



AND NOW — THE FUTURE!

I'M ALWAYS AMAZED at how previews of anything command rapt attention. Who, for instance, when watching their favorite television program, doesn't suffer through the credits just to catch a sneak peak of next week's episode?

We hope this year's teaser cover of our Top 100 Products will have the same magnetic effect for our readers — those vying for a glimpse of the technology products poised to descend on the profession in 2009.

But while technology trends and products may change, *Accounting Today* has, for 16 years, brought you what we consider the century elite of software products. Our editorial staff, as well as our contributing editors in the technology space, zero in on a basic checklist for qualification, including frequency of use, practitioner levels of acceptance, visibility, support for end users and, of course, market demand.

This year we've added some enhancements, not the least of which is an expanded "Ones to Watch" section that will now spotlight some 50 promising solutions to keep an eye on.

Through proprietary research, we've also gleaned insightful data on technology use at over 500 CPA firms across the country, as well as their purchasing plans for the upcoming year and their feedback on specific applications.

And finally, we've polled a panel of well-known technology experts who offer their 2009 predictions on hot new technology trends, as well as their advice on what technologies CPA firms should be investing in.

So as not to delay the anticipation any longer, it is our pleasure to bring you this year's Top 100 Software Products.

It won't remain in previews for long.

— Bill Carlino
Editor-in-Chief

TECH TITANS TOUT TOP TRENDS, TOOLS

ACCOUNTING TODAY POLLED several of the profession's high-profile technology experts and consultants to elicit their advice on what technologies CPA firms should be investing in, as well as to gauge their predictions on what current tech trends will impact the accounting landscape in 2009.

The panel of Top 100 technology experts includes James Bourke, a partner at WithumSmith+Brown and a member of the CITP credential committee of the American Institute of CPAs; L. Gary Boomer, chief executive of Boomer Consulting; Randy Johnston, principal at K2 Consulting; and Geni Whitehouse, principal at consultancy Even a Nerd Can Be Heard and a former executive with Navision, Sage and Accpac.

What do you think will be the most important new technology trend for CPA firms in the coming year?

Bourke: The most important new technology trend will be the implementation of workflow management tools. For years, CPA firms have struggled with multiple databases containing similar information and applications that were disconnected in terms of status reporting. Today, tools and applications streamline the workflow process throughout the firm and allow for a central point of reporting, regardless of the application being utilized.

Boomer: While the technology is not new, firms need to commit to becoming digital, including workflow. ... The advantages of digital include the ability to work from any location, the ability to share resources among offices or departments, search and integration of data, retaining and attracting quality people, and compliance.

Johnston: Software as a Service is one of the key technology areas for firms, since so many operational products are being delivered this way. ... Accessing software through a browser to an off-site facility will become far more common.

Whitehouse: I think it's imperative that they embrace blogging as a way to foster relationship-building. I'm amazed at the number of people who aren't even using LinkedIn as a way to keep in touch with their network and potential clients.

What new technology products should CPA firms invest in next year?

Johnston: I would definitely recommend a

backup appliance. Backups can be made continuously, but we recommend that you backup every 15 minutes. Beyond that, I'm going to recommend fundamentals like a document management system. Look specifically for records management, e-mail archiving and workflow technologies to minimize the liability of the firm. The second key technology is widescreen monitors. At today's price point, investing in two or three 22-inch and 24-inch widescreen monitors for each practitioner is a productivity gain that will last for up to 10 years.

Bourke: Software as a Service. ... This allows the CPA to act as a conduit to their clients with respect to the processing of accounting and related transactions. This scenario is perfect for the start-up and smaller companies that generally don't have the capital to spend on the implementation of a sophisticated IT infrastructure.

Boomer: Social networking and the establishment of communities are important to firms and their clients. Portals are one component and firms should be implementing them for better client service and compliance with federal and state privacy laws. The firm that owns the client portal will be the primary business advisor.

What is your favorite new tech trend?

Bourke: The "smart scanning" technology. In looking back over the past few years, it is one of the few "wows" that I had when it came to technologies that meet one of the many needs of a CPA firm. This technology allows for the scanning of tax documents and the automatic population of tax returns via that technology. ... The end result is lower cost of production with higher profit margins on the end product.

Johnston: My favorite technology trend is virtual desktop infrastructure, which allows complete virtualization of desktops that can be run on servers or appliances. VDI desktops can be used while disconnected from your network and automatically replicate when you reconnect to your network. My next favorite trend is HD videoconferencing. As the price falls, and bandwidth becomes more affordable, videoconferencing will return with a vengeance.

Whitehouse: CPA firms are lagging behind in understanding the demographics of their clients, so I see this year as the time to harness business intelligence tools that allow them to see client information across all of their internal practice management solutions. **AT**



Gary Boomer



James Bourke



Randy Johnston



Geni Whitehouse