

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

COVID-19

CPA-as-a-Service: Re-imagining Your Clients as Subscribers

There is a certain amount of agony to the monthly billing cycle. We generate the numbers of hours worked and try to justify the work, anticipating client pushback. The process continues each month in agony, like an unpleasant sequence from Groundhog Day.

Garrett Wagner, CPA • May. 05, 2020



As we search for finding “new normal,” one aspect of the old normal we won’t be sad to leave behind will be hourly billing.

There is a certain amount of agony to the monthly billing cycle. We generate the numbers of hours worked and try to justify the work, anticipating client pushback. The process continues each month in agony, like an unpleasant sequence from the movie *Groundhog Day*.

What if the “new normal” means that we leave behind the old hourly billing with our dear friend SALY (Same as Last Year)?

Can You Imagine CPAaaS?

What if our shift to a new normal empowers us to provide better value and get paid in the process—by moving into a subscription pricing model?

You may know what SaaS means: Software as a Service. You may have even heard of CAS, client accounting services, but can you imagine CPAaaS? CPA as a Service? The real acronym that will change the accounting landscape.

In his book, *Subscribed*, author Tien Tzuo, one of the leaders in the subscription model, observes that the market for subscription services has grown to \$2.6 billion in 2016 from just \$57 million in 2011. Subscription pricing isn’t some futuristic trend. It is how consumers and businesses are buying staples right here and now.

In your move to a new normal, why not let go of the old ways and increase your customer satisfaction? Move customers out of monthly head-scratching and potential bickering. Be seen as effortless and more relevant all at the same time.

With your move to a subscription services model, you shift from selling an hour of time or packages in response to seasonal events to more open access to your knowledge and skills. We live an age of commoditization. Services to help with accounting, taxes and even compliance are becoming commodities. Your ability to shift from selling based on a client’s reacting to tax season or a letter from the state into an open door will set you apart.

You may be surprised to hear this feedback, but most clients work with you to take advantage of the knowledge you have. The best clients talk to you before they make a financial decision, large or small. Many others would do the same, if they understood it does not always translate into a billable event.

Clients want your insight. How can they grow their business? How much more would the business be worth doing this versus that? With COVID-19 upon us, clients want your knowledge to understand the changing dynamics of the payroll protection program process and rules.

Your knowledge is what they truly desire and need. But what most pay for is a tax return, something no one really enjoys. And they equate your brand with taxes. Not solutions.

Re-invent Your Marketing

By shifting to a subscription model, the tax return becomes a just one bullet point in a value chain. Access to your knowledge lands front and center. For a low monthly price, your subscribers gain access to your knowledge, perhaps a monthly or quarterly one-on-one, a roundtable with peers, and oh by the way, a tax return.

High value products and services like yours are being sold this way. Instead of buying or leasing the latest model Porsche, now Porsche lets you drive a different one every month, with their subscription program.

There is no better way to introduce customers to more of your services, new associates and getting work done ahead of peak season than a subscription model. By engaging clients throughout the year, you can help them to help you. As your customers interact with you more, you gain a deeper understanding of them and are able to identify key solutions they desperately need and were afraid or aware of before.

When customers are no longer worried about getting nickel-and-dimed over hourly billing, you can deepen that relationship, understand their needs and present new ideas in proactive ways. That is how real value gets created.

Our goal remains the same. Old days or new normal, we want to be relevant to our clients and be the one our clients count on again and again.

With a subscription model, they get access and a punch list of ongoing services. While you remind them with email marketing that you are there—count on them to be reaching out to you, too, because they want the value of what they're paying for. They become more proactive, seeking your help based on that bullet list of services. You have created demand by increasing supply.

Your New Normal as a Subscription

Your shift to the new normal is an opportunity to align how your firm operates with how \$2.6 billion is being spent right now on software and services: subscription based. Much of this also aligns with the Millennial mindset where subscribing to services just makes more sense than capital outlays and commitments. Why pin all your marketing and sales on a once-per-year event like taxes? Will future clients remain that loyal? Will Artificial Intelligence and automation be perceived as “good enough” to do their taxes for them next season?

By offering a subscription, clients gain access to your depth of knowledge. They have an incremental, low-risk commitment and they feel compelled to take advantage of that small “streaming” investment in you. Watch your customers grow more engaged, as your own services get sharper and more clearly defined year-long—increasing your relevancy for the future.

COVID-19 • Firm Management • Article • coronavirus accounting firm • coronavirus small business • COVID-19 • Firm Management

CPAPA is registered with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) as a sponsor of continuing professional education on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors.

© 2022 Firmworks, LLC. All rights reserved