

CPA Practice Advisor

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

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SPECIAL SECTION:
2020 Executive Predictions
& 2019 Year in Review

MARKETING YOUR FIRM
11 Marketing Tips for
Accounting Firms

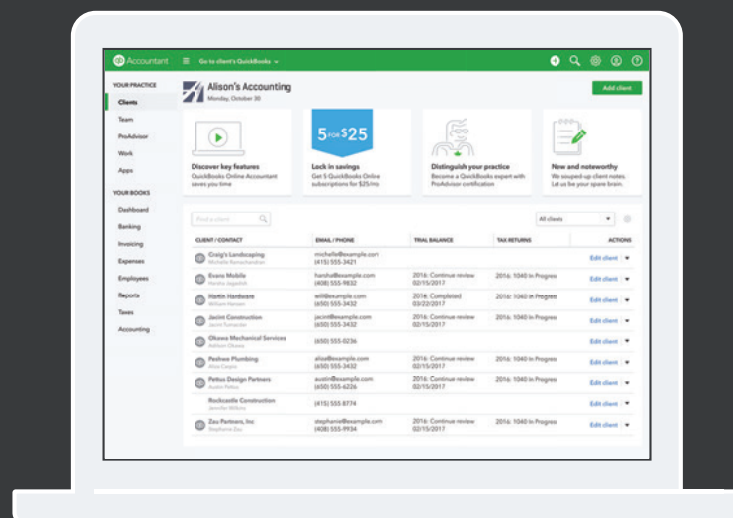
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Do Your Best Emerging
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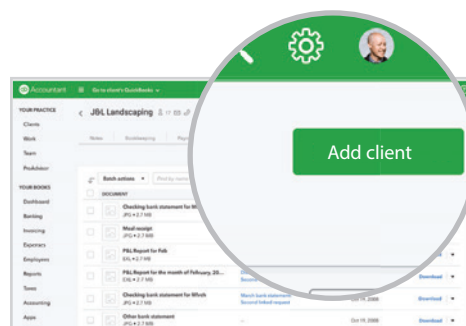
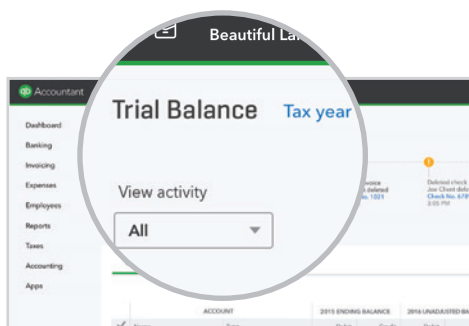
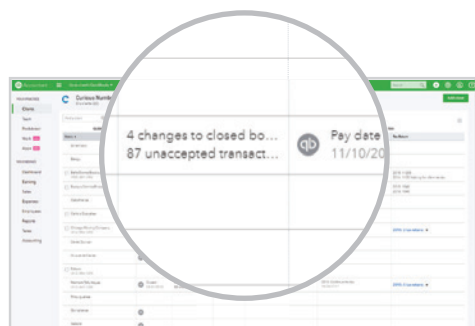
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GAIL PERRY, CPA
Editor-in-Chief
gail.perry@cpapracticeadvisor.com
@gperrycpa

Predictions for 2020

WE'RE FEATURING PREDICTIONS in this issue as well as highlighting the winners of the 2019 "40 Under 40" and "20 Under 40" awards – that's a lot to digest for people who might think the accounting profession is a stagnant place. This profession is far from same old, same old, and if you're among those who have been doing the same job for your entire career, I predict your life is about to change!

Some of the predictions for the year ahead focus on technology, which is no surprise in general since we're certainly not going backwards in that area. But the surprises come in the form of the programs we have been using for years now transforming themselves to automate more of our mundane work (data entry, summarization, calling attention to potential errors) and providing us with analysis tools

so that we can actually start using the information we process to help point our clients on paths to future success.

I encourage you to pay attention to the recipients of the 40 Under 40 in the Accounting Profession Awards and the 20 Under 40 Influencer Awards – these are the people who will be leading the profession in the very near future. Already many of them are partners in CPA firms, owners of innovative firms and companies, technologists who are breaking new ground, consultants, speakers, and writers. Individually, these innovators are taking paths that have not been traveled in the past. Collectively they are moving the profession ahead at a record pace and they are not allowing themselves to be tied to traditional firm structures or methodologies.

We see some

key changes on the near horizon that we believe will impact our readers and their clients:

- The remote workforce will continue to grow resulting in shared desks, communal work areas, and overall reductions in space needed by many companies. Restructured leases, more modern office build-outs, and office building vacancies will create new opportunities (or headaches).
- See first bullet point – if you have a remote workforce and you're not using a team software such as Slack, Yammer, Microsoft Teams, or any of the other team chat and collaboration programs out there, you will be.
- The software subscription marketplace is here to stay and thus the concept of you having to upgrade your software is a thing of the past. Will this result in users stepping out of their comfort zone and deciding to try new products? We think it might.

- The line is blurring regarding the types of services that accountants offer to their clients. Going beyond auditing, compilations, and tax prep, accountants have been caught providing clients with retirement plan services, software selection and training, estate planning, data security, forensic accounting, business valuation, outsourced CFO services, marketing and rebranding, retreat facilitation, and much more. We see an expanded service line in your future too.

Most importantly, we see a bright future for progressive and innovative accountants, led by a stellar group of enthusiastic younger members of the profession who are making life better for accountants and their clients. ■

— Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief



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Publisher: Barry Strobel
Editor-in-Chief: Gail Perry, CPA
Managing Editor: Isaac M. O'Bannon
Contributors: Ken Berry, JD
Doug Sleeter
Jim Boomer, CPA, CFP
Kristy Short
Randy Johnston
Roman H. Kepczyk, CPA, CFP
Paul McDonald
Amy Vetter, CPA, CFP, CGMA
Becky Livingston
Brian Tankersley, CPA, CFP, CGMA
Reviewers: Mary Girsch-Bock
John Higgins, CPA
Art Director: Rhonda Cousin
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Editorial Advisory Board:

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EVP/Group Publisher: Lester Craft
General Counsel: Tracy Kane

Subscription Customer Service
877-382-9187; 847-559-7598
Circ.CPA@omeda.com
PO Box 3257, Northbrook IL 60065-3257

Article reprints: Brett Petillo
Wright's Media 877-652-5295, ext. 118
bpetillo@wrightsmedia.com

List Rentals: Michael Costantino
402-836-6266
michael.costantino@infogroup.com

Kevin Collopy, 402-836-6265
kevin.collopy@infogroup.com



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ROMAN H. KEPczyk, CPA, CITP

Director of Consulting
Xcentric, LLC.

roman.kepczyk@cpapracticeadvisor.com

2020 IT Predictions and 2019 Results

THE RAPIDLY APPROACHING year-end signifies that it's once again time to take pause, reflect on the progress of the previous 12 months and to begin planning for 2020, particularly in regards to the impacts of Information Technology, which is one of our primary areas of focus. However, with technology evolving at an increasingly breakneck pace and impacting literally every aspect of today's accounting practice, it has never been more difficult to separate the tech hype from the reality of workable solutions.

This has created one of the most volatile IT environments that we have experienced in our careers, which is reflected in the great uncertainty and consternation we are hearing from both firm practice leaders and IT personnel alike. In the hopes of providing some clarity, we present our 2020 IT predictions which we will be utilizing to prioritize our direction in the year ahead.

2020 PREDICTIONS:

With six WINS and only one LOSS, we'll close out 2019, by giving ourselves an "attaboy participation ribbon" and striving to do better and be more definitive in 2020. Accordingly, we list our top ten IT predictions which we anticipate becoming a reality by this time next year:

■ **Outsourced Security Standard:**

With ransomware on the rise and phishing emails abounding, firms will take security more seriously than ever and outsource their cybersecurity responsibilities. This leads to our first 2020 prediction that the majority of firms will work with a third party to manage their security rather than relying on their own internal personnel.

■ **Rebuilding the firm "Tech Stack:"**

This will be one of the hottest "tech" terms of the year as firm's focus on re-evaluating the tools and applications they utilize to service clients and put the majority of them in their "tech stack." This is all happening in the cloud where both native SaaS and hosted versions of on-premise

applications can be seamlessly integrated and accessed remotely on a single platform customized to each firm's unique needs.

■ **Stalled Privacy Regulations (Again):**

While the California CCPA law goes into effect in January 2020, there will be a long pause in adoption across the country as everyone takes a "wait and see" approach to see how it is applied. Political turmoil and elections will take precedence, so we are predicting no significant adoption of Federal Privacy Legislation by the Fall of 2020.

■ **Data Visualization Democratized:**

While we scored a DRAW on this in 2019, we predict that there will be a significant push towards Microsoft Power Query and Business Intelligence capabilities within Excel as the primary "accounting consumer" application for data visualization. Training for using it with both internal firm applications (practice management) and external client needs will abound including the usage of non-financial metrics to help businesses make proactive decisions.

■ **Learning Concept Reemerges:**

While we were promoting "Learning Organization" concepts two decades ago, the current environment warrants that this become a primary focus once again in firms to be able to quickly integrate new applications and processes. We expect to see an increase in firms designating "Learning Officers," updating learning curriculums, and expanding firm

learning well beyond required tax and assurance CPE.

■ **App(lication) Expansion:** The age of applications replacing human toiling will become obvious this year as firms question the value and functionality of their "old school" application vendors and add two or more completely new apps to their burgeoning tech stack that minimize manual production processes. Integration of applications utilizing Machine Learning, Natural Language Processing, and Augmented Intelligence will be adopted within leading firms, heralding in the age of application expansion in the accounting profession.

■ **Portal Evolution:** With many firms utilizing two, three, or even more methods of file transfer and interactions with clients, we predict that at least one of the major software vendors will roll out a portal solution that combines the ease of two way transfers, customization of PBC lists, and integration with the firm's other applications so a firm can pick a single solution that is easy for both clients and firm personnel.

■ **Data Trust Introduced:** There will be a significant environmental push towards identifying ways to "trust" the information and data we are provided by clients both live and after the fact. Accountants will be uniquely situated to own the space because of existing "trust" and "ethics" pillars that are owned by our profession, so we are predicting the push for "Data Trust" services in

the year ahead.

■ **AI Delivered as a Service:** To be successful in the accounting profession, we believe that artificial intelligence tools need to be seamless and intuitive which means they need to evolve from stand-alone applications to those integrated with existing accounting products. We predict at least one of the major vendors will deliver on this prediction by next Fall.

■ **Innovation Mindset:** While "Practice Transformation" was management's buzzword for 2019, we predict "Innovation Mindset" will be the strategic management buzzword for 2020. To promote the rapid adoption of digital tools, the entire accounting profession, vendors, and even academics, will focus on touting innovative ways to add value to clients and businesses, which will all be driven by technology.

Well, that summarizes our top information technology predictions that we anticipate happening in 2020. We hope we have provided you with some new insights to think about as you prepare to roll into next year's strategic planning and another busy season. ■

Continue reading to see how we fared with our 2019 predictions:

www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21114785

FROM THE TRENCHES



RANDY JOHNSTON

EVP & Partner
K2 Enterprises &
CEO of Network Management Group, Inc.
randy.johnston@cpapracticeadvisor.com
@RPJohnston

DO YOUR BEST EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

IN MY COLUMNS last year, I explored the details of various emerging technologies. For this column, I'd like to re-visit and update changes in emerging technologies for the profession.

The frenzy continues around several emerging technologies, and some of the hype is starting to be true. Startups and traditional providers to the profession are putting more AI in their products. Key emerging technologies include: Robotic Process Automation (RPA, which some people are incor-

rectly calling bots...both are important), Machine Learning (ML), Artificial Intelligence (AI), voice recognition, virtual reality (VR), 3D printing, as well as data analytics are included in emerging technologies. Please refer to my prior columns for more on these trends (www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/contributors/randy-johnston).

What is new now, and what should we expect in the coming year or so? As the technologies arrive and are stable enough to adopt, you can rest assured that we will cover them here as soon as possible. For example, this month Wolters Kluwer releases a collaboration portal CCH Access Client Collaboration, that has some AI coded in the product. During the summer, Thomson Reuters released an update to their Checkpoint Edge that

had a worthy and working AI component. At the recently completed Thomson Reuters Synergy conference they announced support for the K1 Analyzer developed by Crowe's AI team.

SO, HOW DO WE RECOMMEND AND PICK THE RIGHT EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES?

Vendors are working hard to produce tools worthy of use in your practice. Much admirable work is being done by start-ups. MindBridge AI, Botkeeper, Vic.AI and Receipt Bank 1tap receipts are all examples of products that apply AI/ML algorithms to tasks. Your evaluation of emerging technologies should be straightforward:

- 1) Does the product solve a problem in your firm?
 - 2) Is the vendor's pricing reasonable enough that there is an ROI when the product is used? In other words, is the price paid for the product better than the alternatives?
 - 3) Then the vetting becomes more difficult
 - a. Is the product easy to use and understand?
 - b. How many algorithms has the vendor developed that are proprietary vs. how many algorithms are standard? A reasonable answer is a combination of approximately twelve to fourteen public domain and proprietary algorithms with six-seven in each category of public domain and proprietary. These numbers should make you more comfortable that the vendor has developed some intellectual property in addition to leveraging algorithms in the public domain.
- c. Training algorithms for AI and ML is a big issue.
 - i. How large is the training data set? Better results today come from algorithms with 1 million to 10 million records. Over time the number of records needed may drop. We've seen some evidence of adequate machine learning accomplished in 100,000 records.
 - ii. Is the application trained with your firm's data? If so, how much data is required to have reasonable accuracy?
- d. Does the application perform better with any proprietary hardware? For example, are graphics accelerators beneficial?
- e. What type of data is stored in the cloud,

2020 and beyond certainly looks interesting as the emerging technologies come into sharper focus and begin to solve client issues.

and are there any disclosures needed for clients?

- f. What is the percentage accuracy of data processed by the application?
- g. How long does it take the application to learn and improve on accuracy?
- h. Does the application take any special skills to configure, deploy or support?
 - i. For example, RPA tools typically require configuration and on-going maintenance
 - ii. ML tools tend to be more self-learning, but require a larger amount of data for accuracy
 - iii. Artificial Intelligence tools may be self-learning or may need sensitivity settings applied
- i. What integrations are available now for this tool?
 - i. Audit software
 - ii. Tax software
 - iii. CAS software – QuickBooks Online, Xero, Sage Intacct, Gravity
 - iv. DMS systems
 - v. Practice Management
 - vi. Dashboard/reporting integration
- 4) If the product survives the selection process to this point, then contracting can begin. At this stage, you should pay attention to several factors.
 - a. How much training is provided, how much is needed and what does training cost?
 - b. Check on the technology charges.
 - i. Are the charges for leasing the tool only (flat rate)?
 - ii. Per item?
 - iii. A blend of both?

- c. Are there any supplemental charges for storage, communication, support or other items that are needed to make deployment successful?
- d. Are any special IT configurations needed?
- e. What are the security provisions in the product and how do we know both client and firm data are protected?

Are there any tools that are ready now, as we head into the new year? Yes, a few tools are performing as described. Consider the following:

- Receipt Bank 1tap receipts
 - Checkpoint Edge
 - Crowe K1 Analyzer
 - Validis plus Valid8
 - CCH Access Client Collaboration
 - QuickBooks classification of transactions
- If you are a vendor and think your tool should be on this list, I certainly want to hear from you!
- Promoted heavily and getting better:**
- MindBridge AI
 - Botkeeper
 - Vic.AI

Likewise, help me (and the market) understand that your tools have improved enough that you are ready to go to market as working without any reservations or caveats.

ARE THERE DOWNSIDES AND UPSIDES TO JUMPING INTO EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES TOO SOON?

Absolutely! Many of the technologies simply do not work. However, when the tools perform as described by the vendor, they let your team do more with less effort. Further, there are activities being done by emerging technology automation that would be unaffordable or impossible with any other approach. Being early to market provides a productivity advantage that will keep your competitors guessing at what you are doing.

If you have wisely chosen partners in emerging technologies, and you have team members that want to learn new ways of completing work for clients, RPA, AI, ML and other emerging technologies show great promise. 2020 and beyond certainly looks interesting as the emerging technologies come into sharper focus and begin to solve client issues. ■

The 2019 "40 Under 40" and "20 Under 40 Top Influencers"

CPA PRACTICE ADVISOR has announced the 2019 members of its "40 Under 40" and "20 Under 40 Top Influencers" programs.

The accounting profession is as dynamic and vital to the success of America's small businesses as ever, which is why CPA Practice Advisor's 40 Under 40 and 20 Under 40 programs recognize professionals who are helping lead practices into the future.

This year's 40 Under 40 Honorees and 20

Under 40 Influencers are among the best and brightest talent in the accounting profession. They are all active in the professional community, as well as in their local communities, where many are small business owners and employers. Many are also frequently seen at industry trade shows, such as AICPA PS/Tech

and state CPA society events, giving seminars or participating in round table discussions on evolving practices and technologies.

The 40 Under 40 Awards spotlight the top practicing public accountants, educators and thought leaders who are leading their profession by visibly and incrementally changing the accounting profession through their exemplary leadership, their innovative thinking, their collaborative efforts to provide unity to the



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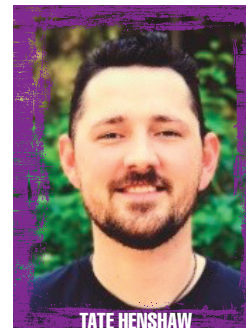
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40 Honorees"

Announced

By Isaac M. O'Bannon,
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40 R T Y
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profession across the generations, and their community outreach which extends the visibility of the profession outside the workplace.

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

“We are fortunate to be surrounded by so many young professionals who are sharing their ideas, skills, and enthusiasm with the goal of making the accounting profession a better place. Change is occurring rapidly in our profession and this year’s award winners are embracing and welcoming the changes,” said Editor-in-Chief Gail Perry, CPA. “They are strong, dedicated, spirited leaders and we are proud to recognize these professionals as the 2019 ‘40 Under 40 in the Accounting Profession’ and the ‘20 Under 40 Top Influencers.’”

Many of this year’s 40 Under 40 Honorees met in Indianapolis October 16-18, 2019, for round table discussions exploring emerging trends and issues that will affect the profession in the coming years.

Visit www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21106742 to learn more about them, their careers, their passions, and the traits that have led us to call them the future of the profession.

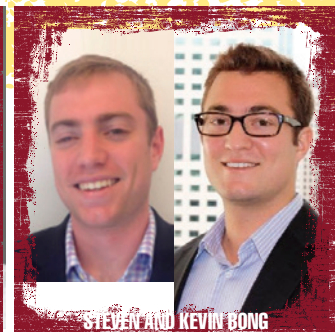
These are the voices of today that are shaping the profession of tomorrow.

Nominations for the 2020 awards will open in March, 2020.

20NTY UNDER 40RTY INFLUENCER



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Canopy Tax



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LSS BB
Director
Boomer Consulting, Inc.



DAVID CARDOZA
Head, ExpensifyApproved!
Expensify



SARAH JOHNSON DOBECK
President & Founder
Innovatus Consulting



LINCOLN FLEMING
CPA, CFP®
Director of Tax
Canopy Tax



HECTOR GARCIA
CPA, CITP, CGMA
Principal
Quick Bookkeeping & Acctg, LLC



SWATI GARODIA
MBA
Global Head of Products
Thomson Reuters



ANNABELLE GIBSON
J.D.
Practice Lead, Federal Tax
Bloomberg Tax & Accounting



DAMIEN GREATHEAD
MBA
Global Accountants Programs
Receipt Bank



ROBERT LADUE
Business Dev. & Partnerships
Expensify



CALVIN LEONG
Product Innovation Manager
Thomson Reuters



MEGAN LEWCZYK
CPA, MAcc
Owner
Megan D Lewczyk, CPA, LLC



ALINA NIKISHINA
CPA
Co-Founder
The Mastery Network



KARA E. PETERSON
CPA
U.S. GAAP Senior Editor
Thomson Reuters



BEN RICHMOND
CA
U.S. Country Manager
Xero



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from



Non-Compliance Can Be Costly

ACCORDING TO AN NPR/Marist Poll, 20 percent of American workers today are contract workers. Of course, this increased use of contract employees also means an increase in the number of 1099s that will need to be processed and distributed at year end.

Good 1099 compliance starts when a contractor is hired, not at year-end. There is no excuse for not having the appropriate information on file for any contractors you may hire. You wouldn't hire an employee without their social security number and home address on file, so there's no reason not to have this information on file for contractors. Remember, non-compliance can be costly, with penalties and interest assessed for late filing of these forms. Why take that risk? In fact, many small business owners, with no interest in completing this task, have turned to their accountants to handle this task for them.

And let's not forget about W-2s. Whether you're a small, local business, or a global enterprise, if you have employees, you need to process W-2s. This is typically completed through your payroll service, but

if you handle payroll in-house, you are responsible for processing these forms, and ensuring that your employees receive them when they're supposed to receive them.

Which leads us to W-2/1099 software. If you're currently in need of W-2/1099 software but are unsure which program(s) would work best for your situation, many of the applications reviewed in this issue offer a free demo that you can try out prior to purchasing.

A total of 11 W-2/1099 software applications were reviewed in this issue. A few of these applications are part of a larger suite of applications and are designed to work only within that application suite, while others are stand-alone applications that can be used with a variety of third-party applications. Most W-2/1099 software applications update their software in

the fall in preparation for the upcoming filing deadline early the following year, so the 2019 version of these applications are either available now or will be very shortly.

Many of the products reviewed offer electronic filing options and other features such as Tax ID Number (TIN) verification which results in a higher percentage of accuracy, as well as less need for corrections and penalties.

Both on-premise and online products are included in the review. These products include:

- AccountantsWorld - After-the-Fact Payroll
- American Riviera Software - Magtax
- AMS - W-2 and 1099 Forms Filer
- EG.Systems Inc. - W-2/1099 Filer
- Greatland-Yearli
- Real Business Solutions - W2 Mate
- Spokane Computer - MAG-Filer
- Tenenz - Eagle View Filing
- Tenenz - Laser Link
- Track 1099
- WoltersKluwer - W2/1099

We've also included our standard chart that shows the features and functions available for each of the reviewed applications.



Contract employees will only increase in the years to come, making it a necessity that you have the tools and resources in place to process and file 1099 forms. Don't be penalized for noncompliance. Find the application that's right for you.

| | ONLINE/MOBILE ACCESSIBILITY | PROCESSES W-2'S | PROCESSES 1099'S | TIN VERIFICATION | EASY SYSTEM NAVIGATION | SUPPORTS COMMON FORMS | ELECTRONIC FILING | PRIOR YEAR INFORMATION AVAILABLE | PRINTS ON BLANK PAPER | INTEGRATION WITH VENDOR MODULES | INTEGRATION WITH THIRD-PARTY APPLICATIONS | SOLID HELP/SUPPORT |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| ACCOUNTANTSWORLD - AFTER-THE-FACT PAYROLL | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X |
| AMERICAN RIVIERA SOFTWARE - MAGTAX | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| AMS - W-2 AND 1099 FORMS FILER | | X | X | | X | X | X* | X | X* | X | X | X |
| E.G. SYSTEMS - W-2/1099 FILER | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X* | X | X | X |
| GREATLAND-YEARLI | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| REAL BUSINESS SOLUTIONS - W2 MATE | X | X | X | X | X | X | X* | X | X* | X | X | X |
| SPOKANE COMPUTER - MAG-FILER | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| TENZENZ - EAGLE VIEW FILING | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| TENZENZ - LASERLINK | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | | X |
| TRACK1099 | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| WOLTERS KLUWER CCH - W2/1099 | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

* WITH ADD-ON

AccountantsWorld - After-the-Fact Payroll

www.accountantsworld.com

After-the-Fact Payroll from AccountantsWorld is exclusively designed for accounting professionals, and is best suited for firms that are using or plan on using other AccountantsWorld applications. After-the-Fact Payroll provides firms with good after-the-fact payroll processing along with complete

year-end W-2 and 1099 processing.

After-the-Fact Payroll is accessible from any browser, and can also be accessed from both smart phones and tablets. The product includes excellent payroll processing capability including the ability to import payrolls from Microsoft Excel, the ability to import employee and 1099 recipient information, and the product supports

reimbursements, 3rd party sick pay, allowances, cash and paycheck tips.

AccountantsWorld also offers a good selection of resources for accounting professionals including eBooks, numerous case studies, success stories, and a company newsletter. There is also a blog that offers a variety of useful information specifically written for accounting professionals.

★ **4.5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

Those interested in After-the-Fact Payroll should contact AccountantsWorld directly to request a demo of the application or to obtain a quote for their firm.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116003](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116003)

American Riviera Software - Magtax

www.magtax.com

Magtax from American Riviera Software is a good fit for both businesses and accounting firms that wish to e-file both W-2s and 1099 forms. Magtax is available in two versions, Standard and Professional, with both versions supporting unlimited payers and recipients. Magtax is an on-premise application that can be downloaded

from the vendor's website after purchasing. At this time, Magtax does not offer remote access or a mobile app, although if online access is a necessity, users can have the application hosted on a hosting service (www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/21112924).

Magtax supports many of the most common year end compliance forms including W-2, 1099-MISC, 1099-INT, 1099-DIV, 1099-C, 1098, and 1098-C,

with additional 1099 forms and 1042-S forms supported in the Professional version of the application.

Pricing for the Standard version is currently \$199 and the Professional version is currently \$299. The Standard version only offers a single-user license, the Professional version offers a 5-user license with more licenses available to purchase if needed. Those interested can download a demo version of

★ **4.75** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

Magtax from the American Riviera Software website and later activate it if they wish to purchase it. Product support is included in the cost of the application.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115999](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115999)

AMS W-2 and 1099 Forms Filer - 1099-Etc.

www.1099-etc.com

W-2/1099 Forms Filer is part of Advanced Micro Solutions (AMS) suite of applications. Designed for both businesses and accounting professionals, W-2/1099 Filer is an on-premise application that can be installed on a desktop or laptop computer. The application can also be installed on workstation computers or used across

a network. Each AMS application is sold separately as a stand-alone application, though W-2/1099 will need to be purchased in order to use any other AMS application.

W-2/1099 Forms Filer supports common year-end forms which include W-2, W-2C, W-3, all 1099 forms, 1096, 1098, 5498, and 1042S. The product also supports Puerto Rico forms including PRR-3, PRW-2, PRW-2C, and others.

W-2/1099 Forms Filer supports up to 1,999 separate payers, and up to 99,999 employees per payer, making it a good choice for accounting firms that process a high number of returns for multiple clients each year.

W-2/1099 Forms Filer's 2019 version is available for \$79, and like most AMS applications is sold as a separate application. If users wish to file forms electronically, they will need to pur-

★ **4.5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

chase E-File Services, which offers a variety of e-filing and mailing options for forms processed, and charges a fee per form filed, with volume pricing available.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115991](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115991)

EG Systems - W-2/1099 Filer

www.w21099.com

W-2/1099 Filer from EG Systems is well-suited for accounting professionals that file year-end compliance forms for multiple clients. W-2/1099 Filer is an on-premise application that can be installed on a desktop, workstation, or network computer. The product offers an easily navigated user interface that

provides access to all system functions.

A handy feature in W-2/1099 Filer is the ability to choose from a variety of data entry options, with interactive, classic, and quick-entry options available. The application includes all electronic tax filing and magnetic media filing at no additional cost, and a Bulk TIN matching feature is available in the application as well. The application

can also import data using Microsoft Excel and uses a wizard to guide users through the import/export process.

Those interested in the application can download a demo from the EG Systems website to try out prior to purchasing. All software from EG Systems, including W-2/1099 Filer can be downloaded immediately upon purchase from the EG website. The basic

★ **4.75** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

W-2 and 1099 software program runs \$119 for the first year, with a renewal fee of \$89 yearly. The Laser Engine add-on module runs \$40, and the ACA module is an additional \$100.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115990](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115990)

REVIEW: W2 and 1099 SYSTEMS

Greatland - Yearli

www.yearli.com

Yearli from Greatland Corporation is an all-inclusive W-2, 1099, and 1095 filing program. Yearli currently offers three plans: the Core and Performance plans, which offer online filing, and the Desktop plan, which is an on-premise application that can be installed on both desktop and network computers. Yearli is a good fit for businesses of all

sizes as well as accounting professionals that need to file a high number of compliance forms.

The Core edition of Yearli offers form processing and filing for W-2 and W-2c, as well as 1099-MISC, 1099-INT, 1099-DIV, 1099-R, and 1099-S, along with payroll forms including Forms 940 and 941. In addition to the forms listed above, the Performance edition

offers processing and filing for 1098 and other 1099 forms as well as 1095 (ACA) forms. Finally, the Desktop edition offers complete desktop processing of all forms previously listed as well as additional Forms 943 and 945.

Yearli offers three plan levels: Core, Performance, and Desktop. The Core plan does not have a base price, but the Performance plan's base price is

★ **4.75** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

\$99, while the Desktop plan is \$439. In addition, there are also per-form prices charged for each form that is e-filed, with pricing dependent on the plan subscribed to as well as the number of forms filed.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116004](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116004)

Real Business Solutions - W2 Mate

www.realtaxtools.com

W2 Mate from Real Business Solutions, is a good fit for businesses and accounting firms that need to file a high number of year-end W-2 and 1099 compliance forms. W2 Mate is an on-premise application that can be downloaded directly from the Real Business Solutions website and can be installed on desktop, workstation, and network computers. W2 can be

used as a stand-alone application, or combined with other Real Business Solutions year-end compliance modules for increased functionality. W2 Mate supports an unlimited number of employees and recipients.

W2 Mate is currently priced at \$39 for the downloadable version, with the CD Rom version running \$49. Most W2 Mate purchasers will also opt to purchase additional modules

that increase product functionality, including Generate Laser Forms, which runs \$25, Network Installation, which runs \$125, Import Data from Excel, QuickBooks, and Sage 50, which runs \$35, Electronic Filing, which run \$110, Additional 1099 Forms, which runs \$25, PDF Creation, which runs \$30 and the 1099 Emailer, which auto batches high volumes of 1099s and W2s and is currently priced at \$135. Those interested

★ **4.75** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

can also choose to download a free demo of W2 Mate to try out prior to purchasing. A free trial of the product can also be downloaded from the Real Business Solutions website prior to purchasing.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115993](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115993)

Spokane Computer - MAG-FILER

<https://www.mag-filer.com>

MAG-FILER, from Spokane Computer is a robust W-2 and 1099 processing and filing solution well suited for mid-sized businesses as well as accounting firms that need to process W-2s or 1099s for clients. MAG-FILER is an on-premise solution that can be used on a desktop, laptop, or workstation computer. At this time, MAG-FILER does not offer

online or mobile access.

MAG-FILER easily processes year-end compliance forms such as W-2s and 1099s, with both paper and electronic filing capability included in the product. Users have the option to manually enter data directly into MAG-FILER, or import data from QuickBooks or by using Microsoft Excel. Conveniently, MAG-FILER also interfaces with a variety of popular accounting

and payroll systems, making it easy to import the necessary data to prepare forms. MAG-FILER will also transfer prior year data, eliminating the need to re-enter data.

Those interested can download a trial version of the application to try out prior to purchasing, where they can begin entering data and later download the current version of the application when it's released, with

★ **4.75** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

all data automatically transferred to the new version. MAG-FILER can be downloaded from the website for \$345, or users can request a USB Flash Drive of the program for \$385.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115996](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115996)

Tenez - Eagle View Filing

www.eagleviewfiling.com

For those looking to eliminate the piles of paper that typically come with filing year-end compliance forms such as W-2s and 1099s, Eagle View Filing Solutions from Tenez offers a form-free approach. Eagle View Filing gives businesses and accounting firms the option to enter data directly into their online filing system. Great for busi-

nesses of any size, smaller businesses can opt to enter details into Eagle View's online system, while larger firms can take advantage of Eagle View Filing's ability to import payer and recipient data directly into the application, which then takes over the entire process from initial form creation, to filing and mailing forms.

Eagle View Filing, which allows

businesses and accounting firms alike to process as many or as few forms as necessary; saving time and money for both very small businesses that lack the time, expertise, or adequate resources to file 1099s and W-2s as well as large businesses or accounting firms that process thousands of forms each year.

The program is volume priced, with users only paying for what they use.

★ **5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

Prices for 1099 and W-2 forms starts at \$4.50 for between 1-10 filings, which includes printing, mailing, and e-filing. Prices drop as volume rises, so 1,000 plus forms will only cost \$1.25 to print, mail, and e-file.

**Read the full review
for this product online at:**
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115998](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115998)

W2 and 1099 SYSTEMS: REVIEW

Tenez - LaserLink

www.Tenez.com

LaserLink from Tenez is well suited for accounting firms that need to process year end compliance forms for numerous clients. LaserLink is a stand-alone application and is not designed to integrate with any third-party accounting or payroll applications. LaserLink is currently available in two versions; LaserLink, which includes up to 25 e-filings, and LaserLink XL, which

supports up to 200 e-filings, with additional e-filings available for purchase on each version. Both versions support an unlimited number of payers and recipients.

LaserLink and LaserLink XL are available on a CD Rom or can be downloaded and installed from the Tenez.com website. Neither version offers remote or mobile access. LaserLink supports all common year-end compliance forms, including W-2,

W-2G, W-2C, 1099(A, B, C, CAP, DIV, G, INT, LTC, MISC, OID, (PATR), Q, R, S, SA), 1096, W-3 & W-3C, 1098, 1098-T, 1098-E, 3921, 3922, (5498), 5498-ESA, (5498-SA), ACA(1094-B, 1094-C, 1095-B, and 1095-C).

LaserLink with E-File is available for \$71.99 and includes up to 25 free e-filings. LaserLink XL is \$229.99, with 200 e-filings available, with additional e-filings available for \$1.65 each. In addition, ACA form processing is also

★ **4.5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

available on both LaserLink and LaserLink XL for paper filing to the IRS. Both products can be downloaded from the Tenez website, or can be purchased as a CD Rom if desired.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115996](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115996)

Track1099

www.track1099.com

Track1099 offers online W-2 and 1099 processing and is a good fit for businesses and accounting firms of any size. Users can sign up for Track 1099 at no cost and will be charged only after data has been entered and an e-filing date scheduled.

Track1099 supports a variety of year-end compliance forms including 1042-S, 1094/1095-C, 1097-BTC, 1098,

1098-C, 1098-E, 1098-Q, 1098-T, 1099-A, 1099-B, 1099-C, 1099-CAP, 1099-DIV, 1099-G, 1099-H, 1099-INT, 1099-K, 1099-LTC, 1099-MISC, 1099-OID, 1099-PATR, 1099-Q, 1099-R, 1099-S, 1099-SA, 3921, 3922, 5498, 5498-ESA, 5498-SA, W-2/2C, W-2G.

Those interested in Track1099 can create an account at no cost, and will be charged only after completing forms and scheduling a day for e-filing.

Track1099 also offers a flexible price structure, with pricing starting at \$2.90 for the first 10 forms, with the next 150 forms running \$1.99 each. Those filing more than 160 forms will see the price drop to \$.99 each, with a further reduction for those processing more than 1,000. Pricing includes IRS and SSA e-filing, e-corrections for recipients, e-delivery to recipients, and combined federal and state 1099 filing, as well

★ **5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

as prepared forms for individual state filing for states not in the combined program.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116006](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116006)

Wolters Kluwer - W2/1099

<https://taxna.wolterskluwer.com/accounting-and-audit/w2-1099>

W2/1099 from Wolters Kluwer, also sold as Payroll Compliance Reporting, is offered only to accounting professionals, and is well suited for smaller firms that currently use other Wolters Kluwer applications such as ATX and TaxWise. The product is sold in two versions: 1) W2/1099, which includes only federal forms required for compliance; and 2) Payroll Compliance Reporting, which includes everything from the W2/1099 product as well as forms for State and local payroll reporting.

The W2/1099 product processes both W-2s and 1099s, with the form entry screen mirroring the form being processed. Information worksheets are available for W-2s, 1099s, or 1098s for both payers and employers.

The W2/1099 product supports multiple users in the application and

will also support a large number of payers and recipients in a single return — a necessity for firms that process year-end Federal compliance forms for multiple clients.

The 2019 version of W2/1099 is priced at \$269, with the full Payroll Compliance Reporting product coming in at \$469. Both can process and e-file forms W-2, W-3, 1099, 1098, 5498, 940, 941, and 944. Both products can also process an unlimited number of payroll returns at \$1.50 per TIN.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21115992](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21115992)

★ **4.5** 2019
OVERALL
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THE STATE OF SMALL BUSINESS 2019



JEFF HOFMANN

Managing Director,
Small Business Lending, Chase

Jeff Hofmann is Managing Director of Small Business Lending at Chase. A member of the Chase lending team for nearly 15 years, his primary responsibilities include developing and integrating strategies across the marketing and credit lifecycle, product development, acquisitions, customer engagement, customer retention and credit.

Q: As 2019 comes to an end, how would you rate the state of small business over the past year?

A: Overall, this has been a dynamic year for entrepreneurs and businesses. More than ever, we're seeing decision-makers build and evolve their business strategies with an eye toward global issues and the global economy. Local businesses also have a focus on the impact that geopolitical decisions have on their customer base, manufacturing procedures, overall bottom line and other elements of their business.

With these considerations at play, business owners have been more enthusiastic about growth opportunities for their businesses over the past 12 months. They are also expecting to see an increase in revenue and sales growth compared to this time last year, according to the annual JPMorgan Chase Business Leaders Outlook survey (available at chase.com/2019BusinessOutlook). And it's not just rising company profits that have business owners encouraged as the year comes to a close – economic expansion and the ability to invest back in their own companies have also been key emerging themes in 2019.

Entrepreneurs aren't naïve, however, and their optimism is not without some caution. Midsize businesses rank the limited talent pool as their No. 1 challenge with 28% extremely concerned about the limited supply of candidates. Keeping up with technological advances also topped the list of concerns for business owners this year.

Q: What do you attribute to the ongoing rise in small business lending in the U.S.?

A: It's true, lending to entrepreneurs and local businesses has been strong over the past few years, and 2019 is no exception. A lot of this has to do with business owners' optimism toward the business economy-at-large and growth within their own companies. Because the economy is experiencing moderate growth, entrepreneurs who have good credit are able to secure capital for their business needs.

It is important for business owners to make sure they have the resources to sustain their current level of business while positioning themselves for

future growth. Banks today are able to provide various options for business owners looking for the type of financing that's right for their business needs, from short-term options, like a Chase Ink business credit card for everyday operation to long-term options — like a line of credit or business loan — for larger investments. It's all about having access to capital and managing effective cash flow.

Q: What were the most noteworthy small business ideas or trends that made an impact in 2019?

A: It's always so inspiring to watch business owners turn their creative ideas and business goals into reality. While there have been many types of businesses emerging over the past 12 months – everything from blogging, podcasting, event planning and craft brewing – we've really seen growth in tech-based companies. Software engineers and developers continue to create businesses to maintain software on a variety of platforms and keep companies on the forefront of emerging technologies. Virtual reality computing (VR) is another area gaining momentum in the tech space. According to Statista, by 2020 the worldwide size of the VR market will be in excess of \$40 billion.

Q: Technology accessibility continues to increase – as we saw this year – so understanding how to build credit is more crucial than ever. With this in mind, how can CPAs help small business owners set themselves up for success in conversations with potential investors?

A: We hear from so many business owners that securing capital for their business is a stressful process. That's why it is so important to make sure business owners know what type of relationship they're getting into before deciding on an investor. Remember that investors will be with you for the long run. Knowing what questions to ask beforehand, such as what their process is like and what their typical investment size is, will help business owners achieve long-term success.

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Avalara
Tax Compliance Done Right

Q&A with Liz Armbruster

Q: 2018 was a watershed year for sales tax with the Supreme Court's *S. Dakota v. Wayfair* decision. How has this court decision continued to shape the compliance landscape for businesses in 2019?

A: We're continuing to see the impact of the broad powers given to states as the result of *South Dakota v. Wayfair, Inc.*, which was by and large the result of rapidly changing consumer shopping preferences from brick-and-mortar to online. In 2019, the domino effect of state economic nexus legislation has continued; the majority of states now compel sellers, regardless of their physical location, to collect and remit sales or use tax once a minimum amount of sales and/or transactions has been reached in that state.

This is also the year that marketplace facilitators such as Amazon, Etsy, and eBay are being required to collect and remit sales or use tax on behalf of third-party marketplace sellers in a broad swath of states. States are exercising their rights under the *Wayfair* guidelines to compel an array of business entities, from small sellers to ecommerce giants, to collect and remit tax on their behalf.

Q: What are some of the challenges you see accountants facing in the wake of *Wayfair*?

A: Accounting and tax professionals are looking for orderly direction and systemic approaches to help clients with tax compliance — but it's a tall order. They need to a) assess their client's sales tax scenario, b) take appropriate steps to get them into compliance, and c) automate the client's sales tax processes with technology solutions in order to ensure they stay in compliance.

The learning curve can be steep and, as a result of ongoing state legislative changes, the landscape keeps shifting. While some smaller firms might make the commitment to develop the sales tax expertise necessary to assist clients, many others will engage with a consulting firm specializing in state and local tax, as well as outsource tax technology automation to a provider like Avalara.

Due to the number of businesses directly impacted by the *Wayfair* decision, 2019 has become a boom year for specialty CPA firms focusing solely on online sellers' sales tax consulting needs. They're helping traditional CPA firms meet these new and unexpected challenges, and we're pleased that most of them are valued Avalara partners; we help connect traditional firms with sales tax consulting specialists.

Q: How is Avalara helping accounting professionals to better serve clients' tax compliance needs?

A: Avalara made a commitment well ahead of the *Wayfair* ruling to educate accounting professionals about all things tax compliance. We knew accountants would be on the front lines of inquiry from clients struggling with sales tax issues. Post *Wayfair*, we continue to provide actionable educational resources and industry perspectives as domestic and global tax compliance changes and evolves. And, of course, our annual Avalara CRUSH conference will continue to help professionals master tax trends within a professional networking environment.

Avalara's core value to tax and accounting professionals and their clients is our suite of Avalara AvaTax tax technology solutions, addressing all aspects of U.S. and international tax compliance, from tax calculations to reporting, returns preparation and remittance, tax licensing and registration, exemption certificate management, cross-border commerce, and more. And, significantly, Avalara offers over 700 prebuilt integrations into business applications across accounting, ERP, ecommerce, point-of-sale, mobile commerce, and CRM software. We assist firms with clients small and large across industry segments, including specialized areas like Excise, Communications, Lodging, and Beverage Alcohol. We've entered a bold new era alongside tax professionals, and are actively partnering to solve their clients' most complex tax compliance challenges.

Avalara helps businesses of all sizes get tax compliance right. In partnership with leading ERP, accounting, ecommerce, and other financial management system providers, Avalara delivers cloud-based compliance solutions for various transaction taxes, including sales and use, VAT, GST, excise, communications, lodging, and other indirect tax types. Headquartered in Seattle, Avalara has offices across the U.S. and around the world in Canada, the U.K., Belgium, Brazil, and India.
More information at avalara.com.



Liz Armbruster

Liz Armbruster oversees global compliance operations at Avalara. Liz brings more than 20 years of leadership experience from a variety of technology sectors including software, media and services and is known for her strong track record of innovative problem solving, process optimization and ability to deliver automation for efficiency and scale. Her strong commitment to operational excellence and aptitude for partnering cross-functionally helped her drive value in her prior roles with Vubiquity, a provider of content monetization technology, and Zilog, a computing microcontroller manufacturer.

If you'd describe your sales tax compliance confidence as 'sort of mostly,' it's time.

With tax compliance rules and regulations changing so fast, find out where you're on the hook. Try our free sales tax risk assessment tool at www.avalara.com/CPA

Avalara
Tax compliance done right



intuit®

Q&A with Ariege Misherghi



Ariege Misherghi
Leader, Accountant Segment,
Intuit

Ariege leads the Accountant Segment at Intuit, which is focused on helping Intuit's accountant partners with elevating their practice and serving their clients in new and innovative ways. Ariege is responsible for leading a team focused on helping accountants grow their practice and scale their impact through innovative products, services and programs. Her areas of focus include QuickBooks Online Accountant and the Global QuickBooks ProAdvisor Program.

Q: How has technology impacted the accounting industry and the services they deliver to their clients?

A: Technology is a tool that the profession has leveraged to deliver better and better service to the evolving needs of clients. I find that accounting professionals are most fulfilled when they can help their clients improve their financial lives and clients are most happy with their accounting professional when they can tie their successful financial outcomes to their accounting professional.

Over the years, technology has adapted to augment these moments of fulfillment. I see a few big shifts including:

- Compliance automation, which reduces the amount of time and effort it takes to collect and input data.
- Increasingly smart data outputs, enabling people to understand the state of their financial lives and how they can improve them.
- Operational efficiency, eliminating work to manage work.

Accounting professionals have embraced technological advances every step of the way to further the impact and expand the services they deliver to their clients.

Q: How do new technologies like artificial intelligence actually help accountants and bookkeepers with small business customers?

A: Artificial Intelligence takes many forms, but fundamentally the goal in our use of AI is to automate compliance and improve data outputs. AI isn't just a buzz term with hypothetical impact. We are using it to dramatically reduce the amount of time it takes a professional to get to clean books with QuickBooks. We find that professionals

who use all the power of AI in QB can serve twice as many clients as those who don't.

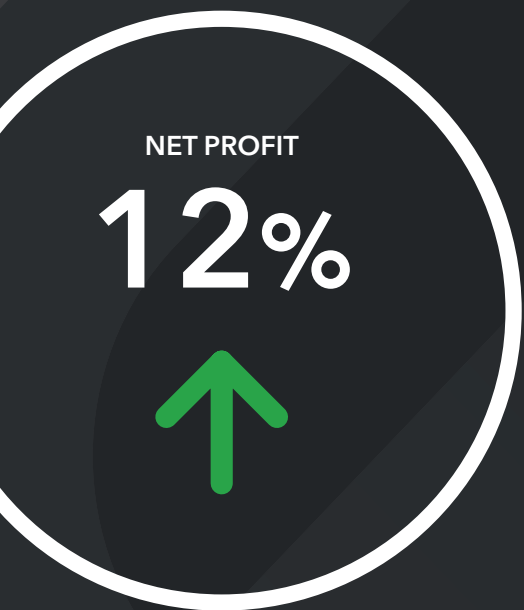
It's worth noting that while automation and machine learning are valuable tools, the human element is still vital. Although machine learning can classify data, identify patterns and predict likely results for a small business owner, having a human expert who is familiar with the clients' business and can digest and explain the insights to devise the best plan for action is essential.

Q: How do you think the accounting industry has adapted to macro technology shifts and what do you see coming next for accountants to leverage technology wise?

A: We know accounting professionals and bookkeepers are ready to harness the power of cutting edge technology to take the profession to the next level and ensure they're delivering the best possible service to their clients. That's why we've recently introduced a variety of new services that accountants can leverage to better grow their practice and scale their impact. Each of these services deliver on QuickBooks' goal of being an AI-driven expert platform that allows accountants to leverage the power of the platform while also delivering the unique expertise only they have.

Within QuickBooks, one example of an experience brought to you by advanced data techniques is our new Business Performance Review, a beautiful data experience that provides accounting professionals with key metrics, trends, and industry comparisons leveraging aggregate anonymized data to see how clients are performing relative to other businesses like them.

Turn visuals into vision



Give your clients a look at the future of their business with the data to back it up. The new Business Performance Dashboard, only in QuickBooks Online Accountant, turns hundreds of rows of key metric data into easily digestible charts and graphs. So you can see where your clients' businesses are today, and show them where they should go tomorrow.

Show your clients the insights they need.

Find more success together with the Business Performance Dashboard.



Right Networks®

Q&A with Roman Kepczyk



Roman H. Kepczyk

Roman H. Kepczyk, CPA is Director of Firm Consulting for Right Networks. Roman is responsible for helping firms throughout North America effectively use information technology and accounting applications by optimizing their tax, audit and administrative production workflows. Roman was named by INSIDE Public Accounting as one of the profession's Most Recommended Consultants for each of the years from 2005 through 2017, CPA Practice Advisors Top 25 Thought Leaders from 2011 through 2019, and Accounting Today's Most Influential People in Accounting thirteen times.

Q: What trend do you see having the biggest industry impact through 2020? (e.g. CAS, outsourcing, acceleration of automation etc.)

A: Digital automation consisting of ingress, workflow and team collaboration-The next generation of digital tools and applications are automating much of the manual entry and calculations traditionally done by accounting staff. Firms are utilizing APIs (application programming interfaces), machine learning, and robotic process automation tools for streamlined data ingress allowing financial data to be captured and utilized in a more timely fashion and without errors. In addition, the integration of Right Networks' "always on" capabilities will allow accountants to synchronize data between QuickBooks Desktop and applications like the way QuickBooks Online works. This will result in near real-time information management and the adoption of KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and dashboards allowing the accountants to provide more proactive guidance and advisory services. Workflow tools are also rapidly evolving to manage all projects and due dates and provide real-time updates to all accounting personnel to collaborate more effectively within the firm and, increasingly, with their clients in a completely digital format. This collaboration will extend beyond the traditional use of email and secure portals to communications and data sharing applications such as Slack, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, which can be accessed anytime and anywhere through the mobile device of choice (computers, tablets, smartphones, etc.). Both firm and client data is significantly more secure within enterprise cloud providers compared to the security tools and capabilities found within most accounting firms. Overall, it has become obvious that firms that have all their applications integrated in the cloud have a competitive advantage over those with traditional in-house networks, so the time for technology-resistant firms to move is now.

Q: How do you see the impact of this trend playing out in 2020?

A: Evolution of applications to cloud will help accelerate transition of traditional services to Advisory/Coaching model-Traditional compliance work will atrophy as automation takes over bookkeeping, payroll and middle- to lower-level tax returns beginning, for instance, with those individuals that transition to the

standard itemized deduction. Firms will need to focus on value-added services for their clients where they are best suited to provide forward-looking direction, pointing increasingly to specialization of business or targeted wealth clients. Firms will need to cast a "wider net" to capture their specific target clients beyond their local marketplace, which again is supported by having all applications in the cloud. The transition towards the Advisory/Coaching model is already playing out as represented not only by the number of firms adopting this strategy but by the significant number of trainers and consultants focusing in this area. We are also seeing a significant uptick in the interest of training for specific data analytics skills and automation tools.

Q: What's one thing you think accounting firms large and small should be doing now to prepare for the future?

A: Focus on business coaching/financial metrics and analytical skills-Not only will accountant skills need to evolve to being more of a business coach, but accountants will need to develop an understanding of the key performance indicators (KPIs) that will make their clients' businesses more effective and even predictive in nature, leaning towards niche specialization. Accounting firms will also need to develop or acquire the technical skills to confidently capture, analyze and interpret client information, utilizing the digital tools that are already here as well as those that are evolving (artificial intelligence, blockchain) which more than likely will be optimized in the cloud. This will include not only the data ingress and automation tools described above, but also data visualization tools that will identify issues, opportunities, and serve as precursors to client decision-making. Firms can begin by utilizing tools such as Microsoft Power BI/Power Query, Tableau, Domo, and Qlik internally to optimize the firm's own production KPIs and then transfer these skills to client advisory engagements.

Company Description:

Right Networks gets all your critical accounting and business applications into the cloud so you and your team can be more productive, collaborate more effectively, and scale with ease. We bridge the gap between legacy and full online solutions with a cloud-connected ecosystem of 250+ best-in-class accounting applications. All the applications in our ecosystem are pre-tested, configured, and packaged to meet the unique needs of accounting and tax professionals.

The leading cloud hosting provider for accounting professionals

Right Networks gets all your critical accounting and business applications into the cloud so you and your team can be more productive, collaborate more effectively, and scale with ease.

Our cloud-connected ecosystem of 250+ best-in-class accounting applications features:

- QuickBooks Desktop hosted in the cloud
- Anytime, anywhere access
- Automatic updates & backups
- Enterprise-class security
- Unparalleled support, 24/7
- "Always on" data transfer & synchronization

Ready to get started?

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100%
Accounting
Focused



250+
Best-in-Class
Applications



50,000+
Accounting
Firms & SMBs

First Impressions Matter

WEB VISITORS MAKE snap judgements in under 5 seconds, and if your web design comes up wanting, it's likely that your firm will as well. Remember, for many of your potential clients, their first impression of your firm will be via your website. They won't be walking into your office to assess your competency. Instead, they will sum up your competence and expertise based on their initial reaction to your website. Is this unfair?

Maybe, but it's also a fact. Today, visitors to your website will judge your firm's competence on a number of things that have nothing to do with the level of expertise that your firm offers. Instead, your firm will be judged on how fast your website loads, how easy it is to navigate, how streamlined the pages are, how useful the content is.

Here are a few things you can do to keep visitors engaged on your website and ensure a favorable impression:

- Make sure your website loads fast. No one will stick around to see your great web design if it takes more than a few seconds to load.
- Give them a reason to stay on your site – and to return. Keep content fresh, change out photos and banners periodically, and get rid of out-of-date materials. If your website always looks fresh, your visitors will know you care about the impression you make, and that should carry over to their desire to interact with your firm.

- Keep your visitors engaged. Offer a free download, an online calculator, a free newsletter, or even a short eBook that they can download. Give them something to sign up for. Signing up is the first step to future engagement.
- Make your firm offerings clear. Now is not the time to be modest. Do you offer same-day appointments? Do you offer a free consultation? Display those offers prominently. If the details are buried under a ton of content, no one will take the time needed to find them. Give potential clients a reason to click on that Contact Us button.
- Mobile-friendly matters. More than 50 percent of first-time visitors to your website are likely accessing it from their cell phone. You can have the best web design in the universe, but if it doesn't show up well on a mobile device, this can deter possible clients.

Fortunately, you don't have to learn web design in order to have a beautifully created website. In fact, there are a variety of website design applications that take the complexity out of web design, making it easy to create and manage your website. These do-it-yourself applications include:

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

If you have absolutely no desire to create a website, even using the tools and resources included in the products listed above, no need to worry. We've also included some custom products that specialize in building custom websites for accountants and CPA firms. These products include:

- BuildYourFirm Accounting Website Packages
- CountingWorks Pro
- CPAsites from CPAsites.com
- GetNetSet for Accounting Firms

Don't become a bad statistic because your website isn't up to today's demanding standards. Instead, use the tools and resources available in the applications above to help you

create an informative, engaging website that visitors will choose to explore and return to again and again.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In many of the reviews included in CPA Practice Advisor, the product reviewed is recommended for a particular firm size. In the majority of instances, this information comes directly from the vendors themselves, as many of the software products on the market today are created with a particular end user in mind. However, when that information is not immediately provided, this recommendation can be derived from a variety of things, including the following:

- Product plan options - If a product offers scalability and a choice of several plans, that usually indicates that it's suitable for firms of any size. However, a single plan option with few add-on features usually means that the product will perform better for smaller firms or businesses.
- Multi-user capability - some applications offer limited user options. If this is the case, the product is typically better suited for smaller firms, since they will have a smaller number of users.
- Price points - pricing can sometimes

DO-IT-YOURSELF PRODUCTS

| | MULTIPLE TEMPLATES AVAILABLE | DEFAULT PAGES INCLUDED | AUTOMATED CONTENT AVAILABLE | DOMAIN MANAGEMENT & BRANDED EMAILS | MAKE IN-HOUSE CHANGES | ADD BANNERS, SLIDES & ANIMATION | CUSTOM DESIGN OPTIONS | SEO & MARKETING | ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS (PORTALS, BLOGS) | SOCIAL MEDIA OPTIONS | SUPPORT OPTIONS | STAR RATING |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| ACCOUNTANTSWORLD WEBSITE RELIEF | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 4.75 |
| CCH SITE BUILDER | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | *X | X | X | 4.75 |
| COUNTINGWORKS | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 5 |
| CPA SITE SOLUTIONS | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 5 |
| INTEGER (FORMERLY AFSB) | X | X | X | X | X | | X | **X | X | X | X | 4.5 |
| WEB BUILDERS CS | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 5 |

CUSTOM PRODUCTS

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
| GETNETSET | X | X | X | | X** | X | X | X | X | X | X | 5 |
| BUILD YOUR FIRM | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | 4.75 |
| CPA SITES | | X | X | | X** | X | X | X | X | X | X | 5 |

*ADDITIONAL MODULE REQUIRED
**LIMITED

play a role in determining the size firm a product is best suited for. For instance, while per-user pricing is an affordable option for firms with 10 or less users, it can quickly become a sticking point for firms with upwards of 50 users.

■ Features - the number of features available in an application is often directly related to the complexity

of the application and who it is optimally designed for. The office that purchases QuickBooks Online in many cases is not the same office that would purchase NetSuite, though that is not always the case.

In any review, we will try to determine what size firm or business the reviewed product is best suited for. That said, a product best suited for a small to mid-

sized firm certainly does not mean that a larger firm could not reap any benefits from using that product. It only means that the features and functionality in that application work best in smaller firms. It's entirely up to you; our readers to determine whether any product is suitable for your firm. We just try to point you in the right direction. ■

AccountantsWorld Website Relief

www.accountantsworld.com

Website Relief from AccountantsWorld is part of their Power Practice System, with all applications designed to integrate seamlessly. Website Relief, like all AccountantsWorld applications is a good fit for small to mid-sized accounting firms, and works best when coupled

with other AccountantsWorld applications, though Website Relief can also be used as a stand-alone web building resource if desired.

If used as part of the AccountantsWorld Power Practice System, Website Relief users also have access to an unlimited number of client portals

that can be used on the newly created website, allowing firms and clients to share confidential documents securely. The Power Practice System includes Accounting Power CAS, Cloud Cabinet, After-the-Fact Payroll, and Practice Relief. Website Relief can also be purchased as a stand-alone website

★ **4.75** 2019 OVERALL RATING

building application if desired. Those interested in Website Relief can contact AccountantsWorld for current pricing.

Read the full review for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116195

CCH Site Builder

www.cchwebsites.com

CCH Site Builder from Wolters Kluwer is well-suited for small to mid-sized accounting firms that ideally use other Wolters Kluwer applications, however the program can also be used as a standalone website building tool.

Designed for user ease, CCH Site Builder allows users to create a func-

tioning website in minutes, with the ability to add, edit, change, or delete information at any time. The intuitive setup process guides users through the all of the standard page options, including the ability to choose from a variety of styles and colors. Users can also change the design of their website at any time, without any

additional fees, and during the initial setup process, custom headers, footers, and background details, as well as a company logo can be added. CCH Site Builder offers a variety of images that can be used on any website created, or users can choose to upload custom images if desired.

A free, 30-day trial is available for

★ **4.75** 2019 OVERALL RATING

users to try out the application prior to purchasing, and interested parties can request a custom quote from Wolters Kluwer.

Read the full review for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116172

CountingWorks Websites

www.CountingWorksPro.com

Previously available as ClientWhys, CountingWorks Pro offers a variety of marketing tools designed for tax and accounting firms of all sizes. Along with custom website creation, CountingWorks Pro offers application users a variety of options for their custom created websites including blogging,

page content, e-newsletters, lead management, and a client portal. Delivered as a SaaS application, CountingWorks Pro is extremely scalable, with three packages, and numerous plans available within each package.

CountingWorks Pro is extremely scalable, with Starter, Core Marketing, and Growth Marketing packages

with various options available in each package, though the Starter package only includes marketing tools. Mobile friendly websites are available in both the Core Marketing and Growth Marketing Packages, with prices starting at \$69.95 per month all the way to \$349 per month for Whitney, which serves as a virtual marketing department.

★ **5** 2019 OVERALL RATING

CountingWorks Pro does not require a contract, and a 30-day free trial is available to those that wish to take the product for a test drive.

Read the full review for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116174

CPA Site Solutions

www.cpasitesolutions.com

CPA Site Solutions offers website design specifically for accounting firms, and is well suited for firms of any size. CPA Site Solutions is a scalable application, with four plans available, with each plan offering a variety of features and functionality, with complete web design included in all plans.

CPA Site Solutions offers an excellent selection of web designs, with the Silver plan offering 69 standard web designs, while the Gold, Platinum, and Diamond plans offer 250 standard and premium website designs. All plans include responsive designs that are optimized for desktop computers, laptops, network computers, and iOS

and Android smartphones and tablets.

CPA Site Solutions has a number of plans to choose from including Silver, which is priced at \$62.50 per month, Gold, which is \$83.50, Platinum, which is \$109.50, and Diamond, which is \$139.00 per month. Users pay on a monthly basis, with no long-term contract required. Those interested in

★ **5** 2019 OVERALL RATING

CPA Site Solutions can visit their website to download a free, 60-day trial to give the product a test run.

Read the full review for this product online at:
www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116192

REVIEW: WEB BUILDERS

DO-IT-YOURSELF PRODUCTS

Integer Accounting & Tax Websites

www.getinteger.com

Integer from Tenenz offers good website design options for small to mid-sized accounting firms. The company's emphasis on marketing can also be a handy resource for firms looking for marketing assistance. Integer currently

offers four plans: Essentials, Marketing Starter, Marketing Pro, and Marketing Expert. All plans include more than 125 tax and accounting themed website templates to choose from, as well as the ability to add an unlimited number of pages to any website.

Integer Websites from Tenenz is best suited for small to mid-sized accounting firms. There are four plans available in Integer: the Essentials plan, which is \$32.99 a month, the Marketing Starter plan, which is \$62.95 per month, the Marketing Pro plan, which

★ **4.5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

is \$89.95 a month, and, newly added, the Marketing Expert plan, which is \$169.95 per month.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116183](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116183)

Web Builder CS

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

Web Builder CS from Thomson Reuters is a good fit for accounting firms of any size that use other Thomson Reuters applications, though it can be used as a stand-alone application if desired.

Web Builder CS is designed specifi-

cally for accounting professionals and currently offers more than 70 templates in a variety of styles, with both classic and mobile friendly designs available. Users can choose to use a standard template, or have Web Builder

CS designers enhance a selected template with custom colors, a firm's logo, and custom fonts. Custom website design is also available for those that do not want to use a template.

Those interested in the application can visit Web Builder CS to view a

★ **5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

product demo. Pricing for Web Builder CS is available directly from Thomson Reuters upon request.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116179](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116179)

BuildYourFirm Accounting Websites

<https://websites.buildyourfirm.com>

Build Your Firm Accounting Website Packages offers a variety of custom website building solutions for accounting firms of any size. Build Your Firm is scalable, with three website design options and three hosting options available, and any of the web designs can be hosted at any level. All plans

include complete SEO capability, an email newsletter, productivity tools, secure file sharing, a content library, and a social media posting wizard.

Build Your Firm offers three different website types: Essential, Niche, and Custom, with hosting options priced separately. The Essential plan does not charge a setup fee, so the monthly

hosting fee is the only cost Essential subscribers would pay. For firms desiring an industry-based website, the Niche website has a setup fee that starts at \$500 and goes up to \$1,250. The Custom plan is the most comprehensive, with a setup fee of \$2,000. All plans are can be hosted at any level, with Professional level hosting starting

★ **4.75** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

at \$69.99 per month (billed annually), Platinum hosting running \$99.95 per month, and Platinum Plus running \$399.95 per month.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116193](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116193)

CPAsites

www.CPAsites.com

CPAsites offers custom website design and setup. A good fit for accounting firms of any size, CPAsites offers four subscription levels: Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze, making it affordable for just about any firm. All CPAsites websites are created from scratch.

Interested firms sign up with CPAsites and then provide firm information including branding materials, a current firm logo, and any other information that should be on the website.

CPAsites is a good option for firms that want a custom designed website without having to be involved in the

creation process. Along with a built-from-scratch website, CPAsites also does all subsequent edits.

CPAsites' four subscription options are priced as follows: Platinum, \$150 per month; Gold, \$85 per month; Silver, \$50 per month; and Bronze, \$300 per year. All custom website design

★ **5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

and setup is free. After the required contract period of one year, firms will own the website outright.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116186](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116186)

GetNetSet Websites

www.getnetset.com

GetNetSet is well suited for small to mid-sized accounting firms looking for a custom website at a reasonable price. GetNetSet is scalable, with three plans available, and all plans offer custom web design, unlimited website changes, and free product support.

Designed specifically for accounting firms, GetNetSet offers completely customized websites, with a custom design included in the cost of the subscription.

GetNetSet currently offers three plans: the Representer, which includes 7 pages, and currently runs \$29 per month, the Retainer plan,

which includes an unlimited number of web pages, an automated newsletter, and a client portal, and runs \$49 per month, and the Recruiter plan, which is designed for larger firms and includes all of the features found in the other plans, along with advanced SEO capabilities, and currently runs \$99 per

★ **5** 2019
OVERALL
RATING

month. All versions of GetNetSet offer unlimited changes, free support, and a free 30-day trial, where users can try out the product prior to purchasing.

Read the full review
for this product online at:
[www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/
21116188](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116188)

AUTOMATED SYSTEMS



PAUL McDONALD
Senior Executive Director
Robert Half
paul.mcdonald@cpapracticeadvisor.com

2020 Hiring and Compensation Trends for Accounting Firms

THE FIERCE COMPETITION for top accounting talent we've been seeing isn't expected to dissipate anytime soon. Now more than ever, it's crucial for public accounting leaders to keep a finger on the pulse of the employment market to ensure they can attract new star players to their firms — and keep the ones they already have in place.

To help you keep on top of things, here are five hiring and compensation trends from the 2020 Robert Half Salary Guide for Accounting and Finance Professionals (<https://bit.ly/2Oj6dWY>).



THE HIRING HEAT IS ON — ESPECIALLY FOR CPAs.

The demand for skilled accounting professionals of all levels will continue to outpace supply in 2020. As in past years, CPAs are hot commodities and will be especially difficult to locate.

Employers are recognizing that dragging out the recruitment process is one of the biggest hiring mistakes (<https://bit.ly/33Twx0A>) they can make: Many workers are entertaining multiple offers and will move on if firms don't act quickly.

Many companies are also adopting more flexible hiring practices. They're no longer waiting for the perfect candidate, for example. Instead, they are hiring professionals who may not have 100% of their preferred skills but who could be fairly easily brought up to speed with on-the-job training.



RETENTION IS AS IMPORTANT AS RECRUITING.

Losing the legacy

knowledge and valuable connections of longtime employees hits where it hurts, so accounting leaders are ramping up their efforts to retain valuable staff.

In addition to reevaluating salaries, employers are increasing the extras they offer, especially those that drive work-life balance. Popular perks include free parking, on-site childcare, gym memberships, and flexibility in the form of telecommuting and compressed workweeks. (See more at <https://bit.ly/2OylDqH>.)

Cash retention and performance bonuses also go a long way. As such, 43% of organizations plan to increase the dollar value of incentives, and 41% intend to up the frequency with which they're offered.



SALARY STAKES ARE HIGH.

Accounting aces know what they're worth these days. Seventy-three percent of respondents in a Robert Half survey say they've compared their salary to market rates in the past year, and 46% feel underpaid.

If you can't meet a candidate's salary expectations, rest assured another employer can and will. But don't hit the panic button yet — many accounting professionals will take a smaller paycheck in exchange for other valuable

resources, such as mentoring, reimbursement for tuition or certification fees, and professional development and career advancement opportunities. Leverage these incentives, along with signing bonuses, during salary negotiations.



DIGITAL DISRUPTION IS TRANSFORMING SKILL SETS.

Accounting firms are taking advantage of the increases in productivity and long-term cost savings afforded by transformative technologies. To make the most of these enhancements, employers now look beyond traditional accounting skills to find candidates experienced in data analytics, cloud-based computing and related tools.

Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are also taking over rote accounting tasks like data entry, shifting the focus of accounting professionals to more strategic duties. This transition will require employees with outstanding soft skills, particularly communication and collaboration.



COMPANY CULTURE IS A MAKE-OR-BREAK FACTOR.

Today's employees put stock in whether a potential

employer's organizational culture aligns with their personal values and goals. In fact, 35% of workers polled by Robert Half said they would pass on a job offer if the company culture wasn't a good fit, even if the job were otherwise perfect. If you feel your organizational culture is an attractive one, communicate this to job applicants and reinforce what makes your company a great place to work with existing staff through your company website, social media, onboarding and executive messaging. If you're not sure how attractive your corporate culture is, take a hint from what working professionals said in a Robert Half survey for our report, Organizational Culture: The Make-or-Break Factor in Hiring and Retention (<https://bit.ly/2r0QjZk>). They reported that some of the characteristics they look for include whether a company has a collaborative work environment, an emphasis on helping employees maintain work-life balance, and a flat organizational structure that involves them in key decision-making processes.

Your organization is only as good as the analysts and auditors who work there. To thrive in today's competitive hiring market, public accounting leaders must keep a constant watch on changing employment trends. Prepare today! ■

WHAT ARE EXCEPTED BENEFITS, AND SHOULD YOU OFFER THEM TO EMPLOYEES?

By Rachel Blakely-Gray

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE waters of health insurance coverage is tricky. You might be wondering, “Do employers have to offer health insurance?” Although the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires employers with 50 or more full-time equivalent employees to provide health insurance, no employer has to offer excepted benefits.

But, many employers do offer excepted benefits. And, the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Treasury are releasing a new Excepted Benefits HRA in 2020.

What does this all mean? Should you jump on board and offer excepted benefits to your crew? To make that kind of decision, you need to know what is an excepted benefit and what the new Excepted Benefit HRA is.

WHAT ARE EXCEPTED BENEFITS?

Excepted benefits under ACA are types of coverage that are not included in a traditional health insurance plan.

The Affordable Care Act requires that a traditional health insurance plan covers the following health benefits:

- Ambulatory patient services
- Emergency services
- Hospitalization
- Pregnancy, maternity, and newborn care
- Mental health and substance use disorder services
- Prescription drugs
- Rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices
- Laboratory services
- Preventive and wellness services
- Pediatric services, including oral and vision care for children

As you can see in the above list, there are a few benefits not included (e.g., vision coverage for adults). There are four categories of excepted benefits, according to the Department of Labor:

- Non-health coverage
- Limited health benefits
- Specific disease or illness coverage
- Supplemental health benefits

NON-HEALTH COVERAGE

The first category of excepted benefits under ACA include benefits that are not considered health care coverage. These benefits are add-ons to regular health insurance coverage. Typically, these benefits pay out wage replacement and may incidentally cover medical care coverage after an accident or extended illness or injury. However, they do not cover general health care costs for employees who get sick.

Examples of coverage included under this category of excepted benefits include:

- Accident-only coverage (e.g., automobile or accidental death and dismemberment insurance)
- Disability insurance
- Workers' compensation insurance

LIMITED HEALTH BENEFITS

Limited health benefits are offered separately from traditional health care plans. These benefits are not required under the ACA and include:

- Dental coverage
- Vision coverage
- Long-term care benefits (e.g., nursing home)

SPECIFIC DISEASE OR ILLNESS COVERAGE

The third category of excepted benefits covers types of benefits that are specific to a certain type of illness or disease. This type of coverage has no coordination with benefits under a group health plan.

Examples of this category of excepted benefits include:

- Coverage for a specific disease or illness (e.g., cancer insurance)
- Hospital indemnity (insurance that pays the holder if they are hospitalized)

SUPPLEMENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

The last type of excepted benefits category includes separate insurance policies that are supplemental to Medicare or Armed Forces health care coverage. In rare circumstances, this category may also include separate insurance policies that are supplemental to a group health plan.

EXCEPTED BENEFIT HRA

Starting in January 2020, employers can choose to offer employees an Excepted Benefit HRA. If you offer it, your employees must enroll during open enrollment. An Excepted Benefit HRA is one of two new types of HRAs rolling out in 2020, with the other being the Individual Coverage HRA (ICHRA).

Whereas the ICHRA is an alternative to traditional group-term health insurance, the Excepted Benefit HRA is something employers can offer in conjunction with traditional health insurance.

CAN YOU OFFER THE EXCEPTED BENEFIT HRA?

If you want to offer employees the Excepted Benefit HRA, you must also offer them a traditional health insur-

ance plan. However, the employee does not have to enroll in the traditional health insurance plan to enroll in the Excepted Benefit HRA—you just have to offer it.

WHAT DO EXCEPTED BENEFIT HRAS COVER?

Excepted benefit HRAs cover things not included in a traditional health insurance plan, including:

- Dental coverage
- Vision coverage
- Short-term, limited-duration insurance (STLDI)
- Copays, deductibles, and other expenses not covered by a primary health insurance plan

CONTRIBUTION LIMIT

Employers contribute to an Excepted Benefit HRA. But, you can only contribute up to a certain amount for each employee. For 2020, the annual contribution limit for an Excepted Benefit HRA is \$1,800.

EXCEPTED BENEFIT HRA VS. REGULAR HRA

So, what's the difference between an Excepted Benefit and HRA that reimburses excepted benefits? Unlike regular HRAs, Excepted Benefit HRAs can reimburse employees for medical care expenses that are not considered excepted benefits. You can learn more about the Excepted Benefit HRA on the IRS's website (PDF) https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/health_reimbursement_arrangements_faqs.pdf. ■

Rachel Blakely-Gray is a writer for Patriot Software, a provider of payroll and benefits services. This article first appeared on the Patriot Software blog.

A Year in the Life of a PAYROLL Accountant is sponsored by



What to Know for 2019 Year-End Reporting Compliance

By Pete Isberg

IT'S YEAR-END AGAIN, which for employers means having to simultaneously figure out what year-end tax reporting requirements have changes, and what new compliance challenges the new year may bring.

Many business leaders may find themselves in survival mode, with so much to know about new tax reporting guidelines, new healthcare reporting and other legislation.

NEW IRS FORM W-4 FOR 2020

The IRS has revamped Form W-4 and all related calculations for income tax withholding. The new form adds a new category, head of household, but it eliminates withholding allowances altogether. Instead, employees will adjust withholding by entering their tax information, such as other (non-wage) income, full-year deductions over the standard deduction amount and any child or dependent tax credits.

Filling out the new W-4 could be more labor-intensive, as new hires likely won't have their previous tax return memorized. You may need to adjust your onboarding process on W-4s. You could, for instance, offer them some time and a private room to call for tax help, or give them a day to complete the form at home.

Starting in 2020, new hires will have to use this updated W-4 Form. If your current employees are happy with their current tax withholding, they can continue the same approach. But if they want to change their withholding after the end of this year, they will need to use the new system.

STATE WITHHOLDING

The new Form W-4 could also affect state tax withholding, as state governments typically base their approach on the IRS system, and state governments are still figuring out how to accommodate the new W-4. Some states continue to use allowances on their withholding tables and rely exclusively on the IRS Forms W-4 for state tax purposes, yet there is no longer an entry box for allowances on the federal form. Expect some year-end changes from state governments as they plan their response to the new IRS Form W-4.

Some state governments are also reacting to the new \$10,000 limit on federal deductions for state/local taxes under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. One possible solution could be reducing income taxes and increasing payroll taxes, which remain deductible. New York launched an optional payroll tax, and Connecticut is running a study

to determine whether it should enact a broad mandate de-emphasizing income taxes and shifting to a payroll tax. This could become more common as states figure out how to operate under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

FEDERAL W-2S AND STATE DEADLINES

In 2020, the estimated Social Security maximum taxable earnings will be \$137,700, while the tax rate will remain the same for employers and employees at 6.2%. Medicare tax rates will remain the same as they were in 2019: 1.45% for employers, 1.45% for employees with earnings up to \$200,000 and 2.35% for wages over \$200,000.

The IRS continues to prioritize preventing tax refund fraud and identity theft and has moved the W-2 submission deadline earlier to Jan. 31 in order to do so. As a result, they've discontinued their W-2 verification code pilot program from the past few years.

Many states are also moving their W-2 deadlines forward, typically to Jan. 31. In addition, most states now require electronic W-2 filing from employers. Several states have also increased their penalties for late filing of W-2s, so this is something to be careful of in the coming months.

ACA COMPLIANCE FROM STATES

The TCJA removed the individual mandate and federal tax penalty from the ACA. Supporters of the ACA believed this was a crucial part of making the healthcare law work. In response, several states are looking to create an individual mandate and tax penalty for their residents.

California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington, D.C. have already passed laws, while other states are considering it. This could create extra headaches for employers — instead of dealing with one version of ACA compliance at the federal level, they would be required to navigate the rules and filing requirements in each state. Critically, most of the states that have enacted an individual mandate will also require employers to report to the state details of employee health coverage.

Continue Reading at:

www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116771

This story originally published on SPARK (www.ADP.com/SPARK), a blog designed for you and your people by ADP. Pete Isberg is Vice President of Government Relations for ADP.



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6 Ways Accounting Firms Can Attract Catering Clients

By Becky Livingston

IF YOU'RE LOOKING to add new catering clients to your existing client list or are expanding into this client vertical, chew on this marketing food for thought. You can find new clients with little to no budget, as well as expand your brand's reach to this audience using these tried-and-true techniques.



ALERT ME

Google Alerts lets you set up free alerts for phrases you're interested in. In this case, set up a Google Alert for "new caterer in [city / state name]". Or, if you know the catering clients you want to attract, set up an Alert on each company's name. Each time the caterer's name is mentioned in the news or online, you can review what's being said and send them an email, congratulatory social media post, or tip about something related to their business. That effort alone may make you look better than their current CPA or accounting firm.



REAL ESTATE AGENTS

Consider working closely with commercial real estate agents who have their finger on the pulse of new catering facilities and kitchen tenants coming to your area. Create a pitch deck or promotional item to include in a Welcome Packet promoting your services and offering a free consultation.



UP THE ANTE

Do you have a website form that captures leads? If so, consider adding an industry field with dropdown list including caterer. That way when you receive the form, you'll know immediately and be able to

identify their business and accounting pain points for a phone conversation.



GET SOCIAL

Did you know there are hundreds of catering groups on Facebook and LinkedIn? Simply login to the social media platform of choice and search for "caterer groups." You may need to click on a "Group" navigation button or advanced search button to be presented with the groups. Follow the group's posting guidelines and get involved by asking a question, such as "What about your catering business keeps you up at night?" Develop a series of open-ended questions like this to engage the audience. Remember, no hard-selling on these platforms, but rather, a conversational exchange.



REACH OUT

Your next catering client might already be within arm's reach via email.

There are a few tactics you can take, including:

- Ask your email subscribers for referrals and combine it with a promotion, e.g., 10% off next month's service.
- Use a banner or graphic in your email to promote services to the catering industry. Tip: Use a food photo image.
- Host an event or webinar for caterers and ask clients to attend with a plus-one catering friend.



FOR THOSE WITH A BUDGET

If you have a budget for additional efforts, consider search, display, and/or social media advertising. For as little as a dollar per day, you can reach leads on social media as long as your efforts are targeted. If you choose search efforts, I recommend using display advertising too so ads appear in supplemental areas, such as in email and social media platforms.

According to Acquisio, "Google's display ad network reaches 90 percent of global internet users." (<https://bit.ly/2P5TJIX>)

Remarketing is also very effective for capturing leads because display ads are based on a user's behavior. Remarketing combines headlines, copy, images, and links you provide to display an ad based on search, engagement, or actions taken by the user.

One thing to keep in mind is, none of this will work effectively if the click goes to one of your generic webpages, e.g., Services. Tailoring content, lead-generation pages, and forms to the niche industry is key. Let the visitor see that you know their industry; that you get their pain points; and that you have solutions for them. Sending them to a generic page just doesn't cut it.

Now that you have these tips to chew on, how will you reach out to your next potential catering client? ■

Becky Livingston is the president and CEO of Penheel Marketing, a marketing firm specializing in social media and digital marketing for CPAs, and has more than 25 years' experience in marketing and technology in financial services and engineering firms.



11 MARKETING TIPS FOR ACCOUNTING FIRMS

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor

MARKETING CAN BE challenging for many accounting professionals. First, most accounting and tax pros are not natural salespeople, which is what marketing seems to be. But if you take the approach that sales is only one part of what marketing is for an accounting firm, it can be less daunting. Successful and well-implemented marketing is much broader and involves an entire business relationship that a firm has with a client. This starts when they were a prospect, then evolves over the course of time to include them as a client with recurring business, and ideally grows into a client which the firm serves in numerous ways throughout the year, such as for taxes, business planning, payroll and bookkeeping services.

1 KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

When you break down the concept of marketing to the individual client level like this, it should decrease the focus on sales, even though selling is present at every stage. The firm is offering its services as a way to help the business and individual clients. To do this, firm leaders need to truly understand what the needs of their clients are, and beyond just an anecdotal level. You don't need to be an engineer to help an engineer with his business, of course – but it does help to understand some of the issues he or she faces, as well as the common challenges of other industries. This helps the firm understand what a client really needs, even when the client isn't aware that there are better ways they could be running their businesses.

2 CREATE A MARKETING PLAN

If you want to realize greater success with your marketing efforts, make a plan or at least an outline. It is also a good idea to view the relationship between this plan and your business plan, since your marketing outline should have the effect of helping to realize the overall business growth strategies. A formal marketing plan would include many elements, from market data, benchmarking, and analyses of firm factors, but you don't have to start big: The plan can be as simple as stating

that you want to have a sit-down meeting with at least one new business owner per month to explain why your firm can benefit their business. Then you have to follow that up with real action. DO IT and record how the meeting went – this will help on future new client building activities and marketing.

3 KEEP INFORMED OF BEST PRACTICES

Accountants can keep abreast of more than just accounting issues through membership and participation in a variety of professional groups and associations. Start with your state and metro area CPA and accounting societies, but also look into business associations that relate to the core industries your clients are in. These can also be good places to network in person, along with the still valuable local chambers of commerce and other networking events.

4 SPECIALTY NICHE

Once you've got a couple of clients who are in the same general field, it can turn into a firm specialty or niche. For instance, a firm that is adept at serving medical clients such as the offices of various types of doctors and health professionals, or franchisees, the restaurant industry, or other channels – will soon find it to their advantage. And, as the firm becomes more experienced in working with similar client industries, their

expertise leads to greater efficiencies – both in the firm, as well as for the client.

5 CLIENT REFERRALS

Referrals are powerful and one of the best methods of getting new clients. After all, people they respect told them that you are someone they rely on. Boom. What the firm needs to do is help nudge that referral in the first place, and make it easy to do – but without sounding like it's a marketing message. So yes, ask your clients to refer you to their professional associates and friends and colleagues. You may even want to offer them a discount on their services, or at least a some form of recognition. How about a gift card to a local restaurant (that is also a client of yours)?

6 YOUR WEBSITE IS ALREADY A MARKETING TOOL

If you maintain a website that has useful content and resources for your clients and prospective clients, you already have a great marketing tool. Now it's time to make better use of it. Make sure that the contact us pages are operational and include an email collection tool so that you can add website visitors to your firm's newsletter.

Yes, that means you need to have a newsletter. Fortunately, there are some tools out there specifically designed for accounting firms that make it easy and pretty much automate the newsletter process. Many even offer pre-written content, so that you can keep clients informed of important deadlines, new tax processes they need to follow, employee issues, or any other news they may need to know. These same newsletter and content tools often include marketing outreach options for sending out not only the newsletter, but also custom surveys and individual reminders.

See the final 5 of these firm marketing tips at www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com/21116136

PERSPECTIVE + MOTIVATION = REWARD: How to Unlock Your Best Self

ASIDE FROM THE golden rule, there's probably nothing more ingrained in us during childhood than the importance of trying. As long as we do our best, we're told, we can be proud of ourselves no matter the outcome. While that age-old wisdom is absolutely true, it falls short of telling the whole story. Exerting maximum effort all the time isn't just a matter of hitting a switch, and it's not even an entirely conscious process.

Have all have days when we're listless, whether personally or professionally, and I promise you're not alone if you've ever mailed in an assignment or two. The question, then isn't so much whether we should do our best, but rather how we can go about doing it.

BREAKING THE MALAISE

Have you ever had that moment when you realize you're just going through the motions (<https://bit.ly/2RdoQPm>)? Times when you're doing the task in front of you with as little engagement as possible, as if on autopilot? I think we've all



been there. Almost all of our jobs include some repetition, drudgery, or otherwise mundane work. When we focus on these tasks exclusively, it's easy for our work to feel meaningless and unimportant. But that's exactly the wrong mindset to have.

Breaking through a sense of fatigue begins with looking at yourself. When I think about this topic, I always come back to a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who says, "The reward of a thing well done is having done it." Think about that for a second. Engagement and effort, Emerson is saying, animate even the most "boring" processes. The reason why activities feel meaningless when you're going through the motions isn't because of the activity itself; it's precisely because you're not giving it your all. Taking half-measures also leave you unsatisfied.

An example of this principle is the art of making a carpet by hand. In some sense, the task is the very picture of busywork. Large carpets contain millions of knots, each made in essentially the same way (<https://bit.ly/2LghVkf>). If you were to focus on the ceaseless nature of each knot, you'd drive yourself insane. But by remembering the overall scope of the task, you can painstakingly attempt to make each knot as perfect as possible. In doing so, you go from tying an infinite amount of knots to creating a single

beautiful work of art. It's simply a matter of perspective.

If you're ever struggling to find the right perspective on your work, there are many quick practices (<https://bit.ly/33Lf9Kh>) that can snap you back into shape. I've found mindfulness (<https://bit.ly/2RjaWeB>) techniques to be a great way to re-center and refocus when the stressful (<https://bit.ly/2rOAT4i>) and always-connected nature of the modern workplace begins to grind me down.

MAKING SENSE OF MOTIVATION

The other piece of the proverbial "doing your best" puzzle comes in the form of motivation. Despite the fact that we talk about motivation all the time, most people don't understand how it works. We like to pretend that motivation is a straightforward matter of willpower. As awesome as that would be, it's simply not how it works.

In his recent book *"The Motivation Myth: How High Achievers Really Set Themselves up to Win,"* (<https://amzn.to/2rL9B5m>) Inc. Magazine contributor Jeff Haden lays out a much more constructive framework for thinking about motivation. "I thought motivation was a prerequisite to starting a tedious learning process—a spark necessary to get me going," Haden



AMY VETTER, CPA, CTP, CGMA

Mindful Technologist &
Keynote Speaker
[@AmyVetterCPA](https://twitter.com/AmyVetterCPA)

writes. "But motivation is really a result. Motivation is the fire that starts burning after you manually, painfully, coax it into existence, and it feeds on the satisfaction of seeing yourself make progress."

Understanding this concept has huge ramifications on how we go about our days. In the case of starting a new fitness regimen, we're unlikely to truly buy in until we start to see results. In the case of our work, we need to feel like we're doing well and making an impact. Once we do, we're energized to do even more. When we believe our hard work will deliver results, it's a lot easier to fall in love with the process. If you're a leader, remember this idea when you're trying to get the best from your team. You can't demand motivation without offering a true sense of satisfaction for a team member's engagement.

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

The beauty of doing our best is that its results begin to compound quickly. There are times when we fall short, but nobody wants to be the person who looks like a zombie or robot at the office. The real reason we should do our best is because it just makes everything more worthwhile. ■

AI-Driven Innovations All the Talk at QuickBooks Connect 2019

WHAT DO YOU get when you mix 5,000 attendees, exhibitors and speakers with announcements about new product innovations that leverage the latest in artificial intelligence (AI), networking around every corner, and even the opportunity to have private, 1:1 sessions with experts?

It's QuickBooks Connect (#QBConnect) 2019! Held Nov. 6-8 in San Jose, Calif., this was the sixth annual conference designed to bring together business owners, self-employed individuals, and accounting professionals to gain and share knowledge, skills, and insights to better run their businesses.

"There's something really exciting and energetic in the air – people, ideas, enthusiasm – and opportunities for new ways of thinking," said Ariege Misherghi, global accountant leader for Intuit QuickBooks, in her opening keynote. Misherghi went on to say that she sees accounting professionals as trendsetters who are using AI to "transform the industry."

Misherghi highlighted the following new AI-powered features in QuickBooks Online Accountant during her keynote:

Business Performance Dashboard: The new Business Performance tab in QuickBooks Online Accountant automatically takes a client's data and pulls out what is needed — key figures, useful indicators, actionable items and more — and organizes it all into one simple, visually driven dashboard. The dashboard can be easily exported to share with a client and used to spark conversations and strategic recommendations based on the financial health of a business as well as how it's performing compared to other similar businesses.

Optimization Center: The new Optimization Center, available via

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early access to accountants, gives bookkeepers an objective measure of how effectively they've set up each client through an efficiency score, plus concrete recommendations to improve efficiency moving forward. This works by scanning all QuickBooks transactions and identifying what percent are "highly efficient" — meaning the transactions are fully automated from recording to categorization and reconciliation. The efficiency score breaks down into three key areas: bank accounts, expense tracking, and income tracking, with each section offering specifics on what contributes to the score and what QuickBooks features can be leveraged to increase efficiency.

Bookkeeping Review: This new expert feature within QuickBooks, also available via early access to accountants, finds errors automatically so accounting professionals don't have to go hunting for them. It brings all errors to one place for quick and easy resolution -- giving accountants high-quality books in a fraction of the time. By automatically scanning QuickBooks to surface mistakes and streamline client collaboration, Bookkeeping Review helps keep client books complete and accurate.

QUICKBOOKS LIVE BOOKKEEPING UPDATE

By now, accounting professionals, bookkeepers and others in the profession may be familiar with one of Intuit's newest offerings, QuickBooks Live Bookkeeping, a platform of assisted professional services that connects small business and self-employed

customers with on-demand accounting experts (all of whom are certified Pro-Advisors) inside QuickBooks. Through a one-way video conferencing capability, small business owners can connect to a virtual bookkeeper to get the help they need and ensure their records are accurate and up-to-date, giving them the confidence and freedom that their books are done right so they can focus on other aspects of their businesses.

"QuickBooks Live is truly the first of its kind — an expert-driven, AI platform that enables small businesses to make smarter decisions and achieve better money outcomes so they can take their businesses to the next level," said Alex Chriss, executive vice president and general manager of the Small Business Self-Employed Group at Intuit. "By introducing QuickBooks Live, we believe more businesses will be able to tap not only into the technology platform that is delivering smarter business outcomes, but accounting and bookkeeping experts they may not have access to today."

QuickBooks Live was designed specifically for small businesses who are not currently connected with an accountant or bookkeeper and feel they only require a light level of ongoing assistance. Several informational breakout sessions were held during QuickBooks Connect to provide a more in-depth look at the offering.

Other announcements made at the show include:

• **Cash Flow Planner:** QuickBooks will soon be introducing the Cash Flow Planner, a brand new offering that leverages the power of AI to enable small businesses to predict their daily cash flow over the next 90 days, empowering them to make the best decisions for their business. The planner proactively alerts business owners when a negative situation is on the

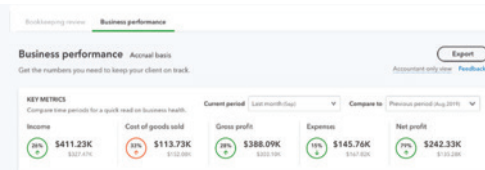
horizon and provides recommendations around how to navigate the situation. QuickBooks leverages anonymized data across millions of customers with more than 26 billion touchpoints to generate predictive scenarios with accurate cash flow forecasts. In addition, the planner can be used for scenario planning to help users answer questions such as: "Is it safe to hire another employee now, given my forecasted cash flow in the coming few months?"

• **QuickBooks Online Advanced:** Although QuickBooks Online Advanced was introduced in 2018, there are several new features coming soon, including the ability to automate transactions and workflows, and an integration with a leading cloud-based organization and customer relationship management tool. Additional features designed for high-growth businesses include advanced reporting, the ability to process more transactions, and increased in-product support, as well as the integration with 700 apps.

BRAIN DATES

In addition to the new innovations that were showcased, attendees had the opportunity to sign up for 1:1 sessions with accounting and business professionals for "Brain Dates" and judging by the hubbub of activity in the Brain Dates area, the program was widely popular. One attendee said, "The 30 minutes I just spent in my session more than paid for QuickBooks Connect and the time I'm spending away from the office. I'm walking away with something I can implement right away!"

For those who can't wait for more, the dates are already set for QuickBooks Connect 2020. The conference will again take place in San Jose from Nov. 4-6, 2020, and you can register your interest in attending by visiting <https://quickbooksconnect.com/>. ■



FORENSIC AND VALUATION CPAs RECEIVE AWARDS

The AICPA honored 17 CPAs during the 2019 AICPA Forensic and Valuation Services Conference. Elizabeth Woodward, CPA, CFF, and William Fellows, CPA, ABV were named Volunteers of the Year, while 15 young CPAs received the Forensic and Valuation Services (FVS) Standing Ovation for contributions in their accounting specialty areas (CFF and ABV) and their communities.

The 2019 list of FVS Standing Ovation recipients is in alphabetical order below:

- Jennifer Allen, CPA, ABV, CFF, Anthem Forensics, Henderson, NV
- Brian Barnhouse, CPA, ABV, RSM US, LLP, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Andrew Baum, CPA, ABV, CFF, Harper Hofer and Associates, LLC, Denver, CO
- Asif Charania, CPA, ABV, CFF, Keiter Stephens Hurst Gary & Shreaves, P.C., Glen Allen, VA
- Kathryn Culver, CPA, ABV, PYA, P.C., Knoxville, TN
- Nene Gianfala, CPA, ABV, CEIV, Chaffe & Associates, Inc., New Orleans, LA
- Natalie Lewis, CPA, CFF, Windham Brannon, LLC, Atlanta, GA
- Tiffany Lewis, CPA, CFF, StoneTurn Group, LLP, Houston, Texas
- John Luna, CPA, ABV, CFF, White, Zuckerman, Warsavsky, Luna & Hunt, LLP, Sherman Oaks, CA
- Nick Lynch, CPA, CFF, Dean Dorton Allen Ford, PLLC, Lexington, KY
- Gregory Peat, CPA, CFF, FTI Consulting, Lake Oswego, OR
- Joshua Sechter, CPA, ABV, MPI, Syosset, NY
- Zachary Snickles, CPA, CFF, Grant Thornton, LLP, Phoenix, AZ
- Quynh Tran, CPA, CFF, Berkeley Research Group LLC, Houston, TX
- Thomas Wagner, Jr., CPA, ABV, Blue & Co., LLC, Carmel, Indiana

A list of prior FVS members and CFF and ABV credential holders who have received awards and recognitions over the years is at: <https://bit.ly/35E1cQ0>.

Financial Satisfaction Remains High

According to the AICPA's Q3 2019 Personal Financial Satisfaction Index (PFSI), satisfaction has dipped slightly for the first time in two years. The index remains in positive territory, though, indicating that the average American should be experiencing financial well-being.

Though decreasing slightly, job openings continue to exceed job seekers. This is the third time in three years that job openings have decreased quarter-over-quarter, and this is the first time they have decreased two quarters in a row since 2012.

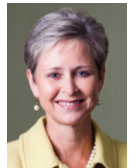
Other findings include:

- For Q3, the Inflation index is up 1.3 points (4.1 percent) from the Q2 level. Please note that the Federal Reserve's target for inflation is about 2 percent.
 - Underemployment is up a slight 0.5 points (1.7 percent) over the last quarter. Its peak value was 84.3 corresponding to 17.1 percent in the fourth quarter of 2009 (versus the current 7.4 percent).
 - The Real Home Equity Per Capita index, based on data issued for April, is flat with the previous quarter level and is currently 3.4 percent below its 2006 all-time high.
- Additional information on the PFSI can be found at: www.aicpa.org/PFSI.

Olivia Kirtley Honored for Efforts to Advance Women in the Accounting Profession

Olivia Kirtley, CPA, former chair of the AICPA and president of the International Federation of Accountants, has been named the first recipient of the ASWCPA Lifetime Achievement Award, which recognizes women who have demonstrated leadership and a strong record of accomplishment in furthering the advancement of women in the accounting profession.

A consultant on accounting, risk management, and governance issues, Kirtley serves on several corporate boards. She was president of the IFAC board from 2014 to 2018 and was elected chair of the AICPA's board of directors in 1998. Kirtley earned her bachelor's degree from Florida Southern College and holds a master's degree in taxation from Georgia State University.



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JIM BOOMER, CPA.CITP

CEO, Boomer Consulting, Inc.
Director, Boomer Technology Circle™
jim.boomer@cpapracticeadvisor.com

Does Your Firm Need a Technology Steering Committee?

IN AN ACCOUNTING firm, technology is embedded in everything we do. Yet too often, we see firms hand off responsibility for all technology projects to their IT teams. Firms that successfully leverage technology as a strategic asset recognize that there is no such thing as an “IT project.” There are only firm projects that are supported by IT.

Still, someone needs to be responsible for decision-making when it comes to choosing and prioritizing projects. That responsibility doesn't fall solely on IT, and it shouldn't be added to firm leaders' already lengthy list of duties. So who should make the decisions? A technology steering committee.

is working effectively, IT projects are strategically planned and approved, and there is better alignment between IT and other areas of the firm.

BENEFITS OF A TECHNOLOGY STEERING COMMITTEE

Too often, firms base their IT initiatives on gut feelings, squeaky wheels, chasing shiny objects or following what others are doing. A technology steering committee can provide a stabilizing influence to help ensure that the firm's technology standards, policies and initiatives are established and maintained with a high-level view. The committee provides direction on long-term strategies that support the firm's needs and vision.

As a bonus, using a technology steering committee helps with the adoption and rollout of new technology because team members from throughout the firm are a part of the selection from the beginning. This involvement helps people feel like they're a driver of the change, rather than a victim of it.

TECHNOLOGY STEERING COMMITTEE BEST PRACTICES

A technology steering committee can serve an essential role in the overall IT governance process – if it operates effectively. When firms simply create a committee without really giving it authority, structure and accountability, committee meetings tend to devolve into the

CIO doing most of the talking while other participants answer emails on their phone. Here are some best practices that can ensure yours serves its intended purpose.

ENSURE SUPPORT FROM FIRM LEADERSHIP

One of the most critical factors that contribute to the success of a technology steering committee is having the full backing from firm leadership. If the committee's primary function is to review and approve the firm's key projects and initiatives, then it must have high-level support and participation to be effective. This also ensures that both IT and firm leaders are accountable for their decisions rather than having one group blaming the other for failed initiatives.

ESTABLISH A STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

Your technology steering committee needs an appropriate structure and key processes to successfully execute the committee's function. Outline key roles and responsibilities of committee members, create a process for project approvals, and for assigning tasks to people who can successfully execute the plan.

One of the first steps toward creating those processes involves establishing project prioritization and selection criteria to ensure that only projects that are properly aligned with the firm's overall strategy are selected for execution. Setting these standards also helps ensure that proj-

ects are evaluated objectively rather than being influenced by steering committee members with stronger opinions or more political clout.

MONITOR PROGRESS AND METRICS

Once projects have been approved and prioritized, the committee needs to monitor the execution and progress of its projects. The committee should request that project managers provide reports and visibility into ongoing projects. By holding the steering committee accountable for results, monitoring projects becomes a priority. The committee can also provide project support if it feels that the project is deviating from its intended goals.

FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A technology steering committee is an important group within your firm, so its effectiveness should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it is delivering value for the firm. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the committee's structure and processes, and make changes as needed.

Nearly every project in your firm will involve technology on some level, but that doesn't mean those projects should be handed off to a technology team. They need to be driven by a multi-functional, multi-level team dedicated to ensuring that technology decisions are made in alignment with overall firm strategy. ■



WHAT IS A TECHNOLOGY STEERING COMMITTEE?

A technology steering committee brings together key IT and business stakeholders to discuss matters related to strategic planning and project prioritization and approvals. The committee may include the CIO and other key members of IT management, but it should also include representatives from other areas of the firm, such as Operations, Tax, Audit, Marketing, Business Development and others.

Members of the technology steering committee typically aren't the people who execute the projects. Instead, they have a stake in the project being completed on time, within budget and using an agreed-upon process. When the steering committee

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JAN 25: CHINESE NEW YEAR (RAT)

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