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**Hugh Duffy** • May. 15, 2014

What path led *you* to become a trusted advisor to your clients?

For James Castaldo, CPA, it's the life lessons learned through a varied career that enabled him to focus on the customer, first and foremost.

Along the way, James' road was paved with a mix of opportunities. Before taking the plunge and starting in his own practice in 2006, he unloaded trucks at UPS, worked in compliance for a cable company and even went into the gym business. He held management positions with a telecommunications company and, eventually, obtained his license and landed at a Long Island-based accounting firm, which he left to start his own business.

Today, his **practice** primarily focuses on offering QuickBooks' services to a range of clients in transportation, retail, construction, ecommerce and engineering. With offices in Long Island's Melville and Lake Grove, NY, he offers what he refers to as a unique "one-two punch" to help him stand apart from other QuickBooks' providers.

"Our clients aren't just looking for QuickBooks consulting and services; what they really want is something more turnkey, so we increase our value by offering bookkeeping *and* QuickBooks," he said. "Offering the two services also encourages clients to pay more because we throw in QuickBooks accounting training for the bookkeepers."

His firm has seen around 70 new clients since it opened, and business increased by 50% last February. James says that much of his success lies in his team's terrific focus

on giving his customers what they want, something he feels is often overlooked in

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terms of billing their customers on a monthly basis with a flat fee instead of charging them an hourly rate. Known as “value billing,” charging a flat fee is good for James because he knows how much cash flow he has coming in. It also helps him retain customers for the long haul because they like the consistency of knowing what they'll spend.

James' firm offers QuickBooks setup, training, support and review, and also works with clients in setting up and installing QuickBooks POS. Although many accountants also offer similar services, he also knows that his certifications in QuickBooks, QuickBooks Online, QuickBooks Enterprise and QuickBooks POS help him reinforce the trusted advisor status.

“Certifications automatically give you credibility because the customer anticipates the fact that you're going to be able to help them with everything they need,” he said. “It gives you a foot in the door.”

Since 2006, James' firm has changed quite a bit trial and error and some tough-learned lessons.

“When I first took the leap of faith, I wasn't making much, and was just meeting the payments on my house and my mortgage,” said James. “Then, about three years ago, I landed a couple big clients, and relied heavily on them as profits soared. I thought they'd take me to the moon, but suddenly, they went out of business! This gave me a sense of realism that this business is ever changing. Yet, Every day is not like the last, and I kind of like that.”

James prides himself on being a go-getter, and says he loves his job because he provides solutions to complex problems.

“I love to be able to sit down with my customers, whether it's helping them save a significant amount of tax money, assist them with an IRS problem or help them with

QuickBooks. I'm a self-made man because I've done it all myself. I'm pretty proud of

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