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By Mairtini Ni Dhomhnaill.

Whether or not you like numbers more than people, client relations are a necessary evil in the accounting world. In my experience, the number one reason new clients cite for leaving their previous accounting firm is a lack of responsiveness — especially over email. Now, as economic headwinds drive fears that a **recession is imminent**, forging and maintaining strong client relationships is one of the best ways accounting firms can mitigate potential economic fallout as enterprise customers look to cut back on spending.

Amid an uncertain economy, dependable client relationships are more important to

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The changing face of accounting as the landscape moves digital

The state of accounting has significantly shifted in recent years. In the past, primary communication with clients occurred monthly, quarterly, or even annually. Today, clients expect their accounting firms to be much more involved in day-to-day activities.

This evolution has largely coincided with the pandemic-induced digital transformation, as automation and artificial intelligence (AI) have shaken up the accounting space. As the new tech proliferates across the industry, the market for [AI in accounting](#) is estimated to reach \$16.07 billion by 2028 from \$1.7 billion in 2021. AI and automation offer significant value to back-office roles, taking over tasks machines can do while providing greater accuracy and efficiency. That said, AI cannot deliver a financial report at your next board meeting.

AI is coming at the perfect time to help firms handle the deluge of day-to-day customer communication. But without investing in automated workflows and the proper technology tools, firms can quickly fall out of pace with customer demands and fail to meet the ever-mounting expectations around responsiveness.

While understanding around appropriate response times can differ depending on the client, the reality is that — when prioritized by company leadership — there are tools available to drive efficient customer support. For instance, my company, Countsy, uses [Front](#) to organize our communication and streamline collaboration by swiftly looping in the people needed to best deliver on a request. With a finger on the pulse of emerging enterprise tech, you can ensure that your accounting workforce is set up for success and able to scale as your business grows.

Using the human touch to drive client retention + expansion

Multi-year client relationships are the bread and butter of any accounting business.

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conversations that truly showcase the depth of their service. When the pandemic began and Countsy moved remote, our clients did not experience a change in service quality since we were already using Front for our customer communications. Without having to spin wheels on relevant players to loop in on client responses, we can deliver faster while digging deeper on the analysis that really drives our value as accountants.

Instead of getting overwhelmed by email aliases and playing hot potato with your team as you wait for someone to spearhead a response, customer communication tools can help you divide and conquer. Above all, people want to be heard, and focusing on that personalized human touch will build trust — making your clients feel seen and understood.

Workforces should evolve with the times, but don't ditch company culture

While the U.S. saw the Great Resignation [peak](#) in March, nearly [two job openings](#) remain for every unemployed person. The accounting profession was hit hard by this attrition, compounding upon an already short supply of accountants as the number of accounting graduates dropped nearly [seven percent](#) in 2019 since peaking in 2012.

Following the recent surge in turnover and subsequent job openings, firms must prioritize comprehensive onboarding and maintenance of company culture to ensure sustainable growth and strong customer relations. Replacing an individual employee is not cheap — costing between [half to two times](#) the original employee's salary. Inadequate knowledge sharing comes with an even heftier price tag. According to Panopto's [Workplace Knowledge and Productivity Report](#), the average large U.S. business loses \$47 million in productivity each year due to inefficient knowledge sharing.

Maintaining a thorough understanding of your history with a client is essential to

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internal relationships and create a place where people want to continue growing their careers.

However tangential to the actual service accountants provide, accurate numbers and detailed analysis mean nothing without strong client relations. As technology changes the landscape and helps accountants meet escalating client demands, a robust communication framework will help accounting businesses retain clients while maintaining their company culture and expanding their workforce. The industry will continue to navigate major technological and societal shifts, but high-touch client relations will remain the linchpin to long term success.

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Mairtini Ni Dhomhnaill is the founder of [Countsy](#).

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