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## ACCOUNTING & AUDIT

# Accounting's Disability Niche

The simple fact is this: disabled Americans represent a segment of the population with serious needs for tax and accounting services. Their needs are unique, and cannot be easily met with a cookie-cutter approach to these services. But for the firms that understand the value of a strong niche market, there is an opportunity for growth in serving the disabled.

**Dave McClure** • Feb. 19, 2014

From the [Bleeding Edge](#) blog.

Tax and Accounting services are and always have been niche businesses. That is to say, firms become successful by identifying segments of their market that have accounting and tax needs, then serving that segment well. Which is why I'm surprised that more firms are not building their client base by serving the growing ranks of disabled Americans.

By all accounts, there are some 8.8 million people in the United States today, and the numbers are increasing. In the year from November 2012 to November 2013, an additional 1.2 million Americans joined the ranks of the disabled. There are a host of reasons for this increase, but four factors are likely contributors:

- The Veteran's Administration and Social Security Administration are working to clear a three-year backlog in disability cases. This means that people who became disabled in the period of 2008 to now are finally joining the ranks of the officially disabled.

- We've spent the last 12 years in a state of war. Since 2001, we have sent more than two million service people to war – half of them being deployed more than once. And the number of disabled veterans has increased to 2.7 million Americans.
- We're living longer, but not as well. The art of medicine has advanced to the point that Americans are living longer, mortality rates among workers have declined, and people who once would have simply died are now living for additional decades. At the same time, though, the aging population is less healthy in their final years than previous generations.
- The job markets are constricted, and this has reduced the ability of some people who are capable of working to find work. Hiring the disabled without discrimination may be the law of the land, but the practical reality is that most businesses would rather hire a healthy employee if given the choice.

But numbers alone are not the reason why disabled Americans need specialized tax and accounting services. Like any other group, the disabled have need of tax services, estate planning, financial planning and assistance in starting or maintaining a business if they are able to work. For those who do choose to work, accounting a strict record-keeping is vital.

But the rules are complicated. Set by Congress, the rules are tricky, the dollars that may be earned without losing benefits are minimal, and even the people who manage disability payment programs don't always know the rules themselves. Worse yet, any chance errors in bookkeeping or tax filings can bring draconian punishments that may include a complete loss of benefits and life-sustaining services.

The marketing of a service firm can be boiled down to six simple words: **Find A Need And Fill It.**

The disability segment of the American population is crying out for help in tax and accounting matters, and there are accounting firms that will see the opportunity in serving them.

It won't be easy. First, you have to be able to walk the walk and talk the talk. The learning curve is not steep, but it does exist. If you don't know the difference between Social Security's SSI and SSDI programs, you don't have the knowledge you need. Likewise, you need to fully understand the work rules and income restrictions, as well as the relevant provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Two places to start are to determine whether you already have a disabled person working for the firm or as a client of the firm, so you can draw on their counsel. Then, get an assessment as to how compliant your offices are with the ADA access rules.

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