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When Steven Brewer started his firm, the competitive landscape was quite a bit different for accounting professionals. The small town of Salem, Indiana, which has a population of about 6,200, provided a fairly traditional client base of individual and business tax clients, and business accounting engagements.

With only a couple other firms in the town, which is about 35 miles north of Louisville, Kentucky, the business was steady, but heavily based on tax services. As the years went by, and the invasion of national chain tax prep stores invaded even small towns tax services became a lower profit service. If he wanted his firm, Steven Brewer CPA (www.stevenbrewercpa.com), to not only survive, but thrive, it would have to evolve with technology and changing client needs.

To do this, he focused first on providing services that clients really value, and the retail tax shops can't compete on. As a CPA, he is uniquely qualified to offer strategic advisory services to businesses, not just after-the-fact reporting and analysis. With technology enabling more interactive relationships with not only clients, but also their bookkeeping and daily operations, Steve started providing client accounting services. Sometimes called virtual CFO services, this is where his accounting firm provides business clients with varying levels of functions, depending on their need.

For some clients, his staff of three full-time bookkeepers, an office manager and a

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when he found AccountantsWorld, which offers a variety of cloud-based systems that help accountants better serve their clients, and better manage their own firm.

Steve's practice uses AccountantsWorld's Accounting Power system, which makes it easy to collaborate with clients to share data, includes strong financial reporting and write-up functions, has trial balance, and includes a full bookkeeping system for the client to use, but the accounting firm gets to keep control over. Clients have a customized dashboard that shows what they need to know, but only lets them access and use the functions the firm wants, so there's less opportunity for the clients, or their employees, to make mistakes. The system's virtual CFO functions also give the firm quick access to financial snapshots of multiple clients.

"Most of my clients love it," Steve said. "Clients don't need to know accounting and it takes all of the hassle of management away from them. Also, my staff bookkeepers can see what they're doing when they're doing it and walk them through issues if they need it."

The firm also uses AccountantsWorld's Payroll Relief and Cloud Cabinet systems. These cloud programs make it easier for clients to run their business, because the accounting firm is always there to provide guidance. This strengthens the client-firm relationship, while also balancing firm revenue. Steve's practice went from 60% tax services, but now has grown the accounting, payroll and advisory services to the larger share.

And the firm continues to grow, now providing virtual accounting and payroll services to nearly 60 business clients with reporting in 12 states. The businesses range in size from micro businesses to as many as 45 employees with revenue in the millions. Tax is still an important service, and the firm prepares about 450 individual and 125 business entity returns each year. Steve has also developed niche markets serving home inspection companies.

Since it's a cloud-based system that uses bank-level encryption, he and his staff can

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