

## Our Digital Future

By Randy Johnston

Since many of you are new to me, and some of you have known me for years, I wanted to make sure you knew my point of view on the blog posts you'll read here at the [Intuit® Accountants News Central blog](#).

First, my technology recommendations are always biased by three attributes: reliability, speed and price. I'll always choose and recommend reliability first, at the greatest speed possible, and let the price land where it may. Second, I'm always willing to trade pounds for hardware and software, if it will save me time, and consequently, allow me to make more, do more and have a reasonable expectation of a positive ROI. Third, I'm willing to try new technology, so that you don't have to, and I will tell you the things that work.

People who know me well understand that I'll respond to your individual request in less than 24 hours, and will always try to give you solid, actionable advice. I understand that my reputation is on the line whenever I make a prediction or recommendation. Enough said!



### What does our Digital Future look like?

Let's first throw out some big topics, and then look closer at one or two. The following technologies will directly affect accounting in the near future: Big Data, Cloud Computing, On Demand Services, Virtualisation, Consumerisation, Gamification, Social Business, Wearable Technology, Intelligent Electronic Agents, Visual Communications, Location Awareness, Mobile Banking, 3D displays and machine-to-machine communications. Each one of these topics deserves a blog post for itself, and each one will make its way into your accounting practice over the next few years.

Let's start with gamification. Gamification uses game-thinking and game mechanics in a non-game context to engage users and solve problems. Gamification will fuel a fast-moving trend, using advanced simulations and skill-based learning systems. These systems are self-diagnostic, interactive, game-like and competitive. All focused on giving the user an immersive experience, thanks to realistic 3D interfaces.

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We see evidence of this in many applications today, including QuickBooks® Online. The transaction download is set up in such a way that matching transactions is somewhat “game- like”. Even though there is a lot of intelligence to match transactions and simplify the process, having the matching process structured in a way that I consider to be “interesting”, makes the routine task less boring and error prone. It is also interesting to note that the top 25 selling iPhone apps in 2013 are all games! If the developer has completely thought through gamification in the application, then there will frequently be a social component that includes sharing. This helps to drive success.

Gamification also shows up in user interfaces. Again, citing QuickBooks Online as an example, think about how painful collections can be. The use of green for good, red for bad and yellow for caution, just like our traffic lights, helps gamify the process of analysing past due receivables.

Most importantly, it is easier to spot trends because the software applications are using something that we are already familiar with as part of the interface.

Most of us are still in the habit of working at a computer from our office desk, at home or on-site with a client. We have gravitated toward smartphones and tablets for their weight, portability, instant-on, and access to information from anywhere. However, some of us have begun using these mobile technologies less because they have not proven to be faster, or allow us to do our normal work. The applications available still seem too limited. The applications are still evolving to become more efficient, and at times can seem awkward. We really need a faster way to enter data. Nevertheless, we will eventually get Intelligent Electronic agents that will be able to effectively recognise our voice and enter data faster than we could from a keyboard.



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We expect the ultimate portable computing technology to be more like the experimental Google Glass, or the recently released Pebble watch. These products interface with our mobile phones, yet extend the portable technology to make it more usable. We've also noted that users are gravitating towards larger smartphones, such as the Samsung Galaxy S4, or Note. Users of these larger smartphones explain to us that they can do away with their tablets, using the larger phone for most portable uses.

When it comes to production work, users revert back to their MacBook Air or UltraBook, which is only marginally heavier than a tablet and keyboard combination. Commuters in New York City tell us that larger tablets are actually a problem on the subways, and that the 7" form factor, or a large smartphone, work much better in the crowds. We predict that at least 10 different wearable technologies will be released by the end of 2013.

Now, does that smartphone and laptop you're carrying seem a little out-dated?



### About the Author

Randy Johnston has been an entrepreneur, technologist and teacher for most of his career. He has helped start and run many businesses, and currently owns part of both Network Management Group, Inc. and K2 Enterprises.

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