Someone reminded me recently, it is just like being on an airplane. In the event of an emergency, your put the mask on your face first.

Once a day, take five minutes for yourself and just breath. Find a moment and seek some tranquility, ground yourself, and recharge for the day ahead. If you have never tried meditation, make that a goal. You can't be yourself if you are overly stressed and fatigued.

As we look around and seek a path forward in these disruptive times, rather than focusing on the negative, embrace change as an opportunity to move beyond your old ways. Embrace an innovative mindset and a new way forward each day. Seek out new solutions to running the accounting practices and processes you have always performed. Experiment with different options, so that you can find a new normal.

Above all, let's not forget to take time every day for ourselves. To keep pushing forward, to keep helping one another, we need to put the air mask on our own faces first. Only then, can we be in shape to help out our neighbor. ■

## Avoiding Employee Recall Issues After Coronavirus Recedes:

# LABOR LAW

By Richard D. Alaniz, JD

THE DESIRE TO get back to normal is growing by the day across the country. It is a feeling that is shared by virtually every person in the country. As the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic begin to dissipate, shelter-in-place orders expire, and the preventative steps taken have their intended impact, employers will begin the process of recalling furloughed employees. Careful planning will be critical if potential issues, both legal and practical, are to be avoided.

As long as anti-discrimination laws are not violated, neither the state nor federal government dictates how a recall of laid off employees must be conducted. To the extent that there are any rules or guidelines to be followed, they are primarily the result of obligations under a collective bargaining agreement or an employer's policies such as those contained in an employee handbook. Even if there are no written guidelines, there may be an established past practice, course of conduct or other written or verbal commitments that employees might reasonably expect would be followed when recalls begin.

Whatever recall procedure an employer follows, it is imperative that employees be thoroughly informed about the process. This is a time for complete transparency. With employees understandably desperate to once again be earning a paycheck, those not promptly recalled when operations resume are sure to raise questions. Early and clear communications to all employees regarding the recall process and schedule will help to ease the anxiety while waiting for a call back. Since it is very probable that the prolonged business stoppage has resulted in the permanent loss of some jobs, the issues of which jobs and whether those whose jobs were eliminated have an opportunity to fill other available positions will be equally critical to address.

### RECALL OBLIGATIONS

If an employer is subject to a collective bargaining agreement, it is virtually certain that it contains layoff and recall provisions. Seniority generally dictates the order of recall and employers are obligated to follow it or else

be subject to grievances and/or unfair labor practice charges. In most non-union situations the employer must look to its written policies, usually contained in the employee handbook. Many include language relating to layoffs and recalls. If so, those procedures should be followed absent unusual circumstances. Since an employee handbook is generally not considered a binding contract, failure to follow its provisions may not result in a lawsuit, but employee morale and the employer's reputation will suffer, perhaps permanently.

In circumstances where there is neither a contract nor written policies, employers must next look to any representations made to employees, either verbal or written. Were any promises or commitments made in the layoff notice, memos, letters or e-mails about the employees' jobs when economic circumstances change? Did supervisors or managers make promises of recall to employees? Such representations may have created rights or obligations where none may have existed previously.

### THE RECALL PROCESS

If there is no contractual or established policy or commitments that mandate a process, an employer is free to implement a policy on recalling employees. A policy is imperative if the recall is to proceed in an orderly and legal fashion. In order to help avoid any legal claims, the policy must be reasonable and non-discriminatory. It must be applied in such a manner as well. The policy must be specific about the terms and conditions of recall. It should address at a minimum, the following issues: (1) How the recall decisions will be

made. It should specify that the company retains discretion to consider employee's skills and the needs of the business; (2) Notice requirements, including responsibility on the employee to maintain contact to affirm availability and time frame for responding to recall notice; (3) Impact of the furlough on vacation accrual and other benefits; (4) The time limit on how long an employee will be considered to have recall rights; (5) Pay out of any accrued vacation or similar benefits for employees not recalled and/or whose jobs have been eliminated. There are no legal requirements for how long the period of recall rights may be. While other matters may be addressed in a recall policy, these listed are among the most fundamental decisions that will be made in any employee recall.

### POTENTIAL DISCRIMINATION CLAIMS

In most if not all operations, quickly resuming production will be the priority. The potential for discrimination arises in the selection of who to recall. All of the protective provisions of Title VII and similar state human rights laws continue to apply. Since the majority of today's workforce falls within a protected category, there will be some situations where an employee within one or more of the various protected categories will be passed over for recall or not recalled due to job elimination. While potential claims of discrimination based upon race, gender, national origin, or disability are always possible in such circumstances, perhaps the most potential lies in claims of age discrimination under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA). The large number of employees well past the protected age of 40 in today's workforce should be a cause for concern for both the recall process, as well as in the case of job eliminations. Whether accurate or not, older workers are often viewed as less productive and more expensive than younger employees. They are sometimes the first casualties in a workforce reduction.

The impact of the extended job 

and income loss, as well as the devastation of 401(k) accounts as a result of the pandemic, will force many near-retirement employees to want to keep working. Many were already considering this as a result of the significant losses to retirement plans incurred in the 2008-2009 recession. Knowing the difficulty of finding suitable employment when a person is 50 or 60, or perhaps even older, they will desperately want to hang on to their pre-pandemic jobs. Therefore, if theirs are the jobs eliminated, or it even appears to be the case, the potential for claims of ageism could be significant.

In a recent study on "Ageism in the Workforce" by global specialist insurer Hiscox, it was noted that of the 400 full-time U.S. workers, equally divided between men and women over the age of 40 that they surveyed, 67% responded that they planned to continue working after they turn 66. The study also noted that workers age 55 and older will soon comprise at least 25% of the nation's workforce, with the fastest growth among persons aged 65 and older. Given the very real concerns of this segment of the workforce with continuing to work that were already present prior to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, they can be expected to challenge even the appearance of discriminatory treatment.

### STATE ORDERS PROTECTING VULNERABLE WORKERS

Some states may enact additional protections that prohibit companies from laying off certain workers that meet certain requirements. For example, on April 13, Governor Inslee of Washington State issued Proclamation 20-46, "High-Risk Employees- Workers' Rights," which prohibits any employer from failing to accommodate high risk workers from COVID-19. The proclamation requires companies to accommodate workers that are over 65 and those that have severe obesity, heart disease and several other conditions. Employers are required to allow these employees to telework if possible, reassign them, or allow the employee to take leave or file for unemployment. Employers must also fully maintain all provided health insurance benefits for these high-risk workers. Employers are also prohibited from permanently replacing any high-risk employee who takes leave or exercises their right to an alternative work assignment. Companies should expect other states to take similar action.

Continued online at  
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21134359](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21134359)

## Workers Earning Less than \$75k Are Being Laid Off Most

By Isaac M. O'Bannon

COVID-19 HAS STRONGLY shaken the labor market in March and April, driving layoffs and unemployment in the U.S. to their highest points since the Great Depression. As of May 1, 2020, about 30 million Americans have lost their jobs during the outbreak, resulting in at least 18% of the country's workforce now being idle.

New data from Rippling, a provider of HR and technology solutions for businesses, reveals that layoffs have most severely impacted those workers who can least afford it. The company looked at anonymized payroll and termination data from more than 600 small and midsize businesses and found a significant shift in layoffs toward lower wage-earners since the onset of Covid-19 in the U.S.

The analysis included companies from a broad array of industries, from hospitality to tech startups, and a correspondingly diverse range of job roles, including chefs and couriers alongside product managers and software engineers.

Employees with an annual salary under \$75,000 made up 49.4% of all terminations between March 1 and April 14, 2020, up from 42.2% of terminations at the beginning of the year (January 1 – February 29, 2020). This represents a 7.2 point-swing toward lower wage-earner terminations, taking share from all other salary brackets below \$300,000.

Meanwhile, high wage earners, defined as employees making \$100,000 or more, fell 4.6 percentage points as a share of total terminations during the Covid-19 spread.

The median salary of employees laid off prior to the broad spread of Covid-19 was \$80,000 compared to \$75,000 during the spread.

The research suggests this trend cannot be explained by seasonal discrepancies. When looking back at the same period (March 1 – April 14) in 2019, employees earning below \$75,000 made up 48.3% of

terminations —up only 2% from the beginning of the year (January 1 – February 28).

### COMPOUNDING DISADVANTAGES

Recessions often hit low-income households the hardest. In each of the past four recessions, the lowest 20% of earners fared far worse on a relative basis than the average American. The Covid-19 recession looks likely to continue that trend. The survey data suggests that the spread of Covid-19 has largely spared high-wage jobs compared to their lower-earning counterparts across many sectors.

The workers most affected by the coronavirus downturn are also the least prepared. People who work low-wage jobs are uniquely vulnerable to economic booms and busts. They have less personal savings to tide them over and higher levels of personal debt.

In one recent survey, 34% of adults making under \$50,000 in annual income said they would run out of savings in three months if someone in their household lost their job, while 18% said they have no savings to fall back on at all.

To make matters worse, because healthcare in the U.S. is usually employer-provided, most terminated workers will lose their health insurance at the same time they lose their jobs, compounding their financial insecurity. It's a devastating turn of events for millions of families. Just a few months ago, pay was rising for low earners thanks to minimum wage laws and robust economic growth.





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## How Financial Transparency Can Level Up Business for Private Companies

HOW MUCH FINANCIAL information do you share with your employees, and should you be sharing more? These are important questions, but up until a few years ago, few private companies were asking them. After all, the SEC doesn't typically require businesses that are privately owned to disclose financial results to the public, including their employees. If financial transparency was raised at all within these companies, it was more likely to be about the risks than the opportunities.

Today, the reverse may be true. In a recent Robert Half survey, 88% of CFOs revealed that their organization shares financials with at least some employees. That's a striking 31-point increase from a similar survey conducted in 2016. Employees are enthused about transparency, too, with 82% claiming to be interested in their company's financial performance.

### WHY IS FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY IMPORTANT?

One case for financial transparency is that if everyone else is doing it, so should you. And there's little doubt that employees and job seekers are gravitating towards firms that share data such as earnings forecasts with their staff. But the case for opening your books to workers goes beyond recruiting new staff. Transparency, among other things:

■ **Motivates employees** — Open sharing of information helps workers see how their roles mesh with the company's broader mission and strategy, creating a culture in which they are partners in a business's

success. When employees know "how we're doing" as an organization on a macro level, they can more easily see on their level how they can contribute toward better and better results. It gives them more reason to want their company to succeed because they have a clearer part in it.

■ **Builds trust** — Even companies in favor of transparency may worry about how their employees will interpret the data. What if a disappointing quarter causes panic, or an encouraging one fosters complacency? These are genuine risks, but the rewards of transparency are real too. Sharing financials sends a powerful message that you have faith in your employees' good judgement and ability to see the bigger picture. Trusting staff to discretely handle data they receive prompts them to trust their employer in return.

■ **Fosters new ideas** — Managers asking workers for good ideas is nothing new, whether it's about trimming waste or streamlining the workflow on the shop floor. But it's hard for employees to pitch in effectively if they lack the underlying data that drives decisions. If you give workers the vague outline of a problem, don't expect more than the vague outline of a solution. But if you give them hard numbers — a set of disappointing sales figures, say — you may prompt them to start tracking these metrics and

brainstorm ways to make them move in the right direction.

■ **Improves customer relations** — How many times have you been frustrated with employees who replied, "That's not my job" or "I don't know anything about that" in response to a customer query? Before putting this down to poor attitude, consider how the same workers might handle the situation if they felt like partners in the company's overall mission, rather than cogs in a larger wheel.

■ **Helps your bottom line** — There's a reason more companies are opening their books to employees: it's good for business. Giving staff the information they need to track each dollar spent improves your chances of cutting costs and boosting profits.

### TIPS FOR SHARING INFORMATION

Companies are right to be wary of revealing too much, too soon, if only because few employees want to be bombarded with raw financial data. So you need to carefully prep your sharing strategy, including creating a context around financial data workers can understand. Here are some ideas:

■ **Decide what to share.** You don't have to give them a list of every single financial detail. This could overwhelm employees without a financial background. Be selective in what information is revealed, and who it's revealed to. This will

obviously vary from company to company. One useful tip is to identify subjects employees are commonly misinformed about and use transparency to correct the record. For example, if your workers only hear the headline figure for last year's profits, they may assume the company is flush with cash. Educating them in what's being reinvested, or used to pay down debt, will give them a proper context for the company's strategy.

■ **Stick to a schedule.** Come up with a frequency (quarterly, twice a year, annually) for employee updates and let staff know in advance when and how they can expect to receive them. Don't shy away from transparency if the news isn't as good as you were hoping for.

■ **Speak plain English.** Not everyone can read a spreadsheet, and financial jargon can sound like ancient Greek even to well-educated people. Define important terms or acronyms, explain vital data in layperson's terms and even consider offering some financial literacy training if needed.

■ **Invite a dialog.** Ensure staff you are available to answer questions and address concerns they may have.

Making financial transparency a priority is a challenge for any business, requiring both management and staff to step outside their comfort zones. But if you provide regular, well-explained data, you may soon be wondering why you ever did things differently. ■



# Helping CPAs Earn PhDs

The AICPA is seeking applicants for its expanded Accounting Doctoral Scholars program, which identifies currently practicing CPAs interested in becoming accounting professors. Applications are being accepted through September 11, 2020. An online application is at [www.adsphd.org/apply](http://www.adsphd.org/apply).

The program, first launched in 2009, will recruit up to 40 practicing CPAs who have shown interest and potential in being college professors to attend an all-expenses-paid conference to learn what it takes to earn a PhD in accounting and to teach and research at a university. Of those, up to 20 individuals will be selected to receive a \$5,000 stipend to support their education, should they ultimately be accepted into one of more than 40 affiliated PhD programs.

Previously, the Accounting Doctoral Scholars program focused on audit and tax accounting. This year, the program is expanding to include management accounting, information systems and financial analytics.

The program is intended to help grow the number of CPAs in the classroom and ensure a steady supply of accounting professors. Educators with recent, relevant workplace experience provide their students with a greater understanding of what a career in the accounting profession entails and the value a CPA license adds.

"As the profession continues to evolve, we're hearing from firms and businesses alike that professional skepticism, critical thinking, and the ability to understand how to use data to make decisions are increasingly essential for CPAs" said Yvonne Hinson, CPA, CGMA, Ph.D., academic in residence, Association of International Certified Professional Accountants AICPA. "What's more, CPAs with recent professional experience are perfect messengers for the central role technology plays in all areas of today's profession."

The program, funded by the AICPA Foundation, is one of many Institute initiatives to help academia and practice align more closely, including putting practitioners on Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business accreditation reviews, offering discounts to academics to attend AICPA conferences, and free resources to help academics engage with practitioners on accounting program advisory boards.

To date, more than 108 CPAs who went through the Accounting Doctoral Scholars program have completed their PhD, and another 45 are currently enrolled in PhD programs. ADS candidates selected for funding, as well as all candidates attending the ADS Orientation Conference and enrolled in an ADS Participating University, are also eligible to apply for the William (Bill) Ezzel Scholarship.

■ CPAs interested in transitioning into an academic career can learn more about the program at [www.adsphd.org](http://www.adsphd.org). This year, the program will be hosting a free virtual GMAT bootcamp for the first 60 candidates who RSVP. More information on the bootcamp is on the program's website. ■

## AICPA ENGAGE CONFERENCE TO BE ALL-DIGITAL THIS YEAR

ENGAGE 2020 will be an all-digital event with the core conference taking place online from July 20–24. The event, designed for accounting and finance professionals, is sponsored by the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA).

The AICPA and CIMA decided to forego an onsite version of ENGAGE 2020 this year to ensure the safety of attendees, speakers, and staff in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The agenda has been updated to cover the latest issues impacting CPAs, clients, management accountants and other finance professionals during the current crisis.

"Our team has delivered interactive, high-quality online learning programs for a decade now and we have deep expertise in running these events," said Clar Rosso, executive vice president of engagement and learning innovation for the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants, which is comprised of the AICPA and CIMA. "ENGAGE 2020

represents an exceptional learning opportunity, and we've added new features to help enhance interaction and build a sense of community among virtual attendees."

### ENGAGE 2020 will be delivered in three ways:

#### Interactive Solution and Key Initiatives Sessions (June 8-12)

#### The Main Event (July 20-24)

Online sessions will run from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern each day, with virtual networking opportunities during breaks. Defined learning tracks include Advanced Accounting and Auditing, Advanced Estate Planning, Advanced Personal Financial Planning, EDGE Career Development, Practitioners and Tech+, Tax Strategies for the High-Income Individual and Finance Redefined.

There will be two July 22 keynote sessions:

- Daymond John, author, founder of the fashion business FUBU, and celebrity judge on Shark Tank, will talk about how he built his businesses, financial lessons he learned on the way and general observations on entrepreneurship.
- A professional update will be given by AICPA President and CEO Barry Melancon, Sue Coffey, the organization's executive vice president of public practice, CPA.com President and CEO Erik Asgeirsson, and AICPA Vice Chair Tracey Golden.

#### ENGAGE + (July 27- Dec. 31)

ENGAGE 2020 All-Access Pass holders also will receive exclusive monthly access to two virtual sessions focused on a range of timely topics.

For more details about conference registration and agenda items, visit [www.aicpaengage.com](http://www.aicpaengage.com). ■

*AICPA News is a roundup of recent announcements and activities by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.*



## Continued from page 5

desk space and all the tools of the trade. Even managing small entrepreneurial businesses from home requires the right tools, as noted in my article <https://www.k2e.com/articles/starting-online-shop/>. Indeed, we have learned the deficiencies of our work-at-home setup. Perhaps there are tools from the past we don't need anymore like calculators or phones, but probably not.

A few apparent changes will occur. First, retirements that were imminent because of the healthy stock markets will be delayed. Postponing retirements will alleviate some of the immediate need for staffing. Unfortunately, some firms have made plans to furlough team members as soon as they can plan their future workloads. Some firms have reduced partner draws. Other firms have increased client service and billings at this time, keeping their clients and their firm ready for when the business climate improves. Appropriate staffing will continue to be a practice management issue.

Second, work-at-home is likely to become the "new normal." While there had been a trend to more remote working, work-at-home was more of the exception than the rule for most CPA firms. The pandemic stay at home orders forced firms to work-at-home and proved that this does work. Maintaining the culture of the firm for the long haul will be a challenge that must be solved.

Third, forced remote work has proven that cloud technologies can scale. Microsoft Azure had a 755% increase in load in March of 2020 compared to April. Microsoft had to turn off features such as synchronization and icon rendering to keep the system working under pressure. Azure performed admirably, and Microsoft's management of the system stress was notable.

Fourth, it was clear that some

technologies didn't work at first and had to be adjusted. VOIP, video meeting tools, and many others suffered under load. During the early conversion to the work-at-home environments, most remote systems that I used had failures of one kind or another. However, the management and IT teams at these companies responded and addressed most issues within a couple of weeks.

Fifth, there are likely to be systemic changes. For example, many practices proved that they could work-at-home effectively. So, will the need for expensive real estate and fancy offices drop? Can we mostly eliminate the 30- to 90-minute commutes that many have routinely been making? Do our expenses drop when we don't have to sit in traffic and pay for fuel?

## AND WHAT TOOLS HELP US MANAGE THIS NEW PRACTICE?

Practice Management systems that have workflow capabilities, billing, scheduling, electronic payment, portals, and integrations into our document management system, tax, and A&A tools would be best. Whether your firm does value billing or bills by the hour or project, you still need to get the invoices out and get paid in a timely fashion. While there are useful practice management tools for smaller firms such as Accounting Power, OfficeTools, Clarity Practice Management, and TPS Cloud Axis, new competitors such as Canopy, Karbon, and Pascal Workflow are trying to break into the market. Products for larger firms like CCH Axxess Practice, Onvio Firm Management, Practice Engine, or STAR are all quite aware of the need for managing remote and work-at-home professionals.

But Practice Management software is only part of what is needed to manage a remote or work-at-home



group of professionals. Other remote tools should include:

- Productivity software with Microsoft 365 (formerly Office), Zoho One, or G Suite
- Phone support with voice over IP (VOIP) from providers like Vantage Unified Communications
- Video meetings with Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, WebEx, Zoho Meeting, or Zoom
- Document management with Doc-It, CCH Axxess Document, or GoFileRoom
- Portals with Doc-It, CCH Axxess Client Collaboration or SurePrep Tax Caddy
- Workflow with XCM, CCH Axxess Workstream, or FirmFlow
- And more

## DECIDE THE RIGHT THING TO DO

What is the right thing to do for your firm and your clients? Can your team members effectively serve clients if they work from home? Are

you providing the right tools with the proper education? Have you planned expertly for all the remote tools listed above? Have you focused on your client and team member experience? How do you and your partners manage people effectively when you can't walk down the hall, or you don't have a partner in charge of an office location?

Visibility in your Practice Management system, combined with effective document management and workflows, are the keys to practical remote work. Yes, we'll still have issues managing things like due dates and scheduling teams for engagements. Flaws in your practice management, document management, workflow, portals, and other tools became evident during the stay at home orders. But if you can't get the bills out and get paid, how would your firm stay around to continue to help clients? ■

# CPA Practice Advisor

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JUNE  
ISSUE

**ISSUE EMPHASIS**  
Building Your  
Para-Professional Team

**REVIEWS**  
Tax Prep and Planning

**APPS WE LOVE**  
The New Normal

## JUNE

- 6 D-Day
- 14 Flag Day
- 19 Emancipation Day
- 19 Father's Day

## JULY

- 4 Independence Day
- 15 **NEW INCOME TAX DEADLINE**  
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