

TaxHelp911.com  
Wyandotte, Michigan

**Creative Solutions software is key to the future for a Michigan accountant offering online, paperless, face-to-face service .**

## The Shape of the Future?

Don Burniac wants to liberate accountants (and, for that matter, their clients) from the constraints of bricks and mortar. His vision is to connect minds and visuals through the Internet, using computers and video technology to supplant the interaction that used to require people coming together in urban centers and cities. As the Wyandotte, Michigan accountant puts it, "I liken computers and the Internet to binoculars for our brains."

Don has watched technology steadily erode the ties between specific office locations and equipment. He has no doubt that this trend will continue, and that soon he'll be able to carry his practice anywhere in a shirt pocket. Until then, he has positioned himself in the forefront by eliminating many of the constraints of space and time with an innovative practice he calls TaxHelp911.com.

Many accountants have started using technology to eliminate the need for frequent face-to-face meetings with clients and their paperwork. Burniac has taken this to another level. He and his staff not only provide tax preparation and small business accounting services to clients live, over the phone and the Internet—but they do so while continuing to provide the kind of face-time that clients find reassuring. And along the way, he has gotten rid of a heck of a lot of paper.

Clients log on to TaxHelp911.com and are able to see live, streaming video of their tax preparers while they talk to them on the phone and exchange documents over the Internet almost instantaneously. It's a one-way video connection that affords the client the privacy to work with their accountant, even while they're in their bathrobes.

And while the tax preparers may be in TaxHelp911.com's central Tax Support Office Hub, they might as well be at home, or even a thousand miles away—anywhere they can get a high-speed connection with their laptop.

"It's face-to-face, desk-to-desk, from anywhere. For clients, geographic market area choice restrictions are eliminated. The only thing they can't do is shake hands, but they can get a smile," says Burniac. "For tax preparers, they no

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longer have to leave their costly homes empty while traveling to another costly office to make their living. An added benefit is that office overhead can begin to be squeezed out of pricing in today's competitive market."

### Laying the groundwork

His practice wasn't always so high tech. It began as a family tax and bookkeeping practice started by his grandfather in 1934. In 1971, Burniac's father made him an offer he couldn't refuse—if he brought in 50 new clients in a year, his father would buy him a new car.

"A male just turning 20 will do anything for a new car," says Burniac. "Little did I know what that would lead to. When I started, we had 350 income tax clients and 73 monthly bookkeeping



*Clients of TaxHelp911.com can see Don Burniac, above, or any of his tax preparers, live, in streaming video while talking to him on the phone. Burniac could be in his office or a 1,000 miles away, running his Creative Solutions software through Virtual Office CS from his laptop computer.*



clients. By the time I was finished and decided to exhale a number of years later, we had 8,500 tax clients and 500 monthly bookkeeping clients.”

Don helped his father computerize to handle the volume, convincing him to invest \$100,000 in a Burroughs mini-computer system in 1977. “Nine months later the CPU burned up. I swore off computers forever.” Instead, they devoted themselves to developing a highly efficient manual system for handling all the clients they had—elements of which Burniac still uses for tracking work flow to this day.

A few years later, Burniac took another look at PC-based accounting software. “Creative Solutions approached us, and we said we would run their software against our manual system. We whipped them for three years in a row, like Paul Bunyan with his axe versus the chainsaw. But the fourth year they came back and beat us. They proved themselves, and we went with the best technology and embraced it.”

### **Making it happen**

Like any innovator, Don Burniac made several attempts to realize his vision before all the pieces came together. The first step was in the mid-1990s, when he experimented with using the Picture-Tel system to communicate remotely with clients. “It was basically a teleconferencing system. Clients had to come to the office, and we beamed in. The trouble was, the system was complex, expensive, and required dedicated ISDN lines. Even so, we did about 300 remote, live tax interviews. That was our pioneering phase.”

The next breakthrough in achieving his vision was Creative Solutions’ introduction of its Virtual Office CS software. “That’s what made it all possible,” says Burniac. They could access all their software and client data remotely, enabling staff to work from anywhere. “And it all came together when we embraced web technology. That’s when TaxHelp911.com was born.”

*Clients are also liberated from the constraints of geography. They can get their face time with Burniac or his colleagues from home, in the office, or even on the road—anyplace where they can get a phone connection and highspeed computer access.*

There was one final wrinkle to be worked out. It turns out that they overinvested in web technology at the outset, with two-way VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) web cameras and phones on both ends. They came to realize that this was needlessly complicated and expensive—the web phones tended to loop and echo, and getting clients on video was a hassle.

You might call their current setup a “high tech/low tech” system—it uses Internet technology, but only for the TaxHelp911.com website with streaming video from a low-cost web cam. Audio is delivered over conventional phone lines. “Regular phones are much more flexible, and clients are relieved not to have to have a camera on their end.”

### **Putting it all together**

“The core of our existence is really Creative Solutions. We just wrap this website technology right around that core. Now it all exists in cyberspace and the integration and data sharing of software like Creative Solutions accounting products and FileCabinet CS with UltraTax CS means that everything interlinks seamlessly,” says Burniac.

“The software integration and largely paperless workflow are especially important. You don’t want to run around tracking down paper files while you’re live, on camera with your client,” he adds.

“I’ve spent a lot of time with Creative Solutions tech support. They’ve been very helpful, and they really listen to users’ needs. I encourage all users to spend time with them and tell them what they need.”

Burniac is eager to share with other accountants what he has learned about using the web to escape the expense of bricks and mortar. He’s easy to find. Just go to TaxHelp911.com.