



Help Your Clients by Participating in Accountant Network Programs

Column: From the Trenches

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We can help our clients the most if we have the right people with the right training, guided by the right partners with the right attitude and leveraged with the right alliances for our client base. It seems like vendors pursue firms so much that we ignore them all and fail to act even when the right program comes along. Each program covered in this article has enough value, that I have no issue recommending membership, including the payment and training requirements, because the value is far higher than your commitment to the program. I won't try to list every possible program for tax and accounting firms, but it is clear that you should at least consider the following partner programs:

HP CPA DISCOUNT PROGRAM

Hewlett Packard has been friendly to accountants and finance professionals for years. The commitment is far higher than a discount or affinity program. HP provides content, webinars and discounts to accounting professionals, and often creates specific products targeted at the accounting profession. They have also produced accounting-specific articles and webinars such as one produced in the 4th quarter on improving productivity. HP provides newsletter updates written for the accounting profession, and is not intrusive with promotion if you participate in its programs.

PROADVISOR, PROCONNECTION & ONLINE RESOURCE

Intuit has three different resources for accounting professionals. The ProAdvisor Program provides software and tools to help you grow your practice and support clients more efficiently. When you join the QuickBooks ProAdvisor Program, you get premium software, QuickBooks Certification opportunities, a listing on the Find-a-ProAdvisor website, unlimited technical support from the Tucson-based, accountant-specific support center, and product discounts. The Intuit ProConnection is a free newsletter that helps you in your accounting, bookkeeping, consultant or tax business. Valuable articles have been created by trusted authors including a long-time associate, Dr. Bob Spencer. The articles can help you provide better service to your clients, with information on Intuit products, tips on building and managing your client base, and practice aids like engagement letters or tax information letters to help you with day-to-day issues. The Online Resource provides information for tax, payroll, practice resources, training and certifications. Also available are links to Intuit products and services by category including TurboTax, payroll software, checks, business cards and other personal products, Quicken, QuickBase, Lacerte and ProSeries. Intuit is focused on working with tax and accounting professionals to improve their practices while supporting small business clients.

SSAN (SAGE SOFTWARE ACCOUNTANTS NETWORK)

Sage Software Accountants Network provides accounting professionals with access to information, software and support to better serve your clients. Membership provides you with an additional channel to communicate with other accountants and stay informed with the latest industry updates, as well as access to special offerings for the tools you need to better manage your practice. Four key benefits

include software and services at substantially reduced rates, an online networking community, discounts for you and your clients, and practice management tools and training. Software that can be purchased in the Accountants Network includes ACT! by Sage, Peachtree by Sage, Sage Abra HRMS, Sage Accpac ERP, Sage BusinessWorks, Sage FAS Fixed Assets, Sage MAS 90, Sage Master Builder, Sage MIP Fund Accounting, Sage Timberline Office, and Timeslips by Sage. Ample customer support is available depending on the program you choose. SSAN provides discounts for online training through Sage Software University. Sage also helps coordinate local support with an authorized Sage Software channel partner. Many of these partners will offer up to eight hours of free consultation services to new SSAN members. A Sage Accountants Network Member Locator provides exposure to the thousands of Sage Software customers looking for an accountant that specializes in Sage products.

MPAN (MICROSOFT PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS' NETWORK)

Microsoft has both a free program and an option that has an annual fee, which we recommend highly. Membership in the basic Microsoft Professional Accountants' Network costs nothing and provides access to products, training and support specifically for accounting professionals. Microsoft's goal is to help you grow your practice and reinforce your role as a trusted advisor to your clients. Key features of the program include free unlimited support until September 2009, access to managed newsgroups and a complimentary license of Microsoft Office Accounting Professional. A fairly new feature of the program is Office Accounting Customization that is only available for MPAN members in Microsoft Office Accounting Express (Microsoft's free, small business accounting program designed for entry-level users). This allows you to embed your firm's name on a tab in the Navigation Bar on the screen's left side, as well as on the menu and links to your services within the user interface. Additionally, free training and promotion is available along with free CPE training and a free online directory listing for your firm. An additional benefit of this program is the option to subscribe to the Microsoft Action Pack, which provides \$10,000+ of Microsoft software, including MS Office and server licensing to support up to 10 users in your firm for \$299/year. To qualify to renew, a simple test is required each year.

BUSINESSONECPA FROM SAP

SAP has two programs to support tax and accounting professionals who recommend accounting software to their clients. One program is a referral program, and one is more of a partnership program. SAP has a long-standing commitment to the accounting community in an effort strongly supported by CPA Steve Ernst who has been with the SAP team after being involved with the development of the IOMega product line. SAP wants to assist businesses to accommodate growth from startup to wherever they want to be with their Business One, Business By Design and All-in-One product offerings. These programs are designed to support practitioners who make the recommendations or possibly serve in outsourced CEO/CFO/CIO roles.

All of these programs are designed to give you knowledge, tools and additional support to answer client questions about applications and options for their business. As a trusted advisor for your clients, don't you want to give your team members the best possible information and capability? And in the end, don't you want to provide the best, profitable client advisement?

PARTNER PROGRAMS TO CONSIDER

- HP CPA Discount Program – www.hp.com/accounting
- Intuit Online Resource for Accounting and Tax Professionals – <http://accountant.intuit.com>
- Intuit ProConnection Program – <http://accountant.intuit.com/memberprograms/proconnection/index.aspx?lid=body1>
- Intuit QuickBooks Professional Advisors Program – http://accountant.intuit.com/member_programs/qb_advisor/index.html
- Microsoft Professional Accountants' Network (MPAN) – www.microsoft.com/cpampan

- SAP BusinessOneCPA Advisor Program – www.sap.com/solutions/smb/businessone/cpa.aspx
- SAP Partners – www.sap.com/usa/ecosystem/partners/partnerwithsap/index.epx
- Sage Software Accountants Network (SSAN) – www.sageaccountantsnetwork.com