

# DIY taxes

Use specialized tax software  
to file your own return

By Lisa Evans

**T**ax season is upon us. While you may be inclined to find the nearest tax accountant's office, adjusting to life in Canada also means learning about its financial system. Filing your own taxes using an online software program downloaded to your computer can not only save you money on accountants' fees, but provide a learning experience with long-lasting benefits.

Eric Nauenberg immigrated to Canada from the United States and used TurboTax to complete his first Canadian taxes. "It was cheaper [than going through an accountant]," he says. While he says the tax filing process itself wasn't all that different from the United States, the program did flag a number of deductions that Nauenberg wasn't previously aware of. "The software was a good introduction to the Canadian tax system."

Tax accountants can charge anywhere from \$60 to \$300 per return. Purchasing or downloading tax software programs can save you a bundle — especially if you're filing income tax for more than one person. With so many programs to choose from, however, it can be difficult to know where to begin. We've done the work for you and compared some of the most popular tax software programs out there to help you find the best one for you and your family.

**MyTaxExpress** — MyTaxExpress offers a customer satisfaction guarantee, meaning you only pay once you're satisfied and ready to submit your return. The cost for one return is \$6.99. Returns are free for families whose total net family income is under \$25,000. The program supports returns for all provinces except Quebec.

**StudioTax** — The words "taxes" and "free" rarely go together, but this downloadable program is free for personal use and the self-employed regardless of income. Their customer support is basic, intended to answer the needs of common tax circumstances rather than tricky cases, so if you have anything more complicated than some simple T4s, RRSP contributions and standard student and family tax breaks, StudioTax may be too simplistic.

**Tax Chopper** — This online tax software is great for a large or extended family. It allows you to prepare up to 15 returns for your family in one account. The program calculates family tax credits and transfers among family members to get the maximum refund. Tax Chopper gives discounts for bulk purchases. A single tax return costs \$9.98, two returns \$15.98, three to five returns \$19.98, and six to 15 returns \$25.98. You may be eligible for a free return if you were a full-time student, if you were single, divorced, widowed or separated at the end of the tax year with a net income of less than \$30,000, or if your married/common-law combined spouses' net income is less than \$35,000.

**TurboTax** — Canada's number one best-selling tax software, TurboTax comes in four different online versions — Standard (\$17.99), Premier (\$32.99), Home & Business (\$44.99) and Free (for students and those who only have income to claim (i.e., no RRSP contributions, no self-employed income). TurboTax offers

phone, email or chat support.

**UFile** — This web-based application simplifies the tax preparation process by coaching you as you make your way through your tax forms. Students can use UFile online for free. Individual returns cost \$15.95 and \$24.95 for a family return. The forms are free to fill out and you pay once satisfied and are ready to submit your return. Customer support is provided online and by phone.

Whichever program you choose, filing tax returns has become easier over the years with Canada Revenue Agency's electronic filing options. Statistics Canada reports nearly two-thirds of all tax returns are now done electronically, via Efiling (for accountants) and Netfiling (for taxpayers), and it's steadily on the rise.

It's not hard to see why the electronic option is gaining popularity. It's fast, secure and refunds can take as little as eight days with direct deposit. Mailed returns can wait as long as six weeks to receive a refund. While you can only use electronic filing if you have filed Canadian taxes at least once before, anyone can use the online tax software. Just print and mail in your forms. The deadline for tax returns for the 2012 income year is April 30, 2013. 🍀

