TOOLS ‹‹‹‹‹‹
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ATX 2012

CCH Small Firm Services' ATX 2012 is the company's latest version of its tax software, available in five versions for small and mid-size practices. The most basic version offers all federal individual returns, three states, and free electronic filing for 100 returns. The most complete package, Total Tax & Accounting, includes the integrated accounting products (Client Accounting Suite with Payroll and Fixed Asset Manager) and integrated workflow products (Paperless-PLUS and Practical Tax Expert Pro). Also included in most versions are all federal individual forms and supporting schedules; all state and local individual forms; federal corporate, partnership, business, and specialty forms; state business returns; payroll returns; sales and use forms; electronic filing; and tax research, including CCH U.S. Master Tax Guide (both print and online) and 1040 Express Answers, also in both formats. Full descriptions of products are available at www.atxinc.com.

BlackBerry Z10

The recently launched BlackBerry Z10 and its twin, the Q10, feature the redesigned and reengineered BlackBerry platform. The Z10 features an all-touch interface, and the Q10 has touch and a physical keyboard. The new 10 smartphone platform includes the BlackBerry Hub, a central managing point for all conversations, including e-mail, BBM messages, social media updates, and the ability to see into the Hub from anywhere with a single swipe. Black-Berry Flow enables features and apps to flow seamlessly together, and BBM (BlackBerry Messenger) allows sharing with instantaneous voice calling, video chat, and the ability to share your screen with another BlackBerry 10 con-tact. A built-in balance technology separates and secures work applications and data from personal content on the same smartphone. BlackBerry Remember combines memos, tasks, and more, and there's built-in support for Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync. The BlackBerry World storefront now includes 70,000 BlackBerry 10 apps, music, and video. The Z10 has a dual-core 1.5GHz processor, 16GB of internal memory, 2GB of RAM, and a MicroSD card slot. There are also a USB 2.0 high-speed port and an HDMI

port. The 4.2" display features 1,280 × 768 resolution. Overall size of the smartphone is 5.12" × 2.58" × 0.35", and it weighs 4.78 oz. The rear camera is eight megapixels, and the front camera is two megapixels. The operating system is the new BlackBerry 10 OS. www.blackberry.com/blackberryZ10

Seagate Wireless Plus

The Seagate Wireless Plus mobile device storage was selected by CNET as Best of CES 2013 in the networking and storage category. The palm-size device is designed to wirelessly stream content for up to eight smartphones or tablets simultaneously. It broadcasts its own Wi-Fi network, so you can stream media or files to your smartphone or tablet on the go and off the grid. A free Seagate Media app, available for iOS or Android, enables your mobile device to receive the Wi-Fi signal. The Wireless Plus has a generous 1TB of built-in storage, which is enough for up to 500 movies or thousands of songs, photos, and documents. You can load media or documents wirelessly from PCs or Macs, or you

can use the USB 3.0 adapter. The Wireless Plus has a range of up to 150 feet. With no line of sight required, you can keep the small device in a pocket, your bag, or on a table across the room while accessing its files. You can use the Seagate to stream media to your TV, game consoles, Blu-ray players, and other DLNA devices by connecting your Wireless Plus to your home network via Wi-Fi. The Wireless Plus is 5" × 3.5" × 0.78", and it weighs 9 oz.
www.seagate.com

iSlip Lite

The best way to keep a tablet screen clean and free of fingerprints is to have a microfiber cloth handy. It's definitely safer than using your shirtfront or sleeve, especially if you have bone or metal buttons. The problem with carrying a cleaning cloth around is that

they have a tendency to get lost, especially in the linty bottoms of gear bags. The iSlip Lite is a clever band that slips over your tablet's cover and can be folded out of the way when you open your smart cover or folio. The elastic side faces out, and the inside band is made of microfiber. Slide it off the cover, fold it into a rectangle, and clean the screen. On a cover like iPad's smart cover, you can leave it in place and fold the cover into a triangle with the microfiber side exposed, then use it like a soft squeegee on the screen. The iSlip Lite comes in a variety of colors and prints, and there's also the iSlip TuFF, which has a thicker, high-grade microfiber surface. The iSlips fit 7" and 10" tablets, and there's the KinSlip, which is designed for 7" or 8" tablets and e-readers.
www.Cooper-Product.com

TECH FORUM

Soluble Fish in the Data Streams

By Michael Castelluccio, Editor

While most of us are at least vaguely aware of our carbon footprints, few ever wonder about the digital tracks each of us leaves all over the place. From the first e-mailed photos proudly sent from the delivery room to the last tweets from those attending a memorial service, humans today trail wide flumes of zeros and ones as they navigate their allotted time and space. The amount of data we generate is exploding, and all of this raises a question about the amount of information each of us contributes to a depository completely unanticipated by mankind—"what's that doing to us?"

The accumulation of big data is nothing short of unnerving. Google's Executive Chairman, Eric Schmidt, put it this way: "From the dawn of civilization until 2003, humankind generated five exabytes of data. Now we produce five exabytes every two days, and the pace is accelerating."

So what happens when you have too much information—a blanketing, snow-blinding blizzard of information? Let's put a yardstick in a few of the drifts.

Juan Enriquez, the founding director of the Harvard Business School's Life Sciences Project, wrote in *Reflections in a Digital Mirror*, "In 1986, only 6% of the world's data was digital, and 'www' was still three years away. There was no Google. Today, more than 99% of the world's written words, images, music, and data are transmitted in the two-letter Boolean alphabet of 1s and 0s."

Put the stick in over here. Enriquez adds, "Now every hour, the amount of information generated by the human race increases by about 80 petabytes." (A petabyte is 10^{15} bytes—a 10 followed by 15 zeros.)

Try over there. The global market intelligence firm IDC claims, "In 2011, we played, swam, wallowed, and drowned in 1.8 zettabytes of data." (A zettabyte is a trillion gigabytes and is bigger than an exabyte—zettas are 10^{21}, and exas are 10^{18}).

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Okay, let's put the yardstick away; the snowpile is obviously over the roof.

The metaphors are varied and colorful—we're blinded, buried, wallowing, swimming, drowning in big data—but what, if anything, is all of this information doing to us?

DEPENDENCE

Because some of these statistics about the recent data explosion come as a surprise, perhaps that indicates that we weren't paying attention. Maybe the new climate arrived silently, overnight. And by the time we began to notice, overwhelmed, we handed over the management of this new environment to our desktops, the smart chips in our cars and appliances, and our iPhones. We fill our homes with Wi-Fi networks, connecting to clouds whose location we're clueless about and an Internet that sends our requests to who knows where. Spreadsheets have eclipsed the sharpened pencil, and modern physics has entered its own mathematical Twilight Zone. Big data is accompanied by a perplexing complexity.

On one level, all this information and complexity will make us all smarter—depending, of course, on how you define "smarter." Enriquez points out that, "Today, a street fruit stall in Mumbai can access more information, maps, statistics, academic papers, price trends, futures marketing, and data than a U.S. president could only a few decades ago." The information is there, and all the fruit seller has to do is turn on his cellphone to open the door.

On another level, we don't function very well in these atmospheres without machine filtering. Take away the locating and sorting done by your favorite search engine, and what happens to the Internet? It will shrink to the very small list of your favorite sites. Computing machines have a critical, increasing role in the process. The fruit seller knows that it's all out there, but where and what's there waits on the circuits in his phone and the algorithms on search servers.

HOLD ON

The amount of data won't decrease. In *Macrowikinomics*, Anthony D. Williams warns, "Distribute billions and perhaps trillions of connected sensors around the planet—just as we are doing today—and virtually every animate and inanimate object on Earth could be generating and transmitting data, including our homes, our cars, our natural and man-made environments, and yes, even our bodies."

Here's a sampling of new streams feeding the cataract:

Intel-GE Care Innovations has prototyped something called the Magic Carpet, which is a carpet that has embedded sensors and accelerometers that read and send data about an elderly resident's movements, pace, and time-/space-related daily events. Data alerts are sent to family and/or physicians when anomalies occur.

New IEMs (ingestible event machines) from Proteus Digital Health can be embedded in small tablets that dissolve when swallowed, exposing an integrated circuit and a thin film battery that can monitor and broadcast a wide variety of health indicators.

Kate Greene ("Our Data, Ourselves") describes a new health initiative called Self-Tracking. It involves meticulously logging your own habits such as sleep patterns, walking speeds, heart rates, calories consumed, and so on.

And then there are the social media. Facebook has a reported 955 million monthly accounts in 70 languages. Some interpret these numbers as proof that 10% of the planet is now socially connected. Not a surprising conclusion with 30 billion pieces of content posted every day, along with 2.7 billion likes and comments.

Angel investor Esther Dyson claims the Computer Age is over, replaced by a "Copernican Revolution" in knowledge that she suggests might be called the Informatics Age. It's Copernican because "humans will no longer be the center of the data solar system, with all of the billions of devices orbiting around us, but will rather become just another player, another node, in an increasingly autonomous data universe." As a caution, Dyson reminds us that despite the promise, we need to be aware that "Big Data is taking the concept of 'messing with something' to a level that humanity has never experienced before." (See her essay, "Pulse of the Planet," in the book *The Human Face of Big Data*.)

In 1924, Surrealist André Breton introduced the century to the weird concept of the soluble fish—a creature that, in time, dissolves into its own native environment. In his manifesto, Breton asks, "Am I not the soluble fish, I was born under the sign of Pisces, and man is soluble in his thought." Is it possible that we're a version of that species, now struggling in our data streams whose currents are becoming rapids? Were the quants on Wall Street, like their formulas, dissolved by the very data streams they created? Are the particle physicists now in depths and dimensions that have turned off the lights of their own understanding? Are we so dependent on our digital connectors that our devices now interpret for us? And how do we step back to see enough of the big picture just to understand what we are "messing with" without resorting to Google? **SF**