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## Christopher Baas brings technology, organization skills to Baas & Associates

by Ken Wall

For Christopher Baas the beauty of accounting is in the details — whether determining what software is used to record and report a company's financial statements, how that software is configured to provide the most accurate and usable information or how the client is billed for services.

Not to imply that the accounting firm co-founded by his father, David W. Baas, some 25 years ago was in disarray before the younger Baas joined up three years ago, but in a relatively short period Baas & Associates has certainly taken on some of the characteristics of its tax and accounting manager.

Having gained some experience with accounts payable and accounts receivable as well as basic tax return preparation during a brief stint at Baas & Associates after college, then going on to learn more of the auditing side of the business at KPMG's Des Moines office, Baas returned to his father's business as an experienced accountant ready to take on some new challenges.

His first major undertaking was to get the firm more involved in setting up accounting software for its small business clients — an important piece of Baas & Associates' customer base.

As an avid photographer who showcases his work on a Web site he created, Baas has a knack for computers. Configuring programs to produce the best results fits right in with his organizational talents and the ability to churn out financial reports that provide every bit of information an accountant could need. That more than satisfied his hunger for details.

"When I got back here I found that tax was a good base for us, but I knew that technology could be almost as important a service for our small and midsize business customers," Baas said. "Since then I have done a lot of work with systems implementation and configuration, transferring data from old software packages to new ones and teaching clients how to operate them. It allows me to get my hands in on a wider variety of work while helping the clients determine what kind of software they need and how to use it.

"I'm certified in QuickBooks and Oracle ASP, which is an Internet based program, and have capabilities in some of the upper-end packages that occasionally might come into play. Probably the only thing we don't get involved in is the big enterprise class stuff because that would be a whole job in itself.

"I think it helps to have the accounting background because it expedites the process of setting up the software. A lot of folks don't realize how important the configuration of the software is to producing the right results. If you use the programs properly, they can make accounting and tax functions so much simpler."

While the firm's expanded technological capabilities are luring new customers in, a change in Baas & Associates' billing structure is making them more comfortable once they get there. It started with a brainstorming session during which Baas suggested creating a monthly fee structure that could replace the firm's per-hour billing system.

The concept has quickly taken flight with about 85 percent of new clients now electing to sign up for the fixed monthly fee.

"One of the biggest frustrations I have heard people have with their accounting firms is how they are billed," Baas said. "You get quoted a certain price for something, and by the time all the work is done it ends up being more.

"We've integrated a fixed price agreement in which for a specified monthly amount clients can call us as much as they need. It's especially attractive to small businesses because it gives them something they can bank on. Instead of getting hit with a big ticket once or twice a year, this provides some predictability.

"It's been available for a couple of years now and we've found that most of our new clients prefer to go that route. Some of our existing clients have switched over as well, and we are exploring the idea of setting up a fixed price system for individual clients.

"Probably the most positive result has been that clients aren't hesitating to pick up the phone and call us. Rather than letting



**Baas in his office... "I'm certified in Quickbooks and Oracle ASP, which is an Internet based program, and have capabilities in some of the upper-end packages that occasionally might come into play."**

things pile up or trying to guess on their own, they know they can call us really quick and not worry about whether it is going to cost them anything extra."

Given his penchant for organization and the fact that his father operated an accounting firm, Baas may have seemed predestined for a career in the industry, but he says he had no plans for pursuing an accounting degree when he graduated from Lewis Central High School in Council Bluffs and headed for Simpson College.

In fact, the only thing on his mind at the time was how he would juggle a two-sport athletic career in college. In high school he had played football, baseball, hockey and tennis. He lettered in both football and baseball during his freshman year at Simpson, which is near Des Moines, before deciding that with his future professional prospects depending more on his degree than his accomplishments on the field, he might be better served to focus more on academics.

Baas set aside his athletic aspirations and even took a break from his beloved

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photographic work and hit the books. Though he doesn't plan to put on football pads anytime soon, he has picked up his camera again. He enjoys taking pictures of landscapes and lifescapes and even sells a few on his Web site, [www.lifeasyouknowit.com](http://www.lifeasyouknowit.com).

"I did a little bit of photography work in high school, shooting for the yearbook,"

Baas said. "I always liked it, and I enjoy being outside. This gives me the opportunity to do both. It also allows me to use the creative side of my brain.

"Accounting is much more an analytical pursuit, so this gives me sort of a different perspective on things. I've found that I'm even able to take that creative energy and apply it to the business.

"I don't play as much sports as I prob-

ably should anymore, but between the photography and spending as much time as possible with my wife, Ami, my free time is pretty well spoken for."

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