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Many of the vendors who provide services or products to accountants offer network, reseller, community or partner programs. These programs are designed to make it easier for accountants to recommend and support the vendor's products and services.

John D. Anderson • Oct. 10, 2011

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core, each of these programs provides something to the accountant for joining.

What types of programs exist?

Accounting firms can take advantage of many different programs from vendors and suppliers. Some have very well developed partner programs that provide training, support resources, internal use software, CPE credits, educational programs, marketing materials, and a few even have national and regional user conferences. Other partner programs are not as well developed and offer very limited benefits or incentives.

Research is an important key to choosing whether or not to sign up for a partner program. You need to determine what is expected of the firm if it signs up for the program. Some programs require a certain sales level or referral level in order to qualify for the program. In other words, they expect you to convert your clients to the system(s). Other programs have no such requirements. Some programs even expect you to pay to participate with limited prospects of revenue to offset the fee. Doing your due diligence in researching the wide range of accountant programs available will help you determine whether or not the firm is willing, ready and able to participate per the requirements.

Who should join?

Depending on the program and the requirements, the firm representative who joins the program may vary. Programs like Intuit's QuickBooks ProAdvisor Program and the Sage Accountants Network register individuals as opposed to firms so the employees who are going to be part of the program have to join. This allows the individual to promote their certification and competency in the product. And if the employee changes jobs, the membership follows the employee and does not stay with the firm. In such cases, the firm loses the benefits of the program. Other programs

allow the firm to join the program irrespective of the number of employees who may

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option will need to be driven by an agreement so that both parties have an understanding about what happens in the event an employee leaves the firm before the expiration of the membership.

What are the benefits?

In addition to the benefits provided by the partner program, there are other benefits to the firm in the form of enhanced reputation, increased specialized knowledge and the ability to provide a service other accountants in your area may not be providing. Participating in these programs brings a level of credibility to a firm. It shows that the firm is knowledgeable with a particular product or service, and members of the community can rely on this firm to service their needs. It displays a dedication to learning about new tools and techniques, which in turn helps to enhance the firm's reputation in the community it serves. These benefits are soft skills that can translate to enhanced service offerings for the firm at higher rates than the typical accounting, compliance and tax services provided by most accountants. Partner programs can be important tools for building specialties and client loyalty.

How does this impact the firm's revenue?

There are a couple of ways this impacts a firm's revenue. If the partner program offers a commission, discount or rebate, this *adds to your bottom line by the amount of the commission*. However, this is not the only way it adds to the bottom line. The most common impact is revenue from helping clients purchase, setup, use and manage the software or service purchased through the partner program. Many programs list member and firm profiles on a referral website, which offers preferred placements to members based on criteria such as product certifications and client ratings. These programs help firms translate their investment in product training into new client consulting opportunities. However, some programs are more exclusive, and you might be the only provider within a certain geographical area. In such cases, the firm

rates will be higher because of the exclusivity of the program and the ability to

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the firm will probably abandon the effort after a short period of time. Firms that dedicate themselves to active participation in a partner program will be successful in increasing firm revenues, firm reputation, and firm service offerings to its clients and potential clients.

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