

Learn how to use CRA's online services

Monitoring your own online profile has its advantages

Last month I referenced situations where owner/operators were lied to by their accountants and tax preparers. I mean, when you get a letter from Canada Revenue Agency requesting your latest GST/HST return, how many times do you have to hear your accountant tell you, "I just sent it in" when you know in your gut that he didn't?

No matter who prepares your tax return, it's up to you to make sure it's accurate and filed on time. When you're counting on someone else for help, how do you verify that your personal or business tax accounts are up to date?

You have to contact CRA. You can call, of course, but you should be prepared to wait a long time on hold.



A better way is to manage your CRA accounts online. A few years ago CRA introduced two programs as a way for individuals and businesses to have online access to many of their accounts and to perform various functions and filings with CRA.

My Account for Individuals

My Account for Individuals lets you view 11 years of tax returns, so if

your tax return was filed you'll see it online.

If your 2011 tax return is shown as "not received," and your tax preparer says he sent it in, you'll know you need to correct the problem by: a) submitting the return; and b) finding another tax preparer.

You can see information about your personal tax refund, your balance owing and payments on the account, set up or change banking info for direct deposit of your refund, check your RRSP limits, and get details about any payments from Child Tax Benefit, GST/HST Credit, Universal Child Care, and other related programs.

You can also change your address and phone numbers online

so your CRA mailings will update properly.

My Business Account

My Business Account is a similar electronic service for accessing CRA business accounts and asking CRA account-specific, tax-related questions. Business owners can use My Business Account to interact electronically with CRA on their GST/HST, payroll, and corporate income tax accounts. Not sure if your accountant filed your GST/HST return? Just go online and check.

Not only will the online service tell you when the return was filed, but once the return has been processed it will tell you when the money will be direct-deposited into your bank account. Now that's darn handy information!

You can also file returns, check account payments and balances, view correspondence from CRA, update bank info, request a CPP/EI ruling, and register a formal dispute.

Another feature we use with all of our clients is called Represent a Client. Our clients sign a CRA form to authorize us as a representative. This gives us access to almost all the same information and features available through My Account and My Business Account.

One service that saves tons of time and aggravation is that we can get info on missing tax information slips – T4s, T4As, T4A(P)s, T4A(OAS)s, and T4Es. If these slips get lost, we can simply go download them from CRA.

Actually, there's another common use of this service. If our client is at the bank getting a loan or refinancing and needs a copy of his latest Notice of Assessment from CRA, we can go online, download it, and fax it to the bank for him. A big convenience and a fast solution.

Signing up

You'll find lots of information about both programs at www.cra-arc.gc.ca, including demos to walk you through. Signing up takes four steps: you provide some personal information; create a CRA user ID and password; create security questions and answers; and enter a CRA security code, which will be mailed to you.

An electronic push

In keeping with CRA's push to become more electronic, many of its District Tax Offices are going to stop offering payment counter services. So no more running to CRA at the last minute to pay your account.

According to CRA, you now only have three ways to make a payment: pay through your bank's Web site or phone banking; pay through CRA's My Payment service; and pay by cheque with a bank teller. Funny that CRA no longer lists mailing a cheque as an option.

I know not everyone is comfortable with CRA's emphasis on online account management. If you need help or reassurance, contact your accountant or tax preparer. And if you don't think you'll get a straight answer, talk to me. □

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