
GOING MOBILE

It's time for accountants to get smart with their mobile devices.

By Craig Foltin, CPA

If you or your fellow accountants aren't familiar with smartphones, tablets, mobile apps, 3G, or 4G, it isn't too late to catch up on the latest technology—but you'd better do it soon before you miss out on the advantages and time savings that mobile computing has to offer.

How Smart Is Your Mobile Phone?

A smartphone is essentially a mobile phone that offers computing capability, Internet connectivity, and the ability to run advanced applications—all at a high speed. It's really a computer, PDA, phone, and camera all in one. There are so many bells and whistles on a smartphone, it's easy to forget that it functions as a phone as well. Many smartphones are third-generation (3G) mobile telecommunications devices. Typically, 3G smartphones have wireless telephone services, mobile video and television, and high-speed mobile Internet. Fourth-generation (4G) devices are even faster, with video streaming, ultra-broadband Internet access, and many of the basic functions of a desktop or laptop computer.

In Comes the Tablet

Tablets are handheld devices that combine the computing capabilities of a laptop with the size and portability closer to a smartphone. They are slightly smaller than a piece of paper in height and width and are generally less than half an inch thick. The tablet market is dominated by the iPad, introduced by Apple in April 2010. Other tablet devices include the HP Slate, the Samsung Galaxy Tab, Motorola Mobility's Xoom, and Amazon's Kindle Fire. Even Research in Motion, the company that introduced the world to the

best selling BlackBerry, has entered the market with its own tablet, the PlayBook.

Tablets can be used to surf the Internet, read and send e-mail, take and store photos or videos, play music or games, conduct research, take notes, create and use spreadsheets, manipulate databases, and, yes, run accounting applications. Though most 3G smartphones have similar capabilities, tablets have more computing power, have larger viewing areas, and come closer to the feel of a laptop. Yet despite their comparatively enhanced computing power, tablets are still closer cousins to smartphones than to laptops. They utilize similar operating systems (OS) and run the same kinds of programs—mobile applications, or apps—as smartphones.

Android, Apple iOS, and BlackBerry OS are by far the three major operating systems for smartphones and tablets. (Tablet owners who rely heavily on Microsoft Windows products are hoping that Microsoft will unveil a tablet-friendly OS in 2012.) To ensure constant Internet connectivity, tablet users need to subscribe to a service provider just as with a cell phone, although the devices can also connect via Wi-Fi when a connection is available. Phone service providers such as AT&T, Verizon, and Sprint provide Web and data access for both tablets and smartphones.

Mobile Apps

As the demand for and use of mobile devices continue to skyrocket, it seems as if new technological advances appear on the scene almost daily. One of the most useful features of a smartphone or tablet is the ability to run mobile apps. Thousands upon thousands of mobile apps are available for download. As reported by Joe Wilcox, Microsoft's Windows Phone division recently boasted it had approved about 18,000 apps in a seven-month period, while Apple is the industry leader with more than 500,000 applications approved for sale in Apple's App Store over the past three years ("In the Battle of Mobile Apps, it's Apple's 500,000 to Microsoft's 18,000," www.betanews.com, May 24, 2011). These apps are easy to download from the Web through various online vendors and stores. Most phones come with a handful of apps for things such as weather, sports, and stocks.

Many people are familiar with mobile apps for shopping, games, and social networking, but there are apps that are for more than just fun or recreation. The mobile app craze is spilling into the business world, and accounting is being swept up in this new wave of computing. Dozens of apps have been developed specifically for

accountants to use in their practices and professional life.

It's Now Essential

More and more people are using smartphones: According to the Nielsen Company, nearly half of all mobile subscribers have smartphones as of the fourth quarter (4Q) of 2011 ("More US Consumers Choosing Smartphones as Apple Closes the Gap on Android," <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/more-us-consumers-choosing-smartphones-as-apple-closes-the-gap-on-android>, January 18, 2012). Figure 1 details the trend of smartphone growth vs. feature phone (regular cell phone) use. The popularity of smartphones and their eventual dominance in the market is almost assured as the cost of data plans continues to drop. There was a nearly 50% price reduction over the last year, as reported by Nielsen.

A similar story can be told with tablet computing. Despite early worries that tablets wouldn't catch on with the public, their sales are projected to explode, making tablets the third-largest consumer electronics category. According to Julianne Pepitone, one conservative estimate projects sales to climb to \$49 billion by 2015, translating into 150 million units sold, while others project \$77 billion in sales, or 294 million tablets sold ("Tablet sales may hit \$75 billion by 2015," CNNmoney.com, April 19, 2011).

During a normal day, it's impossible to walk down the street, ride a subway, or sit in a meeting without seeing someone glued to their phone or tablet. It's almost inevitable that accountants will need to use a mobile device in the next several years to remain competitive and current in the business world.

You Don't Use E-mail?!

From the time the first e-mail was sent in 1971, e-mail has been a fast, inexpensive way to communicate. Many people would think it impossible to conduct business without it. But believe it or not, the use of e-mail is fading, especially among young users. Recent studies show that Web-based e-mail use dropped a dramatic 59% in 2010 for users age 12-17 (Alexia Tsotsis, "ComScore Says You Don't Got Mail: Web E-mail Usage Declines, 59% Among Teens!" TechCrunch.com, February 7, 2011).

Growing numbers of people communicate by text, instant message (IM), or tweet. Texting is sending short messages through your phone, PDA, or tablet. Instant messaging is similar to texting except it's in real time and is typically conducted through a separate system that enables selected individuals or groups to communicate. Tweets are messages sent or posted through Twitter, a pri-

vately owned social networking service, and they are limited to 140 characters. Twitter began in 2006 and averages more than 140 million tweets a day, with 460,000 new Twitter accounts opening daily (<http://blog.twitter.com/2011/03/numbers.html>). With this new wave of communication technology, e-mail could be going the way of the vinyl record.

As prices for data packages and mobile devices continue to drop and their functionality continues to increase, many people are opting to forgo desktop computing altogether. Emerging countries like China and India seem to have bypassed desktop computing in favor of mobile computing. A January 2011 survey from On Device Research found that 20% of Internet users in the United States and England were “mobile only,” with that number rising to more than 50% in African and Asian markets.

Accounting Goes Mobile

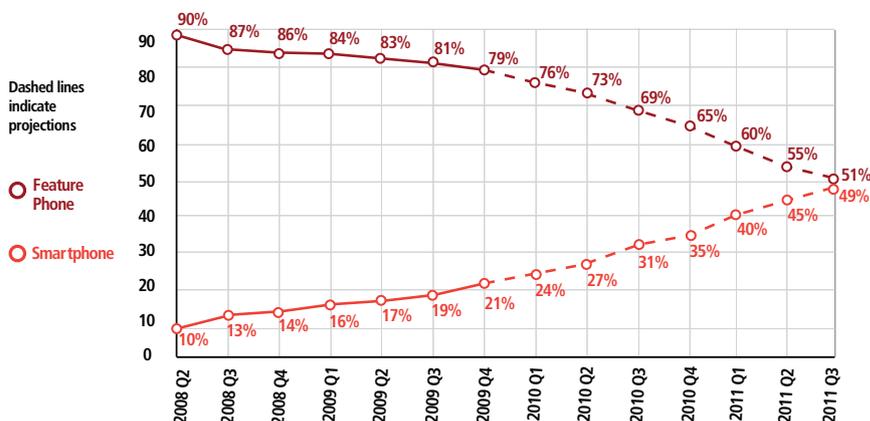
Whether it's to provide access to accounting and client information or to run accounting-specific software from any location, mobile technology gives accountants a number of different options to simplify business life and provide better service to their clients. Table 1 contains brief descriptions of some of the more relevant mobile apps currently available to help accountants perform their various job functions. Let's take a closer look at some of them.

Administration, Operation, Business, and Client Management

Technology has made running accounting practices easier, faster, and more accurate over the years, and now those functions can be performed on a mobile device. For example, Thomson Reuters has introduced an app called Mobile CS that lets you run an entire accounting practice from a mobile device. Mobile CS provides real-time data on client contacts and staff projects while also interfacing with other Thomson software, such as Practice CS, to get access to a firm's practice management software.

Intuit has also entered the accounting app field, offering several mobile apps that can help an accountant manage a practice while on the run. There's a popular mobile version of its QuickBooks software, and Intuit's GoPayment app enables an accountant to accept and process report payments over a mobile device and is integrated

Figure 1: Smartphone vs. Feature Phone Market Share



Source: Center for Digital Education, “Issue Brief: Mobile Learning for Business Schools,” e.Republic Inc., 2010.

with QuickBooks.

Many industry insiders are closely watching Square, a new company that has developed the hardware and software for merchants to accept payments through a mobile device. Created by Jack Dorsey, who launched Twitter, the app itself is free and comes with a simple pricing structure: 2.75% per card swiped. There are no contracts, monthly fees, or other strings attached, so this simple system soon could become the standard for mobile payments.

Management Accounting, Financial Reporting, Budgeting, and Compliance

SAP is a leader in making business software accessible through mobile devices. SAP's Business One software, with its financial management model, can now be accessed on an iPhone through SAP's Business One mobile app. This app provides remote access to accounting, controlling, cost accounting, and banking and reconciliation functions.

Many accountants are familiar with XBRL (eXtensible Business Reporting Language), the open technology standard that allows financial information to be described uniformly so that it's easier to exchange and retrieve financial information. It's used by most government agencies and, as of January 2009, is required by the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) for all corporate financial reporting. Xamtech LLC has released SEC Filing XBRL, a mobile app that enables this SEC information to be viewed, searched, and sorted via smartphone or tablet. There's even a notification feature that can alert users when a specific company files with the SEC.

Table 1: *Mobile Apps for Accountants*

SOFTWARE NAME	VENDOR NAME	DESCRIPTION
Administration, Operations, Business, and Client Management		
Currency Convert	Hearn Apps, LLC	This app is a simple exchange-rate converter based on Yahoo! Finance data.
Dropbox	Dropbox, Inc.	Free cloud storage that can sync to all your computers.
GoPayment	Intuit	GoPayment software enables a mobile device to accept payments. The app and card reader are free, and the user pays a percentage of each transaction.
iCloud	Apple	iCloud securely stores data for use by any device, at any time, and automatically updates and syncs across all of a user's devices.
Kashoo Accounting	Kashoo	Kashoo uses cloud computing to make accounting mobile, specifically for small businesses.
Mobile CS	Thomson Reuters	This multidevice app lets an accountant access data from a number of Thomson's CS Professional Suite Products, including Practice CS.
QuickBooks Mobile	Intuit	This app provides mobile access to a number of Intuit products, including QuickBooks Pro, QuickBooks Premier, and QuickBooks Enterprise 2011.
Square	Square	A free app and device that allow mobile devices to accept credit card payments.
Management Accounting, Financial Reporting, Budgeting, and Compliance		
Accelus	Thomson Reuters	This suite of software, designed to manage governance issues, risk, and compliance, can now be accessed via mobile device. For example, BoardLink can now be used by board members and corporate managers wherever they may be.
FinancialForce Accounting	FinancialForce.com	Building business applications for Salesforce.com, a leading cloud computing company, FinancialForce Accounting allows a user to access mobile cash management, accounts receivable, and general ledgers and to create reports and dashboards.
IBM Cognos Mobile	IBM	This app enables access to and interaction with Cognos reports and dashboards.
MicroStrategy Mobile	MicroStrategy, Inc.	Provides a platform for mobile business information, analytics, data exploration, visualization, dashboards, etc.
NetSuite Financial Management	NetSuite	A cloud-based software provider that offers comprehensive, online accounting and financial management software for use on the go.
Oracle Business Intelligence Mobile	Oracle America, Inc.	Lets users view, analyze, and act on Oracle Business Intelligence Content.
Roambi Analytics	MeLLmo	This app converts business intelligence data from Excel, Google spreadsheets, and Salesforce CRM into immersive mobile analytics. Three versions are available: Lite (free account), Pro, or ES4. ES4 converts SAP Business Objects, IBM Cognos, Oracle Essbase, SAS, and other data.
SAP Mobile	SAP	SAP is increasing its mobile app offerings so a user can use more and more of SAP's software remotely.
SEC Filings XBRL	Xamtech LLC	This app provides real-time access to SEC filings made with XBRL. It includes search by company name, ticker symbol, or central index key; filters by date and filing type; the ability to follow specific companies; and other features.
Tax Practice		
Checkpoint	Thomson Reuters	Industry-leading online tax and accounting information now available on an iPad.
Employee Management		
Expensify	Expensify	Can create expense reports and upload expenses and receipts from a number of mobile devices.
Online Payroll	Intuit	Allows a user to look up employee information, pay employees, pay clients' employees, and view historical data from a mobile device.
Tungle.me	Research in Motion	Provides Web-based scheduling that syncs with each user's calendars to eliminate double booking and back-and-forth e-mails to find available times.
Reference and Research		
IntelliConnect	CCH	Online access to a subscriber's entire CCH subscription library.

(Table continues on p. 34)

WEBSITE

www.hearnapps.com

www.dropbox.com

<http://gopayment.com>

www.apple.com/icloud

<https://www.kashoo.com>

<http://cs.thomsonreuters.com/mobilecs>

www.intuit.com

<https://squareup.com>

<http://accelus.thomsonreuters.com>

www.financialforce.com/products/salesforce-accounting/overview

www-01.ibm.com/software/analytics/cognos/business-intelligence/mobile-bi.html

www.microstrategy.com/mobile

www.netsuite.com/portal/products/netsuite/financials/accounting.shtml

www.oracle.com/us/solutions/ent-performance-bi/business-intelligence/index.html

www.roambi.com

www.sdn.sap.com/irj/sdn/mobile

<http://secipad.com>

<http://ria.thomsonreuters.com/integratedsolutions>

<https://www.expensify.com>

<http://payroll.intuit.com/product/apps.jsp>

www.tungle.me/Home

www.cchgroup.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/content_intelliconnect_default2

Thomson Reuters, a leader in governance, risk, and compliance issues, developed mobile versions for many of its software solutions. Its BoardLink app, for example, allows sensitive board of trustee data to be shared securely with top corporate managers via mobile devices. Calendars, books, documents, and committee materials can be shared easily no matter where a manager is located.

Tax Practice

Thomson Reuters has also made mobile apps for tax practice. Its Mobile Practice CS app gives up-to-date information on tax laws, rules, and regulations. It can walk a tax professional through the entire tax reporting process via a mobile device. Thomson also offers a mobile app for its Checkpoint product, which provides expert analysis, workflow tools, and breaking news on federal, state, local, and international tax issues.

Another tax app is the mobile version of Intuit's ProLine tax software. Users can access their data anytime and from anywhere, enter data, and seek guidance on business and individual filings. This app also allows remote tax filings.

Employee Management

Intuit's Payroll Mobile software provides an accountant with the ability to pay clients or employees through a few simple taps of the screen. From a smartphone or tablet, you can enter employee hours, review and approve payroll, and pay employees through direct deposit. The software can also synchronize with your company's traditional payroll software.

The Hard Dollar mobile app allows for mobile transmittal of time-sheet information, expenses, equipment usage, project notes, and productivity data. It's particularly useful for contractors and project managers. Another mobile tool is Expensify, which lets users create and submit expense information and reports through their phone or tablet. It touches all aspects of employee expense reporting and management.

Reference and Research Tools

Researching the most complex accounting problems can now be done via mobile device. With better connectivity and faster online speeds, mobile devices can give you access to the entire

Table 1: *Mobile Apps for Accountants* (continued)

SOFTWARE NAME	VENDOR NAME	DESCRIPTION
Presentations and Meetings		
Dragon Dictation	Nuance Communications	This free dictation app is based on NaturallySpeaking software. There's also a Salesforce version.
Evernote	Evernote	Software allows a user to capture information from a variety of sources and electronically store and organize it on a PC or the Web.
i-Clickr	Sentick	App turns your iPhone, iPod Touch, or iPad into a remote control for PowerPoint presentations. The app allows the user to see the presentation on the mobile device as well.
Keynote Remote	Apple	This app allows a user to control a Keynote presentation from a Mac, iPad, iPhone, or iPod Touch or from another iPhone or iPod.
Note Taker HD	Software Garden	This app is designed specifically to facilitate writing and organizing handwritten notes on the iPad.
PowerPoint Mobile	Microsoft	PowerPoint Mobile enables a user to open and view a PowerPoint presentation on a mobile phone.
WebEx	Cisco	Combines real-time video and audio sharing through a Web portal so that all meeting attendees see and hear the same thing.
Accounting Education		
Blackboard Mobile Learn	Blackboard	Allows teachers and faculty to use Blackboard remotely by making much of its core content available on mobile devices.
Checkpoint Learning	Thomson Reuters	CPE and additional training through virtual conferences, online classes, and traditional print materials.
CliffsNotes Guide for Accounting	CliffsNotes	Free, online, quick-reference guides for basic accounting principles and terms.

Internet and all its resources. One thing an accountant needs in his or her mobile research arsenal: a library card. Public libraries across the country offer full-text access to accounting reference books, journals, and news sources. Library cardholders can access these from an Internet-enabled mobile device, so don't overlook them as a way to quickly procure accurate, reliable information remotely.

There are also proprietary mobile apps that give access to specific accounting research on the go. CCH offers a mobile app providing remote access to its IntelliConnect research platform. Depending on the user's subscription level, accountants may now remotely access news, online tools, and even the Internal Revenue Code and Regulations from their smartphone.

In addition, most mobile devices can store and download PDFs (files in Portable Document Format). PDFs generally allow searching by keyword, greatly speeding up the search process. You might need to download a third-party app to read the files on your device, but once you've mastered it, you can easily move through the largest PDFs with ease. Some PDF apps, such as GoodReader or Bluefire Reader, even contain more functionality, such as the ability to highlight, write

sticky notes, or make annotations.

PDF versions of accounting manuals; tax guides; promulgations from the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB), Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), and International Accounting Standards Board (IASB); guidance from the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA); government documents; and more can be at an accountant's fingertips with a mobile device. PDFs are also valuable for storing and searching work papers. Most any document can be converted into a PDF with a scanner and the Adobe Acrobat software, making it much easier to locate information and data on your device and saving you from drudging through boxes of hard copies.

Presentations and Meetings

Giving presentations out of the office has never been easier, thanks to portable storage and electronic devices. Mobile devices can store presentations and connect to a computer or projector just as easily as an external USB storage device. Tablets and smartphones often have the added benefit of being able to make updates and changes to your presentation right on the device itself. Add in the presentation apps that are available for these devices, and

WEBSITE

www.nuancemobilelife.com/apps

www.evernote.com

www.senstic.com/iphone/iclickr/iclickr.aspx

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/keynote-remote/id300719251?mt=8>

www.softwaregarden.com/products/notetakerhd

www.microsoft.com

www.webex.com

www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Mobile/Products/Mobile-Learn.aspx

<https://checkpointlearning.thomsonreuters.com>

www.cliffsnotes.com/more-subjects-study-guides.html

electronic presentations from mobile devices are becoming the standard.

Microsoft includes PowerPoint Mobile as part of its Microsoft Office Mobile package that comes on its Windows Phone 7. This app allows for editing, modifying, sharing, and presenting a PowerPoint presentation from a mobile phone. Apple devices can use Keynote Remote, which works with a Wi-Fi connection to enable a user to display and control a Keynote presentation. For meetings, WebEx allows staff from anywhere on the globe to participate in online conferencing.

However you decide to display your presentation, be sure to activate the airplane mode of your device to disable the cellular connection. You don't want an unexpected phone call to interrupt your presentation and possibly electronically interfere with the presentation software you're using.

Accounting Education

Accountants can now pick up CPE credits over their mobile devices while sitting on the train, at the airport, or virtually anywhere. With Thomson's Checkpoint Learning, you can choose from hundreds of online courses in accounting, auditing, tax, government auditing standards

(the Yellow Book), and more. There are countless apps, such as Accounting for the iPad, that cover basic topics such as double-entry accounting, the accounting cycle, inventory, ratio analysis, and Sarbanes-Oxley issues. There's even a CliffsNotes app for access to information on U.S. GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles), the FASB, the GASB, and basic accounting issues.

Where mobile apps are really taking off is in the classroom. Many colleges and universities are incorporating mobile learning into their curricula. Virtually any accounting class that's taught online can be done via mobile device. Some schools even require students to purchase a tablet or other mobile device so they can use the appropriate apps in their classes. In-person classes are enhanced with supplemental mobile applications for class announcements, assignment and homework postings, collaboration on group projects, quizzes, study materials, chat rooms, grading, and in-class polling. Blackboard Mobile is an app that has those functions and also provides functionality for course registration, course payments, searchable campus mapping, campus directories, athletics, and much more.

QR Codes

QR Codes (quick response codes) are yet another way mobile technology is being brought to the accountant. QR Codes encode data much like a barcode, though where barcodes only encode data horizontally, QR Codes encode data both horizontally and vertically using a grid of tiny squares, allowing much more data in smaller spaces. There are a number of mobile apps—many of which are free—that can be used to read and generate QR Codes.



The main advantage of a QR Code is the ability to very quickly and easily link content. Accountants can use QR Codes for quick linkage to financial reports, dashboards, presentations, work papers, technical bulletins, newsletters, a firm's website, business cards, résumés, and forms. Users simply decide what information they want to link and then generate the QR Code. Once generated, using the link is as easy as taking a picture with your device. Just point it at the QR Code, click, and the newsletter, financial report, website, or whatever will appear! One clever example that the western New York accounting firm Freed Maxick developed was a mobile site connected

through a QR Code that helps businesses claim new tax credits for job creation and investment for companies in high-tech, biotech, pharmaceutical, financial services, and other areas.

Getting Apps for Your Device

Each OS has its own store or marketplace for acquiring apps. The Apple App Store is at www.apple.com/iphone/from-the-app-store. If you have an Android device, you can buy and download apps from the Android Market at <http://market.android.com>. And if you have a BlackBerry device, apps can be downloaded from BlackBerry App World at www.blackberry.com/appworld. Most smartphones and tablets also connect directly to their respective app store, letting you browse and shop right from your device. Use the device's app icon to find countless app choices and the ability to search for what you need. Most apps cost a dollar or two, and many are free. Apps aren't always available for every OS, but most major apps have been configured for at least the big three operating systems.

Security

Yes, mobile computing does bring additional security risks—but no more than any other emerging technology. The operating systems for mobile devices employ security parameters similar to those found on PCs. Passcodes, security access levels, maximum passcode age, inactivity lockout, and user restrictions can be set for smartphones and tablets. Business leaders and IT personnel should take the same control measures for mobile devices as they do for their enterprise-wide information computing systems.

Larger firms or businesses should consider purchasing specialized consulting expertise and wireless security management systems (WSMS) software, which often includes measures such as data encryption, lost or stolen device protections, network link security, third-party access, and more. In the future, mobile security controls will become as much a part of general procedures of a firm or business as the standardized internal control systems of today.

Integrate Mobile into Your Firm or Business

Mobile computing is a business reality, and it only stands to become more of a part of everyday business life. As your business attracts new talent, especially younger personnel, it's essential to reconfigure your business to allow mobile computing as part of the culture. New policies

and procedures will need to be implemented, costs will be incurred, and security issues must be addressed. Just as accountants have had to accept and incorporate spreadsheet packages, database software, PCs, laptops, and modern operating systems into their professional lives, we must now do the same for mobile computing. Those innovations have positively shaped the accounting profession, and so will mobile computing. If your clients or customers aren't on board, you'd better get them signed on as well.

Whether used by customer relationship managers, financial controllers, audit firms, or management accountants, mobile access will be needed to remain competitive. Your favorite accounting software probably already has a mobile app. If not, it likely will soon. But accountants' use of mobile computing certainly doesn't stop at the practice of accounting. Banking, financial analysis, risk management, human resources, recruiting, compliance, personal finances, marketing, managing stock portfolios, and virtually any related field of business are all now using mobile computing. Deloitte, for example, has developed an app called Bamboo for crisis management. Bamboo stores and updates procedures for a crisis without relying on network connectivity. It will be used by more than 100,000 Deloitte team members and will be available to their clients.

A Smart Investment

Mobile applications will also save your firm or business money. Employee efficiency and customer satisfaction should rise by taking advantage of this new instant access and constant connectivity. According to *Technology, Accounting & Auditing*, a small to medium-sized accounting firm could yield a projected annual savings of more than \$32,000 per partner with mobile computing (Brett Owens, "Eleven Cool Mobile Apps for Running Your Practice," February 16, 2011).

Mobile accounting is still in the early stages, but hundreds of new applications are being developed daily. This article has only touched on the tip of the iceberg. Mobile computing is being integrated throughout the culture of business and growing at exponential speed. Accounting professionals must invest time and money in this emerging technology to stay competitive—and because it's worth it. **SF**

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