

# How Accountants Really Feel About Their Tax Research Software

**T**he English language is replete with the power of testimonials—from “straight from the horse’s mouth,” to “word of mouth,” even “What you need is a testimonial!” from the Wizard of Oz.

Welcome to “From the Field,” where we poll software vendors and clients to determine why and how end-users benefit from using products reviewed in the current issue. Let’s look at what they say about tax research software.

**MaryEllen Bennett**, Aligeb™ Tax and Accounting Consultants, offered perspective as a Kleinrock user. “I used Kleinrock software for years before its affiliation with ATX. It provides all you need to complete accurate, professional research and on-target tax returns. You can spend large sums for ‘big name’ services with bells and whistles, but that’s all you’ve done: spend money. Kleinrock offers quality for the price; to me, that’s what matters.”

Kleinrock’s turnkey positioning states, “Total Kleinrock Office is an all-in-one tax research service that gives practitioners everything necessary to understand complex tax issues, advise clients on efficient tax plans, and file clean, penalty-free returns.

“For one low price, practitioners get answers to tough federal, state, and employment tax questions, over 10,000 tax forms, tax preparation guidance, access to archive materials, and up to 60 hours of CPE. Practitioners receive daily updates on latest developments plus online access at no extra cost.”

LexisNexis® Tax Center is a new product used by **James Penlington**, International Tax Manager, RR Donnelley & Sons. He states, “LexisNexis Tax Center offers simplified tax research software with access to all LEXIS research tools (Boolean and natural language searches, focusing and Shepardizing). No other tax research software offers this level of sophistication. Tax Center is a must for any serious tax researcher!”

LexisNexis itself says, “Separate from *lexis.com*®, the new LexisNexis® Tax Center streamlines tax research to ensure you don’t miss critical information. The new Tax Center combines cases, codes, regulations and analytical materials from CCH®, Tax Analysts®, Matthew Bender® and Kleinrock. You can conduct single searches across all this content to quickly obtain comprehensive results.”

**Ron Burkert**, Director, RIA Checkpoint Product Development, believes research software is integral to client operations. “Tax and accounting profes-



**TAX RESEARCH**

sionals rely on Checkpoint for critical tax and accounting information—federal, state, local and international tax from WG&L, RIA and now PPC. Checkpoint is the only platform with integrated, up-to-date workflow tools, interactive checklists and expert guidance to help industry professionals work most efficiently.”

RIA Checkpoint clients agree. “As a heavy-duty researcher and writer, nothing comes close to Checkpoint in terms of its huge, varied content, organization of content, ease of navigation and seamless document options (exporting to Word, emailing, etc.,” said **Fred Bruckner**, JD, LLM, Margolin,

Winer & Evens, LLP.

Other vendors focus on productivity. **Holly Flater**, BNA Product Manager, Tax and Accounting, reflected, “The Tax Practice Library provides quick, practical answers to all basic tax questions across a wide range of federal taxation topics. The software provides concise analysis and examples written by leading tax authorities. The business-building and time-saving productivity tools includes hundreds of client letters and interactive tax forms. The Library also includes a full range of primary source and news and notification.”

**Clay Ayers**, CPA and Director of Tax at webMethods, Inc., Fairfax, Virginia, agrees. “BNA Tax Management allows me to prepare myself with confidence once I’ve gathered the facts around a particular issue. BNA often does 75% of my legwork. It keeps legal and professional costs way, way down as a result. I consider BNA a vital investment. It’s always more than paid for itself very quickly.”

CCH Tax and Accounting has spent considerable time evaluating customer input. “We’ve focused on improving productivity, reducing training time, and helping customers manage risk. Our SmartCharts automatically create dynamic charts on hundreds of issues such as sales tax holidays. Information can download to Excel with live links to updates and changes.

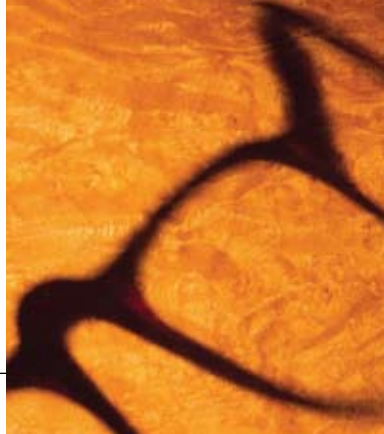
“Interactive Tools, part of our new Tax Research Consultant, walks users through interactive examples and decision trees to facilitate decisions. CCH@Hand provides 2-click research answers from any Microsoft Office program. Our added content makes CCH the one-stop shop for the tools and information customers need. Additions over the past 6 months include BNA content Ginsburg and Levin’s Mergers and Acquisitions, state legislation tracking, a wealth management library and more.”

—By Alysia McDonald

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# Users Will Find Hot-Links to Other Sources on Related Topics

*The program picks up issues in its Analysis and Explanation that practitioners might not consider.*



By Alysia McDonald

**T**he powerful ATX/Kleinrock software, Total Kleinrock Office, arrived beautifully repackaged this year in a handy binder built to contain all CDs, updates, installation codes and guides. Kleinrock includes an Internet version not reviewed here. It provides quick turnkey answers to federal, state and employment tax questions with comprehensive explanations for individuals, corporations, S corporations, partnerships, estates and trusts.



The navigation window shows Contents and Search down the left screen menu, while the right side shows results of queries or full sections of tax code, interspersed with Kleinrock's handy observations, compliance tips and hot-links to related documents.

Helpful icons across the top menu bar make navigation even easier. Clicking "History" opens a far right screen menu with a list of the documents you have viewed; you can click on the document name in this history and go straight to it. At the same time, History can save documents for you and automatically create a complete document trail. "Bookmark" works much the same way, appearing in the lower right screen.

The search section of Federal TaxExpert offers a complete database list from which to search. You may select some or all sources and then search by word. For example, typing in the word "alimony" creates a comprehensive list of items related to the topic from all Kleinrock sources in a single Contents list in the left menu. You may scan the contents or move consecutively through the list by hitting "Next Document." Click on any document name to open it in the right screen. Within that document, the word "alimony" is highlighted wherever it appears, so users can quickly scroll through hundreds of pages very quickly. Within each document, users will find hot-links to other sources on related topics.

As an interesting note, the program picks up issues in its Analysis and Explanation that practitioners might not consider, helping the work product immeasurably. Under "alimony," the software even picked up an obscure reference to rental income expense deduction, important when divorcing parties contemplate income tax implications relating to income and expense on jointly held rental property.

## Summary

Total Kleinrock Office also offers Kleinrock's Federal Tax Bulletin, IRS publications, IRS Revenue Rulings, IRS Letter Rulings, Tax Court reported decisions, notices, announcements and memorandums, Treasury decisions, and proposed regulations.

Total Kleinrock Office is a workhorse program that streamlines extremely difficult, interrelated research issues, and ensures complete and thorough evaluation of issues.

**ATX**  
[www.atxinc.com](http://www.atxinc.com)  
877-728-9776

## Features

This program installs easily. Simply insert the first disk, use the installation codes provided at the front of your binder, insert the next disk and proceed. Installing seven disks took approximately nine minutes. This version included Kleinrock's Federal TaxExpert, Employment TaxExpert, and All States TaxExpert East and West, plus Total Tax Guide, Complete Tax Library, Quick Answers Library and 1040 Essentials.

All release notes are now on the CDs themselves, detailing "What's New" in the current release, a section that should not be overlooked because it lists much more than just changes to the program. For example, the Analysis and Explanation portion of employment tax alerts preparers that "the IRS set forth specifications for the private printing of paper and laser-printed substitutes for the January 2006 revisions of Form W-2c, Corrected Wage and Tax Statement, and Form W-3c, Transmittal of Corrected Wage and Tax Statements. See Section 35.10." Sounds fairly mundane, but it is a significant compliance issue.

This level of detail appears throughout the product. For example, the WageFinder Index immediately identifies whether any type of compensation whatsoever is exempt or not exempt from withholding, FICA or FUTA (Federal Unemployment Tax Act) taxes.

The product launched showing a simple window with tabs: Federal Tax Research, Handbooks, Compliance Titles or Reference. Clicking a tab provides a complete list of resources within that tab. For example, Reference gives you access to Total Tax Guide, 1040 Quick Answers, Business Quick Answers and All States Quick Answers.



# BNA Provides News in Daily, Weekly and Bi-weekly Formats

*A tax practitioner can easily type in a word, search What's New and see if that particular topic has any hot developments.*

By Alysia McDonald

**T**he BNATAX Management Library operates as a clean, crisp, easy-to-follow research tool with a full complement of primary sources, analysis and practice tools. With very little introduction, you can be up and running on the Internet site in a few minutes. The subscription service allows you to pick and choose among an extensive assortment of sources based on your practice needs.

## Features

BNA comes equipped with a handy 30-minute tutorial that covers the highlights of the program, including clickable examples. I did look through the tutorial, but, in reality, the format was logical, simple to use and thorough in its application.

The program opens to a clean format with a Federal/Foreign menu in the top half, and State in the bottom half. The left vertical menu displays a

wealth of options: Daily Tax Report, What's New, sign-up for email Highlights, a user's guide and library tour. Three tabs at the top of the column are the heart of the system: Search, Indexes and Go To.

Click Search and the program directs you to a page where you enter your search words or phrases, and then select the documents you wish to search from a list of 25 different categorized sources. Depending on your subscription, the results appear listed by source, showing the number of hits within that source. You may then view results by table of contents or entire document. Your search term is highlighted within the text for easy perusal of search results, a real time-saver in extensive research.

If you already know your IRS Code section, you may start in "Go To." From there, it is a simple matter to find specific information. Conversely, you may also browse topics to find the code section.

A great feature of this product is its ability to show current *and* historical information well. The history explains how the rules evolved, relates them to other regulations and provides pertinent analysis. The primary sources include full text of the U.S. Tax Code, including links to the history and analysis.



Some of it is a fascinating read beyond its basic research function.

BNA does an excellent job of providing the latest news in daily, weekly and bi-weekly formats, a real strength of the product. The weekly information provides concise and understandable analysis of changes in tax law. The bi-weekly bulletin offers tax planning developments. The state information provides excellent guidance covering state tax news, reports, statutes and more.

The What's New section was extremely useful as a resource for tax planners to quickly view changes in tax law—not just changes to the program. This section can be found on the left menu list and is searchable by word or phrase just like the other documents. Accordingly, a tax practitioner can easily type in a word, search What's New and see if that particular topic has any hot developments. What's New covers new legislation; tables, charts and lists; and new and revised portfolios.

BNA also added a new audio-conference program to help with items of current interest. Users may register online or call toll-free for information.

BNA is rich in hot links within text and for cross-references, including specific code sections. Clicking on the link takes you directly to the citation. At the same time, you have access to a wealth of analysis, commentary and related history.

As you navigate through the system, exact information about your navigation location appears across the top of the screen. This is a very helpful feature; at a glance, you can see what document you are in and what research trail you are following.

## Summary

With BNATAX, the detail level is very thorough; layout and functions are highly intuitive for most users; and individuals can rest assured they are receiving current, real-world information based on up-to-date analysis, commentary and law.

## BNA Software

[www.bnasoftware.com](http://www.bnasoftware.com)  
800-424-2938

# The Topical Index Finder Combines all Results into One List from all Sources

*CCH@Hand searches, views, retrieves and shows results from any Microsoft Office 2003 application without having to leave your document.*

By Alysia McDonald

**A**s always, CCH delivers an exceptionally well-crafted product with attention to user need. CCH Tax Research NetWork provides total access to virtually all tax information—federal, state and international. It also supplies an excellent complement of tax tools, planning aids and daily critical tax updates. Users may also sign up for *Today's Tax Tracker News*, an email update of tax information.

## Features

This system is 100 percent Internet-based, meaning all information is current with new details added continuously. It opens as easily as your search engine to a very intuitive menu page. Within seconds, I was able to type in search words, select areas to search (current federal law, legislation, analysis, practice aids and even archives by consecutive year back to 1978), and view results. All results include integrated full-text primary source documents, analysis and current tax news.

All functions and tools are listed across the top of the screen in a tab format. They are easy to understand and use. The Training and Support tab provides a quick and easy way to get started. Under this tab, you can sign up for formal web training, or select chat support, phone support, email support, Internet articles and more. Handy Quick Start Guides walk you through the process each step of the way. The product is so intuitive that most people won't need this function; however, it is nice to have if you get stuck.

CCH@Hand is a particularly innovative feature that is fascinating to watch in action. This tool finds answers and integrates them into the workflow. Included with all subscriptions, CCH@Hand searches, views, retrieves and shows results from any Microsoft Office 2003 application (Word, Excel, Outlook) without having to leave your document, email or browser. It also accesses the CCH Tax Research, key related websites through Google and your own computer desktop in one search. The results are grouped in logical folders you can review while keeping your work open.

I particularly like the options for reviewing results. For



example, the topical index finder combines all results into one list from all sources. One click opens an expanded right window list where you can view more detailed information.

With the Table of Contents display on the Tax Research NetWork, search results are grouped by publication; it is not just a long list of documents to peruse. Table of Contents ranks results by context with relevant information listed first versus a sequential list. This functionality allows you to preview material and decide quickly what is pertinent—a real time-saver.

*The Tax Thesaurus* is a great time-saving tool. Using synonym logic, it finds all relevant documents without the user having to enter every possible tax term. As an example, searching the word “divorce” also pulls up documents with the word “separation.”

The Citator is another useful tool that helps track the history of cases through the legal and regulatory process. With this feature, you gain access to court cases and rulings that significantly affect a specific case. If you have a case open on your screen, simply click the Check Citator button to view the citation. Or, if you know the name or number of the case, type it in the Citator and hit search. This function is available in federal tax, the U.S. Master Tax Guide, and the Securities and Health Law libraries.

Tax Tools is an area that should not be overlooked because it provides powerful support documentation and useful tools. For example, under “Calculators,” there is a handy Loan Amortization function. Type in the principal balance, number of months and interest rates; it immediately calculates monthly payments and reduction of principal. The Quick Answer Charts offer in-depth multi-state details about state taxes, motor fuel, property tax, credits and incentives, and much more. The Practice Aids and Lookup Tables include details such as per diem by date, state and town, down to the average hotel price.

## Summary

This is a powerful, comprehensive program that is a joy to use. It's obvious that CCH has taken its years of experience and applied them to this excellent product.

**CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business**

[www.tax.cchgroup.com](http://www.tax.cchgroup.com)

800-344-3734

# Shepard's Citations Service Ensures You are Accessing the Most Current Law

*The topical index finder combines all results into one list from all sources.*

By Alysia McDonald

**L**exisNexis Tax Center is a new product completely separate from the widely-known existing product at its primary website, [lexis.com](http://lexis.com). This Internet-based service is not for the casual researcher; rather, it seems targeted to firms that work with highly complex, detailed material as an integral part of their practice—and need total access to virtually all sources.

## Features

LexisNexis Tax Center combines not only the expected codes, regulations and case documents, but also adds analytical materials from competitive research products, including CCH, Tax Analysts and Kleinrock. The service's claim that "you do not miss any critical information" seems valid, especially looking at sample searches. In fact, linking technology allows you to connect back and forth among critical primary and secondary content including cases, codes, legislative histories, treatises, and other analytical sources.

Specific examples include *Federal Income Taxation of Corporations Filing Consolidated Returns*, *Rhoades & Langer*, *U.S. International Taxation and Tax Treaties*, *Federal Income Taxation of Inventories*, *Applying GAAP and GAAS*, *Handbook for Internal Auditors*, and *Accounting for Public Utilities*. Marketing material stated "virtually all sources," and it pretty much hits the mark.

The product is targeted to Corporate Tax and Accounting Firm Practitioners, and Law Firm Tax Practitioners. Tax practitioners can access insight and analysis from leading tax practitioners, plus topical materials and explanations repeatedly cited as authority. Law firm tax practitioners can get analysis from partners in law and accounting firms and agency leaders for practical application for complex tax issues.

The product opens to a tabbed page called "Research." From here, there are "sub tabs" that take you right to the types of materials you want to search: federal, state, international, accounting and SEC, tax topics, or an A to Z source list. With "My Tax Center" as your default tab, you can customize the items you wish to see and sources you access frequently. Tabs



detail available functions, including Get a Document, Shepard's, Tax News and Tax Forms. Within those functions, you have access to your subscribed level of service. In other words, if you attempt to access something not available to your account, a friendly pop-up alerts you to that fact; it doesn't just leave you hanging wondering why something did not work.

Although it takes about an hour to learn Tax Center's navigation simply because it offers so many options and sources, the designers built in a wealth of help and learning tools that speed the process—if you will use them. It's a little like the old scenario of putting together children's toys: Read the directions first to save a world of time and trouble. In this case, directions, tutorials and references are right on your screen.

"Show Me" is a very helpful button that appears throughout the product; a quick click takes you to a tutorial on how to use or access the feature you are working in at the time. Another helpful icon is "i" that gives you a description of the source and what you will see if you use that source. Any "?" icon pops up a box with an explanation.

Shepard's citations service, an industry standard that is a part of the system, helps ensure you are accessing the most current law. Throughout many documents, you can "Shepardize" (the term actually used in the program) to find additional information about the topic you are researching.

For example, I entered a specific U.S. Tax Court case to evaluate the system. The product quickly located the case, related cases, and a list of complete tax code citations, plus related citations. It notated all Shepard's references and provided hot links within the text that take you to in-depth explanatory notes on literally all pertinent issues. Additional icons within the text alert you to negative treatment, positive treatment, references with analysis and each word where citation material is available.

## Summary

For those with complex, demanding research needs, this product can save time, ensure accuracy, and provide access to all manner of analysis and real-world results.

**LexisNexis**

[www.tax.lexisnexis.com](http://www.tax.lexisnexis.com)

800-227-4908

# PPC's Five-Minute Tax Briefing Provides Daily Summaries for Tax Issues

A newsletter library opens selections from *Cummings Corporate Tax Insights*, *Howard Zaritsky's Estate Planning Update* & *International Taxes Weekly*.

By Richard Buse

**R**IA Checkpoint from Thomson RIA demonstrates the convenience and power associated with an online tax research service. Accessing Checkpoint only requires a standard browser and Internet connection. Research sources update automatically each day, ensuring access to the most current information. Checkpoint also incorporates numerous Thomson PPC resources. RIA, based in New York City, was acquired by the Thomson Corporation in 1989.

## Features

User-defined options let subscribers configure Checkpoint's services to meet computing preferences and research priorities. Subscribers select the first screen to open when they log in to Checkpoint, as well as the items they wish to view in Checkpoint's Newsstand section.

Checkpoint's home page includes new tax law alerts, headlines and a user-defined list of Quick Links that offer instant access to many of the features located elsewhere in the service. There are also tabs for Research, Newsstand, Practice Development, Tools and CPE resources. Throughout Checkpoint, users only see the content and services that are included in their subscription. For example, if they do not subscribe to Tax Alerts, they would not see a tab for Practice Development.

Multiple clicks enable subscribers to quickly find information most relevant to their needs. For example, Texas is replacing its franchise tax with a reformed business tax. Clicking on the State and Local link in the Quick Links table opened a checklist of states, and selecting "Texas" generated more search options. With several more clicks, Checkpoint found legislative highlights explaining the various aspects of the reformed tax, as well as the full text of that legislation.

Further search options locate relevant information based on date ranges, Congressional sessions, cases, codes and regulations, and other criteria.

The Newsstand section opens periodicals addressing federal, state and local tax updates, payroll updates, and corporate finance rates. A newsletter library opens selections from *Cummings Corporate Tax Insights*, *Howard Zaritsky's Estate*



*Planning Update*, *International Taxes Weekly* newsletter and other related publications. Hogan and Hartson's SEC Updates provide further insight, while PPC's *Five-Minute Tax Briefing* provides daily summaries for tax issues. Newsletter search options include date ranges, keywords and newsletter titles.

CPAs need updates on issues affecting specific clients, and Checkpoint's Tax Alerts, located on the Practice Development tab, gathers that data. Subscribers set criteria, such as tax topics and key words that match that client's circumstances. Specific, related information then appears each time the user visits the Practice Development section and enters that client ID.

In addition to various research materials, Checkpoint offers a Tools section for calculating financial outcomes associated with various actions and strategies. For example, based on an individual's age and planned retirement age, a 401(k) calculator presents the earnings and tax ramifications associated with cashing out or rolling over a 401(k) account when leaving a current employer.

The Tools section also includes PPC's e-Tools. Practice aids open in Microsoft (MS) Excel or Word formats from the e-Tools link, as well as workpapers with advanced diagnostics, dynamically changing content and greater automation than workpapers found in PPC Guides. Additional PPC e-Tools include interactive disclosure libraries and an engagement letter generator.

Checkpoint offers online courses from its CPE section and links to other educational resources provided by Thomson RIA. Thomson RIA provides Checkpoint on a subscriber basis, with prices based on range of requested content.

An extensive online Help section index locates information based on topic or keyword. RIA offers phone support 8:45 a.m. to 7 p.m., EST, Monday through Friday, with technical support available weekdays, 9 a.m. through 7 p.m., EST.

## Summary

Accessing Checkpoint requires only a standard browser; various user settings add further convenience. An array of continually updated research materials ensures the availability of current and relevant content. Calculation tools and PPC's e-Tools further extend Checkpoint's usefulness. All of those qualities make RIA Checkpoint a very valuable tool for CPAs.

## Thomson RIA

[www.ria.thomson.com](http://www.ria.thomson.com)  
800-950-1216