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HOW TO AVOID
THE 16-HOUR WORKDAY
DURING TAX BUSY SEASON

Osborne & Osborne CPAs, LCC

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**Osborne & Osborne CPAs, LLC
Share Their Firm's Story**

Interviewed: Tom Osborne, CPA,
Osborne & Osborne CPAs, LLC

Osborne & Osborne CPAs, LLC

Stats at a Glance

Goals: Leverage technology to maintain reasonable hours without losing business, despite limited staff.

Office locations: Madelia, MN

Employees: 6

Website: www.osbornecpas.com

Technology of choice: Virtual UltraTax, 1040SCAN PRO, 1040SCANverify, SPbinder

Introduction

Many tax professionals work exhausting hours during tax busy season. Due to staffing shortages, firms have no choice but to impose demanding schedules, which leads to accounting burnout and attrition. The problem is cyclical. Over time, unsustainable labor practices backfire on the bottom line.

This is not inevitable. There are solutions.

Osborne & Osborne CPAs, LCC is a small firm based in Minnesota. It is comprised of six employees, including the firm's founder, Tom Osborne, CPA. Due to the firm's rural setting, Tom has always struggled with a limited hiring pool. Once the pandemic hit, hiring became almost impossible.

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> - Tom Osborne, CPA

Despite these circumstances, Tom maintained reasonable hours for his staff during 2020's tax busy season—without losing business. How? Years earlier, Osborne & Osborne had implemented 1040 automation technology from SurePrep. They leveraged that technology to maintain volume on manageable schedules, despite limited staff.

Osborne & Osborne's tax busy season before the upgrade

The firm's previous 1040 workflow was a time sink. Tom's team would scan and organize incoming documents manually. They had to perform a separate scan for each folder in the binder, which meant larger returns took an eternity. The firm did not use OCR, so after all that scanning, staff still had to enter data into UltraTax manually.

The purpose of scanning up front was digital preparation, but their workpaper management system held them back. Preparers had to open every single file separately. There was no way to divide Excel sheets into separate workpapers.

Somehow, the software managed to make digital workpapers more cumbersome than paper. All the unnecessary back-and-forth added friction throughout the process and slowed their workflow.

"That process was cumbersome and inefficient. It was hard to navigate through," said Tom. "That's what pushed us to look at other solutions and that's when we came upon SurePrep."

The turning point: 1040 tax automation technology

Tom is a member of Rootworks and first heard about SurePrep at a trade show. His previous firm implemented SurePrep back in 2011, so he knew the benefits first-hand. When his own firm needed a solution, Tom described turning to SurePrep as a "no-brainer."

They started with 1040SCAN PRO and SPbinder. The time savings realizations were immediate. Tom estimates that 1040SCAN PRO automates data entry and workpaper sorting for 90% of all documents. "At least 1/3 of the process

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is already over" by the time a return reaches a preparer, Tom explained.

Osborne & Osborne felt their staffing situation grow tighter in 2020-21. By that time, SurePrep was a proven ally and time savings solution. Tom looked for new ways to alleviate workload compression with SurePrep technology. He did not want to see accounting burnout in his staff.

All data that passes through an OCR program must be verified by a person. Verification takes a fraction of the time compared to manual data entry, but requires a trained eye. Tom saw an opportunity to shave even more time off the firm's 1040 process. After a careful cost-benefit analysis, the firm added 1040SCANverify to its workflow.

1040SCANverify is a software and service combination. After documents pass through SurePrep's cloud-based OCR software, the encrypted data routes to a secure SurePrep facility. There, trained SurePrep staff verify the OCR data for accuracy. When Tom gets the data back, it's ready for direct export to tax software. His preparers don't need to spend any time performing verification.

To maximize his ROI, Tom plans to keep some verification in-house and shift the most complex returns to 1040SCANverify. Skipping verification for returns with several 1099s or brokerage statements is a welcome release valve during tax busy season.

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>
> - Tom Osborne, CPA

"Going forward, we're going to be using [1040SCANverify] and [1040SCAN PRO] and figuring out what the happy medium is," Tom said. "We're basically trying to parlay it into a virtual staff person."

A workpaper management system purpose-built for tax busy season

Front-end optimization with 1040SCAN freed Tom's more experienced staff to focus on preparation and review. He noted the back-end optimizations with SPbinder were just as powerful.

His staff no longer have to open separate files to annotate workpapers; "it's all right there." His preparers can annotate Word documents, Excel sheets, PDFs, and emails in the same interface. They can sort Excel sheets into separate folders, even if they were part of the same file. With two clicks, prepares can create hyperlinked cross-references between any two points in the binder. All the old frictions are gone.

"The binder is probably what adds the most value out of everything. [...] Hot-linking, calculators, everything that's in there. It's a very good product."

One of Tom's favorite SPbinder features is the Review Tree. When he logs in, he can see exactly which workpapers need review. The program tells him where he left off, so he never has to waste time retracing his steps. As preparers work, Tom's review tasks generate automatically and self-sort into intuitive categories. Hyperlinked cross-references mean he never spends time digging for source documents. SPbinder facilitates such well-prepared workpapers, there's less for Tom to do in review.

From a management and production standpoint, SPbinder has become Tom's go-to workflow management tool. He

can easily see how many projects his preparers have in the pipeline and assign incoming work accordingly. SPbinder lets him track works in progress with built-in tools like multi-level sign-offs. Keeping track of his team's workload is important to Tom during tax busy season.

"I'm trying to keep my people from working those 16-hour days because you get a lot of diminished return. At some point it's not helping you gain anything," Tom explained.

No more accounting burnout, even with limited staff

Osborne & Osborne CPAs, LLC automated data entry and workpaper organization with 1040SCAN. They simplified preparation and streamlined review with SPbinder. When the next tax busy season hit, Tom saw a transformation at his firm.

"We made up so much time in efficiency. The upfront scanning took a fraction of the time and the review took a fraction of the time," Tom said. "We had zero resistance because it was so much better than what we had done before."

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> ### - Tom Osborne, CPA

In partnership with SurePrep, Tom reduced his staff's workload, saved time, and mitigated accounting burnout. The firm's cloud-based workflow adds a bonus benefit: remote work. Inclement weather conditions are common in Minnesota. Having the flexibility to work remotely is invaluable. Tom can keep his operation running throughout tax busy season, no matter the weather or workload. He strongly recommends SurePrep to other firms.

"All our staff love it. They can get more done in less time. You're going to gain efficiency no matter how you use it."

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About SurePrep

SurePrep was founded in 2002 and is the leader in 1040 productivity for firms that process 1040s. We deliver seamless integration with your existing tax software to automate and streamline the entire 1040 process for both the taxpayer and tax professional. Our solutions are used by over 23,000 tax professionals ranging from Big 4 firms to sole practitioners to reduce administrative costs, automate workpaper preparation, maximize review efficiency, and improve client service.

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