There's no faster way to drive a deeper relationship than to begin surfacing insights and automating opportunities for more regular and substantive interaction.

Adam Neary • Feb. 08, 2012

Towards the end of 2011, I was at the annual Sleeter Conference, which is quickly becoming the Super Bowl for accountants, if such a thing is possible. They held a session about Financial Dashboards, and the auditorium was quite literally standing room only. People were squeezing in as others waited outside for people to leave.

And, rightfully so. Accountants and bookkeepers are eager to put dashboards in front of their clients. There's no faster way to drive a deeper relationship than to begin

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Accountants know they need to be in the cloud, their clients are asking for it, and they want to deliver, but they end up not taking the plunge. "Maybe next year."

Why No Plunge?

The pundits will tell you it's concern over security or that accountants don't get technology, but I think that's ridiculous. (If CPAs can figure out QuickBooks, they can figure out anything!)

No, I think there are two opposing forces that are behind this rampant Accountant Cloud Stagnation (ACS) epidemic...

1. Many accountants believe that each of their clients is unique and needs thorough customization of any dashboard they would consider using.
2. Many accountants believe they don't have time to customize (or learn *how* to customize) all these crazy, "sophisticated" cloud software suites that are out there.

The Cure

I think ACS is a curable malady, and these three simple steps can help you get started today:

1. Find a solution that is turn-key and works with your existing business

Many accountants mistakenly believe that in order to "get into the cloud" they need to leave their existing processes behind. Most accountants are comfortable with QuickBooks desktop, and that's fine. In fact, it's more than fine. There are plenty of cloud solutions that interface with QuickBooks securely. Intuit handles all the data transfers, so you know you're OK. Just keep what you've got and bolt on what you need.

And the idea is to provide a fully turn-key solution for accountants. Upload your

manufacturers have supply chain analyses, but they both look at the same cash flow projections and profitability analysis.

Listen, if you were to plug in 30 clients from 10 different industries, each client wouldn't need 100 percent of the reports that are available. But with a couple targeted customizations for each, your clients would have a ton of information at their fingertips that used to take a lot of time to compile and often times never gets done. They call that the 80/20 rule, and it's a good one.

3. Fill the gaps... with your expert advice!

If you sat down today and plugged in a web-based dashboard tool for your clients, made a couple tweaks for each, and then put the application in their hands, there would no doubt be a ton of gaps. If it had industry benchmarks, you would probably want to make adjustments for geography or business size. If there were no benchmarks, you would want to talk through the context of several key metrics. In fact, you might be tempted to discount the value of the cloud-based app because of its limitations.

But the app is just a starting point for the conversation. Rather than working your fingers to the bone trying to customize each report to automatically generate crisp, automated gold, our clients have had a lot more success just printing the reports out, penning them up, and talking with their clients about what they think.

Because that's the point of these tools

Cloud-based apps don't give you all the answers. (Be wary of folks who say they do!) Instead, they provide data in an easy way so that you can drive the conversation to the next level and help your clients achieve their goals. Essentially, cloud apps can help CPAs migrate from "bookkeeper" to trusted business advisor, in the eyes of their clients. And that's the win we're all seeking here.

In time, you'll learn the tricks and shortcuts about particular tools just as you have

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plan, measure, and execute on what matters: the business. He can be reached by email at [*adam.neary@profitably.com*](mailto:adam.neary@profitably.com)*.*

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