

Toronto CA Solutions Multiplies Business Advantage With Intel

Case Study

Intel® Xeon® processor technology, Intel® Centrino® processor technology

TorontoCA Solutions



Challenge	To modernize and automate the traditional manual accounting processes of ledger books and file boxes.
Solution	Intel® Xeon® processor technology, Intel® Centrino® processor technology

With a software solution and remote access powered by Intel, Toronto CA Solutions has evolved into a fully-automated, paperless accounting firm.

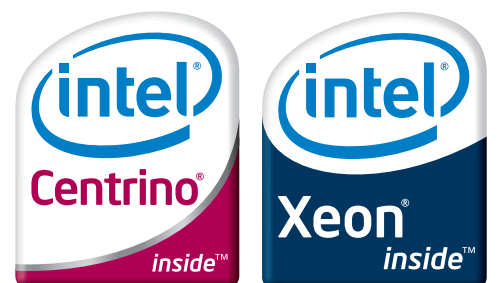
Summary

Toronto CA Solutions has been providing businesses and individuals with professional accounting and consulting services since the early 1950s, but current President Pramen Prasad needed to eliminate the tedious manual accounting processes, so the business could grow globally. Toronto CA Solutions used Intel-based technology to move from a paper-bound environment to a greener paperless office. And, leverages mobility solutions powered by Intel to provide the flexibility an expanding business needs.

Challenge

When Pramen Prasad met his now retired business partner, he had been working as an accountant but was considering a career change to IT. When Prasad came into his partner's office, he saw a very manual business process with ledger books and file boxes. He quickly vowed to modernize and automate.

"I swore the only way I would stay in this business is if it were automated, so I started that day to automate the business," recalls Prasad. In the old environment, accounting records were tabulated on ledger pads which required a complete re-write if one mistake was found.



The firm now known as Toronto CA Solutions was founded in the 1950s. Prasad joined in 1990 and has helped put the company on a path of growth. Since those early days where the firm was staffed by Prasad, his partner and a secretary to 15 professionals, the company today provides a full range of accounting services to business and professional clients, and individuals and their families in Canada, the U.S. and abroad.

“It was a purely manual enterprise and people spent a lot of time doing things inefficiently. We were a very small firm but I knew that to have a competitive edge in our industry we would have to be ahead of the pack in terms of automation.”

Prasad knew that there was a lot of work that could be done by computers and that software and hardware, when coupled with business process improvements, could make the company more effective and profitable.

Solution

Prasad started looking for a technology solution to handle the redundant tasks. He focused on solutions specific to the chartered accounting industry that mirrored their existing workflows and decided to move the business to CaseWare*, a leading software solution for accountants that would integrate all facets of his business from emails and scheduling to generating financial records and internal financial management. CaseWare helps to prepare, review and audit financial statements, manage client engagements, conduct detailed audit and fraud detection tests, track time and billings and support overall practice management. It is also fully integrated into QuickBooks* to manage financial records for clients.

With their business integrated into one software application, Prasad knew they needed to have a solid platform on which to run CaseWare and choose a Dell PE1900* server with Intel® Xeon® processor technology. To allow his associates remote access from client or home offices, Prasad selects notebooks powered by Intel® Centrino® processor technology.

With automation underway, Prasad looked at other ways of increasing his business' efficiency and started moving from a traditional accounting model with boxes and files to a fully paperless system.

“When we first started working with CaseWare, it was a glorified spreadsheet and word processor but the technology has evolved into a fully integrated system that has allowed us to get rid of all of our paper,” he says.

With so much of his corporate data living electronically, Prasad also recognized the need to build a solid network infrastructure that has redundant back up and data management capability. He turned to Network Integrators of Canada Inc. (NI), a leading out-sourced, managed technology services provider. NI helped expand the backup and data management process to include automated and fully managed off-site replication, while improving business continuity with

industry leading recovery processes. NI also implemented managed technology services to enhance network and internet security including firewall, secure-remote VPN access, URL filtering, content security and anti-virus. With NI, Toronto CA Solutions gained scalable data storage and management which ensures Prasad that mission critical data would be available when it is needed without a capital investment. Prasad notes this redundancy helps them sleep at night knowing their data is protected.

“Toronto CA Solutions has embraced technology. They are an excellent example of how a traditional firm can gain efficiency using technology.”

- NI President Rob Duxter

With NI, Toronto CA Solution has a reliable, off-site data back up on NI's servers powered by Quad-Core Intel® Xeon® processor technology. The out-sourcing of one part of the data storage needs ensures redundancy to their internal back-up processes, and NI provides additional outsourced support to the internal IT manager at Toronto CA Solutions.

NI's team of experts provide Toronto CA Solutions by with pro-active 24x7 network monitoring and maintenance, customized alerts, and immediate response to technical support requests with secure remote access to their office computers and server.

Whether searching for reliable computers including servers and notebooks, or a hosted solution at NI, Toronto CA always chooses Intel. And so has NI. Both firms cite Intel as the best fit for their computing needs.

“It is the benchmark for us. We try to stay with genuine products because we know the brand quality is high,” Duxter says. “We find it is important to stay with the leaders in technology because it gives us a better bang for our buck.”

Key Advantages

One of the best results from the transformation from a manual firm to a technologically advanced one has been the tremendous gains in efficiency. In the first five years, the firm has more than doubled their revenues but were able to maintain the same staffing levels. Today, the company has 15 staff with revenues more than four times what they were in the early 1990s.

“I pay very close attention to our efficiency because I thought it would become a very large competitive advantage. We were growing both in revenue and market share, but our labour force can do more work for clients more efficiently,” says Prasad.

Paper Files Shelved

The decision to move from paper to electronic files was an easy one for Prasad ... the process was more challenging.

"You first have to identify what information you are storing and how you are storing it. You sometimes find you are storing paper you don't really need," he says. "We chose to file documents electronically in the same way we stored paper records, which is a standard format for accounting firms. This makes it easy for new people coming in to find everything."

With decades of paper that has to be retained, Prasad hired part time help to scan all their documents into CaseWare running on their Dell servers with Intel Xeon processor technology. With processing power to spare, the scanning and filing of years of critical data was easily managed. With the archival data captured electronically, the process of keeping their client information up to date is much easier.



"We no longer do print outs. There are only a few filing cabinets in our offices for signed financial records that we have to maintain as original documents," he says. "Aside from that, everything is gone."

For clients, moving paperless means Toronto CA Solutions can respond more quickly to inquiries. "If a client calls for incorporation documents, we can find it and send it instantly, instead of going to

a file room, pulling the file, sorting through paper and sending the document hours later. We look extremely efficient and organized because we can do that."

In an attempt to further extend mobility solutions for the company, NI has started hosting Toronto CA Solutions' QuickBooks software and files on their data centre servers with Quad-Core Intel Xeon processor technology. This move will allow for easy and simultaneous access to files for authorized staff and customers regardless of their physical location. It also provides a secure, robust platform for growth.

In addition to the more efficient management of client documents, the move to a paperless environment also saves Prasad money on rent. Under the old system, Prasad would need to dedicate three to four rooms for filing and storage, and would have had to expand his offices by now.

Duxter notes that by moving to a paperless office, Toronto CA Solutions foregoes the need to use services that provide offsite document storage for paper files which can cost hundreds, even thousands, of dollars a month. "Electronic records not only speeds response time but reduces the need for physical space. If a customer's storage requirement grows, we simply add another server or increase hard drive space. Customers love it because they aren't burdened with a major infrastructure investment."

"I know that the step of going paperless was a big investment but after the first year, we saw the reward and improved results and efficiency of the organization."

- Toronto CA Solutions President Pramen Prasad

"Plus, paper files could be subject to damage or loss of theft which is not a factor with electronic records, if it is stored and backed up properly."

An added bonus for customers has been that, upon request, Toronto CA Solutions can provide online access to a client so that they can review their own data files on-demand over a secure VPN connection to the servers. While few clients request that access, it is a benefit of using leading technology that they can offer that level of instant access to information.

Offsite Data Management Protects Business

To keep client records safe, Prasad does redundant backups both on site and relying on the offsite data management services of NI, which runs on Quad-Core Intel Xeon processor technology.

"Accountants have significant needs to protect customer privacy but also for offsite back up of critical files," says Duxter. "Toronto CA Solutions is very advanced in their use of technology and while there is still some paper, they are way less than other firms. This means they need solid back up and data protection."

For Prasad, redundant back up is peace of mind. "If the building burns down, I'd be back in business tomorrow morning," he says. "It's not expensive to maintain and is very important for business continuity. It is also required for us to keep our clients who need this kind of protection."

When they started, Toronto CA Solutions managed their data internally but as business grew, Prasad felt they were not as efficient as an outsourced solution. They turned to Network Integrators to enhance their data management and free up their in-house staff to get involved in other areas of their business.

Additionally, they have the assurance that their data is being protected. Prasad explains that hardware can be easily purchased but to remain in business, their data is critical to restoring the firm in a worst case scenario.

"With Network Integrators, we know back ups are being done religiously and they have a better solution for data management than we could have built or afforded on our own. It is vital to our disaster recovery process," he says.

An added benefit of working with NI on network efficiency has been the ability to more effectively track network use by staff, controlling spam and emails, as well as unauthorized attacks on the server.

"We couldn't easily monitor that before NI," says Prasad, noting that "although we're a small organization, this is a big concern for us."

File Preparation Time Cut

With business automation made possible by CaseWare running on their servers powered by Intel processor technology, Toronto CA Solutions has cut the time it takes to prepare a client file. Prasad estimates file preparation dropped time by between 25 and 30 per cent in the first year thanks to automation, and has seen a further efficiency gain of 10 per cent in the second and third years.

By tapping into the CaseWare software running on their servers with Intel Xeon processor technology, employees have access to the most up to date accounting rules and reports they need to effectively process a client file. Prasad notes that accounting rules change regularly.

"Accounting rules change almost as quickly as IT changes. We have to stay on top of both accounting changes and innovations in technology," says Prasad.

CaseWare software today drives Toronto CA Solutions by integrating everything from financial records to scheduling and project management. The software also manages email and is moving to a web based email solution to allow more remote access to information.

"Most of the resources we use for preparing files, accounting rules, etc. are now driven by the software. Using this technology improves the quality of the reports and minimizes risks of errors and risks of being reprimanded by the Institute (of Chartered Accountants)," says Prasad.

Technology Aids Productivity

CaseWare also allows Prasad to help his employees track performance and independently manage productivity. Every morning when staff log into Toronto CA Solutions' servers, they can instantly see how they are performing against the measures that have been set, and can proactively make changes to their work to meet their targets.

"It's about more than billable hours," says Prasad. "We can set targets for everyone and help them know what they need to do to meet those targets. It is much more proactive and not reactive."

For Prasad, having an integrated software managing all aspects of his business means it is easy to track client files, staff productivity and manage finances and billing in one location. It has helped him with business planning because he can see instantly which clients are profitable and which aren't, and which employees are more productive than others.

"Our business has really changed since the 1990s. I don't know what I would do without my software and our IT strategy," he says, noting their IT strategy is to be better than their competition and Prasad says they are realizing that goal.

Going Global

While the company started doing business only in the Greater Toronto Area and Ontario's golden horseshoe region, the firm has expanded to new provinces as their clients have grown and opened offices across Canada. More recently, the company has started working for clients in other parts of the world including Alaska, and Dubai.

"We do business using email and conference calls," says Prasad. With the expansion of the business, the need to work remotely and access information from anywhere using a VPN connection to their servers allows everyone to be effective. CaseWare has started to move to a web-based application which will be good timing for Prasad who will be depending on his notebook with Intel Centrino processor technology for connectivity to the office whether he's on a client site or working from his boat.

“The way we do business is not just local anymore – it is all over the world so technology is important to us. It is means of communication between us and our clients,” says Prasad, adding that as the company continues to grow and add offices, they will rely more heavily on technology to keep connected.

In addition to the need for remote access while traveling, Prasad’s staff needs to be able to work efficiently at a client site for work such as an audit. During an audit, a team of two to three staff members might be working wirelessly on their notebooks with Intel Centrino processor technology and accessing Toronto CA Solutions’ server with Intel Xeon processor technology to input data directly into CaseWare. Prasad estimates that combination of leading edge technology with CaseWare software cuts the time required to perform audit procedures by at least 50 per cent.

Since CaseWare allows users to work in the same file, at the same time, and see changes on the fly, the need for the rapid processing power of Intel keeps things running quickly and allows for better collaboration.

“We have moved from number crunchers to accountants providing value-added input into business efficiency. We are still crunching numbers but with technology we spend less time on that manual process and can spend more time reviewing client data and providing greater commentary to support their business growth,” says Prasad. “This has allowed us to be able to provide more services including consulting, financing and IT solutions to our clients.”

Future Uses

With a major move into leading technology over the past years, Prasad is waiting for the next leap in technology before making further changes to his business. One area of interest is the move currently underway at CaseWare to allow web access to their software through, a software as a service model. This will be beneficial to Prasad as his business continues to expand both nationally and internationally.

“I am constantly looking for better ways to manage business, whether or not I am in the office. We are also looking for better ways to manage information including time management, and a better way for staff to measure performance beyond billable hours,” he says, noting that having employees be able to see “at a glance” where they are against performance measures on a daily basis helps improve productivity. Prasad requires that his staff be IT literate and take advantage of the technology the company has in place, whether it is new software, notebooks, or Blackberry technology.

“We have an edge now where we’re so ahead of our competitors. I don’t think there is a significant investment we can make in their short term but within another two years, I know there will be.”

A solid network with managed services provides the framework to expand the number of software programs that are being run, as well as the power required to run increasingly complex applications.

“We’ve all heard a lot about new *killer applications* like video conferencing or Voice over IP (VoIP), both the positive and the challenges. I am confident that we are putting the right pieces in place to capitalize on these technologies while enjoying the benefits to our existing infrastructure and core applications,” says Prasad. “We’ll be ready for whatever technology is coming down the pipeline”.

For more information on
Intel® Xeon® processors, visit www.intel.com/go/xeon
Intel® Centrino® processors, visit www.intel.com/products/centrino

INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT IS PROVIDED IN CONNECTION WITH INTEL® PRODUCTS. NO LICENSE, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, BY ESTOPPEL OR OTHERWISE, TO ANY INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS IS GRANTED BY THIS DOCUMENT. EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN INTEL'S TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SALE FOR SUCH PRODUCTS, INTEL ASSUMES NO LIABILITY WHATSOEVER, AND INTEL DISCLAIMS ANY EXPRESS OR IMPLIED WARRANTY, RELATING TO SALE AND/OR USE OF INTEL PRODUCTS INCLUDING LIABILITY OR WARRANTIES RELATING TO FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, MERCHANTABILITY, OR INFRINGEMENT OF ANY PATENT, COPYRIGHT OR OTHER INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHT. UNLESS OTHERWISE AGREED IN WRITING BY INTEL, THE INTEL PRODUCTS ARE NOT DESIGNED NOR INTENDED FOR ANY APPLICATION IN WHICH THE FAILURE OF THE INTEL PRODUCT COULD CREATE A SITUATION WHERE PERSONAL INJURY OR DEATH MAY OCCUR.

Intel may make changes to specifications and product descriptions at any time, without notice. Designers must not rely on the absence or characteristics of any features or instructions marked “reserved” or “undefined.” Intel reserves these for future definition and shall have no responsibility whatsoever for conflicts or incompatibilities arising from future changes to them. The information here is subject to change without notice. Do not finalize a design with this information.

The products described in this document may contain design defects or errors known as errata which may cause the product to deviate from published specifications. Current characterized errata are available on request. Contact your local Intel sales office or your distributor to obtain the latest specifications and before placing your product order. Copies of documents which have an order number and are referenced in this document, or other Intel literature, may be obtained by calling 1-800-548-4725, or by visiting Intel's Web site at www.intel.com.

Copyright © 2008 Intel Corporation. All rights reserved. Intel, the Intel logo, Intel. Leap ahead., Intel. Leap ahead. logo, and Xeon are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries.

*Other names and brands may be claimed as the property of others.

