

February 2014

For CPAs, Online Resources Now a Tool of the Trade



In a blink of an eye, the once innovative idea of exploring online opportunities is futuristic no more. It is now how businesses operate. The business you run, as well as the businesses you serve.

And so it is for CPAs and CPA firms. Clients – both big and small – are no longer willing to wait until a meeting is held or hard copy documents can be delivered. After all, why should they? They want information and services now, and they want to conduct their business anytime, anywhere.

J. Carlton Collins, CPA, a former chair of the AICPA's Technology Council as well as an award-winning author and editor who writes a monthly technology column for the *"Journal of Accountancy,"* sees this move toward online resources as a good thing for accounting practitioners – something to be embraced. For small to mid-sized CPA firms, said Collins, an investment in speed is always sure to pay dividends. A good place to start, he said, is in securing fast computers, fast Internet, Excel, Word, Outlook and proper training on how to use those applications.

Collins adds, "A carpenter used to need a hammer, but now they need a nail gun to get the job done right. A dentist used to use pliers, but now they use high speed drills. CPAs used to use calculators and fax machines, but today, computers and the various workplace applications are the CPA's tools of the trade."

Collins also identifies a critical marketing and sales component in terms of the opportunities that online commerce presents.

"It all depends on the type of services offered, the technology capabilities of the clients, and the client's needs," said Collins. "But I am 100 percent certain that CPAs should be selling their products and services online. If you want to sell to me, you'd better have your products and services listed online. For those out of the loop, trends indicate that people are tuning out of traditional television, yellow pages, and newspapers, and tuning into the Internet. If you want to market your products and services, then having multiple websites, utilizing Facebook, and leveraging various internet marketing opportunities are critical."

First Impressions

Sansiveri, Kimball & Company, L.L.P., in Providence has eagerly and aggressively embraced technological resources.

Michael DeCataldo, CPA, and managing partner at Sansiveri, Kimball & Company, L.L. P in Providence, has found that tapping into online resources – social media sites, as well as the firm's two separate websites – has allowed for a more direct line of communication with clients and very real opportunities to save time and money. For example, he said, when new tax laws or other vital information comes to light, the firm is now able to strategically target who it wants to share such information with, and do so instantaneously.

"We aren't bombarding clients with information that is not relevant to them," said DeCataldo.

For practical purposes, the advent of online business saves time, and in turn, money. DeCataldo remembers vividly a day not too long ago when it would be standard procedure to make three paper copies of a client's tax return – sometimes running 150 to 200 pages in length.

"Now, we are paperless," he said. "If a client wants a hard copy, they can have one. But we now upload to our portal and the client can download it directly to their computer. It speeds up the process and there is a huge savings."

DeCataldo laughs at the memories of the "old days."

Lead Story continued

"I started here back in 1983 and I can remember standing outside the Fleet building on a Sunday morning waiting for a tax return to be delivered," he said.

The social media sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, all serve their own purpose, according to Eileen M. Fullaway, the firm's marketing manager. The give-and-take of information, she said, is simply invaluable.

"Our goal is to be value driven," she said. "We want everything we put up to be useful to our clients."

Fullaway said the firm closely monitors the amount of increased traffic that continues to visit its [website](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#) pages.

"What we have learned is that not only do we need to be responsive as a firm, but our website needs to be as well, as more and more people are searching for information about Sansiveri using devices other than traditional PCs such as smart phones, laptops, iPad and Kindles," she said. "We recognize that the internet needs to be a vital piece of our marketing efforts. When someone recommends a business to you, the first thing that you do is check them out online. Our website creates the first impression of our firm and it must be a positive one if we are to be successful."

Easier to Earn CPE Credits

Another important tool of the trade is access to education. Earning [CPE credits online](#) can save a CPA valuable time. RISCPA understands that opportunities for education must be convenient. As a Society, it offers online resources to members so they may obtain both a portion of their educational requirements from the comfort of home or office, and a unique way of tracking in real time their CPE in Rhode Island or anywhere they may be registered.

"Beyond the obvious saving of time, online educational resources provide an excellent variety as a complement to one's specialty," said Robert A. Mancini, executive director of the RISCPA. "We've established a strategic collaborative with Surgent & McCoy, the preeminent provider of CPE – in class and online – and one with the New York State Society of CPAs."

Mancini stresses that online resources present competitive advantages.

"Case in point, a CPA firm – particularly a smaller one – can create an alignment with a fellow CPA given the individual's unique specialty," he said. "In effect, say a firm is based in the Ocean State and, given a particular client's needs, the alignment with the specialist – perhaps, based down South – is all handled online without the individual having to be brought in. Thus, the firm is saving on travel expenses and, importantly, is able to specifically target to the particulars of the assignment."

More Efficient Tax Collections

Online business is not confined to the private sector. Public entities too are capitalizing on advances in technology. David M. Sullivan, Tax Administrator at the Rhode Island Division of Taxation, points out that moving online wherever possible has helped to speed up and streamline a wide range of services.



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Lead Story continued

“Our ‘Where’s My Refund?’ online tool allows taxpayers to check the status of their refunds,” he said. “So taxpayers can get the information they need when they need it, 24/7. That also frees up our staff to do other tasks. And new for this tax-filing season, we have upgraded the online tool to give taxpayers more detailed information about their refunds status.”

Sullivan said retailers are now able to file their annual sales tax reconciliations online, and most of the 30,000 sales tax permit holders do so.

“This saves a lot of staff time opening envelopes and manually entering data into our computer system,” he said.

From a communications standpoint, the state now uses Twitter, Google Blogger, and Facebook, as well as its listserv and website, to reach practitioners quickly with the current tax information they need in their practices, said Sullivan, especially during tax season.

Sullivan credits Gov. Lincoln Chafee and the General Assembly for implementing a new agency-wide computer system.

“It’s known as an integrated tax system,” he said. “It will unite all of the different computer systems we have now. It will also allow us to end our reliance on our old mainframe system, which is based on computer code that dates to the 1970s, and has outlived its usefulness. Right now, we have to maintain a number of separate systems to keep track of different types of taxes. Under the new system, we’ll be able to keep track of all tax records – no matter the type of tax – by a single system.”

As part of that system, the state Division of Taxation acquired a new high-speed scanning and imaging machine, which allows the department to quickly process paper returns and other documents, including checks.

“We will be able to store more documents electronically, reducing the need for long-term storage of paper documents, which in turn will save taxpayers money in storage costs,” said Sullivan. “The Rhode Island Society of CPAs was outspoken in its support for the overall agency-wide computer system.”

Technology is ‘Relatively Inexpensive’

The bottom line for CPAs, according to Collins, is to expect to see steady advances in technology. He understands his professional colleagues sometimes “lag behind the curve.” That’s different, he said, than not getting in the game at all.

“Playing catch up is a typically continuous proposition for the CPA,” he said. “The good news is that technology is relatively inexpensive. However, the training and time required for training are the biggest costs of technology, but these costs are typically necessary. I don’t see much of a change in momentum. Sure, cloud computing technology has come on strong in the past few years, but many CPAs wary of security issues are slow to adopt the cloud for data storage, though they are implementing more cloud based applications.”

“For the most part, it’s been a fun and steady ride watching CPAs embrace the various technologies, usually a couple of years after they emerge which is prudent considering that it’s typically not a good idea to buy version one of anything,” he added.

Stephen Ursillo, Jr., president of the RISCPA, sums it all up nicely points in his quarterly “President’s Message.” The move to online is being driven by the customer – as it should be.

“We are going to where our customers are and we are making ourselves available to them now – not later today or tomorrow,” said Ursillo. “Information, access to resources, and accesses to one another must be instantaneous.”



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SMALL STATE, BIG IMPACT

Setting a New Course for the Rhode Island Economy

When some 200 business leaders gathered at the Rhode Island Convention Center for two days in the fall of 2012 to “set a new economic course for Rhode Island,” Alan H. Litwin was there. As Managing Director of Providence-based [Kahn, Litwin, Renza & Co. \(KLR\)](#), the largest accounting firm in the Ocean State, he not only wanted to be there, he felt a responsibility to be there.

“It’s important for us to give back to the community,” said Litwin, CPA, MST, and MBA. “If we are going to have a strong business community we have to have business leaders working together. At KLR, we feel strongly about participating and contributing to local charitable and civic organizations and encourage all of our employees to participate as well.”

So for two days, Litwin and business leaders from a wide range of industries came together for the kickoff of the Rhode Island Foundation’s bold, [“Make It Happen” initiative](#). Committing \$1 million to the cause, the Rhode Island Foundation – through its Civic Leadership Fund – embarked on a determined effort to accentuate the positive and give the Rhode Island economy a proverbial push in the right direction.

Litwin, who serves on the finance, corporate and real estate subcommittee for “Make It Happen” with about 25 other professionals, believes the initiative is paying big dividends. Litwin has been especially impressed by the statewide media campaign that came out of the initiative, [“Rhode Island: It’s All in Our Backyard.”](#) Through a series of television commercials, print advertisements, billboards, and more, the campaign highlighted the successes of the state’s people, businesses, organizations, and industries.

“It is certainly bringing a pride and confidence to Rhode Island’s business community,” he said.

Litwin believes accentuating the positive is important, and an approach not emphasized enough in the business community.

“The press doesn’t necessarily focus on the positives and rather, points out the negatives,” he said. “I understand that. But even in our business, we don’t always celebrate our victories enough. We are always looking to improve. That’s what this campaign does for the State. It is a statewide celebration of the attributes and accomplishments of the businesses in the State, that too often we take for granted.”

“Make It Happen” is an ongoing initiative. The investments made by the Rhode Island Foundation’s Civic Leadership Fund cut across a wide range of sectors, though there is certainly a strong flavor of companies and programs looking to open doors made available through technological advancements, such as the [DESIGNxRI](#), [Digital City](#), and [MedMates](#) initiatives.

Litwin said he is glad he took the time back in the fall of 2012 to become a part of the “Make It Happen” effort. And he is excited to join other business leaders that are playing a role in setting that “new course” for the state’s economy. The skill-set that he and other CPAs possess – the ability to break down numbers, thus ensuring that investments are based on sound business practices – is a critical ingredient in the success of the initiative.

Politicians, philanthropists, business professionals, including those in the accounting profession, all have the ability and responsibility to have a big impact on the state’s future.



Alan Litwin



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AICPA NATIONAL ISSUES

AICPA's Online Offerings Provide a Powerful Resource for Small, Mid-sized Firms

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) – founded in 1887 and now 390,000 members strong – has always been about advocacy, training, the development of professional skills, educational opportunities, publications, and networking. As an association, the AICPA offers an impressive array of resources and services that have benefited countless CPA firms, CPAs, and other businesses and professionals.

If there has been one constant in the AICPA's approach over the past century-and-a-half, it has been a willingness and commitment not only to listen its members, but its ability to respond to that member feedback. That long held tradition remains firmly in place today, manifesting itself in the latest turn the AICPA has taken to serve its members.

Regardless of size of organization, specialization, or location, AICPA members have an unprecedented array of resources at their disposal and are just a mouse click away.

"I don't think many AICPA members realize the wealth of information that the AICPA makes available online via aicpa.org," said Donny Shimamoto, CPA.CITP, CGMA, and Chair of the AICPA's Information Management and Technology Assurance (IMTA) Executive Committee.

Shimamoto, a long-time AICPA member who holds the distinction of being the first Certified Information Technology Professional in the state of Hawaii, points out that most services offered by the AICPA online are either free or tied to a nominal section fee.

"For example, our Information Management and Technology Assurance (IMTA) section costs \$200 to join, which gives you access to our entire site of content on topics such as business intelligence, IT audit, business solutions/systems implementation, privacy, and information security," he said. "Once you get into the section there is a ton of information and you can filter through the things by using the search options built into the web site."

Shimamoto works closely with Susan Pierce, CPA.CITP, CGMA, an AICPA senior technical manager who oversees the IMTA member section. Together, they have instituted an outreach program focusing on technology-related conferences and workshops hosted by state societies. Shimamoto and other leading CPA and CITP speakers have toured the country, presenting information management and technology assurance conference sessions, seminars and CPE training. Pierce and her team exhibits at technology-focused state conferences on a monthly basis. The result has been more direct and invaluable feedback from AICPA members.

"Through these opportunities to speak with members face-to-face, and the online social media forums, we are focused on learning what members need to help them deliver superior services leveraging technology," he said.

Shimamoto sees the AICPA's online resources as a competitive advantage, particularly for the small to mid-sized firms.

"It's increasingly important for smaller firms to leverage technology to remain competitive," he said. "Additionally many 'enterprise' technologies have come down in price and are now offered via the cloud computing model, so it is much easier for a small firm to have access to the same technologies that only the 'big firms' used to have."

Many of the resources found in the [AICPA's IMTA section](#) are rooted in practicality for non-techies, said Shimamoto, such as the "IT Audit School, which helps external or internal auditors assess technology risk." The IMTA resources as whole, "helps firms to leverage leading technologies and techniques by educating their non-techie staff on how to leverage technology into their practices," he said.



Donny Shimamoto

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Meeting Customers Where They Are

It is a rarity these days to see a high school or college student clutching a newspaper. Our young colleagues don't begin the work day with a newspaper spread over their desk, but rather a smart phone or tablet. This may not necessarily be an indication of the newspaper industry, but rather an evolution of how information is spread and gathered.

Those students and young professionals would not think of grappling with a bulky newspaper when all of the information contained inside is already at their fingertips, tucked neatly into their cell phone. Nor do these consumers of news and information possess the patience to be informed hours or days after something has happened. After all, why should they? No one waits for news or information anymore. The results of that legislative hearing, a long-range weather forecast, and the score of a football game are available instantaneously.

Thus, the newspaper industry has found that it must change too. They provide stories and advertising on blogs, websites, as well as all of the social media destinations on which their customers gather. They reach out to their customers where they are, not where they were. In doing so, they will survive and prosper in the new "Information Age."

So it is with our profession – and the highly competitive business arena in which we operate. We are going to where our customers are and we are making ourselves available to them now – not later today or tomorrow. Information, access to resources, and availability to one another must be instantaneous. With that in mind, we are excited to report that RISCPA has never been more plugged in to instantaneous information and communication. With the help of our communications partners at Providence-based [New Harbor Group](#), we have invested in and sharply elevated our use of social media.

As an association, we no longer dabble in social media circles, we embrace all of the resources at our disposal – such as [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#) – to keep our members informed and apprised of information relevant to their success. Included in these efforts are our bi-weekly email Society Updates, as well as our quarterly [What Counts](#) electronic newsletter. These publications contain timely articles meant to inform and entertain. They, along with our presence on social media outlets, serve a practical purpose. Ours is an evolving profession, where regulatory changes must be addressed on a timely basis.

To have various engines to put information out there immediately is critically important. For small practitioners, having a community of people networked together allows us to stay up to date and serve our customers with the expertise and professionalism they expect and deserve. We have also expanded our strategic alliances with the AICPA and Surgent McCoy, a leader in the field of [continuing professional education \(CPE\)](#) for CPAs. They offer hundreds of webinars and online self-study courses and are registered with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy. With these third-party relationships we are connecting our members to relevant, virtual and timely training sessions, webinars, and so much more.

In closing, let me say that it was wonderful to see many of you at our January Networking Event, which grows in popularity each year. I look forward to seeing you again soon, and I wish you prosperity as this New Year unfolds.

Steve Ursillo



Steve Ursillo

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GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Political Polling 101

With an election year underway, we reprint an updated piece by David Preston of [New Harbor Group](#), the Society's government relations and communications counsel, on political polling during the campaign season that appeared on his company's blog. To read more, [click here](#).



Election year is upon us, and candidates are beginning to gear up for the November elections. And with campaign season upon us, that also means it's time for more and more political "polls." But what do those polls really mean – if anything?

There are two main reasons for a campaign to conduct a poll:

1. To find out information that you need to know
2. To get some degree of validation for information that you want others to know

Reason #1 is the political equivalent of market research. Some may find this idea unsavory because of worries that it could lead to pandering by candidates. Well, maybe. Certainly poll-driven candidates are out there, but I give voters more credit for seeing through them. In reality, it's crucial for candidates to have good information about what voters care about in order to stay in touch with the electorate's top priorities. If a candidate wants to talk about apples, but the electorate wants to know about oranges, the campaign's in trouble. A poll can help a candidate know what voters want to know about – and address those concerns.

Unfortunately, polls with reliable numbers are hard to find and expensive to conduct. What makes it hard – and expensive - to conduct a good poll?

- You need good callers who understand the questions and ask them in the right way;
- You need callers who can be trained to pronounce candidate names and place names correctly;
- Informative polls are long, and it's difficult to get people to stay on the line all the way through to the end;
- It's harder to find voters in the era of the cell phone, which are off-limits to pollsters by law;
- It takes time and real expertise to draft a sound, useful questionnaire;
- It takes time and expertise to interpret the data, weighing it properly so it's reflective of area demographics, and gives an accurate, useful view of public opinion.

In short, the kind of good data you need for the first kind of poll is expensive and difficult to come by – and becoming even more so.

Which brings us to the second kind of poll. These tend to be notoriously unscientific and rigged to score points for whoever is releasing it. Your radar should really go up if poll numbers are released by a campaign, a political party, an organization affiliated with one, or a special interest group.

In reality, all public polls should be greeted with healthy skepticism. Media outlets used to do them with the necessary rigor, but few can afford it anymore, with some national exceptions (New York Times, national networks, etc.). Local media outlets are, for the most part, unwilling to spend the money it takes to get good, sound data. They usually settle for on-line polls or automated telephone polls. What you end up with is very cheap data that barely passes the accuracy laugh test – but is reported by the media as near-gospel. The best information is usually found in the hands of well-funded candidates, and jealously guarded like the precious commodity that it is.

Government Affairs continued

If you want to know who's really up and who's down, the best indicators are not public polls but the activities of the candidates. If they're spending precious time and resources campaigning in neighborhoods, towns, counties or states they are expected to win, they're in trouble. If they're launching a desperate attack on an opponent, they're in trouble. But if they've kept a consistent message, are counter-attacking from the high ground, and campaigning in areas that are considered a toss-up, they're looking at good numbers.

ONE-ON-ONE**Technology Helping to Steer Fast Growing Company**

Marianne Caserta began working at [Atrion Networking Corporation](#) in 1997 as Controller, until her move to CFO in 2006. Over the years her responsibilities have progressed as Atrion has grown from a \$4 million company to over 75 million.

As CFO, Caserta directs the organization's financial planning and accounting practices as well as the relationship with its lending institution, vendors, and shareholders. She oversees the budgeting, accounting, tax and insurance activities for the company.

A native Rhode Islander, Marianne Caserta earned her Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Rhode Island College in 1989 and her MBA in Finance from Bryant University in 2003. She received her CPA license in 1996.



Marianne Caserta

WHAT COUNTS: When and how did you arrive at Atrion Networking? What are your primary responsibilities as CFO?

Marianne Caserta: I spent about eight years in public accounting and was very happy there. My husband Curt was a scuba diving instructor and was on a dive with a student – who is now Atrion's CEO, Tim Hebert. They were talking about Atrion's growth and the fact Tim felt the company needed a finance professional. The opportunity to interview was presented and I was offered the Controller position. I was torn between staying in public accounting and moving to the private industry. A mentor at the time advised me to take a chance on Atrion, knowing I could always go back to public accounting. It was by far the best career decision I made. The opportunity I've had at Atrion has been extraordinary. The company has changed and grown substantially in the last 16 years. The opportunities for learning have been incredible, the company supported me as I went back for a graduate degree, and our training around leadership skills is strong. We have some of the best and brightest minds at Atrion; add to that a great mentor – our CEO Tim Hebert – and what I have been able to do and experience has been amazing.

WC: When did you join RISCPA?

Caserta: I joined the Society as soon as I received my CPA certificate in 1996. I felt it was important to be connected to others that I felt have such an important role in our community and business. I have a lot of pride in our profession. It's one of the main reasons I chose accounting.

WC: How have you been active in the Society?

Caserta: I have attended many CPE sessions over the years which provided not only a good education but also a strong network of professionals to share best practices. Early on, I participated on the CPE committee as I have a passion for education (I was tutor in college and a part-time professor at Newbury College).

WC: In what new ways have you used technology to make your job more efficient?

Caserta: We are fortunate to have access to a lot of technology at Atrion. I will admit I am still traditional in some ways.

One-On-One continued

I use a Franklin Covey organizer for daily and weekly planning, although I do leverage Microsoft Outlook for planning as well. I also use an iPad for email management and note-taking in meetings. I've begun to use some tools in Excel that link to our accounting system in order to make reporting and analysis more effective and efficient for myself and our leadership team.

WC: Do you have an example of a particular technological advance, perhaps you were reluctant to take advantage of at first, but it has turned out to be an excellent approach?

Caserta: Automated email invoicing for our clients and also deposit scanning for our cash receipts are two examples that come to mind instantly. These two relatively straightforward applications not only make the job more efficient for our staff, but also have improved cash flow which is extremely important in a fast growing business like Atrion.

WC: Looking forward, what possibilities do you see for technology for folks in your line of work?

Caserta: There are some powerful tools that we can use for strategic planning and forecasting that will help us systematically plan for continued growth. The business intelligence tools that are available which will help executives understand what is really going on in their business are paramount to making educated decisions regarding the lines of business generating success and those lines of business that may be providing less than stellar returns. Over the last few years Atrion has begun to grow its Applications & Information practice, among other things – the team focuses on Business Process Management, Enterprise Content Management and Business Intelligence.

One of the projects we (in Finance) have begun to work on with this team is the automation of our Accounts Payable system. There will be significant benefits to us around document management and the automation of workflows and reporting that will give us a significant advantage. We will have the ability to free up the staff's time to work on more value based projects that contribute to their professional growth as well as the success of the organization. In addition, the application will help provide higher quality information to leadership and add to our ability to provide information "at our fingertips" as we work with outside parties like our CPA firm and others during audits etc.

WC: Is there an example of a technological advancement that you use these days that you did not envision 10 or 20 years ago?

Caserta: I would say the smart phone has been an incredible advancement. I remember my first position after I graduated college, working for Ed Marchwicki who owns an accounting firm in Providence. Ed was definitely considered progressive around technology. When I began to travel to clients to do some ERP consulting he gave me the first cell phone I ever used, which I carried in a large briefcase! I would never have imagined that we'd all be carrying something as small and yet as powerful as what we have today.

WC: Getting back to the RISCPA, in what ways do you see the organization helping CPAs tap into technological opportunities that may be valuable to them?

Caserta: I believe that the Technology Committee and CPE Committee can contribute to the educational aspect of what CPAs are doing in Public and Private Practice. We all know one of the most difficult things about technology is simply keeping up with the rapid pace of change in the industry. I have definitely witnessed this thru the Atrion lens and in leading our Finance department. CPAs have an amazing opportunity to leverage technology for themselves and also help their clients and companies look at the tools that will accelerate their business by taking basic "Run" tasks off their plate (data entry etc.) and provide valuable data that can help drive the business to higher levels of success.

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PROFESSIONAL NEWS

Online Resources from BOA Opening New Doors

State License Renewals and Important BOA Resources Just a Click Away

The Board of Accountancy (BOA) continues to provide a wide array of resources via the web, through its online home under the state Department of Business Regulation (DBR).

Visitors can access the state-mandated e-licensing program and find numerous other BOA resources by simply visiting <http://www.dbr.state.ri.us/divisions/accountancy/>.

Mary Bernard, a past president of RISCPA and the director of income and finance tax at Ryan LLC., enters her fourth year as a member of the Board of Accountancy. The DBR site, she said, provides important information related to the BOA, including the ability to renew state licenses.

“The license renewal program is brand new for us and we anticipate that our licensees will appreciate the online convenience,” said Bernard. “We also provide all forms necessary for certification online, as well as the Rhode Island General Laws and regulations pertaining to the professional certification requirements. It is also possible to search our database to determine the status of individuals holding CPA licenses issued by the Board.”

Bernard said that individuals who do not find adequate answers to their questions online are encouraged to send an [inquiry to the Board](#), which will be addressed by the Executive Director.

AICPA Store, a Wise Place to Shop

The AICPA offers online resources that are sure to help you – and most especially, your clients – visit the AICPA Store at aicpa.org. In addition to a wide range of products and training materials available for purchase, the AICPA has the latest tax CPE self-study, publications, conferences, and web event guidance to bring you up to speed on the key changes you’ll need for you and your clients as a result of tax changes.

CCH’s ProSystem fx Suite Driving Up Efficiencies for CPAs

Using online resources and technological advances to make life easier for CPAs is the driving force for [CCH Tax & Accounting North America](#). [Jonathan R. Breault, MBA](#), a field sales consultant for the company, said CCH offers a wide range of products and services specifically designed for the accounting community.

“We have solutions that firms use from beginning to end stages of tax preparation, audit, practice management, and a complete workflow solution,” said Breault.

Breault said the emphasis at CCH is to offer a streamlined one stop solution with seamless integration between products. CCH Axxess™ is a one of a kind cloud based tax prep, compliance and workflow solution that enables firms to access information anytime, anywhere.

“In today’s marketplace, the CPA community is using our products and services to acquire and retain strong talent,” adds Breault. “This is a critical business issue in the industry and by having the best technology for the firm, means quality professionals will be attracted to them, as well as want to stay.”

Tapping into cloud based and mobile opportunities, said Breault, is a formula for success for CPA firms, large and small.

“With CCH products, coupled with the right training and implementation, firms can be extremely powerful and efficient,” he said. “Firms can accelerate growth by providing tech savvy solutions that build positive client relationships and create higher billable work by generating new clients.”



PROFESSIONAL NEWS



Mobile Technologies in Accounting Means Greater Need for Security

Tablets, smart phones, laptops, thumb drives, cloud services – the list goes on and on. Professionals are on the move and so is the often vital information they must guard. And as client demand pushes CPAs into an exciting new age of access to real time information, it also pushes them into an arena loaded with costly consequences.

To that end, “Mobile Security” has emerged as an issue of high priority for CPAs, and all business people who engage in exchanging information while on the go.

“The use of mobile technology is catapulting – it’s exploding,” said Steven J. Ursillo, Jr., president of the RISCPA and principal and director of Information Technology and Assurance Services at [Sparrow, Johnson & Ursillo](#).

Ursillo, a recognized national lecturer, has created a PowerPoint presentation on “Mobile Security” for the AICPA that he shares regularly with CPAs and others. It is a subject garnering increased attention. The purpose of his presentation is to provide information relevant to current mobile device threats and risk, as well as to offer preventative risk mitigation and mobile device management recommendations. Ursillo said as clients demand more information in real time, it is becoming more important than ever that CPAs take steps to protect that very information. Professionals, said Ursillo, need to adapt to the demands of protecting information in an environment operating at a speed never seen before.

People don’t use the same type of security on their mobile devices as they have historically done for their laptops or home computers,” he said. “And they need to.”

There are, said Ursillo, inherent risks that accompanies new found access to information. They are real risks – and they can become costly.

As part of his PowerPoint presentation, Ursillo cites statistics from a 2012 Ponemon Institute Global Study on Mobility Risks. Among the key findings of the study:

- 38 percent of respondents experienced theft, removal, or loss of information
- 31 percent of respondents experienced disclosure of private or confidential information
- 10 percent of respondents experienced interruption of services

The numbers are alarming. But they also serve a purpose. They represent a wake-up call that needs to be made.

“It scares a lot of people,” said Ursillo. “But the awareness is important. There is so much that needs to be looked at.”

For more information related to Ursillo’s presentation, [click here](#).

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ACADEMICS

'Digital Media' Expert Draws Direct Link to Accountancy

Renee Hobbs, PhD., is the Founding Director of the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island (URI). Hobbs grew up in Michigan and earned undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Michigan. She holds a doctorate from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

Hobbs arrived at URI last January from Temple University in Philadelphia, where she had been teaching and honing her reputation as an expert in the field of "digital literacy." She describes "digital literacy" as being able to "critically evaluate and communicate information and ideas using digital technology, as well as the ability to adapt to whatever comes next."

Having begun her career teaching business students at Babson College, Hobbs firmly understands the relevance of digital literacy to those in the accounting profession.

"Accountants recognize how to represent a company's values through numbers, which means they are also aware of 'what's missing' in any of the systems of representation they use," says Hobbs. "Recognizing the constructed nature of numerical information and learning to ask critical questions about how it is constructed is a dimension of digital literacy."

In an effort to explore more deeply this idea of "digital literacy" and its place within our field, we asked Hobbs to explain in greater detail its link to CPAs and the accountancy profession.

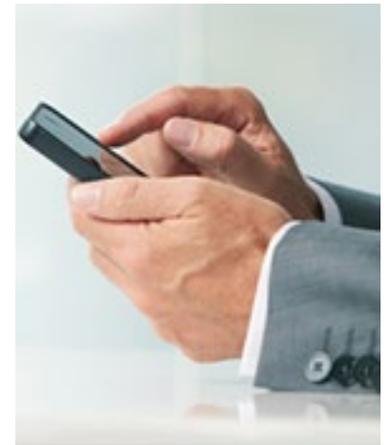
WHAT COUNTS: What drew you to focus on this idea of "digital literacy," that is, what were you seeing or hearing that took you in that direction?

Renee Hobbs: I have always been an explorer when it comes to digital media and technology, especially those resources that combine images, language and sound. That's probably because I am a visual learner. I love technology tools that help me visualize complex information and ideas and I love helping people develop their capacity to learn new things.

WC: Are so called 'soft skills,' such as teamwork and collaboration more important than ever in the business arena? If so, what role could they play in an office of CPAs?

Hobbs: In every field, people with effective communication skills have strategic advantages. A digitally literate person will be skillful in deciding which medium of communication to use, depending on the audience, message, and purpose. They will self-assess their own needs and the needs of their colleagues and make strategic choices, knowing when to use email, when to pick up the phone, when to shoot over a quick text message, and when to talk face-to-face over a glass of wine. They will share high-quality information appropriately in ways that really offer value to their colleagues. They will naturally motivate and inspire others to be the best they can be.

WC: You talk of the importance for professionals to develop skills to evaluate what they find in cyber space. It sounds like CPAs, for example, may have limitless resources out there at their disposal, but the key is to know how to find them and what to do with them?



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From The Director's Chair continued

Hobbs: Today, there are numbers you can believe and there are numbers that are less trustworthy. Many of the most important business accounting problems are not black-and-white situations, but ones that are full of ambiguity. Learning to reason through such a real-world situation means knowing how to ask good questions, listen well, and keep one's mind open to avoid the risk of premature jumping-to-conclusions. Often we make assumptions about 'where the numbers came from' in ways that may give them more power than they deserve. So good accountants evaluate their own assumptions and reflect on their biases.

WC: How might your traditional CPA benefit from "thinking outside the box?"

Hobbs: I've been fascinated by the literature that shows how accounting students benefit from developing their writing and public speaking skills, and also from learning about innovation in the arts, sciences and other disciplines. I think accountants might benefit from learning how to create effective YouTube videos - using images, language, sound and interactivity really stimulates creativity and promotes reflective thinking, too. I really admire Jason Blumer and his accounting group, Thriveal. They are exploring ways to be innovative in the services they provide to clients. He believes, as I do, that innovation comes from experimentation, risk-taking and getting comfortable with 'failing fast.' They want to reinvent the profession of accounting. Such new thinking may help CPAs help business owners build the best businesses possible by exploring new services, new technologies and new ways to add value.

WC: Are you seeing new connections all the time between the ideas behind the digital literacy movement and the business arena?

Hobbs: Yes! I am an entrepreneur at heart. Now with my leadership of the URI Harrington School of Communication and Media, I am focused on how to support people in their fast learning curve with digital media and hoping that their comfort with innovation leads to innovation in business, the community and society.

WC: Lastly, could the Rhode Island business community and RISCPA serve as an especially effective test market for some of these ideas, given our size and the accessibility of so many people from different areas to come together fairly easily?

Hobbs: One of the great attractions of Rhode Island is its small size. I have been honored to get to know some amazing movers and shakers who are doing great work here. I welcome the opportunity to explore how digital literacy could help advance innovation across a variety of sectors in our state.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

There's Never Been a Better Time to Be a CPA

The ever changing New England weather can be challenging, but that didn't stop our RISCPA members and the equally astute and vigorous professionals who braved the winter elements to attend our annual January Networking Event. The event was the most successful on record, with a vibrant audience of over 580.

Held at the Omni Providence Hotel ballroom, the January 22 event was attended by hundreds of professionals from the accounting, legal and financial worlds. It was a terrific night to spend time with old acquaintances and make new connections for the years ahead.



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From the Director's Chair continued

A primary motive for many was to assertively seek out new business development opportunities from the high caliber crowd of RISCPA members and their significant circle of colleagues. And, we are very much delighted to host this event since it's the Society's way of helping to promote economic development for not only our members, but also those savvy enough to stay close to our first rate member base.

Many thanks are in order for the collaborating sponsors that helped make things happen. TD Bank, was our Platinum Sponsor, followed by MassMutual Financial Group, Southern New England (Gold), and Duffy & Sweeney (Silver). We are also indebted to our Bronze sponsors, Freedom National Bank, Endurance Wealth Management, Accounting Management Solutions, Inc., Partridge, Snow & Hahn, LLP and Pierce Atwood LLP.

This was also a unique event for RISCPA, as a portion of the proceeds were earmarked for RISCPA's Philanthropy Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation.

Of course, putting an event together of this magnitude requires much preparation. And, since RISCPA is blessed with a terrific staff in its camp, namely, Susan Breen, Denise Jacobson and Ellen DeCataldo, it all ran very smoothly.

Throughout the years, RISCPA has elevated its brand considerably by emphasizing advocacy (including community outreach), education, leadership and economic development. No doubt, the organization's networking focus has certainly contributed and will continue to amplify its success as it brings forth an important added value component to our members. Therefore, a very special thanks to all who participated.

As a preamble to the networking event, the OMNI Hotel was also the setting for a special seminar entitled, "Add Value to Your Client Relationships." This special CPE program produced in cooperation with XPX Boston (the exit planning exchange), RISCPA and Building Bridges, LLC, delved into ways on how to measure and manage the most valuable part of the business: making intangible value tangible. Also participating with this exciting pilot program are Providence College and RISCPA member firms: Kahn, Litwin, Renza & Co; Piccerelli, Gilstein & Co; and, Charland Marciano.

In all, as we move ahead through 2014, RISCPA's Board and staff will continue its efforts to bring our members the highest quality programs, seminars and events.

Remember, at RISCPA, ***there's never been a better time to be a CPA.***

Bob Mancini



Bob Mancini

WHY I'M A MEMBER

Technology Allows Businesses to Think Big

For Thomas Kiley, success has always meant looking ahead. It has been about seeing – and seizing – opportunity.

A key component of his success, said Kiley, has been his willingness to embrace collaboration, to appreciate the benefits of sharing ideas, of listening to others. It is an approach that has proven to be time well spent. It's why he joined the RISCPA, soon after earning his CPA license in 1999. The networking opportunities, he said, have been invaluable and have played a key role in his ability to nurture his business pursuits.

And yet, he said, the RISCPA has proven to be much more than that. There is limitless practical support through committees and programs that have helped him to refine existing businesses, while boldly creating new ones.

“The Society has always given tremendous support to firms who want to improve their technology and processes,” said Kiley. “The various committees are a wealth of information on all topics. I personally found that the friends I have made through the society have been the best source of new ideas and innovation.”

At the core of Kiley’s professional success has been [Kiley + Co.](#), the small business tax practice he established in 2006. Kiley + Co provides tax services and business advice to approximately 200 clients. In addition, Tom also delivers professional education to CPAs across the country through his new venture, [20-20 Tax Training](#). Since 2008, he has delivered training, or authored material, for 12 of the top 100 accounting firms.

Of all the lessons he has given – and received – over the years, none has been more important than the idea of embracing technology. It is a lesson he finds himself delivering to CPAs over and over again. Advances in technology, he said, provide small businesses an opportunity to “think big.” It has certainly made a difference at Kiley + Co, he said.

“Our tax practice is small, but we utilize many technological advances,” said Kiley. “A few years ago we started using a cloud based filing system with portal access for our clients. We store our files electronically, the IRS receives the tax returns electronically, and our clients access PDFs through their portal. Therefore, we have realized significant savings in postage, paper, and ink by no longer printing any tax returns. Our latest technological adventure is an automated practice management system, which is streamlining our work flow and saving me a lot of time.”

The accounting profession as a whole, said Kiley, has done a good job tapping into opportunities afforded by technology. Those firms that will succeed going forward must continue to do so.

“The industry has changed so drastically since I started in 1997,” said Kiley. “I can probably service two to three times as many clients as I could have 20 years ago because of technological advances. It will become harder and harder to compete if you are lagging behind. Even the complexion of firms is changing, as many of the duties of a staff accountant or bookkeeper have been automated. The old pyramid structure is obsolete.”

Kiley also suggests that CPA firms set their sights on a wide playing field on which to operate.

“It doesn’t matter where you are located anymore,” he said. “I have clients all over the country whom I have never met face to face. We communicate via Skype, email, or other electronic methods. As the Rhode Island economy continues to struggle, you have to look outside our region for new clients if you want to grow.”



Thomas Kiley



EVENTS

Mark your calendars! Here are some upcoming events in the area for RISCPA members.

Stay tuned for details regarding our April Meeting and July Golf Tournament.

See the photos from the January Networking Event on the next page.
[Click here to view the full photo album on the RISCPA Facebook Page.](#)

Photos from the RISCPA January Networking Event:



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