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Let's be real. None of us really knows what the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 are going to look like. The good news is that CPA firms that survived the pandemic chaos have learned valuable lessons about how to adapt work processes in a crisis, which means being prepared for anything and everything. The hard reality for CPA firms girding themselves for another uncertain new year crunch is that preparation never really ends.

In that spirit, Cetrom offers four critical actions CPA firms must take in 2021. Doing

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but it's not an endgame. Business continuity planning needs to be continual and should include IT, security and disaster planning, including improving redundancies and your firm's data backup plans.

The minute you stop tinkering and investing in your IT infrastructure, security protocols and software — the moment you stop striving to empower your team and help your clients with upgrades, be they large or small — is when your CPA firm will fall behind and create risk.

So, as we head into 2021, CPA firms need to have a plan in place to solidify IT systems that are in place, upgrade technology, software and hardware where it makes sense, and weave these augmentations into a revised business continuity plan for an uncertain 2021.

Embrace Automation

Perhaps your CPA firm introduced some automation software as a response to the pandemic and the need for near 100% remote work capabilities. Maybe your firm deployed a chatbot on its website or artificial intelligence to automate mundane, repetitive, labor-intensive tasks ... if that's the case your firm is on the right path, but it needs to keep moving and progressing.

The automation of manual, labor-intensive tasks will transform the CPA industry in the next 10 years. Where processes like audit work require heavy investment in human capital, time and treasure, AI will enable CPA firms to process huge amounts of data quickly and efficiently, allowing audit teams the space and time to focus more on analysis rather than aggregation.

Not only will audits be automated, but back office processes will as well. With AI and automation handling time-consuming tasks, CPA teams will have more time to think

strategically, be innovative, and perhaps most important of all, spend more time in

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Migrate to Cloud Technology or Upgrade Your Cloud Infrastructure

Remote work, stronger security, automation, increased collaboration, enhanced productivity — these are all made possible and supercharged by the cloud. If your CPA firm hasn't migrated to cloud accounting, it is already way behind the curve. If your CPA firm was proactive in migrating to cloud technology in 2020, there are steps you can take to upgrade its cloud accounting capabilities to enhance not only employee satisfaction and productivity, but also to improve your client experience.

Cloud accounting is now industry best practice, not some futuristic, distant reality. It's either time to make the move to cloud computing, or it is time to enhance the cloud infrastructure you've adopted to perform better.

Partner with an Experienced Cloud Service Provider That Knows the Accounting Industry

This action item is simple but absolutely essential. To navigate the possible unknowns of 2021, CPA firms need to partner with a cloud accounting service provider.

Partner with an IT provider that is deeply experienced and knows the accounting industry like the back of its hand. The combination of IT know-how, 24/7/365 monitoring, geographically dispersed, highly secure data centers, and the latest security software, AI and automation tools, is what your CPA firm needs to stay focused on delivering the best possible customer experience to its client service.

An IT provider should become another experienced team member at your CPA firm, working in the background to keep your firm operating smoothly and protecting its data, and pushing back when your firm leadership needs to move on IT initiatives that will mitigate risk while elevating a firm's performance.

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