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Abel worked for other firms. During this time, she enhanced her practitioner skills while also gaining valuable insight into what it takes to run a successful business.

Kristy Short • Sep. 30, 2011

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THE ART OF THE QUICK CHANGE
Andrea Abel's move to the Cloud was quick and painless — and key to her firm's rapid growth

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Firm Profiled: Andrea Abel, Lime & Company

Andrea Abel's move from filing cabinets to the Cloud was quick and painless — and key to her firm's rapid growth

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she would ever be able to operate her own firm. She had heard of Cloud-based applications, but didn't really know what that meant or how these advanced technologies would ultimately solve the IT issue.

“At the time, I was not up-to-date on Cloud solutions. So in my mind, high-end applications and costly IT support was the reality. It was what I experienced working for other firms,” said Abel.

A Quick Change Artist in Action — From Paper-Heavy to Paper-Free

In 2004, Abel took a break from public accounting to start a family. In 2005, as a stay-at-home mom, she began helping a few friends with business consulting support. A few friends quickly turned into a few clients ... and then a few more.

“It happened so fast. First, I'm helping friends get their businesses going, and then suddenly I have a list of clients.”

Before she knew it, Abel was well on her way to running a full-service accounting firm. However, technology was still an issue. Convinced that growing her home-based business into a full-service firm meant tackling complex technology issues and investing in an IT expert, she concluded that growth was not in her future.

“The technology aspect of running a firm was intimidating,” Abel admitted. “So I continued to work with desktop software and paper files. I knew there had to be a more efficient way to work; I just didn't know what that was.”

A few years later, Abel attended The Sleeter Group's Accounting Software Consulting Conference and was blown away by presentations on Cloud computing and the ease of use that web-based applications offered.

“I talked to a few Cloud technology vendors and asked questions about how their

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“After seeing a few product demos at the Sleeter show, I jumped in and invested in an all-Cloud system. Within a few weeks, I set up my clients on Hosted QuickBooks using InsynQ and SmartVault for storing and exchanging files,” Abel said. “My transition was quick because all the technologies were incredibly intuitive — for both me and my clients.”

For many of Abel's clients, one training session on the solution was all that was needed. Some didn't require training at all and were able to get up and running by following a concise instruction guide supplied by Abel.

A few months later, Abel enhanced her firm's workflow by adding Fujitsu's ScanSnap.

“There is no reason to have paper at all,” Abel said. “Because ScanSnap fully integrates with my document management system, I can scan docs, and with just a few mouse clicks, data is filed electronically within the proper client folder. It's all there, at my fingertips, accessible in seconds.”

Abel admitted to having a few “paper hold-outs” among her clients. She honored these clients' requests to be left out of the Cloud, but was also direct on what they were missing.

“I explained that online services offer unlimited access to me. At any time a client can request a file and have it sent immediately,” Abel said.

Abel's paper-based clients are also restricted to a set number of hours per month. Under her fee scale, clients receive four hours of onsite time for review and consulting. If more time is required, they pay extra. For her web-based clients, the lines of communication are open 24/7.

“I was direct with clients when it came to my time,” Abel explained. “If they were

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“I’m up to 45 clients and predict continued growth,” Abel said. “It’s just so easy to service clients in the virtual environment. I can now accomplish tasks in minutes.”

Because her firm is established in the Cloud, she was also able to hire two part-time contract employees without leasing office space.

“I have one employee in Michigan and one here in Sarasota. Both work from their homes like I do and have full access to the technology and data,” Abel explained.

Overall, Abel’s outlook on the future of Lime & Company is bright. Cloud computing completely changed the way she operates her firm and serves her clients. By eliminating the boundaries of time and distance, growth potential is unlimited.

“Technology is what initially held me back,” Abel said. “But in the end, it’s what allowed me to launch my firm and grow very quickly. I would tell anyone thinking about starting a firm, but intimidated by technology, to look into Cloud applications. These advanced technologies really do take IT out of the equation.”

[CALL OUT BOX]

Stats at a Glance

- Firm website: limeandcompany.com
- Year founded: 2005
- Total employees: 1 full-time; 2 part-time
- Home base: Sarasota, Florida
- Firm description: Full-service accounting practice for small businesses
- Technology of Choice: SmartVault, InsynQ, Hosted QuickBooks, Fujitsu ScanSnap

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