

2026 CPAFMA Digitally Driven Firm Survey Results

by Roman Kepczyk, CPA.CITP, PAFM

The CPA Firm Management Association (CPAFMA.com) completed their 2026 Digitally Driven Firm survey in December 2025 to identify the technologies and applications firms are adopting and using going into the upcoming busy season. With the obvious impact that AI is having on changing the technology landscape at an increasingly faster pace, this year's survey consolidated alternating hardware and software surveys into a single survey to be updated and administered annually.

For 2026, 162 firms participated with 51% having between 26 and 100 personnel and 18% having more than 100 members. In addition, 40% were multi-office, reflecting the medium to larger size firms representative of CPAFMA membership. This information was presented in a [webinar on December 16, 2025](#) which is available to members.

Infrastructure/Hardware: The survey found that 23% of respondents continued to maintain their own networks in-house which was a 2% reduction from 2024, and a far cry from a decade ago when 77% of firms managed their own networks. 5%, primarily larger firms, utilized colocation facilities, and 12% stated they hosted the majority of their applications within their "accounting vendor's" cloud (13 CCH and 13 Thomson Reuters firms). The majority 60% of firms utilized a managed service provider with 75 firms using Rightworks*, 9 firms on Microsoft Azure, 3 with Cetrom and 2 with NetGain. Interestingly, the number one reason for significant downtime was once again Internet outages (27 firms-AWS, Azure, cable) followed by cloud hosting outages (19 firms-Accounting Vendors/MSPs).

Desktops vs. Laptops: The transition to laptops over desktops was emphasized by 18% stating their firm was 100% laptops, 38% stating that 90%-99% were laptops, and 22% of respondents having 50%-89% laptops. This left 22% of responding firms stating they selected desktops for the majority of their workstations.

Chrome vs. Edge Browser: Google chrome continues to be the dominant Internet browser selected by firms (81% of users, which dropped 2% from 2024), but Microsoft Edge jumped to 26% usage (9% increase from 2024) which may be due to integration of Copilot.

Security Applications: 57% of respondents utilized a password manager which was a 12% increase from 2024. LastPass continued to be the most selected (31 firms) followed by 1Password (18 firms), Keeper (12 firms) and Bitwarden (8 firms). For Multi-factor authentication, 74% respondents utilized Duo which was a 9% increase from 2025. On the rise, 35% of respondents used Microsoft Authenticator (16% increase over 2025) and 5% utilized Google authenticator, pointing to firms supporting multiple MFA tools.

Security Management: 91% of firms had formal phishing testing and security awareness training-SAT (21% increase from 2024) with the top vendors being Rightworks SAT-39%, KnowBe4-27%, Huntress-4% and Ninjio-4%. In regard to managing firm security, while 25% of respondents did so with their own IT personnel, 36 different external Managed Security Service providers were listed for the other 75% of firms. 42% of respondents listed Rightworks Total Security which coincides with the higher number of firms previously listed using Rightworks for their managed infrastructure as well as their phishing testing and security awareness training.

Collaboration: A new question for 2026 asked what tools were primarily utilized for collaboration within the firm and with clients. *Within the firm*, Microsoft Teams was dominant (57% + 10% Zoom/Slack) followed by email (17%) and “in person discussion” (16%). Conversely, when communicating with clients, 75% selected email as the primary communication, followed by 13% phone. Microsoft Teams was used by 6% and the rest was split 3% in person and 3% Zoom/Slack.

Telephone Systems: In 2018, 65% of respondents had their own telephone hardware/PBX. For 2026 that number dropped to 12%, meaning that 88% of respondents had moved to VOIP. While 19 firms stated they had moved to Microsoft Teams or Zoom phones in 2024, the key providers listed in 2026 were RingCentral (21 firms), Vonage (6 firms), Comcast (6 firms), Webex (5 firms), 8x8 (5 firms) and 3 firms each for 3CX, Avaya, Mitel and Spectrum.

Offshore: Another new question this year identified that 27% of respondents utilized an overseas staffing provider with the top providers being TOA Global (7 firms), SAPro (4 firms), 3 firms each for Alliant, Entigrity, Frontline, and 2 firms each with Arabella, Connect OS, Vasquez and Xpitax.

Firm Internal Applications: The survey next delved into internal technology stacks.

- **Accounting:** Of the 142 responses, 64 firms utilized QuickBooks Online, 57 utilized QuickBooks Desktop, and 18 utilized Sage Intacct which reflects the same dominance found in the client accounting tech stack.
- **Payroll:** Firm payroll processing followed the traditional vendors with ADP (31%), Paylocity (12%), Paychex (9%), and Intuit/QuickBooks (9%) being dominant. Unexpectedly, Gusto (3%) dropped and Paycor (5%) increased in respondents.
- **HR Automation:** BambooHR (18%) was the most selected product followed by Linked in (12% in 2026, 23% in 2025), and Indeed (10%), with many firms using a combination of these three products for recruiting, evaluations, etc. JazzHR (3%) was joined by newcomers to the survey: Insperity (2%) and Workday (2%).

- **CPE Automation:** Traditional practice management applications from CCH (16%) and Thomson Reuters (8%) were slowly being displaced for CPE tracking by the dedicated CPE applications with LCVista (formerly Proleara) at 18%, Cerefi (acquired TR Required) at 11% and CPE Link at 8%.
- **Accounts Payable:** Bill (Bill.com) was the dominant product utilized by 32% of respondents followed by 23% using QuickBooks for bill payment. This was followed by 3% selecting Thomson Reuters Accounting CS and 3% each selecting Aiwyn and Ramp, which are being seen as rising stars.
- **Accounts Receivable:** In 2025, the majority of firms were sending digital invoices via a broad range of applications including email, practice management and dedicated tools. For 2026 the question focused on integrated payment systems and found that 35% of respondents utilized CPA Charge and 26% utilized QuickFee (now owned by Aiwyn).
- **Firm Dashboard:** 36% of respondents utilized Excel and 24% utilized Microsoft Power BI, followed by 8% of respondents using Abdo Compass (custom Power BI) for their firm dashboard.
- **Practice Management:** CCH was the dominant PM vendor (45%) utilized by respondents with 28% using Pfx Practice and 17% using Axxess Practice. This was followed by Thomson Reuters Practice CS (24%) and relative newcomers Canopy (3%) and Firm360 (3%), which should be watched along with Karbon (which only had 1% for 2026 but 4 firms stated they were switching to it in the year ahead!).
- **Document Management:** DM was another area where there was a broad swath of products being utilized by respondents but highlights how some of the next generation practice management tools that were incorporating document and portal management:
 - 29% CCH Axxess Document (41 firms)
 - 16% TR Go FileRoom (23 firms)
 - 6% TR FileCabinet (8 firms)
 - 6% Doc-It (9 firms)
 - 4% CCH Pfx Engagement (6 firms), (...2 Caseware)
 - 4% Canopy (5 firms), (2 Firm360, 2 TaxDome)
 - 4% iChannnel (5-traditionally CCH firms)
 - 3% SmartVault (traditionally Lacerte firms)
 - 3% Onvio (4 firms, 2 of which looking to switch)
 - 21 firms Windows/None>>> 2 MS SharePoint
- **Portal/Secure Email:** Thomson Reuter's SafeSend continued to dominate this category (47%), followed by 25% Progress Sharefile (formerly Citrix). This was

followed by CCH Axess Portal/ShareSafe (13%), SuraLink (9%) and Thomson Reuters NetClient CS (8%). And as with the DM vendors above, Canopy (3%), Firm360 (3%), and TaxDome (2%) highlighted how the next generation PM products are integrating competing portals as well.

Tax Automation: CCH maintained its lead as the most utilized tax application (39% Access Tax, 7% Pfx Tax) followed by Thomson Reuters UltraTax (36%) and Intuit Lacerte (11%) which flowed over into other integrated processes and applications:

- **Digital Workflow:** CCH Axess Workflow/XCM 32%) was again the top product selected, and with their Axess Workstream (11%) and Axess Practice (6%), CCH accounted for 51% of workflow/project implementations. Thomson Reuters was next with Practice CS (projects-12%) and FirmFlow (9%) but the area where there was the most change was in the 33% of firms (12% increase over 2025) that went away from CCH/TR towards practice management applications integrating workflow and other DM/portal capabilities: 4% Canopy, 3% Firm360, 2% Karbon, 2% OfficeTools, 2% TaxDome, 2% Doc-It, 2% Drake, 2% Jetpack, 1% MS SharePoint, 1% Amelio, 1% Mango, 1% Practice ERP, 1%TR ONVIO.
- **eSignature:** SafeSend increased dominance among respondents as the primary eSignature tool for engagement letters (55% which was a 12% increase over 2025). DocuSign (20%) was next, followed by RightSignature (13%). Once again, newcomer PM tools with eSignature capabilities were present (3% Canopy, 2% TaxDome, 1% OfficeTools and Mango along with Ignition, Knuula, Liscio, Truss, and AssureSign.
- **Tax Document Requests:** For document requests, firms are sending a combination of traditional digital organizers and customized lists with Thomson Reuters accounting for more than half of users (46%-SafeSend, 6% TaxCaddy). A surprising 16% stated they were using SuraLink, which traditionally has been utilized more in the assurance side followed by CCH's Sharefile (8%) and those practice management products that integrate this capability (3%-Firm360, 2%-TaxDome, 1% each: Karbon, Mango, Liscio, and Stanford Tax.
- **PDF Optimization:** Not surprisingly, Adobe continued to be the dominant PDF application with many also using CCH PDFlyer (63 firms), Tic Tie and Caculate (15 firms) and Doc-It PDF Editor (5 firms) for annotation. For tax client source document scanning, organizing and autoflowing 38% of Respondents utilized CCH Scan and 30% utilized Thomson Reuters SurePrep.
- **Tax Return Delivery:** For document delivery Thomson Reuters SafeSend jumped from 45% in 2025 to 58% adoption in 2026, followed by CCH Axess ShareSafe (13%) and Progress ShareFile (7%).

- **Tax Research:** All of the big three tax research vendors saw drops in usage which we believe is due to firms eliminating duplicate and triplicate licenses. Thomson's CheckPoint was utilized by 55% of respondents, benefitting from their CoCounsel integration. CCH Intelliconnect followed with 24% of respondents, and BNA had 11%. The big surprise this year was BlueJ at 29% adoption, compared to 3% in 2025.

Assurance Automation: Was next covered in the next series of questions with little movement of applications.

- **Engagement Binder:** CCH continues to be the dominant engagement binder with 53% selecting CCH Pfx Engagement and 3% on CCH Axxess Engagement (now Essentials and Pro) for assurance engagements. 16% selected Thomsons Engagement Manager/AdvanceFlow, and 12% selected CaseWare. Interestingly, 24% of respondents stated "None" or "no longer do audits."
- **Assurance Portal:** SuraLink maintained the top individual assurance portal slot with 23% of respondents using them. Progress ShareFile was next at 15% and CCH Axxess Portal at 14%. Thomson split the rest of portal respondents with NetClient CS (8%) and SafeSend (9%).
- **Data Extraction/Audit Analytics:** 50% of respondents primarily utilize Excel for data extraction followed by IDEA (7%), CCH Teammate Analytics (5%), and ActiveData (3%), but the standout product was DataSnipper which jumped to 9% usage amongst respondents. When the focus switched to audit analytics, CCH TeamMate Analytics jumped to the top with 25% of respondents using it, again followed by DataSnipper (3%), IDEA (2%) and Inflo (2%).
- **Scheduling:** Scheduling continues to be a weak spot in firms with 25% of respondents still using Excel, 17% selecting CCH/TR Practice Management and 13% utilizing CCH Axxess Workflow/Workstream. ProStaff was the only dedicated scheduling program mentioned with 6% of respondents.

Client Accounting/Advisory Automation: CAAS practices have been on a growth track as accounting automation tools have improved and firms emphasize advisory opportunities. In 2025, 50% of firms stated they had a standardized tech stack. This question was expanded for 2026 to include "which your personnel are aware of" and the number dropped to 41% answering in the affirmative. Below we summarize the CAAS tech stack findings.

- **Primary/Secondary Client Accounting Product:** CAAS Tech Stacks are built around the accounting products your clients utilize. When we asked firms what their primary accounting product was, 75% selected QuickBooks Online (QBO), 24% selected QuickBooks Desktop (QBD), 5% Thomson Reuters Accounting CS and 4 %

Sage Intacct. When asked what the secondary product was, 60% stated QBD, 21% QBO, 14% Sage Intacct and 4% each for Thomson Reuters Accounting CS and Xero.

- **Client Accounts Payable:** AP products were in line with what the firm utilized with Bill (39%), QuickBooks (11%), Ramp (5%) and Aiwyn (2%) being selected.
- **Client Payroll:** 40% of firms selected ADP as their CAAS payroll solution and was followed with a 3-way tie between Gusto, QuickBooks, and Paychex with 9% of respondents each. An interesting note was 18% of respondents stating they do not do payroll.
- **Client Fixed Assets:** 50% of respondents selected Thomson Reuters Fixed Assets CS for depreciation followed by 31% CCH, 4% AssetKeeper, and 2% Lacerte.
- **W2/1099 Creation:** For 2026, the top three products utilized by respondents were Tax1099 (23%), 1099ETC. (16%), and QuickBooks (15%) pushing Greatland Yearli (9%) to a distant fourth spot followed by CFS Tax Tools (7%), Thomson ACS (7%) and Avalara (6%).
- **CAAS Workflow:** Many firms have struggled to get the firms Tax/Assurance workflow tool to work effectively within the CAAS space and while CCH Workflow/Workstream was the top selected tool (17%), the integrated PM tools where often being used by the CAAS practice (12% Double/Keeper, 5% JetPack, 5% Karbon, 4% Firm360, 2% Financial Cents, 1% Canopy, 1% PracticeERP and 1% TaxDome.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): The final section on this year survey focused on benchmarking AI governance which 91% of firms said were using generative AI in some manner. The survey found 57% of respondents had written AI policy/guidelines which people had been trained upon, compared to 20% in 2024. Firms were asked if they established an AI strategy committee and 47% said yes with a designated representative. Not surprisingly, OpenAI ChatGPT (34%), Microsoft Copilot (29%), and Rightworks* SPARK (13%) were the top three products being utilized. This was followed by BlueJ (4%), Google Gemini (3%), and Thomson Reuters CoCounsel (2%).

The CPA Digitally Driven Firm Survey began in tabulating member technology usage with the “paperless benchmarks” beginning in 2003. The bi-annual IT and applications surveys will be combined into a single annual survey highlighting key needs of member firms.

** Roman H. Kepczyk, CPA.CITP, CGMA is Director of Firm Technology Strategy for Rightworks and partners exclusively with accounting firms on production automation, application optimization and practice transformation. He has been consistently listed as one of INSIDE Public Accounting’s Most Recommended Consultants, Accounting Today’s*

*Top 100 Most Influential People, and CPA Practice Advisor's Top Thought Leaders.
Information presented above is for informational purposes and not to be viewed as
providing advice or recommendations.*