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Accounting Revolutionized Since the Dark Ages

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Accounting Revolutionized Since the Dark Ages

By: Heather Willoughby

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“Technological progress is like an ax in the hands of a pathological criminal.” Although this statement may appear to be a bit extreme or vague at first glance, when dissected, Albert Einstein’s declaration provides interesting insight to the concept of technology. This scientist is implying that once technology is set in place, its progress is inevitable, just as a pathological criminal will inevitably have an ax (or something of the sort) in hand. The field of accounting has been completely revolutionized from decades past, as technological advances have been constant and have ultimately changed the entire face of the occupation and of an accountant’s responsibilities.

Starting with just the use of a pencil and paper to keep records and number columns, followed by the invention of the abacus, accounting has been needed for as long as civilization has existed. Although it took on a different form than the traditional bookkeeping that it turned in to, it has always been necessary to keep track of inventory as well as the costs of products and services. Constant inaccuracies and human shortcomings have spurred bigger and better ways of keeping records of these things. Although the concept of using machines to solve mathematical problems has been around for a long time, the need for numerical calculators grew and grew. Greatly reducing inaccuracies in recordkeeping, technology progressed from adding machines to calculators, and finally to computers. Once computers were underway and accounting software was developed, it entirely eliminated the need for any other calculating tools. Using spreadsheets, databases, and software not only made an account’s job simpler, faster, and more efficient, it also minimized the mistakes made since the computer has the ability to catch them.

Despite popular belief, the accounting profession today does not consist of a lot of debit and credit work, balancing finances, and creating a trial balance as it did not very long ago. Thanks to technology, computers do all of that work for us, and accounting is now more of an analytical occupation. Rather than sitting behind a desk crunching numbers all day, accountants are stepping up and really having a voice in the company. Although the increased developments of accounting software programs now have the capability of preparing any and every chart or financial statement imaginable, it is up to the accountant to make the information useful. After the computer prints out all of the financial statements, it's an accountant's job to analyze the information, organize and prepare a report, and present it to those of higher authority in such a way that they can understand it and make it useful to the company and their goals.

The changes made in the field of accounting have been significant in that now it is completely natural for an employee to largely rely on the technology to do their job for them. While technology has vastly improved the occupation with its increased speed, capability, efficiency, and ultimately accountability, it has also in a sense established barriers. Because society has gotten so accustomed to using the latest and greatest technology, without it, oftentimes they feel lost and therefore limited in their ability to complete a task. While the level of intelligence and education for accountants increases in some analytical areas, on the other end of the spectrum, they might not always know exactly how to piece together financial statements if the program fails, or how to understand why results come out a certain way, or how to fix any mistakes that might not be recognized by the computer.

The face of the occupation has changed considerably as a result of technological advancements. College students that are graduating and entering the accounting field are no longer faced with the task of recording debits and credits, but instead are focused on studying how to analyze the information with a managerial mindset. The computer has not only revolutionized accounting, but it has even opened up new areas of work like forensic accounting that would not have otherwise been possible. This makes it easier to track down and eliminate early attempts at fraud. Although the accounting field has made such significant improvements in just a few short years, strong growth is expected to soar even further in years to come. Just as Albert Einstein stated that progress is contingent upon the advancement of technology, the expected growth in the occupation will undoubtedly enable accountants to do even more unimaginable things in the future.