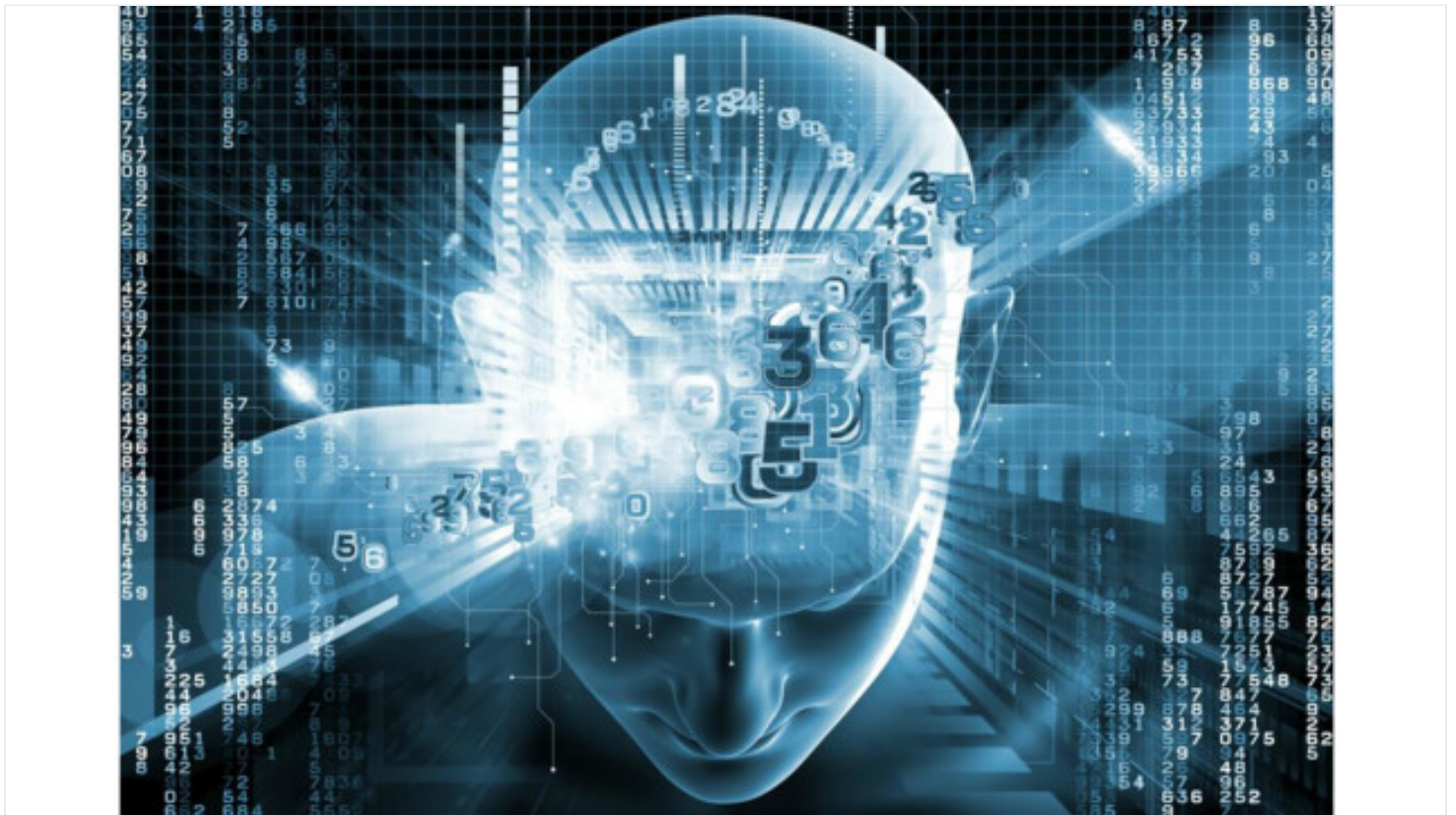


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Dec. 07, 2021



By Jeannie Ruesch.

The past two years have taught small businesses and accountants alike the value of resiliency.

Your clients that survived the pandemic did so by pivoting, adapting and downright changing in ways they may have never expected. While their core model or values may be the same, there's something new about them, influenced by their experiences

over the past two years. You may also be seeing a surge in brand new clients. After all,

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client. (Easier said than done, I know.) This is the first step towards helping them, and Client 2.0 may not fit the scripts you had for clients pre-pandemic. How do you understand where Client 2.0 is coming from, and how can you help them maintain momentum as they navigate new terrain? Let's look at what we know.

Who is Client 2.0?

The small businesses that survived so far have revamped every aspect of their operations: from how they staff and clean, to what products and services they offer. They've had to be agile, adaptable and willing to upend their business to keep going. Similarly, the newly formed businesses are monuments to lessons hard learned and opportunities unlocked. They are sweet lemonade squeezed from sour or old lemons. Resiliency has won.

So too, has purpose. The pandemic has changed our "why" and reframed what's most important in life. Businesses are defining what "business as usual" will mean in the future, and the signs point to passion, flexibility, technology and community impact as the next wave of what will be considered table stakes.

While optimism abounds, Client 2.0 will still battle some headwinds: our [recent survey](#) found that a third (30%) of bookkeepers say their clients' top challenge is keeping their business open, followed by increasing costs (27%) and employee recruitment and retention (17%). Temporary fixes for an overnight shift to e-commerce and/or remote work may also need to be optimized or bolstered to be viable in the long-term.

What Client 2.0 needs from you

Don't worry. Client 2.0 will still find value in your core services. They will always need an accurate ledger, but they may expect a shift in how you communicate the data and the speed at which it is available. Moving forward, the emphasis is not only

on what services you offer, but how you deliver them. The following tips will help

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conversations like you would in the onboarding process. Interview them and take time to learn what they're dealing with. What is their growth plan (do they have one)? What types of decisions are they facing today? What keeps them up at night? Questions like these lay the groundwork for a productive, trusting partnership.

● Be proactive & offer ongoing advice

The fast pace of change means that these types of exploratory conversations should be ongoing, and so too should your counsel. Pre-pandemic, a [lack of strategic advice](#) was one of the top-cited reasons businesses did not refer their accountants to others. Today, any friction in your client's experience could be the reason for them to seek a different provider.

The good news is that the tide is already turning. A majority of accountants and bookkeepers we surveyed (57%) plan to offer more advisory services in the year ahead. Remember that advice can come in any number of forms. What do you see in your clients' books, processes or technology choices that could be improved? Assess everything from the client's financials, to agility, to how to optimize any hastily implemented technology. Whether you're advising on financials, providing a process improvement tip, or offering insights into the clients' business, you'll be able to demonstrate your value as a long-term partner and create a competitive advantage.

● Stay on top of tech

Because of their ability to adapt to pandemic era change, it is safe to assume that Client 2.0 is more tech-savvy (or maybe just more tech-ready) than clients of years' past. They'll appreciate you leveraging technology to better meet their needs. In fact, they'll demand it. A Canopy survey found that nearly 80% of small businesses would consider switching accountants to one that uses the latest technology.

One place to start—without prompting, look for opportunities to help them

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There is so much in the day-to-day business management that's out of Client 2.0's control, particularly in this economy. Even as you evolve your services, providing confidence in their numbers and access to real-time data is still fundamental. Keep client trust by staying true to the reliability and accuracy they've come to expect from you. Add speed or real-time visibility as a new benefit to delight them.

Take a fresh look to make sure work styles are in sync too. Client 2.0 may have new team members or new ways of working. Ensure your team is on board with any changes to communications and processes, and equip them with the right skills or training to meet tomorrow's needs.

While the basic premise of what keeps a business afloat has not changed, whether they're a brand-new company or a longtime client, your roster has been remade by change. Challenges abound for small businesses and accountants, but so does opportunity.

This next generation of clients will remake our world and economy, and you are just the right advisor to help them.

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