Automate your practice and save time, risk, and cost

Peter Walker of Berkowitz Pollack Brant shares the firm's automation experience with GoSystem Tax APIs

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Peter Walker
Process Improvement Project Manager,
Berkowitz Pollack Brant

Established in 1980, Berkowitz Pollack Brant (BPB) is a certified public accounting firm with offices in Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Boca Raton, West Palm Beach, and New York City. With more than 300 accountants, tax specialists, and consultants, BPB is one of the largest accounting firms in South Florida and one of the top 100 firms in the United States.

Automation offers many potential benefits to firms: APIs and RPAs allow firms seamless access to client data, reduce time, risk, and cost, connect teams and clients no matter where they are in the world, free up expert staff for tasks that really matter, and allow firms to make data-backed business decisions with built-in analytics.

Thomson Reuters® GoSystem Tax APIs enable firms to automate tax workflow processes related to e-Filing, printing, and importing/exporting tax return data. Import hundreds of partners into a partnership return or update a specific value within a tax return in real time using one of the 38 GoSystem Tax APIs available on the Developer Portal.

Peter Walker, Process Improvement Project Manager at Berkowitz Pollack Brant, shares his perspective on the value of automation and his firm's experience engaging the Thomson Reuters Professional Services team to streamline his firm's workbooks via API integration with GoSystem Tax RS.

Walker shares, "In the last couple of years, a lot of companies undertook automation because of the environment that we were forced to live in. Throughout this pandemic, companies have sought ways to be more efficient. They were forced into the position to do so, and they adapted, or they went out of business. More so than ever, it's important to reevaluate your processes and your efficiencies. Efficiency is the number one reason why you would want to venture into automation because it's not just about time savings. It's also about savings in mental health. At the end of the day, the last thing that you want to do is to have skilled workers, who are talented and provide value elsewhere in your company, do mundane, repetitive, consistent data entry."

Though it's a common practice throughout the accounting industry to collect client data via an Excel workbook and then manually re-enter that same data into accounting software, it's also a known vulnerability to managing cost and time. Berkowitz Pollack Brant found significant improvements to efficiency by creating processes which reduced or removed the need for this kind of repetitive, manual data entry.

"One of the pain points consuming a lot of time and causing issues and inefficiencies in our tax department was the activity of our workbooks. Data is collected, calculations are done, and then the data from the Excel workbook must be manually reentered into GoSystem Tax RS. "

"Tax is a much larger group than all our other facets, and these issues are very high on the chart. We're a relatively small to mid-size firm. So, a lot of the issues and inefficiencies are very visible to all, from the lower end staff to the higher end staff. There was hardly any resistance. Streamlining that process to avoid double data entry and saving time; that concept was very easy to sell."

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"We're paying our professionals to be professionals and subject matter experts in whatever niche that they're in. APIs help take away the lower end work and the time consumption of those manual tasks."

According to Walker, efficiency gains from automation are not only found in data entry.

He shares, "It takes time in GoSystem Tax RS to get to particular screens. You have to click four or five times probably, to run a batch report on e-file status or submit an e-file status. Using an API, you could potentially generate that report easily and have it dumped into something that you're looking at constantly, like Teams, or a dashboard, something like that. An API can take away the day-to-day time consumption of these tasks."

Leveraging APIs, BPB streamlined the activity of their workbooks by implementing an automated process that enables one time data entry for 1065 federal engagements.

"The Professional Services team helped identify inefficiencies within the workbook, then helped develop a standard for the workbook, so that the implementation of the actual APIs into the workflow went smoothly. The solution is phenomenal. A lot of people love it. It's one area in which morale has improved during the busy season because there are a lot of time savings achieved by not having to re-enter this particular data. Staff had enough personal pain from the processes to feel motivated to embrace the change. Absolutely not only staff, but management as well."

"The expertise of the Thomson Reuters Professional Services team was a huge advantage, especially if you don't have that level of skill in-house. Sometimes it's conducive to buy into those services, so that way they can help you, guide you in the right direction, and offload some of the work entailed in configuring the APIs to communicate properly."

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For firms looking to evolve their practice via automation, reduce manual data entry and streamline processes, Walker offers this advice.

"People gravitate to what they're comfortable with, much like accountants gravitate to Excel. When things don't work, Excel is the solution. So, success (in automation) is about ensuring that the cost and effort that it took to implement the solution is enforced with a healthy ecosystem, a healthy process that maintains it. I think that's where the challenge is."

"If I were to sum it all up, automation is all about garnering commitment, and that means commitment from your internal team to undergo this exercise: planning and analyzing what your needs are. Making sure that your needs are fulfilled based on the products which Professional Services have provided. That entails commitment during the process of development, and commitment after, when it comes to maintaining the solution and the support mechanisms that make the solution successful."

"If anything, I would say commit, commit, and commit again."

"You want to make sure you're working as productively and efficiently as possible. The last thing you want to do as a professional paid to cater to your clients is spend your time doing work that anyone could handle, you know?"

"Let's leverage technology in a in a wise way and not let it leverage us."

Related products:
- **GoSystem Tax RS** - https://tax.thomsonreuters.com/us/en/cs-professional-suite/gosystem-tax-rs
- **GoSystem Tax APIs** - https://tax.thomsonreuters.com/en/products/api/gosystem-tax
- **GoSystem Tax API Development Roadmap** - https://tax.thomsonreuters.com/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/tax/en/pdf/other/gosystemtax-api-roadmap.pdf
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