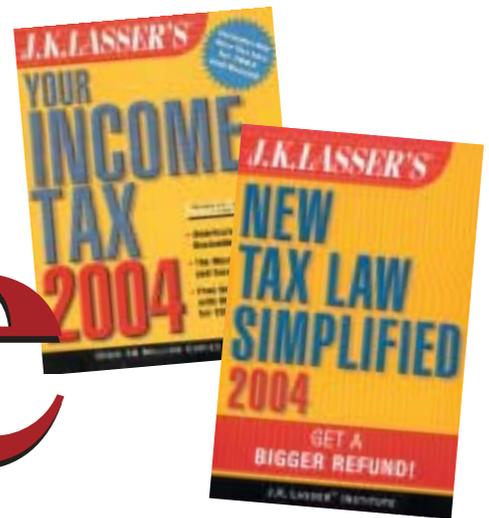


# tools of the trade



The ATX Offerings

## Tax Season Help

ATX of Caribou, Maine, has expanded its tax software offerings with **Total Tax Office™ Plus** at the top of a line that has a variety of their traditional **Saber™** products shoring up its foundation. The Total Tax Office Plus includes the Max® tax prep program; Kleinrock's Total Tax Guide, which provides immediate access to explanations and practical guidance that goes beyond IRS instructions; and Kleinrock's Tax Expert® Online, which links to every cited document, IRS ruling, and expert analysis. The user friendly Max® program

has federal, state, and city programs, including 1040, 1120, 1120S, 1065, 1041, 1099, School District, Applications, Foreign, Estate, Gift, Sales and Use, and many others, and it also includes Zillion-Forms® with more than 9,600 tax forms. The Saber products are available as SaberPRO® for individual and business tax preparation, SaberBIZ, Saber PRS11 with Pay-Per-Return system, and Easy E-file. Go to the ATX site at [www.atxpros.com](http://www.atxpros.com) for complete feature lists of the offerings, and try the demos without even downloading the program.

Intuit's ProSeries tax preparation software has a number of enhancements for the tax year 2003. Downloading and installing have been simplified, and in-product help lets you type in a question once, and the program searches different areas of the Help content to find an answer. Speed entry automatically re-enters information such as company name, bank name, or city in fields that request the same information entered before. The federal/state integration is improved, with more data flowing automatically from the federal to the state return. Form descriptions rather than just form numbers identi-

fy the document throughout as you are working on it, and you can also search by the form description when you don't remember or know the number. The e-filing process has improved acknowledgments and rejections functions, and ProSeries includes support for the Practitioner PIN program. You can take a quick tour online or order a free ProSeries evaluation CD at [www.proseries.com](http://www.proseries.com).

## The Bookshelf

J.K. Lasser's™ 800-page **Your Income Tax 2004** includes guidance on the numerous tax law changes of the past year. Some of these tax cuts continue to phase in and phase out,



ProSeries Demo

## Real-time. Really? ◆ Michael Castelluccio, Editor

■ It wasn't very long ago that the basic complaint about business technology was, "When are we going to see a return on our investment?" The answer was elusive because it was a little like measuring water with a yardstick. You could estimate the time saved when gathering the information needed for a close, but just exactly what is e-mail worth? Everyone understood that information

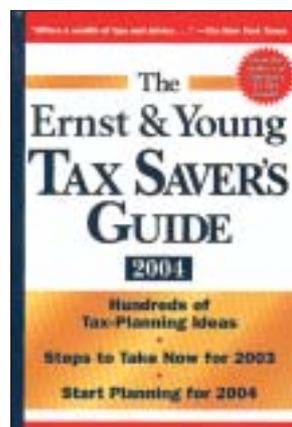
was essential to every business process and whatever improved its collection and analysis was good—but how good and at what cost still eluded most. But instinct prevailed, and new kinds of information systems kept appearing everywhere.

Finally, there was the unspoken realization that we had reached a point of no return. As all *continued on next page*

and it's useful to have a compendium in a single source on your bookshelf. Tax reductions originally scheduled to occur in 2006 apply retroactively to January 1, 2003, the income taxed at the 10% bracket has been expanded, the marriage penalty has been banished for 2003 and 2004, standard deductions have changed, capital gain rates have been lowered along with dividend tax, child tax credit has been increased, and there are changes for small businesses and the self-employed. The Lasser guide takes you from filing basics at the beginning of the book to planning strategies for the changes in years to come. Business tax planning is covered along with personal tax savings. A detailed Contents list and thorough Index make it easy to locate topics, and there are numerous usable sample tax forms, tables, and tax rate schedules.

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

A more focused (207-page) look at the tax changes enacted in the four major tax acts of the last two years can be found in **J. K. Lasser's™ New Tax Law Simplified 2004**. The subtitle, *Get a Bigger Refund*, explains the book's purpose. The eight chapters cover specific areas of change: Income Tax Rate Reductions; Tax Relief for Families; Tax Relief for Investors; For Educational Expenses; Pension and IRA Relief; Small Business Tax Relief; Estate, Gift, and Generation-Skipping Transfer Tax Relief; and Miscellaneous Tax Changes. The Appendix has State-by-State Col-



lege Savings Plans. The Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 has more than 400 changes to income, estate, and gift tax rules, so there's a definite need for a digest such as this.

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

**The Ernst & Young Tax Saver's Guide 2004** offers information on changes in recent tax law, but it's primarily a guide for tax planning with year-round strategies to manage your taxes. In highlighted blue-text sections throughout the book, Tax Savers, Tax Alerts, and Tax Organizers offer reminders and guidance. There's a life-events index to help you plan for taxes associated with marriages, home buying, retirement, and more. A mutual fund chapter covers when to make new investments and how to treat distributions, transfers, and redemptions. There are worksheets, charts, and tables throughout to simplify

your tax planning.

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

**PricewaterhouseCoopers Guide to the New Tax Rules** offers an analysis of the 2003 Tax Law along



with investment strategies that take advantage of the changes. After introducing the tax changes, the authors turn to individual chapters on Investments and Stock Options, Retirement Planning, Tax Advantages of Home Ownership, Savings for Education, and Estate Planning Ideas. A Nuts and Bolts review at the end of the book summarizes the basic concepts in simple summaries.

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

*continued from p. 55*

the processes from production to CRM accelerated, and as profit margins got thinner and thinner, the technological substructure reached a critical mass. Unplug the ERP or CRP or e-mail, and you were dead.

Remember what happened when the Melissa and other viruses shut down systems? Companies shut their doors until they could disinfect their hardware. The question "What's it cost?" had become moot. The need to know is addictive because it creates its own appetite.

Whether the information is for a manufacturer, a financial services group, or a start-up online, it needs to be accurate, comprehensive, and current. As storage and processing improve, warehouses of data are constantly being fed into and through analytics engines that scrub, sort, select, and sniff millions of cells and lines of bits and business rules, constantly looking for an advantage.

With cost no longer the point, the effort now concerns "How can I improve the quality of my information?" More is better, so storage is an issue, and descriptors like "server farms" indicate the scales we have reached as we go up the steps from mega, to giga, to tera, to exabytes of information. And processing speeds have gone beyond the individual computer as we plug together machines into supercomputer configurations that make the mainframes of the past far less impressive.

And then there's the third element beyond space and power—there's time and the attempt to make data so current that it's called "real-time." In his white paper, *Meeting Real Needs in Real-time*, Ken Gardner, founder and CEO of Iteration™ Software, quotes the Gartner Group when

he defines real-time: "The Holy Grail is the Real-Time Enterprise [(RTE)]—the enterprise that knows what's happening in its operations right now, at this very moment, so its leaders can see risks unfolding as they happen. It's one of the most powerful movements unfolding in technology today. It has the potential to separate the winners from the losers... RTE is the complete compression of lag between the detection of an event, the reporting of that event, the decision-making, and the response. For your customers, your management, and anyone who needs information quickly to make a decision, it's a dream come true."

The "complete compression of lag between the detection of an event... and the response." That would be business decisions by reflex—what a concept. You can almost imagine the shudder going through management in companies around the country. They've just completed the last round of upgrades, their data centers are massive, and all the old legacy systems are history, and now Gartner, as well as AMR Research, Aberdeen, and IDC say if you want to remain competitive, you need an RTE.

#### **Real Definition for Real-Time**

The answer for some technology providers who would like to fill this need for companies is a little disingenuous. They offer "almost real-time" systems—*almost*. Now what is that supposed to mean? Would that help you create an RTE? This fudging the phrase is understandable when you realize that real-time is an impossible goal. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* offers a definition of the noun *real time*: "the actual time during which something takes place <the computer may partly analyze the data

in *real time* (as it comes in)." It's significant that in the example given, a computer can only "partly" analyze data in real time. That's because the computer needs to read its own list of programmed instructions even though it rattles through millions of machine instructions per second (MIPS). To expect a system to see a sale in the field, enter it into a general ledger, notify accounts receivable, tell the warehouse and shipping, analyze the significance of the sale for marketing, alert HR to possible overtime scheduling, fit it into a budget, and make it part of a report for the board—and to do it all at once—is asking a lot even though the data will be traveling around the network at the speed of radio waves and electrons (nothing, not even light, moves faster).

#### **Realistic Steps**

Although the systems will never be truly real-time, the various parts of a company's network can be rearranged in an architecture that enables instant notification throughout and much more nimble cooperation between units. For a look at how this works in a system that gets closer to real-time than most, go to [www.iteration.com](http://www.iteration.com) and open the solutions menu in the top bar. There are a number of PDF documents that show how Iteration's Real-Time Suite™ 3.0 works in banking, manufacturing, call centers, retail, supply chains, and other sectors. From data storage to designing multiple-view reports and integrating Iteration's proprietary instant-messaging system, you'll get a look at a practical set of solutions working toward a very difficult goal. And store away that acronym RTE. It may be coming to an enterprise near you real soon. ■