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OCTOBER 2014

CAPITAL ACQUISITIONS FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2014

As the tax law currently reads, the more generous 2013 limits of rapid write-offs of capital expenditures (Section 179 Expense Deduction and Bonus Depreciation) are "off the books" for 2014 and have been replaced by much slower depreciation deductions. An extension of the rapid tax write-offs has been anticipated by many commentators, but Congress has not acted. Absent Congressional action, there will be no bonus depreciation, and the Section 179 current expensing limit for 2014 will be \$25,000 rather

than 2013's \$500,000 amount. The limit for 2014 on the acquisition cost of qualifying equipment is \$500,000 rather than the 2013 limit of \$2 million. In the past, Congress has often seen fit to extend the higher deduction limits late in the year. If you are anticipating the elective acquisition of significant fixed assets, you might want to consider deferring your acquisition until after the November elections when Congress might be more likely to act on tax legislation.

CYBER SECURITY

We have, in the recent past, written about the possibility of preventing internal fraud and other theft from businesses by adopting and maintaining a few good internal controls and maintaining employee fidelity insurance. As more and more business activity is conducted electronically over the internet, it is also prudent to try to ensure security from electronic fraud. Small businesses and individuals are targets for criminals seeking sensitive data because such criminals well understand that small businesses and individuals have limited resources dedicated to information system security. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), and other similar organizations have published suggestions for securing your electronic business. The following are some of their suggestions that small business owners and individuals might want to consider:

- *Protect against viruses, spyware, and other malicious code:* Maintaining the latest security software, web browser, and operating system are the best defenses against viruses, malware, and other on-line threats. Set antivirus software to run a scan after each update. Install other key software updates as soon as they are available. Such software is readily available on-line from a variety of vendors.
- *Provide firewall security for your internet connection:* A firewall is a set of related programs that prevent outsiders from accessing data on a private network. Make sure that your operating system's firewall is enabled. Free firewall software is available on-line. If employees work from home, ensure that their home systems are protected by a firewall.

(Continued on reverse)

- *Monitor e-mails:* Do not open e-mail attachments from strangers, regardless of how enticing the subject line or attachment might be. Be suspicious of any unexpected e-mail from someone you do know as it might have been sent from an infected machine without that person's knowledge.
- *Make back-up copies of important data and information:* Regularly back-up the data on all computers. Critical data includes word processing documents, electronic spreadsheets, databases, financial files, human resources files, and accounts receivable/payable files. Back-up data at least weekly and store the back-up copies either off site or in the Cloud. If possible, set the back-ups to occur automatically.
- *Control physical access to your computers:* Prevent access or use of business computers by unauthorized individuals. Lap tops can be particularly easy targets for theft or can be lost, so they should be locked up when out of use. Make sure that a separate user account is created for each employee and that it requires strong passwords. Administrative privileges should only be given to trusted IT staff and key personnel.
- *Establish cyber security rules for employees:* Establish rules of behavior describing how to handle and protect personally identifiable information. Establish basic security practices and policies for employees, such as requiring strong passwords, and establish appropriate internet use guidelines, including penalties for violating company cyber-security policies.
- *Secure your Wi-Fi networks:* If you have a Wi-Fi network in your workplace or home, make sure that it is secure, encrypted, and hidden. To hide your Wi-Fi network, set up your wireless access point or router so that it does not broadcast the network name (the service set identifier or SSID). Password-protect access to the router and be sure to change the administrative password that was on the device when it was first purchased.
- *Limit access to data and information:* Do not

provide any one employee access to all data systems. Employees should only be given access to the specific data systems that they need for their jobs, and they should not be able to install any software without permission.

- *Passwords and authentication:* Require employees to use unique and strong passwords and change passwords frequently (every three months is one suggestion). Consider implementing multi-factor authentication that requires additional information beyond a password to gain entry. Verify with your vendors that handle sensitive data, especially financial institutions, to see if they offer a multi-factor authentication for your accounts.
- *Manage and assess risk:* Ask yourself, "what do we have to protect? And, what would impact our business the most?" Cyber criminals frequently use lesser protected small businesses as a bridge to attack larger companies with which they have a relationship. This can make unprepared small firms a less attractive business partner in the future.
- *Create a mobile device security plan:* Mobile devices can create significant security and management challenges, especially if they hold confidential information or can access the company's network. Require users to password-protect their devices, to encrypt their data, and to install security apps to prevent criminals from stealing information while the phone is on public networks. Be sure to set reporting procedures for lost or stolen equipment.

Adherence to these tips should help to create a cyber-security system that will protect your electronic data against fraudulent use and theft. There are many resources available on-line that will help in this regard.

If you have any concerns or questions about your systems cyber security, we will be glad to help.

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Tax & Business Alert

OCTOBER 2014

CONVERTING A SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP TO A LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY

As sole proprietors, business owners enjoy the advantage of simplified income tax reporting via the use of Schedule C (Profit or Loss from Business) within their Form 1040 (U.S. Individual Income Tax Return). However, sole proprietorship status can expose a business owner's personal assets to the risks and liabilities of their business operation.

State statutes generally allow a sole proprietor to conduct business as a limited liability company (LLC). The intent is to provide a broader protection from liability. The concept of the LLC statute is that the owner (technically referred to as a "member") does not have any liability for business debts solely by reason of being a member or owner. Of course, this does not relieve the owners of responsibility for their personal actions, nor for debts that they have personally guaranteed. But personal assets would be protected from claims arising because of ordinary business transactions. This liability protection could be particularly advantageous when there are employees working in the business. With a sole proprietorship, employees' actions may expose the business owner's personal assets. Sole proprietors interested in limiting personal liability should consult an attorney to more fully explore the protections that are relevant to their particular business situation.

The other attractive aspect of LLC status is that IRS regulations allow the business owner to continue reporting for income tax purposes as a proprietor, despite forming an LLC under state law. Gaining the extra legal protection of an LLC will not entail any extra filing with the IRS.

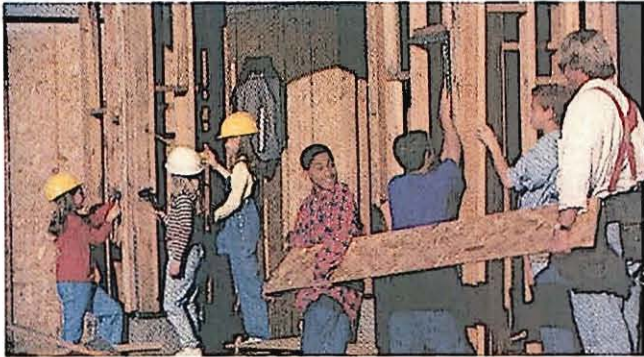
Of course, there will be transaction costs to create the LLC. It will be necessary for an attorney to draft an LLC document to be filed with the state. The attorney can provide an estimate of this cost, as well as any initial or recurring fees that must be submitted to the state office. Also, when conducting business as an LLC, it will be necessary to consistently use the LLC designation on business letterhead, business checking account, business licenses, and the like. The business owner would need to make sure someone goes through the process of adding the LLC designation to the various contracts and documents under which business is conducted.



In summary, a sole proprietor should weigh the advantages of the liability protection from LLC status against the initial legal and administrative costs of accomplishing the conversion. For most proprietors, the added liability protection will merit the costs of converting to LLC status, but this should be explored more fully with legal counsel. If you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please give us a call. ■

TRAVEL WHILE GIVING TO CHARITY

Do you donate your services to charity and travel to do so? While you can't deduct the value of your services that you give to the charity, you may be able to deduct some of the out-of-pocket travel costs you incur.



For the travel expenses to be deductible, the volunteer work must be performed for a qualified charity. Most groups other than churches and governments must apply to the IRS to be recognized as a qualified charity. You can use the IRS's Select Check tool (search for "select check" at www.irs.gov) to find organizations eligible to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions.

Of course, not all types of travel expenses qualify for a tax deduction. For example, you can't deduct your costs if a significant part of the trip involves personal

pleasure, recreation, or vacation. Additionally, you can't deduct expenses if you only have nominal duties or do not have any duties for significant parts of the trip. However, you can deduct your travel expenses if your work is substantial throughout the trip.

Deductible travel expenses must be: (a) unreimbursed, (b) directly connected with the services, (c) expenses you had only because of the services you donated, and (d) not personal, living, or family expenses. These travel expenses may include air, rail, and bus transportation; car expenses; lodging costs; meal costs; and taxi or other transportation costs between the airport or station and your hotel. You may pay the travel expenses directly or indirectly (you make a payment to the charitable organization and the organization pays for your travel expenses).

If a qualified organization selects you to attend a convention as its representative, you can deduct your unreimbursed expenses for travel, including reasonable amounts for meals and lodging, while away from home overnight for the convention. You cannot deduct personal expense for sightseeing, entertainment, and other expenses for your spouse or children.

If the requirements are met, traveling while donating services to charity can be a win-win. ■

TAX CALENDAR

October 15

- Personal returns that received an automatic six-month extension must be filed today and any tax, interest, and penalties due must be paid.
- Electing large partnerships that received an additional six-month extension must file their Forms 1065-B today.
- If the monthly deposit rule applies, employers must deposit the tax for payments in September for social security, Medicare, withheld income tax, and nonpayroll withholding.

October 31

- The third quarter Form 941 (Employer's Quarterly Federal Tax Return) is due today and any undeposited tax must be deposited. (If your tax liability is less than \$2,500, you can pay it in full with a timely filed return.) If you deposited the tax for the quarter in full and on time, you have until November 10 to file the return.

- If you have employees, a federal unemployment tax (FUTA) deposit is due if the FUTA liability through September exceeds \$500.

November 17

- If the monthly deposit rule applies, employers must deposit the tax for payments in October for social security, Medicare, withheld income tax, and nonpayroll withholding.

December 15

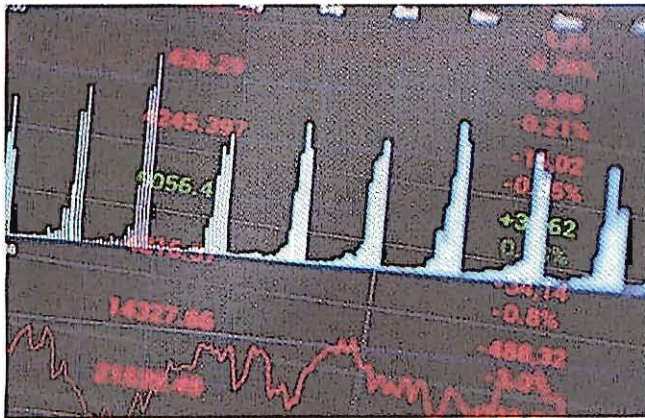
- Calendar-year corporations must deposit the fourth installment of estimated income tax for 2014.
- If the monthly deposit rule applies, employers must deposit the tax for payments in November for social security, Medicare, withheld income tax, and nonpayroll withholding.



SIMPLE TAX SAVINGS TECHNIQUES FOR SECURITY GAINS

The market swings over the last several years may have you wondering whether it's time to capitalize on some market gains. While taxes should not be the main consideration in this decision, they certainly need to be considered as they can make a significant impact on your investment return.

With that in mind, here are a couple tax-smart strategies to consider as you analyze your investment opportunities and decide what to do about recent gains.



SHOULD YOU WAIT TO SELL UNTIL THE STOCK QUALIFIES FOR LONG-TERM CAPITAL GAINS TREATMENT?

If the stock sale qualifies for long-term capital gain treatment, it will be taxed at a maximum tax rate of 23.8%. Otherwise it will be taxed at your ordinary income tax rates, which can be as high as 43.4%.

Clearly, you'll pay less taxes (and keep more of your gains) if the stock sale qualifies for long-term capital gain treatment. The amount of taxes you'll save depends on your ordinary income tax bracket.

Are the tax savings that would be realized by holding the asset for the long-term period worth the investment risk that the asset's value will fall during the same time period?

To qualify for the preferential long-term capital gain rates, you must hold the stock for more than 12 months. The holding period generally begins the day after you purchase the stock and runs through (and includes) the date you sell it. These rules must

be followed exactly, because missing the required holding period by even one day prevents you from using the preferential rates.

The question then becomes: Are the tax savings that would be realized by holding the asset for the long-term period worth the investment risk that the asset's value will fall during the same time period? If you think the value will fall significantly, liquidating quickly, regardless of tax consequences, may be the better option. Otherwise, the potential risk of holding an asset should be weighed against the tax benefit of qualifying for a reduced tax rate.

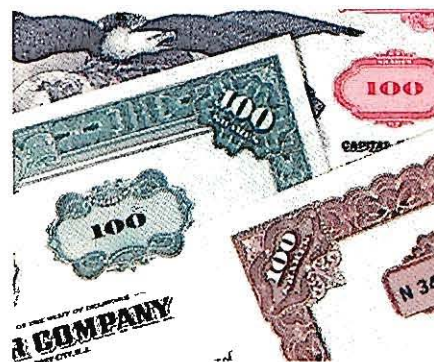
Comparing the risk of a price decline to the potential tax benefit of holding an investment for a certain time is not an exact science. We'd be glad to help you weigh your options.

USE "SPECIFIC ID METHOD" TO MINIMIZE TAXES

If you are considering selling less than your entire interest in a security that you purchased at various times for various prices, you have a couple of options for identifying the particular shares sold—

- (1) the first-in, first-out (FIFO) method and
- (2) the specific ID method.

FIFO is used if you do not (or cannot) specifically identify which shares of stock are sold, so the oldest securities are assumed to be sold first. Alternatively, you can use the specific ID method to select the particular shares you wish to sell. This is typically the preferred method as it allows you at least some level of control over the amount and character of the gain (or loss) realized on the sale, which can lead to tax savings opportunities.



The specific ID method requires that you adequately identify the specific stock to be sold. This can be accomplished by delivering the specific shares

to be sold to the broker selling the stock. Alternatively, if the securities are held by your broker, IRS regulations say you should notify your broker regarding which shares you want to sell and the broker should then issue you a written confirmation of your instructions. ■

SWAPPING BONDS TO CLAIM LOSSES

Taxpayers holding bonds that have decreased in value may benefit from a technique known as a *bond swap*. A *bond swap* enables a taxpayer to currently benefit from the decline in a bond's value and either increase or keep the same cash flow generated by the bond. To facilitate a bond swap, the taxpayer sells currently owned bonds at a loss and

immediately reinvests the proceeds in different bonds. This technique is beneficial if the taxpayer has current capital gains, particularly short-term, that can be offset by the bond's capital loss, or the taxpayer's overall net capital loss following the bond disposition is \$3,000 or less (which the taxpayer can offset with other ordinary income).



Taxpayers entering into bond swaps must steer clear of the wash sale rules to avoid having the loss from the disposition disallowed. If the replacement bond is purchased within 30 days before or after the sale of the old bond, it cannot be substantially identical to the original bond. Bonds issued by a different entity would not be substantially identical to the old bond. Bonds of the same issuer would not be substantially identical if they have different coupon rates or terms than the original bonds, provided such differences are not negligible. Also, the transaction charges (e.g., brokerage commissions) associated with buying and selling bonds will reduce the economic benefit of a bond swap. ■