

White Paper

Using software in the 'cloud' to help branding and promotion

Author : Julian Shaw, November 2008

Topics

- Explain how online white labelled software works
- Explain how it can be used by accountants to improve branding
- Show that customer satisfaction can be improved and why this is important
- Suggest promotion of other services can be achieved by using this point of contact

Abstract:

This paper explains briefly how online software works. It then shows how the particular structure of such software lends itself to improving branding, promotion and marketing functions for businesses, by focussing on client satisfaction and brand awareness. Finally it applies these principles to the specific needs of accountancy practice.

The Problem:

"Cloud computing" - "Software as a Service" - "Web 2.0"

We have all heard the phrases above: they are mentioned regularly when articles are written about the new wave of computing. But what do they mean? And why will it affect your business? How can it help you market your practice? The answer, although fairly straightforward, requires explaining.

As everyone knows, traditional software has limitations because it is installed on individual computers. This leads to major drawbacks when disseminating information and collaborating on work. Computers are isolated in effect - unless they are part of a network. Essentially, a central computer acts as a 'hub' with a series of computers connected to as if on the spokes of a wheel. This allows for more connections between the computers.

The web is in effect a huge network, except with a myriad of central 'hubs'. (This is technically inaccurate, but the analogy is useful.) This allows for connections between computers that are geographically and temporally distant, \built on the infrastructure of the internet.

Our whole technology is built on the idea that computers are interconnected in this way. 'The Cloud' and 'Web 2.0' are merely a progression of this idea. The basis of the system has not changed radically.

Rather than software sitting on an individual computer, or in a closed network, it runs from a central point and is accessed whenever it is needed.

NOTES:

Outline of topics

"On-demand" accounting software used by clients can help marketing for your practice.

What is cloud computing? What is its relevance to your accountancy practice?

"Traditional" accounting software is very inflexible.

However, the way that structure is used has seen an almost revolutionary upheaval in the last couple of years. The advent of software such as Google Mail, Facebook, YouTube and the like have shown that we can interact with the web in ways we are only now beginning to appreciate.

Web 2.0 apps are revolutionising the way we use software and the internet.

And one of those ways is the fact that software does not need to sit on an individual computer. It can sit on a remote server and be accessed via the internet; bringing many clear advantages.

Remote software can be more flexible.

As the software sits remotely, it is possible for it to be much more flexible when it is accessed. A good example is the new AOL portal. It is possible to tailor the web page to show the colours you prefer. If you like a blue web page, you can make it blue; if you like green, it can be green. All you need to do is choose the colour once, and the web page will 'remember' your preference.

Precisely this flexibility is why using the new style of internet based software can help you market your business.

Flexibility brings new branding possibilities.

Marketing has many aspects, and most of them are based on image. Your brand name; the colours your business uses; your logo. They all add to the image people have of your business. And the important thing with all of them is that people – new clients and existing clients – are aware of them. And that they maintain that awareness.

In today's rapidly moving market, keeping your name vital is becoming more and more difficult. How do you keep your name in your clients' minds; and how do you get new clients to know about it?

Online software can help. The easiest way to do this is have your own website, and promote that. Almost all businesses have one – it is almost a given. There is another level to web technology that is available to you, a much more interactive one.

Most online software is now so flexible that it can be branded – white-labelled – as your own software / system. Through a pain-free process, a version of the software is created in your image. Your logo can be shown, your company colours used, and your overall style incorporated. To all intents and purposes, the system is yours.

White labelling allows you to put your name and image online easily.

Since the power of this format was been recognised, software developers have been working both to identify areas that it can be used and to implement systems to accommodate them. To date, it has been utilised in web seminar software, human resources functions, accounting solutions, whole website creation, online casinos, internet shopping sites and many more. And more examples will be rolled out regularly.

Many types of software can be white labelled, including accounting software.

Having your company name or brand in front of your clients all the time has immense value for marketing, in a number of ways:

- **Awareness**
Your clients see your brand every time they use your system. Your name becomes ingrained with them.
- **Image**
Using the latest technology shows how progressive your business can be and that you are not content to stick with existing ways of working.

- **Customer Relations**
Your clients have access to the very latest technology. It is you that is providing this, not the software house.

So, how can this help an accountancy practice? Quite simply an online accounting system has all the above advantages, but as applied to the particular ways accountants work, plus advantages that come from other areas. Our other white papers have explored how accounting software can be used by your clients to help your practice.

Accounting software fits this model perfectly.

On top of the advantages in practical terms, there is the very powerful message you are giving to your clients when they use a good service with your name on it. Very often disillusionment of clients comes from the fact that they feel as though your job happens only once per year. There is a feeling of being unconnected.

Clients get a **positive message** about your practice. You are always seen to be **looking after** your client.

Online accounting software solves this in a very subtle way. As your client is using your system constantly, you are always in touch with them. They feel as though your practice is guiding them, providing a service whenever they use it. You are not actually doing any work at that time, but your customers feel that they are being "looked after".

Whilst not quite "hand-holding", the presence of your name can engender a feeling of comfort and confidence in your practice. The perceived value of your service can only increase from this.

Confidence increases with use, as does the **perceived value** of your service.

You will also have the added kudos that comes from using the very latest technology. Your clients will be familiar with the internet, and if you can show you are using it to their benefit, you will portray your practice as forward thinking and able to move with the times.

But accountancy is a very traditional business, so this transition to more technological methods needs to be dealt with carefully, and the best software will use the power of new techniques whilst retaining the existing ethos of the accountant taking care of a business's finances. This can be done with online software because it can give you access to the client's records instantly. It may not appear it, but this is part of the marketing of your practice. You are showing yourself to have control over the record keeping process, whereas in reality you may not need to access your clients' records often.

Traditional values are not jeopardised as you have overall control.

A final benefit from using the web is communication. And effective communication is crucial to marketing. As online systems necessarily use the internet, lines of contact are open between you and your clients. They can ask you questions, and you can answer them in a very ordered fashion. More importantly, your clients will know that they can contact you easily. That you are there if needed is a very powerful and confidence building message to give to your clients – again you are marketing your practice all the time.

Effective, positive communication is an important part of marketing.

This efficiency of communication also means you may be able to marketing other services. If you provide bench-marking services or financial consultancy, for instance, you can reach all your clients with no cost to you. Again though, this is effective marketing as, provided it is done correctly, you will be showing the range of services that you can offer and thereby the care and attention your practice provides to your clients.

Product promotion is easier with effective communication.

Bear in mind that marketing does not just mean selling. Once you have a client, then it is important to carry on promoting your services. By using white labelled software, presenting your company name regularly, you can create and maintain a very strong, positive image of your business. This is a very effective way of marketing.

Marketing is **more than selling.**

Conclusion

By harnessing the connectivity possible over the internet, developers have created a whole new way of looking at the way we use computer software: Web 2.0; Cloud computing; Software as a Service. These terms may be jargon and current buzz-words, but they are important and will change the way software is used at some point by almost everyone who uses a computer.

The power of new online software can be harnessed to help your brand.

One way this change has manifested itself is in the use of white labelled software; where a generic system shows the branding of a particular organisation for their users.

White labelling puts your practice name in front of clients.

Particularly suited to the format is accounting software. This can be used by accounting practices to help maintain and build brand awareness. Not only that, savings can be made through more efficient working practices.

Marketing is effectively creating an image in a person's mind of the benefits they can get from buying your product. An accountancy practice provides a product by way of a range of accounting services.

Marketing is as much about maintaining an image as it is creating one. White labelled accounting software can do this very effectively. It shows your practice name continually – in a positive way – that increases recognition; it allows for efficient communication; it opens possibilities for other areas of marketing; it offers kudos to your practice; and finally, most importantly, it lets your clients know, throughout the year, that you are taking care of their business.

In short, using white labelled systems helps you remind your clients the real value of the services you provide without you having to tell them.