



TECHNOLOGY

Should CPAs switch to Windows 10 or Office 2016?

The *JofA*'s annual gathering of accounting technology experts examines the newest major Microsoft releases and identifies the most exciting technologies on the horizon.

By Jeff Drew



Let's talk about Windows 10. What have you seen from it so far, and what should CPAs be considering in whether to switch to it?

Collins: I've personally seen Windows 10 work very well after a fresh reboot, but as new updates are downloaded and await installation, Windows 10 starts periodically displaying the "not responding" notification whenever you launch or switch to an application. The lesson I've learned is that Windows 10 has to be frequently rebooted. And in much the same way I believe this could be the year for my college football team to go all the way, I hold high hopes that each new Windows 10 patch will fix everything. But, unfortunately, that hasn't happened yet. So right now I would advise CPAs on Windows 7 and 8 to stick on those platforms until we learn that Windows 10's "not responding" issues have been resolved.

Cieslak: While I appreciate some of the concerns that Carlton has shared, I really think the benefits far outweigh some of those concerns, with security being the single biggest reason. The actual undercarriage of the Windows operating system was redone with Windows 8, and that has now progressed into Windows 10. It is far and away the most secure operating system that Microsoft has ever put forth. Digital verification of drivers all but ensures that any kind of bootkit or rootkit can't make its way into rooting out the machine. The Edge browser itself is a far more secure browser than Internet Explorer.

As for the proactive pushing of patches back to the end-user machines, while some people may say, "Hey, I'm an adult, I'll make my own decisions regarding patching," the reality is too many people were either ignoring or opting out of installing critical patches. So Microsoft has taken a more proactive role in terms of pushing those back to end-user machines. Again, I think we're finding ourselves getting more secure and better placed as a result of Windows 10 in aggregate, not worse off.

But to Carlton's point, while we recommend implementing Windows 10 on all new machines, I am not as big a proponent in terms of rolling

As the accounting profession emerges from another busy season and approaches the midpoint of the year, many CPAs find themselves facing several key decisions related to technology. And, as often is the case, questions related to Microsoft are near the top of the list.

- Should CPAs embrace the Windows 10 operating system? If they are running Windows 7 or Windows 8, should they switch to Windows 10?
- What new features does Office 2016 offer? If CPAs are using Office 2013, should they switch to Office 2016?
- Should CPAs jump to an Office 365 subscription instead of updating every few years with the traditional, downloaded version of Office?

To help CPAs answer these and other technology-related questions, the *JofA* gathered three of the profession's top technology minds for the magazine's annual accounting technology round table. The *JofA* interviewed the experts—David Cieslak, J. Carlton Collins, and Lisa Traina—in a February conference call. They addressed several topics in a wide-ranging discussion. The *JofA* has produced an edited transcript of the conversation that will run in two parts. The first part addresses the aforementioned Microsoft questions in addition to discussions on whether Apple is safer than Microsoft and which are the most exciting technologies on the horizon. Part 2, which will appear in the July *JofA*, explores the proper technology priorities for CPAs, the evolving security landscape, and emerging technologies that could disrupt the accounting profession.

Profiles of the panelists appear on page 52, and the first part of the edited transcript follows.

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David Cieslak

[Windows] 10 on top of an existing Windows 7 machine or Windows 8 machine. We don't believe you have to clean house or even weed out those machines.

(Update: After the tech round table conference call, Collins gave up on trying Windows 10 on his older computers and bought new Dell XPS computers with 8 i7 core CPUs, 16 gigabytes of RAM, and a 2 terabyte hard drive including a solid-state drive component. He reports that the results have been "outstanding," and his recommendation is that Windows 7, 8, and 8.1 users stay put until they are ready for a new computer and then fully embrace a new Windows 10 computer.)

Collins: I agree that after reboot Windows 10 is awesome, but I do not agree that the Edge browser is awesome. In my opinion, it's not ready for prime time. Several websites that I use regularly don't even work properly on Microsoft Edge, and I have to constantly change over to the [Google] Chrome browser to get the job done.

Cieslak: That's valid because Edge doesn't support extensions just yet, and that has created some real functional limitations.

Traina: Let me chime in and say that I could be a whole different realm of contrarian and say just move to an Apple platform, but that probably might not be popular among certain crowds.

Of your clients, Lisa, how many are Apple versus Microsoft?

Traina: It's still way, way tilted toward Microsoft, and that's because many of them have applications that won't run on an Apple platform. But as we see people moving more to exclusively accessing applications in the cloud through a web browser, we are starting to see more Apple systems. It's still a tiny percentage, but it is happening somewhat.

Is the Apple environment more secure?

Traina: I think it's inherently more secure for a couple of reasons. One, they just build in a little bit more security ▶

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THE PANELISTS



David Cieslak, CPA/CITP, CGMA, GSEC, principal and founder of Arxis Technology Inc. and a popular technology speaker known as Inspector Gadget.



J. Carlton Collins, CPA, the CEO of ASA Research and author of the *JofA's* monthly Technology Q&A column.



Lisa Traina, CPA/CITP, CGMA, founder and owner of Traina & Associates, which provides information systems and IT security audit and consulting services to business clients.

to some of their systems and devices. Second, because most of the world uses Microsoft systems, and there are so many different versions of those, hackers find those systems to be easier targets. With Apple, there are fewer versions, and those tend to be pretty nailed down.

Cieslak: What Lisa is describing is what we in the security world call security through obscurity. In years past, Apple was definitely a much smaller part of the computing landscape. Therefore, not a lot of people bothered with hacking it. By design, is Apple software more secure? Because they make their own hardware and software, they do have the advantage of having a kind of closed system. But overall, Apple, just like any other company that depends on people who write code, isn't perfect, and so that's where vulnerabilities are discovered and exploited.

Collins: The majority of data breaches are not related to specific operating systems or platforms; more often data breaches are linked to laptops that are stolen from cars, offices, and overhead bins in airplanes. Additionally, trusted employees who steal customer, member, and employee data behind the scenes also account for a significant number of data breaches. There are many types of security breaches that have little to do with the specific platform or operating system you run; therefore, running one specific

platform probably won't meaningfully mitigate your security risks.

Of course, the vast majority of CPAs are in a Microsoft environment, and I would say the vast majority of those rely on Office quite a bit. Is there anything new on that front in Office 2016? And, obviously, Microsoft is pushing more and more for people to go with Office 365. What's the landscape in the Office space right now?

Collins: As you know, I'm typically pro-Microsoft everything, and Office 2016 is a great product, but the small list of new improvements compared to Office 2013 offers very little to get excited about. Microsoft does tout standard Excel 2016's new business intelligence tools, but those tools were already available in Excel Professional 2013. So they're not really new features. Most Office 2013 users will likely not notice anything new with [Office] 2016, except maybe that moving files now requires an additional annoying mouse click to navigate to your desired folder. I would say if you pay for Office using Microsoft's Office 365 subscription service, which you should, by the way, then upgrading to Office 2016 is a simple step that costs you nothing. However, if you still purchase Office, then upgrading from 2013 to 2016 probably is not a justified expense.

Cieslak: I would 100% agree with everything Carlton just said.

Wow, that's concise. And possibly unprecedented.

Cieslak: I know, right? I will throw in that I agree it's not quite as compelling given the limited new features; I think a lot of it was meant to be viewed from consistency across platforms. So when you opened up Office 2016 on a Windows-based machine versus

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Lisa Traina

opening up the Office app on your iOS-based devices, it looks and feels and behaves in a much more consistent fashion. I am a pretty big fan of Office 365. And Microsoft, for its part, will continue to seek ways to create value for active subscribers of Office 365, whether it's PowerPoint templates or an additional functionality within the app. I think we'll see the 365 subscribers become the "in crowd" for Microsoft, while nonsubscribers will become the have-nots. But that's in the years to come.

What technology are you most excited about?

Traina: I think the whole concept of the sharing economy is going to continue to be both disrupting and transformative. Uber, Airbnb, RelayRides (now rebranded as Turo), and sharing sites like those have really impacted traveling and lodging, and peer-to-peer lending is out there with Lending Club and things like that. So are we going to see a peer-to-peer tax prep site to connect taxpayers and accountants, AirCPA or something? With people getting used to going through an app to find whatever it is they need in life, what's to say that the sharing economy won't come to CPAs? Now, I'm not going to dare to get into the regulated nature of the business, but it's something to ponder.

Cieslak: That's a great point. That's called the gig economy. It is definitely notorious for potentially impacting all professions, the CPA profession included.

Traina: Here's the thing I'm excited about that I would really encourage other CPAs and firms to pursue. We

perform IT audits rather than the traditional financial statement audits, but we're still performing an engagement that requires us to send auditors to client locations. And as anyone that has had this job knows, the travel and long days of being away from home eventually can lead to burnout. So we've always tried to reduce the time that auditors spend away on the road by handling anything we could off-site.

This year we took another step forward to try and minimize the time on the road and help with the employee burnout issue. For every engagement, we will continue to send an auditor on-site to perform certain procedures because someone has to actually look at computers and things, but much of our work involves interviews and gathering of information, documents, and facts. So we have started using videoconferencing for our auditors to meet with clients. What that means is one person goes on-site rather than a team, and that person sets up interviews (via video with our personnel off-site) and performs the necessary on-site work, while the other auditors assigned to that job are back at their office performing a majority of the audit work.

When we implemented this, we immediately cut the number of travel days per auditor almost in half, and we started seeing a drop in field expenses to the client. We were a little unsure how the client would receive this because we didn't want to be out of sight, out of mind. So we tested the waters slowly, but what has surprised me and makes me excited is the clients seem to love it and they think it's innovative. I

am very excited about this, but it's going to take a big shift in the mindset of CPAs. It wasn't even feasible until we had the technology that was available and affordable, not to mention that people are much more comfortable with the concept due to the popularity of Skype and [Apple] FaceTime.

Collins: I don't mean to be a Debbie Downer, but videoconferencing was a big craze about 1998, and a lot of companies have jumped on that bandwagon only to find out the hard way that, when they lost face-to-face contact with their customers, their customer retention suffered greatly. Some companies reportedly took up to five years to gain back the customer base they had enjoyed prior to implementing videoconferencing. I would advise people in industries where face-to-face contact is important to jump on videoconferencing as a supplement to, not replacement of, your client/customer communications.

Traina: Excellent point, and we are sensitive to that. We do still have people on-site, and we might have more interim or drop-in visits because that is a risk that we're sensitive to and trying to manage.

Collins: Without question my favorite 2015 technology is my Epson WorkForce Pro WF-4640 EcoTank All-in-One duplexing color printer (as a personal or small group printer). Not only is this printer a beast that produces high-quality results, I don't miss having to run out to purchase and replace color toner cartridges all the time. Supposedly, one set of cartridges in the new EcoTank print will last the average user two years (assuming a typical amount of printing). In addition, I'm glad to see that unbreakable waterproof smartphones like the Motorola Droid Turbo 2 are now available. And I predict it will be a big hit. Most CPAs I know are tired of traditional smartphones that shatter easily, forcing

them to either fork out big bucks for a replacement or put up with a screen that looks like it was designed by Picasso. The bulky phone protectors are not a great answer. While Gorilla Glass covers do help some, they don't prevent cracks when you drop the phone on a corner, and they make it annoyingly difficult to pull my phone out of my pocket.

Cieslak: A piece of technology that I would mention that I think is really poised to be really significant is in and around virtual reality. It really is going to change the way all of us potentially consume entertainment. Specifically, you're able to put on a set of virtual-reality goggles and watch content as if you were attending that event—whether it's a NASCAR race and you're in the pit crew or an NBA game courtside or taking a hike in the mountains and you're able to look up, look down, turn around, and look behind you. It is absolutely spectacular what that does for an end-user experience.

I think what you're going to find is that all the types of entertainment companies are going to be not only looking to produce content, but you're going to have all sorts of organizations saying how can we further monetize content and present that to end users. So while I may not be a regular attendee of, say, maybe a Golden State Warriors basketball game, I still have an opportunity for not near as much money to virtually sit courtside and watch just some great basketball viewed through some virtual-reality type of product. I think we're probably still 12 months out on it kind of hitting its stride. ■

About the author

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