CASE STUDY

Tax preparation in the cloud: How SmartVault and ProConnect Tax streamline firm workflows

Tax and accounting services are undergoing a rapid, technology-driven transformation. Client expectations for digital interaction, coupled with the increasing demands for data security and operational efficiency, have pushed firms to re-evaluate their fundamental workflows.

For years, document collection, organization, and secure archival have been critical bottlenecks that prevented firms from scaling and maximizing billable hours.

This case study explores the integration of Intuit® ProConnect™ Tax and SmartVault to create a seamless end-to-end digital tax preparation workflow.

Critical pain points in workflow

For tax and accounting firms, achieving efficiency often means addressing legacy friction points that consume non-billable time.

"The initial phase of client engagement and document collection is consistently identified as the single largest impediment to productivity," said Daniel Fritz, vice president of products at SmartVault, who referenced a report from AccountingWeb that reported accountants spend 50 percent of their time and 50 percent of their jobs chasing after documents. "To address this issue, a feature such as our SmartRequestAI is the catalyst to help an accountant get to the next level of automation."

This document chase, marked by scattered emails, insecure attachments, and endless follow-up calls, creates a significant administrative overhead. In fact, it's the collect phase of the tax workflow that is the primary cause of friction. SmartVault and Intuit ProConnect recognized that solving this problem required an integrated solution that works directly with tax preparation software.

A large part of developing the integration was listening to the tax community and their needs for smoother workflow. Jonathan Young, vice president of Marketing at SmartVault, emphasized the commitment to the professional community: "The deep understanding of the professional's daily struggle helped us develop tools that were designed not just to transfer files, but to automate the entire client intake process."

Integration and cloud-native design

The partnership between SmartVault and ProConnect Tax is built on a decade of collaboration, and extends across the entire Intuit tax ecosystem, which also includes Lacerte® Tax, ProSeries® Tax, and QuickBooks® Online. As a result, SmartVault is the only document management system (DMS) and client portal fully integrated across the Intuit ecosystem, ensuring that firms can leverage the DMS, regardless of which tax software they use.

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A critical element of this joint solution is the architecture of the tools themselves. ProConnect Tax is a cloud-native platform, eliminating the need for local installation, updates, or backups—a feature highly valued by modern practices. This cloud-first approach allows ProConnect to automate tedious tasks, catch errors, and seamlessly integrate with other cloud services.

"The number one reason users choose ProConnect Tax is because it's cloud native," said Ashley Henderson, a senior sales solution specialist with Intuit. "There isn't anything to install or download, and no updates or backups. All of that is handled by us."

SmartVault complements this advantage by serving as the central document repository for a firm because today's practice is more than just a "tax shop;" firms handle client accounting services, bookkeeping, payroll, and other services.

"SmartVault consolidates all internal documents and client-shared folders in one secure, branded client portal with unlimited storage and client capacity," said Fritz. "So many tax pros are really excited about the ProConnect integration with SmartVault because it just really makes things easy. The combined system moves beyond simple file storage to become the organized backbone of the firm's entire operations."

Automating the tax prep workflow: From intake to archival

The ProConnect Tax and SmartVault integration is designed to manage the full, five-stage tax prep workflow: engage, collect, prep and review, deliver, and archive. By automating key actions at each stage, the system significantly reduces manual administrative time.

SmartRequestAI: Revolutionizing client intake

To tackle the sometimes-difficult collect phase, SmartVault developed SmartRequestAI, an advanced automated client intake tool. This feature leverages the previous year's client 1040 that is automatically routed and archived in SmartVault to generate a truly customized, conditional questionnaire.
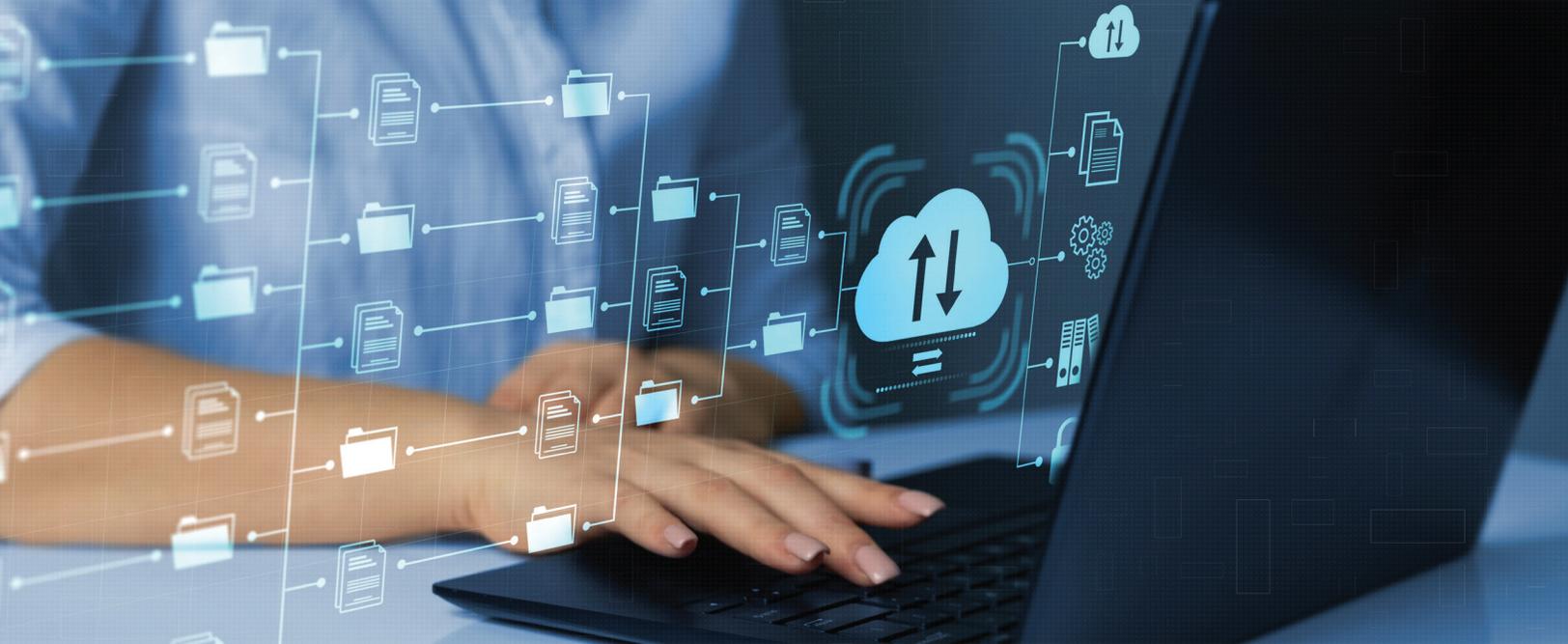
Instead of sending generic organizers, SmartRequestAI extracts specific data points, such as income sources, dependents, and deductions, to guide the client through a series of targeted questions. For example, if a client indicates they have W-2 income but no rental properties, the system conditionally removes the rental property questions, streamlining the process for the client. The interface is designed for simplicity, allowing clients to answer questions, save their progress, and return later, even on a mobile device.

The power of SmartRequestAI culminates in two key deliverables for the firm:

1. **The work paper:** A bookmarked PDF contains all client-provided answers, mapped to mirror the input fields in ProConnect Tax to allow the preparer to quickly navigate and enter data.
2. **Work paper source documents:** A consolidated PDF contains all uploaded supporting documents, including W-2s, 1099s, and other forms, where each is tagged and bookmarked by question and can then be used for direct data entry or integration with external tools.

This process is further enhanced by SmartScan, a feature that allows clients to use their mobile phone to scan documents instantly. Similar to a mobile check deposit, SmartScan automatically straightens, crops, and uploads the image as a secure PDF directly into the client's SmartVault folder, eliminating the security risks and formatting hassles associated with email attachments and HEIC files—Apple's version of a "high-efficiency image format."

"According to Internal research and customer advisory feedback by SmartVault, firms are **saving approximately one hour per return** using SmartRequestAI, converting a critical time-suck into a highly efficient, client-driven process."

Seamless routing and data control

Once the client's documents are collected, the integration ensures they are organized instantly. SmartVault uses smart routing functionality that provides a clear folder structure. When the final return is generated in ProConnect Tax, the preparer simply clicks one button to "Send to SmartVault." The system automatically reads the client and year information from ProConnect, and routes the final return directly into the correct client and tax year folder.

Example: *[Client Name] > Taxes > TY24* engagement folder—without any human intervention or risk of misfiling.

This cloud app to cloud app approach ensures a seamless and accurate workflow, eliminating the need for error-prone "print to PDF" processes that can often create administrative clutter and are often done manually. The SmartVault-ProConnect Tax integration also automatically creates the client and the year-based engagement structure in SmartVault if they do not already exist, ensuring consistency across all engagements. This automated structure not only enhances internal organization, but also ensures clients have immediate, secure access to their files within their branded portal.

The capability also extends to e-signatures and other third-party tools. Documents needing signatures, such as an 8879, can be printed to SmartVault, where a firm can then initiate a DocuSign request. The completed, signed document automatically boomerangs back into the correct client folder, maintaining the integrity of the seamless workflow. The secure storage and instant retrieval of these final documents address the archive and deliver phases, ensuring the firm meets its data retention requirements while providing clients with 24/7 access.

Uncompromising security and operational reliability

A critical consideration for any firm moving to the cloud is security, given the sensitive nature of financial data and the mandates of regulations, such as IRS 4557 and FTC Safeguard. SmartVault emphasizes an enterprise-grade security posture, which is foundational to the entire system and the level of security practitioners have come to expect.

SmartVault operates as a SOC 2 Type 2 compliant vendor, explained in detail by Jonathan Young, vice president of marketing at SmartVault, in this Intuit [Tax Pro Center article](#).

"This designation is achieved only after continuous and rigorous third-party auditing over a 12-month period, ensuring that the company's security protocols for protecting client data are robust and adhered to," said Young. "By using SmartVault as their DMS, firms can achieve compliance with relevant mandates."

Beyond compliance, the system offers granular control and reliability. Firms can customize granular user permissions, allowing specific employees access only to certain client files or document types. The system provides detailed activity reporting and audit trails, showing who last opened or edited a document, a crucial step for accountability and internal review.

Operational reliability, especially during the high-pressure tax season, is another plus.

"One of the numbers SmartVault is most proud of is **100% uptime**, especially during tax season," said Young. "This commitment to zero downtime is essential because the system must remain available when 30,000 accounting professionals and more than half a billion documents are actively using the platform. The combination of uncompromising security and proven uptime ensures that the DMS is reliable when firms need it most." –**Jonathan Young**, SmartVault

Scaling success and achieving work-life balance

The true measure of the ProConnect Tax and SmartVault integration lies in the quantifiable, positive impact on firm success and quality of life. The efficiency gains afforded by the integrated workflow translate directly into profitability and improved work-life balance for tax pros and their staff.

Customer testimonials highlight these transformative outcomes. These three examples underscore that the integration's value proposition extends beyond technical capability to enabling better business management and a superior lifestyle for firm owners:

"Adopting SmartVault was one of the smartest technology decisions I've ever made to future-proof my firm. By shifting hours away from administrative tasks toward revenue-producing work, we have saved more than $150,000 annually in billable time." –**Eric Green**, Esq., Green & Sklarz LLC, and the Tax Rep Network.

"As a proponent of the 'work from anywhere' model, SmartVault is the backbone of my tech stack and integral to scaling my firm without adding new staff." –**Dawn Brolin**, CPA, Team Brolin and Powerful Accounting.

"SmartVault made it possible to grow and serve more clients, but work less hours and live the life I want. We doubled our client base without increasing our firm's workload, maintaining smooth operations, even during extended travel periods." –**Nick Boscia**, CPA, EA, Boscia & Boscia and The Balanced CPA.

Meet the authors of articles on the Intuit Tax Pro Center:

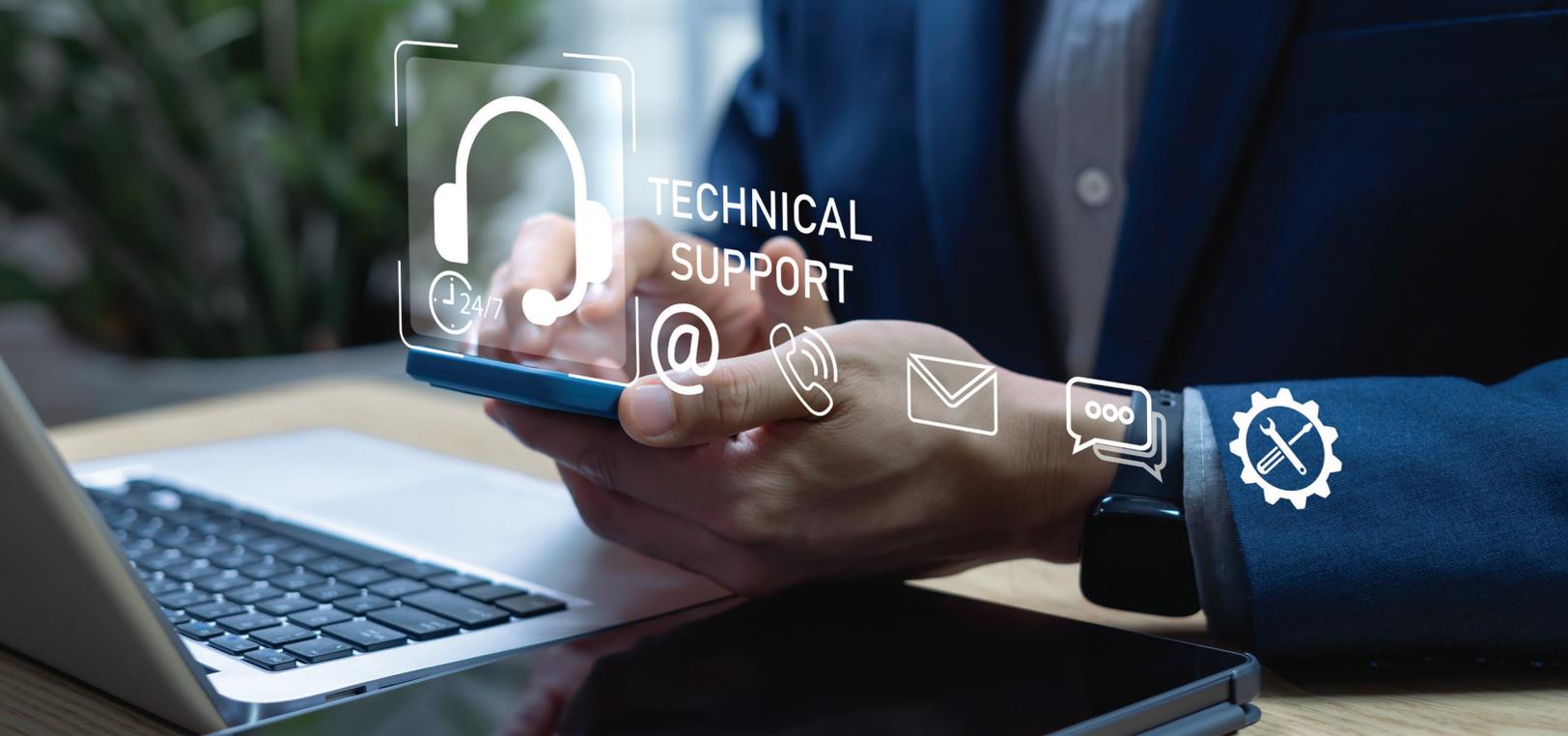| Eric Green	Dawn Brolin	Nick Boscia

Onboarding and support: A commitment to success

Recognizing that transitioning a firm's entire document storage and workflow can be cumbersome and difficult, ProConnect and SmartVault heavily invested in dedicated, US-based support and migration services.

For firms moving from existing desktop solutions or other storage platforms, SmartVault provides a clear, guided migration process. This includes a dedicated migration specialist who assists with data verification, folder mapping, and a staged import process.

"Our team of onboarding specialists is going to help convert your data, and if you're coming from a different solution other than Intuit, you're going to get that hands-on onboarding," said Henderson.

For users moving specifically from Intuit DMS, SmartVault offers an accelerated path with a dedicated tool that connects directly to the DMS to quickly transfer all folders and client data. This ensures a rapid, successful transition with minimal disruption. Post-migration, SmartVault continues to provide support through SmartVault Academy, Smart Hours (one-on-one training), and weekly office hours, ensuring users are not just given the software, but set up for sustained, successful adoption.

A unified path to efficiency and growth

The integration of SmartVault and ProConnect Tax represents a critical evolutionary step for the tax and accounting profession. By bringing together a cloud-native tax preparation platform with a robust, highly secure DMS, the partnership systematically eliminates the most significant friction points in the tax workflow.

From the intelligent, client-guided intake of SmartRequestAI and the one-click auto-routing of completed returns, to the foundational enterprise-grade security and operational reliability, this integrated ecosystem can truly move a firm forward. Firms can meet compliance requirements and operational demands, but also save hours of lost time, resulting in measurable improvements in profitability and the ultimate goal for many practitioners: sustainable, balanced growth.

Stop chasing the paperwork; start focusing on advisory and revenue-producing work.
Schedule a demo and get more information today.