

How software can reduce next year's frenzy

At all stages in your business, technology can make you more efficient and more proactive

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The annual 60-day RRSP frenzy has come and gone and you and your staff have survived it once again. Now is a good time to look back and ask yourself if you were as efficient as you could have been at what is often the busiest time of the year. Also, you might ask what role technology played in your business process.

David Stevenson, president of **PowerAssist Technologies Ltd.** and a consultant in automated portfolio and client-management solutions, says only about 5% of individuals in any given industry aggressively take advantage of technology. Those 5% are the people who always have the latest and greatest of every product. Most people, however, are reluctant to embrace technology, often because of a fear of the unknown, not being aware of what's available or simply not knowing how easy to use software has become.

Stevenson, whose firm has offices in Vancouver and Waterdown, Ont., has consulted with advisors and corporations across Canada. He has come to the conclusion that many professionals are not utilizing technology to their advantage.

"When the software industry first began, packages were difficult to learn," he says from his office in Waterdown. "Today, good software solutions are designed with the user in mind." This makes implementation and training fast and easy.

As an advisor, you face a number of challenges in today's technology-driven environment. You need to generate, process and control business leads and opportunities. You also must have database management control; improve internal and manual processes; improve customer relationships and service; increase productivity; have staff accountability; and reduce costs and duplication of efforts.

As your business grows along with your client base, you seriously run the risk of having things fall through the cracks if you are not using technology to help support the business, he says. Regardless of the stage in your career, Stevenson insists, technology does make you a better business person.

He says an advisor goes through certain stages in the course of operating his or her business. The earlier stages focus on efficiency, and the latter stages involve making significant revenue gains as well as maximizing efficiency.

In the beginning, you are just getting started and have to learn the forms and procedures. The next stage is contact management. At this stage, you should be using a computer, incorporating a word-processing program, a spreadsheet and a financial planning package along with some of your back-office functions.

Two years into the business, you are at the growth stage, at which a snowball effect takes place. You know the workflow and how to organize your workdays. The problem many advisors face at this juncture is the rapid increase in the number of clients they're serving.

Stevenson says at this point you are probably more reactive than proactive. You've gone from growth management and getting clients to making sure the relationships you've established remain secure and grow stronger. Many advisors, when they reach this point, begin losing contact with clients and actually start forgetting who they are. Hiring more staff is usually the first remedy to this problem. At the final stage, you have a team in place. The issue is not only managing client relationships but also managing your entire book of business. So if you want to make a change in an investment, you must identify all clients who fall into that category, notify them and then automate the whole portfolio transaction.

Even with the success many advisors across the country enjoy, Stevenson is surprised by the number of individuals who still do not have or resist using any sort of client-management solution despite the obvious advantages. At a minimum, it will save having to re-enter basic client information repeatedly. Having up-to-date and accurate current information will also tie into other client-contact activities, such as completing tasks, making phone calls and even using your calendar.

All the tasks and activities done on behalf of a client in a good contact system will automatically register.

As the advisor acquires more clients, it becomes even more important to set up processes within the contact-management system. This means more than just name, address, phone number and so on. It also means managing the business and using a software package that is easy to operate and helps you become more proactive.

Stevenson says a good advisor doesn't go insane with work in February. A good advisor takes his or her vacation in February. ie

Next month: What makes a good software package for managing client accounts.