

*The Evolution of the ProAdvisor Role:
From Bookkeeping & QuickBooks Training to
Working With, & Becoming, a Developer – Part I*

As a long-time bookkeeper, I have been using and supporting Intuit products since 1986. First using Quicken and then QuickBooks (since Version 1 in DOS), a ProAdvisor since 1999, a developer of QuickBooks add-on software since 2000, an Intuit Developer Network (IDN) Premier member since 2001, and heavily participating in the IDNAC since August 2003; I have seen the role of the QuickBooks ProAdvisor evolve dramatically in my own life as well as the lives of other Advisors and want to share my experiences.

During the '90's when I had an active bookkeeping practice, it included:

1. Weekly visits to 15 clients to 'do their books,' including payroll, quarterlies, and year-end
2. Consulting/Training engagements conducted on-site to evaluate their QuickBooks file; assist them in the 'clean-up' needed, teach them to do things the right way, and perhaps a quarterly or semi-annual review on an on-going basis
3. QuickBooks Setup & Training – either one-on-one or in a classroom environment, which would lead to on-going training sessions as needed

Back then things were pretty definitive as to what QuickBooks could or couldn't do. For example, if I was asked "Can I track Union Benefits or Retainage in QuickBooks?" The answer was Yes. But if a client asked "Can QuickBooks do a certified payroll report or an AIA billing?" The answer was always No.

The No answers always led to discussions of "how can I accomplish this?" The discussions always resulted with the same answers:

1. Switch to a higher end (more costly) program with those capabilities
2. Complicated spreadsheets, running numerous reports in QuickBooks and manually entering data

Everyone grumbled, everyone complained...but in the end they all bit the bullet in resignation and spent countless hours doing things manually, with less than stellar results I might add. We all know the stories of frustration, duplicate data entry, time-consuming, and error prone processes. In one form or another; we all became spreadsheet accountants, much to our own dismay.

The need for automation...

For me the need for automating tedious, error-prone, and time-consuming tasks started back in 1996; when I took on a large highway bridge building contractor as a bookkeeping client, whose then \$30,000.00 construction specific software failed to do what they had paid the additional money for - a program to deal with multiple unions and multiple states.

I was faced with the daunting task of doing payroll for 105 employees working on 5 Federal Highway projects requiring certified payroll reports, subject to 3 different Unions for Dues and 2 different Unions for Benefits! This client and their requirements was a full-time job in itself; but I still had 15 other clients that I also needed to provide services for. I won't bore you with the details, because I'm sure at one point you have all had this type of client at one time or another.

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The quest for automation solutions.....

Creating heavily filtered, memorized reports, exporting as much data as possible from QuickBooks into Excel, creating cumbersome and complicated Excel spreadsheets helped to automate these tasks to a degree, but I always kept thinking that there "had to be a better way".

That "better way" in my mind, included being able to access information that I had already entered in QuickBooks, and use it, automatically...without all of the manipulation tasks. In my way of thinking this could be accomplished...after all, there was a Peachtree add-on that would create certified payrolls at the time...just not in the state specific format that I needed.

The search for automation.....

Thus began my 4 year search for a means to automate this daunting task.

Anyone who said that they wrote software heard my tale of woe, and most often I was told that I was "crazy, a nutcase, or asked **why** I would want this kind of functionality for a low-end accounting program like QuickBooks?" some even suggested that the QuickBooks database was totally unreliable....

The "why" was an easy question to answer. QuickBooks was quickly becoming "the" bookkeeping package of choice for a growing number of small to medium sized businesses because of its ease of use.

However for these same businesses, purchasing costly high-end construction specific software that had these types of capabilities already built-in; simply wasn't an option. For many of them it all boiled down to money and choices.....would they rather spend \$10-30,000.00 on software or equipment? For the contractor, the equipment always won.

Finding a means to make automation possible....

In February 2000 I met Ben Smyth (now my husband). Ben had written software since his teens as part of a family owned business that dealt with cash registers and then large retailers like Ames. He was currently living in Montana and writing complex payroll software for cities, counties, schools and the Indian Reservations through his own business.

By August 2000 I was living in Montana with Ben; who showed a "real" interest in automating complex tasks like certified payroll and AIA billing; we just needed to find a reliable method of extracting the data from QuickBooks and .iif was not a reliable or viable source.

We found a tool called **OfficeQPro** which claimed to be able to read every transaction from QuickBooks, as long as the QuickBooks file was closed. So we bought the product, it did exactly what it claimed to do, and **Sunburst Software Solutions, Inc.** was born. Thus the start of another new journey....and many additional challenges, which I'll discuss later.

That's it for this month. Next month I'll talk about working with a programmer (aka Developer) and my own transition from Bookkeeper/ProAdvisor to Developer.

Until then.....

Nancy

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