

# CPA Practice Advisor

AUGUST 2021

VOLUME 31  
NUMBER 7

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

## 2021 TOP TECH WINNERS and FINALISTS ANNOUNCED

### THE LEADERSHIP ADVISOR:

A Guide to Better  
Client Communication

### THE MILLENNIAL ADVISOR:

Back to the Basics

### FEATURE:

The Digital Nomad Client



# IN THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

# CPA Practice Advisor



**THEME:** Sales & Use / Transactional Taxes

## IN EVERY ISSUE

### APPS WE LOVE

Personalization

### AICPA NEWS

A round up of recent association news and events.



## ON THE CALENDAR

September 6	Labor Day
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- How 2020 Stopped SALY in Her Tracks
- 3 Tips to a Better Peer Review
- Automating the Remote Tax Engagement Life Cycle



**GAIL PERRY, CPA**  
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## Work From Home, or Go Home from Work?

IN THIS MONTH'S magazine, we address some of the issues associated with the workplace disruption we all have experienced. Whether you changed your own work environment as a result of the pandemic, or you experienced changes in relationships with colleagues, clients, customers, and companies, the variations in how we do our jobs certainly impacted everyone. Brian Hershman's article ([www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/21230254](http://www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/21230254)) discusses some of the strengths and weaknesses of remote working. In particular, he feels that a solid office culture, teamwork, and excellent technology are the keys to the success of remote and hybrid workplaces.

Nellie Akalp, CEO of CorpNet, approaches the remote work topic with regard to clients who own their own businesses and who work remotely in her article ([www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/21230816](http://www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/21230816)) on digital nomads. What type of business structure will work for the digital nomad, and what recommendations should you make to your clients who don't stay put?

The workplace as a whole seems uncertain about how best to move forward. While many companies and organizations are requiring that their employees be vaccinated, which is setting off its own kind of stir, the accounting profession is mixed in its responses to the WFH phenomenon.

In the spring of 2020 (yes,

2020!), the CPA Firm Management Association (CPAFMA) released a booklet called *A Guide to Re-opening Your CPA Firm* (<https://tinyurl.com/wx5x7fkp>) which laid out suggestions for inspecting and cleaning offices, instituting health checks, and mitigating anxiety for those workers who were expected to return to work in early summer of 2020. While the release of that guide might have been a bit premature, at least it laid out some general procedures for those firms that wanted to prepare for getting back to the office.

Alternatively, this past spring, the Virginia Society of Certified Public Accountants (VSCPA) conducted a survey (<https://tinyurl.com/4u8zsrjn>) of more than 600 of its

members across the state, and found expectations that a hybrid of remote and on-site work will continue over at least the next year. More than a third of respondents expect to make remote work a permanent option, as long as the work can still be completed. Investing in new technologies for remote workers and improving workplace safety for those who want to return to the office are key indicators that a hybrid model may surface as the new normal.

Interestingly, a pre-COVID-19 survey (<https://tinyurl.com/up53hsrw>) conducted by outsourcing firm Airtasker, found that remote employees work 1.4 more days per month than those based in an office. Food for thought for those employ-

ers who worry about productivity of remote workers.

Earlier this year, results from a Gartner survey (<https://tinyurl.com/fv6rrj2w>) indicated that, "Service employees who traditionally did not have many work-from-home opportunities, have become used to it and like it, and the majority (about 70%) wish to continue." And so, in addition to creating a guide like the aforementioned one about returning to the workplace, you may need to consider creating a strategic guide for maintaining a WFH workforce.

One thing we know for certain, this is still new territory for most CPA firms, and each firm will need to reckon with its own team and that team's wishes for workplace safety, productivity, and success as the firm moves forward in a post-pandemic world.

— Gail Perry, Editor-in-Chief

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# The Importance of Internal Controls

By Mary Girsch-Bock

**THE USE OF internal controls is paramount to the success of any organization. Put in place by management, internal controls allow businesses to successfully achieve three objectives:**

- Production of accurate financial reporting
- Compliance with all rules and regulations
- Efficient organizational operation capability

Along with these three primary objectives, internal controls have five main components established by the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations (COSO) which provides guidance for companies around the world. Known as the COSO framework, these five components include the following.

## CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

Before any of the other components can be examined, the control environment must first be established. The control environment examines the behavior of top management and their ability to implement the necessary controls, looking at everything from the ethics of an organization's top management to their integrity in handling any problems or issues that may arise, because top management sets the tone for the rest of the organization, things like human resource policies and procedures, management philosophy, and organizational structure. Control environment also includes participation of management and board to ensure that internal controls are abided by, as well as how employee responsibilities are assigned and managed.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

After the control environment has been established, the next component to consider is risk assessment. Assessing the risks of a company is essential since risks must be identified prior to any control procedures being implemented. Risks will naturally vary from

company to company, depending on the organization itself, its current control environment, or even a specific industry. Both internal and external risks must be identified so that a proper process can be put into place to help mitigate the identified risk.

## CONTROL ACTIVITIES

The third component of internal controls is control activities. This area includes all policies and procedures that have been put into place by management as well as how those processes are carried out. Similar to the control environment, the control activities component looks at how top management handles tasks such as delegation of duties, transaction authorization, asset protection, as well as routine reconciliations. While it may be impossible for a small company with few employees to ensure that tasks are equally distributed, it's still important, that proper oversight measures be put into place.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The fourth component is information and communication. This component ensures that the flow of information within the company is completed both timely and accurately. For example, if communication between management and staff is not completed promptly and properly, it's probable that necessary activities will not be completed in a timely fashion.

## MONITORING

It's important that every business have adequate monitoring measures in place. While managers can be tasked with

monitoring their employees, it's the responsibility of upper management to monitor any controls that have been established. It's also upper management's role to modify any monitoring and control processes should the need arise.

If all five of these components are implemented and are operating effectively, they can help ensure that an organization will achieve its goals while avoiding unnecessary complications along the way.

## WHY ARE INTERNAL CONTROLS IMPORTANT?

Establishing and using the proper internal controls is vital for businesses of any size. While internal controls cannot always prevent fraud, particularly if the fraud is being carried out by upper management, in normal circumstances they can help in the detection of fraudulent activity. Internal controls can also ensure that financial statements are prepared both timely and accurately, while also addressing any assertions made in the completed financial statements.

Human error can occur even if internal controls have been implemented. However, with the appropriate internal controls in place, it's more likely that any errors made will be found quickly, and they will be corrected promptly.

Finally, establishing robust internal controls can help set the tone in a business. A business that does not properly establish internal controls is far more likely to experience multiple issues than the business that has strict internal controls in place.

By setting and properly managing internal controls, businesses of any size will be able to meet three key business objectives: accurate financial reporting, compliance with all necessary regulations, and effective operations. ■

*Mary Girsch-Bock is a freelance writer specializing in business and technology issues and is the author of her first book, several HR handbooks, training manuals, and other in-house publications. She can be reached at [mary.girschbock@cpapractictheadvisor.com](mailto:mary.girschbock@cpapractictheadvisor.com)*

IS IT

# MORE EFFICIENT

# TO WORK FROM HOME?

By Brian Hershman, EA

MOST OF US know what it's like to work in an office full time, but before March 2020, not everyone knew what it was like to **work remotely** full time. Thanks to **COVID-19**, most of us now do, so which one is best? Working from home or working from an office outside the home? What about a hybrid model combining the best of both worlds?

When drilling down to the biggest strengths and weaknesses of both, the two main concerns revolve around efficiency and culture. However, the strength of one is the weakness of the other, in most cases.

I had some unique experiences with remote work early on. In 2007, I worked for a global company that was entirely remote – and I would call the working environment a success. The company grew from \$1 million to \$3 million in sales in just a couple of years.

Believe it or not, working remotely was completely possible, even 14 years ago, without Zoom, cell phones with internet, and other technologies we now consider business as usual.

From a culture perspective, I have always been fascinated by a championship culture. I was a basketball coach for many years, and there was no such thing as a championship team without a championship culture.

## REMOTE IS THE WAY TO GO

You can have an office culture with efficiency, but in my experience, working remotely is way more efficient. Have you ever seen the episode of Seinfeld where George discovers that if he just looks frustrated and upset in the office, everyone thinks he's working extremely hard? This is how I see the old paradigm of in-person work: equating your mere presence with productivity. Don't mistake activity for achievement.

That is where I feel the office setting loses efficiency with small talk, long lunches, and distractions, which could be the biggest reason for inefficiency. People will generally ask others around them for help, but if you're working remotely, you might find the solution on your own and remain more efficient.

## ESTABLISH A WINNING CULTURE

Recently, I attended the Intuit ProConnect virtual conference, which had some of the best technology I had ever seen for a virtual conference; they even had an online "networking lounge." However, I just don't see how virtual learning will ever be as good as going to a conference in person.

I printed out an article from a Rootworks breakout session called "Healthy Culture in the Modern Firm." This article provides information on how your firm is operating under

the influence of a living and growing culture. Culture is defined as "the collective beliefs and behaviors of a firm."

In my experience, learning from a great mentor, CPA, or EA in person is superior, because you can model and learn behaviors and belief systems from that person. There is no way to replace this learning remotely by osmosis. A lot of great lessons come from learning by example.

Too much focus on efficiency can turn into killing a goose that lays the golden eggs.

## THE ANSWER?

As I write this, I think remote is the way to stay if you are a small firm with a few employees. If you have more employees, consider a hybrid model combining the best of both worlds. Structure your firm with efficiencies that focus on a championship culture. Great teamwork helps boost efficiency, so a culture developed in person can pay long-term dividends.

However, this can work in reverse, too. A bad culture at the office will lead to more costs, including human resource headaches and gossip.

You may be thinking, if everyone is remote and I am not watching them, will they do what they need to be doing? You don't have an eye on them right?

The best person I know who taught culture was a basketball coach who believed a great culture occurred when the following happened: Every single manager and coach had an emergency and needed to leave – and the team and practice level had no drop in activity. They could run it themselves and keep the same level of integrity.

That should be the goal: Develop the culture in person, so you can improve efficiencies remotely, save costs, and thrive.

## TECHNOLOGIES THAT HELP YOU WORK REMOTELY

Here are several technologies for consideration; of course, every firm will be different, but here are my recommendations:

### OBVIOUS AND MUST-HAVES:

- Zoom
- Slack
- Google Drive

### SOME FAVORITES:

- Intuit ProConnect Tax – being in the cloud is huge.
- Intuit Practice Management – CRM/practice management software.
- Loom – screen share videos to share with clients and your internal team.
- Calendly – share your calendar and have clients book directly to your Google calendar.
- Veem – free international payments.
- QuickBooks Time – time tracking.
- 1Password – secure password management.
- Momentum (Chrome plugin) – focus and inspiration to your new Google Chrome tab.
- Calm – meditation app that improves productivity.
- Todoist – to do list management with your team.
- pdfFiller – fill out PDFs; I also use my online fax to send PDFs.
- Upwork – find freelance contract work from all over the world.
- eSignature – available through ProConnect to enable digital signatures.

## APPS I HEAR GOOD THINGS ABOUT

- Practice Ignition – proposal/contract/client payment system.
- Asana – project management software.
- focus booster – track productivity.

## REMOTE COST SAVINGS

- Staff meals.
- Transportation costs.
- Office expenses, such as food for staff.
- 2x computers and tech – I have a desktop mac at my house; if I had an office, I would have to buy another one.
- Office furniture.
- Utilities – When I had an office, I had to buy these extras: a water delivery service, cable TV, plant watering, internet, and electricity. ■

*A licensed EA and QuickBooks Online Certified Advanced ProAdvisor, Brian Hershman has more than 15 years of experience as a business owner. His first business was in the sports world, where he developed, from scratch a nationally recognized youth basketball academy that produced college players and an eventual NBA draft pick.*



# PRODUCT LAUNCH

## How to Launch People Advisory in

ACCOUNTING FIRMS ACROSS the country are regularly evaluating new opportunities to launch additional services in their practice. Whether it is launching a traditional service like tax, audit or accounting services, or launching complementary services like IT services, HR or consulting, accounting firms are well equipped with the skills to provide more services if launched well. **How do you successfully evaluate and launch a new line of service within your current practice?**

My firm Reconciled, an online bookkeeping and advisory firm, faces this challenge every year as we consider whether to launch a new service offering. One of the first questions we ask ourselves is, “What are the major problems our customers are trying to solve that we currently do not have a solution for or find ourselves referring our customers away for a solution?”

Another way to ask this question is “What service can I offer today that



# Your Practice

By Michael Ly

would solve a problem many of my customers currently have and would be willing to pay for?”

**Step 1 when trying to launch a new service in your practice is to come up with a list of several problems your customers are facing.** Then try to come up with possible solutions for each individual problem. One of these problems and solutions will likely be a natural fit

for your firm to solve and launch as a service.

Reconciled went through this process in 2019. HR issues is one of the top issues brought to us by our customers on a regular basis and we found ourselves referring work away regularly. Like Reconciled, many firms currently offer payroll services as a part of their overall Client Accounting Services practice as it closely ties with the

core accounting services needed by most small business customers and processing payroll is something most bookkeepers are familiar enough with. However, we received many requests related to payroll that fell more on the “HR” side of a business problem, and we did not have a defined service at Reconciled to meet our customer’s HR needs.

**Step 2 is finding a champion to launch your service offering.** We did not have anyone within our firm with an HR background or skillset to do this, so I began inquiring for the right person within my own network. I got introduced to an HR expert through a customer of ours, and we aligned well on wanting to launch a new service offering.

We decided to launch the HR service as a separate company called Humnly (this was mainly to make it easy for the HR expert to have part ownership in this specific business line), but we could have also launched the service within Reconciled itself. We worked with the HR expert to define some of the service offerings while allowing some room in the future for feedback from customers that may influence the direction we take this new service.

**Step 3 is letting your customers know about your new service offering.** This is where marketing and sales kicks in. We leveraged Reconciled’s customer list and referred work to Humnly. Reconciled would be handling the bookkeeping and payroll aspects of the small business while Humnly would be handling the HR side, such as creating an employee handbook, employee onboarding, benefits strategy, etc.

As Humnly grew and we worked on more customers together, the cross over between “more than payroll” and HR services continued to grow. We found ourselves seeing

even more opportunities to grow and begin standardizing our service offering around a standard set of tools.

**Step 4 is standardizing tools and service offering.** Reconciled already had a relationship with Gusto, as many of customers are on it, and Gusto made it to easy to facilitate more than just payroll services. Fortunately, Gusto had recently launched its People Advisory certification within its platform, which provided standardizing training for Reconciled and Humnly.

Gusto began to help us standardize the way we approached our customers and gave us language to describe that crossover between more than payroll, but not full HR. People Advisory gave us tools to talk with confidence about helping our customers with the most important resource at their company – their people. More recently, Reconciled and Humnly have participated in the Gusto Accelerator program, a new program Gusto has launched to help firms accelerate the introduction of People Advisory into their practice.

**The final step – Always Be Learning.** This step never really ends. Just like any service offering at your firm, you are going to learn more as your serve more customers, refine the way you deliver your service, and find new tools to help you standardize. If learning from your experience is not already a practice at your firm with all of your service offerings, then I recommend you start evaluating all of the services your firm provides and make the changes that will make them better and your customers happier. ■

*Michael Ly is CEO of Reconciled, an online bookkeeping firm for entrepreneurs with team members in multiple states serving small businesses nationally.*

## CLIENT EXPERIENCE FOR TODAY

# Audit & Assurance Tools

PUNDITS IN THE profession continue to promote the thinking that audit and tax compliance are gone and that your firm needs to pick a new service line to survive. But, did you look at your firm's financial success last year? And the year before that? Most firms still make the majority of their revenue from compliance. While many small firms generate up to 80% of their revenue from tax, larger firms tend to generate 40% from tax and 40% from audit.

As pointed out in last month's column, Client Accounting and Advisory Services (CAAS) is a growing revenue source for many firms. You are certainly already doing some advisory work with your clients, although it might not be structured or charged appropriately and not as profitable or valued as it deserves. However, non-CPAs are entering the space at an accelerating rate. Plus, automation and outsourcing are providing scale for firms that organize around these principles. As a result, CAAS is often included in the A&A division of firms.

I have the privilege of consulting directly to firms of all sizes. During the past week, a client firm's managing partner said, "We need to provide audit services because it is a regulated service that only CPAs can provide, and our clients ask for it. While the number of audits required is not as high as it was because banks and others don't require them as often, we still have plenty of audits, comps, and reviews to perform and need to do them effectively and efficiently."

While many firms of 15 or fewer staff might have stopped providing audit services, I have heard similar sentiments about providing audit services over and over during the pandemic period. Further, remote audits eliminating fieldwork had to become the rule. Therefore, more remote work will remain in the post-pandemic period. I'm privileged to have a large client that has been

performing audits using an entirely virtual office/home office team for years. We were pleased to help our client make CCH Engagement work right for 100+ auditors.

During another consultation last month with a larger firm that performs over 400 audits annually, we spoke about the inefficiency of the firm's tools, and frankly, I was appalled. While I would never disclose the identity of clients, I can leverage my learning to help other firms avoid pitfalls and help publishers improve their products for the good of all. When I have private conversations with clients, I don't pull punches, and frequently I get threats of lawsuits for telling the truth. However, in my public speaking, I follow the "Grandma Rule." "If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all."

One of my associates, Brian Tankersley, who is the co-host of our podcast The Technology Lab ([www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/podcasts](http://www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/podcasts)), frequently introduces himself as a recovering auditor. He has been both an internal and external auditor, done tax work, and supported technology as a firm's network administrator. When we review preparation, compilation, and review (PCR) engagements or audit tools, I always try to have Brian involved. For this column, with Brian's help, I wanted to provide you some of the latest developments on software tools in this area, from trial balance to artificial intelligence in Audit.

### SO, WHAT'S NEW IN AUDIT AND ASSURANCE TOOLS?

Perhaps the best thing you can do before reviewing these tools is to determine your firm's needs. Do you simply need a trial balance for tax purposes? Tallyfor may be for you. Do you only do prep, comp, and review? OnPoint PCR may be for you. Do you want to use the market-leading product for audit? CCH Engagement may be for you. Do you want a Web-Based audit tool? AdvanceFlow, CCH Axxess Engagement, or Inflo may be for you. Some comprehensive audit tools enable comps and reviews, but you'll need to do more setup work and learning to be efficient and effective.

An old rule that I've recommended to firms: if you have more than 15 audits, you need a tool for your working papers. AND it is likely to take you two years to improve your realization after acquiring and implementing a new tool. We don't see any audit tool that is a "silver bullet" to improve realization and manage the end-to-end process of risk-based planning, fieldwork, preliminary financials, review & sign-off, and securely deliver final financials to the client.

First, let's clarify that there aren't as many choices in audit and assurance tools when compared to CAAS or practice management. However, almost any one of the tools listed below is an improvement over using Word, Excel, and Adobe DC to do any prep, comp, review, or audit work.



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Although not 100% comprehensive, this is a pretty good list of what's available today:

#### TOP AUDIT PRODUCTS

- Accounting For Practitioners - Pendock Mallorn
- AdvanceFlow - Thomson Reuters
- APT - BDO
- AuditFile - AuditFile, Inc.
- Checkpoint Engage - Thomson Reuters
- Dynamic Audit Solution - AICPA
- CaseWare - CaseWare International Inc.
- Inflo - Inflo Software
- MyWorkpapers - MyWorkpapers
- OnPoint PCR - CPA.com
- ORB - RSM
- SMART Practice Aids Audit Suite - Thomson Reuters
- ProSystem fx Engagement - CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business
- ProSystem fx Knowledge Coach - CCH, A Wolters Kluwer Business

#### TRIAL BALANCE PRODUCTS

- Accounting Power - AccountantsWorld
- CaseWare Working Papers - CaseWare International
- ProSystem fx Trial Balance - CCH, a Wolters Kluwer business
- Tallyfor - Tallyfor
- TaxWise Trial Balance - CCH Small Firm Services
- Workpapers CS - Thomson Reuters

#### OTHER TOOLS FOR AUDITORS

- Active Data for Excel - Information Active

- CaseWare IDEA - CaseWare International Inc.
- Confirmation.com - Thomson Reuters
- Galvanize (formerly ACL) - ACL Services Ltd., a Diligent brand
- MindBridge AI Auditor - MindBridge Analytics, Inc.
- RIVIO - CPA.com
- Spreadsheet Auditing Tool - ClusterSeven from MITRATECH
- TeamMate Analytics - Wolters Kluwer
- Validis - Validis
- Valid8 - Valid8

As you can see, there are tools for all kinds of audit and assurance work. The overall “containers” of working papers or binders are CCH Engagement, CaseWare, AdvanceFlow, and Inflo have continued to improve, and Inflo has made its workpaper solution available for free. I believe all these products promote working digitally. Because of this, I agreed to speak at a recent webinar on Digital Opportunity and the need to innovate for Inflo because of its insightful innovation.

Further, the risk-based guidance used in these products has improved notably in the last 3-5 years. Advances in Checkpoint Engage, the Dynamic Audit Solution, and KnowledgeCoach alone could merit a column each. Roughly 25 industries are covered, and each major vendor has published guidance for PCR, too.

And don't forget that Client Experience is essential for PBC documents with market leaders like Suralink and Liscio leading the way. Suralink has features such as drag and drop into CaseWare that make this solution work very well for audit-related work. Both Suralink and Liscio have exciting road maps and features delivered throughout the remainder of this year and into next year that convince me that they will capitalize on their market-leading positions. CCH Access Client Collaboration Portal is evolving for more capabilities for firms adopting the CCH Access Suite. The RIVIO offering is a secure way to deliver financial statements, which we have recommended since inception.

Finally, something as simple as scheduling is often complex for audit teams. Traditionally the market leader has been Excel spreadsheets or Access databases, but the leading product is ProStaff. Other outstanding options are XCMworkflow's scheduling tool, and my favorite high-end tool for this is WSG Systems Corp Empire Suite RESOURCE. Remember that with the right practice management tool, you can complete your scheduling tasks inside your PM system, too.

## EMERGING TECHNOLOGY AND CLOUD IN AUDIT

Covering current generation audit tools without noting the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence and the leverage of cloud technologies would be irresponsible. However, having the pleasure of watching smart innovation at Thomson Reuters in Checkpoint Engage, Inflo Data Analytics, MindBridge AI Auditor, and Validis has made this old programmer's heart feel good. You see, software should assist and leverage the skills of accountants and auditors to achieve things that might be impossible through their own efforts. Through the years, you've heard me repeatedly say that I want to spend money on hardware and software to leverage my people, who are the firm's highest cost and greatest asset.

Every tool in the “Other Tools for Auditors” category above provides very sophisticated, fairly priced capabilities to accomplish their design goals. As I mentioned, referring to the guidance earlier, each of these products could have a whole column and still not be adequately covered. However, let's note that the combination of Validis and Valid8 allows transaction-level auditing with supporting documentation without sampling. In addition, for the first time using these tools, you can go from the original transaction all the way to the general ledger in an automated fashion.

And what has made this technology possible? The cloud. Centralizing the applications and data has allowed programmers to implement artificial intelligence techniques in products like Checkpoint Engage or MindBridge AI Auditor. While there is lots of “fake-AI” in the market, these tools have real AI working. The products are becoming more effective all the time.

## SO, WHAT CAN WE DO TODAY?

First, decide how you want to handle the audit, assurance, and accounting work that must be done in your firm. If your firm is small and needs better trial balance tools, look for tools in this category. While few are as efficient as the old Accountant's Trial Balance (ATB) product was, Tallyfor is certainly close to that efficiency and is easier to boot! Consider tools that will drive effectiveness and efficiency in your specialty audit areas if your firm is large.

Regardless of your firm's size, make sure that you think about how the current technology works, implement it properly, and teach your team members how to use the tools. From a fundamental setup

perspective, I can't tell you how many hundreds of firms I've been in where CCH Engagement binders, CaseWare working papers, and AdvanceFlow (as well as Engagement CS before that) structures have been set up incorrectly.

Auditors and accounting professionals are muddling through the issues, doing the best they can. They do not know what they do not know and think their use of the product and process is ideal. I want to find and have a heart-to-heart with implementors who didn't do a thorough job of teaching the auditors, didn't identify the incorrect setup, or worst of all, didn't know better themselves.

Yes, I understand it is hard to manage an audit team profitably with all the regulations and fee pressures in the market. But audit can and should be one of the most valuable services you can provide to a client. A good auditor can find many things that need to be exposed in a business. And while audit engagements are not forensic or fraud detection engagements, the auditor, often uncovers fraud during routine procedures.

Unfortunately, I believe we will see more fraud commitment in these next years than we have seen for a long time. It is hard enough for our clients to earn the money, let alone have it stolen out the back door. So likewise, fraud and forensics deserve completely separate coverage from this column.

It would be best if you contemplated your practice offerings. Where do audit, tax, and CAAS fit? Are you doing your best job to help clients be successful? Are you making the client experience with your firm convenient and seamless? You must know what your offerings should be, how to profitably price them, market the service, and complete the service in a timely fashion.

As part of creating, sustaining, and scaling each offering, you also must pick technology tools to support those efforts. Use the whole-of-client advisory approach to build a practice and relationships that can last for decades and generations and help your client choose the services you provide. For other services, act as a concierge and refer clients to reputable providers, which you may have to do in areas like forensics. You may be forced to refer other firms for audit work if you provide CAAS services, and you should do that referral thoughtfully.

For audit, I want you to maintain your independence fiercely. Independence, honesty, and integrity are three attributes I continue to admire in the CPA profession. It is hard to find these three attributes and resolute ethics in many other places. And always look for ways to create the very best client experience! ■

## A GUIDE TO BETTER Client Communication

*In an accounting world obsessed with advisory services, it's strange that we tend to overlook the foundational aspect of relationships: communication.*

**YOU DON'T NEED** to be a research expert to find countless articles online detailing the vital importance of advisory services for accounting firms preparing for the future. As AI and machine learning advance, the thinking goes, compliance accounting based on computational accuracy and efficiency will become less valuable, forcing firms to lean on consultative services to generate value. The logic makes perfect sense, but knowing you need to improve and having the tools to do it are two entirely different matters. And when it comes to advisory services, no tool is more important than effective client communication.

What's important to note here is that successful communication for advisory accounting is much more complicated than what's required for compliance services. When your main job is making sure documents get filed on time and the numbers add up, your main job as a communicator is to be timely, succinct, and clear. However, when you want to actually help your clients improve their businesses, you need a greater range of communication tools.

To frame it another way, you can't just be a good service provider; you have to make a real connection and be a trusted confidant. That trust is built through multiple interactions and conversations, and if you have the tools to make the most of those conversations, you'll be more helpful as an advisor.

With that in mind, here are some ironclad communication tips for the advisory era.

### **ASK QUESTIONS EARLY AND OFTEN**

Whether you're having a first sit-down with a new client or chatting with a business owner you've known for years, you need to ask pointed questions in order to learn about the client's business. Understanding the mission and values of a business allows you to animate your analysis with knowledge of the qualitative parts of running a company. Similarly, learning the pain points your clients deal with regularly will help you provide individualized advice.

No business owners want to feel like they're getting cookie-cutter suggestions.

You have to be willing to dig deeper for detail and reframe

questions when you're not getting enough information. Taking the time to really investigate your clients in as many ways as possible shows that you care and are invested in their success. It will also provide a much clearer picture of their operations.

### **COMBINE DATA AND NARRATIVE**

As an accountant, you know how to look at numbers and see the story they are telling. Many clients don't share this skill. You can't just show a client a spreadsheet and expect the client to figure out its deeper meaning. To close that gap, it's so important that you contextualize numbers in order to help the client make sense of your advice. The hard truth is that the quality of your advice or its basis in statistical fact doesn't mean much if you cannot present it in a compelling way. If you've done your homework and asked good questions, you'll be able to attach your findings to a story



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that resonates with the client.

Becoming too reliant on narrative is also a problem, though perhaps one fewer that firms fall victim to. Nevertheless, you can't offer advice based on hunch or gut feelings alone. The data has to tell the same story you are. Finding the right balance between numbers and narrative will strengthen the impact of any consultation.

### **ADAPT STYLE TO CLIENT PREFERENCES**

In some ways, clients resemble your friends and relatives. Like those in your personal life, your clients will each have individual ways of communicating. Some clients will prefer unvarnished honesty in the simplest terms possible while others may require a more delicate touch. Delivering advice to clients in the style that makes them feel comfortable and cared for will go a long way in them acting on it. In this respect, some clients may prove much more difficult than others. If you want to succeed in advisory, though, you have to make the effort to find the communication methods and styles that work best for the people you serve.

There are many ways to strengthen the suite of advisory services at your firm, but none will have as wide-ranging effects as focusing on the basic necessity of effective communication. ■

# New QuickBooks Card Reader Speeds Up Mobile and Contactless Payments

ANY SMALL BUSINESS client that sells a product is likely to ask you for your advice on how he or she can get paid faster and more efficiently, without dealing with invoicing and manual systems. And if you think about your clients' businesses within the context of how you as a customer want to pay for a product or service, you can quickly see where mobile and contactless payment would be most beneficial.

Just imagine if a Girl Scout troop were to make available mobile, contactless payment for Thin Mints in front of your local grocery store. Who's to say the troop wouldn't sell more cookies, especially because they accept credit cards and make the transaction easier?

How your clients will accept payment is perhaps one of the most important decisions a small business can make – and there are a lot of factors that go into managing the variety of ways the business' customers want to pay. Across the board, Intuit has heard from small business owners that they are increasingly looking for hassle-free payment hardware that enables faster in-person sales and the ability to get paid on the go.

The new QuickBooks Card Reader (<https://quickbooks.intuit.com/payments/mobile/#readers>) delivers on both, with fast and contactless payments processing, packaged in one sleek and compact device that fits in the pocket. Now that's mobile!

According to Transparency Marketing Research (<https://tinyurl.com/etsd94dr>), the mobile payment technologies market around the world is expected to increase at a compound annual growth rate of 20.5% between 2016 and 2024. In addition, according to Juniper Research, (<https://tinyurl.com/ys2u5ne8>) mobile point-of-sale revenue around the world is expected to reach almost \$50 billion in 2021, up from \$6.6 billion in 2016, and one in every three point-of-sale terminals will accommodate mobile.

The QuickBooks Card Reader is ideal for small business owners who recognize the need to enable contactless payment. Small yet powerful, the exclusively designed QuickBooks Card Reader makes it easy to accept payments on the go.

"As business goes increasingly mobile, having a way to process payments is critical, and just as e-commerce is starting to become ubiquitous, so too are mobile payments," said Katie Bunschoten,

president and founder of Certum Solutions, an executive-level QuickBooks Solutions provider. "Our clients love the simplicity of being able to take payments on the go and cut down any time spent waiting for payment."

Bunschoten believes the QuickBooks Card Reader should be the de facto standard for any business that offers on-the-go payment.

"If you're typically on a job site or on the road, mobile payments are critical. You have a much higher probability of immediate payment by taking a credit card on site, rather than sending an invoice and hoping for the best. Time is money, and when you have to wait or follow up to get paid, you are losing both.

Here's what you can expect with the new QuickBooks Card Reader:

- **An LED display** provides clear reader status indications to small business owners and guides customers through the payment experience. Starting with a friendly "Hello," it clearly displays the purchase amount, allows customers to add a tip, and confirms the payment.
- **Tippling functionality** means no sharing of devices, something that is often needed with other card reader and point-of-sale offerings. Small business owners have the ability to customize three tip options for the customer that will conveniently display on the card reader, either as a percentage of the total amount or a flat dollar amount.
- **Clear connectivity and battery level indicators** give small business owners the confidence that they're connected and ready to accept payments.

In addition to the features integrated in the card reader, QuickBooks is also introducing the QuickBooks Power Stand, which will give small businesses a portable countertop payments' hub that can support their businesses - no matter where they are or where they go. The Power Stand battery



wirelessly charges the QuickBooks Card Reader, and has an integrated USB port, offering the unique capability to charge USB-compatible devices such as a phone or tablet.

The newly designed Card Reader is backed by the power of QuickBooks and QuickBooks Payments, which helps small businesses get paid faster and more seamlessly. Payments are automatically reconciled within the QuickBooks accounting platform, ensuring books update with every sale so that your clients are always tax-ready and have a financial source of truth that can help them better manage their cash flow.

"It's our mission to improve cash flow health for small businesses. With the addition of QuickBooks Card Reader to our portfolio of money offerings, we continue to make it easier for small businesses to get paid," said Rania Succar, senior vice president of Intuit QuickBooks Money Offerings. "These industry-leading payment hardware solutions that pair seamlessly with the QuickBooks platform further enhance our robust end-to-end payments offering for small businesses and provide flexibility depending on how they do business and how their customers want to pay."

Your clients who are QuickBooks Payments customers can now purchase the QuickBooks Card Reader for \$49 on the QuickBooks website <https://quickbooks.intuit.com/payments/mobile/#readers>. The QuickBooks Power Stand will be available later this summer for \$39, and both devices can be purchased as a bundle for \$79. ■

The ProAdvisor Spotlight is sponsored by





# 2021 INNOVATION AWARDS FOR ACCOUNTING FIRMS

TECHNOLOGIES THAT ENABLE remote work and help further automate and streamline accounting and tax practices are in the spotlight as the **18th annual Tax & Accounting Technology Innovation Awards** were announced by **CPA Practice Advisor** on Wednesday, August 4, 2021.

The Innovation Awards honor new technologies that help accounting firms and their business clients operate and collaborate more efficiently and profitably. This can be through improved workflow, enhanced automation capabilities, increased accessibility, or additional efficiencies. Nominated products or technologies must be less than 2 years old or have

new, significant features or enhancements during that time. “These awards recognize new technologies that dramatically enhance the ability of accounting professionals to provide services to their clients and run their own firms,” said CPA Practice Advisor Editor-in-Chief Gail Perry, CPA. “As the tax and accounting profession continues to evolve, these new technologies and workflows are a key element to firm productivity, efficiency, and their ability to increase profitability.” Perry also manages a tax practice and is the author of more than 30 books, including *Mint.com for Dummies*, and *Idiot’s Guide to Introductory Accounting*.

The winners of the CPA Practice Advisor Tax and Accounting Technology Innovation Awards

are selected from nominated products by our editorial board and awards committee, which include thought leaders and professionals engaged in various practice specialties across the country.

CPA Practice Advisor provides a variety of independent digital and print resources for accounting professionals, including practice resources, technology reviews, interactive tools and content that helps firms achieve greater productivity. Learn more about the Innovation Award winners and finalists in the August issue of CPA Practice Advisor. (The award winners are listed in alphabetical order.)

## 2021 INNOVATION AWARD WINNERS

### AVALARA MANAGED RETURNS FOR ACCOUNTANTS – BY AVALARA

<https://www.Avalara.com>

The Supreme Court’s Wayfair ruling is about three years old, and most businesses still haven’t taken steps to ensure they are in compliance with the states they sell in. So, naturally, these businesses are turning to their accounting and tax professionals for guidance. Avalara’s Managed Returns for Accountants (MRA) was designed specifically to help accounting and tax firms automate the sales tax compliance process for multiple clients that sell to multiple states. And firms can implement the system at any scale without adding resources or burdens to existing staff.

MRA accomplishes this by letting these firms provide these vital compliance services for their clients, but then offloading the complex and tedious tax return filing process to Avalara. This lets firms focus on more profitable engagements, such as financial and tax advisory services, strategic business consulting, audit preparation, nexus assessments, and other advisory services. MRA can be used by any size firm for filing SALT taxes for any size business clients. As a cloud-based service, it offers full remote office support for managing these compliance challenges.

With MRA, firms can:

- Manage the sales tax filing process for all clients and their returns from a single dashboard designed for efficient accountant workflow, with customizable, multi-client views, all managed from one cloud-based system.
- Automatically prepare tax returns based on the appropriate government forms and state and local requirements.

- Remit payments on clients’ behalf, with Avalara handling the filing, payment, and related notice management (at firm’s request) on behalf of clients.
- Work remotely, with staff managing clients’ returns from any location, keeping the firm nimble and efficient. Support omni-channel data imports, easily aggregating client sales information from multiple channels and marketplaces.
- Keep client data safe and private, with MRA providing strong security controls.
- Avalara MRA enables accounting firms to offload the complex tax return filing process in order to focus more on audit preparation, nexus assessments, and other more profitable tax advisory services, contributing to meaningful firm growth in 2021 and beyond.

### CPA BUSINESS FUNDING PORTAL – BY CPA.COM/BIZ2CREDIT

<https://www.cpaloanportal.com>

The CPA Business Funding Portal was jointly developed by Biz2Credit and CPA.com, a subsidiary of the AICPA, to provide a single, centralized platform for CPAs assisting clients with much-needed access to business relief programs. During the initial rollout of the Paychex Protection Program (PPP), CPA firms were forced to set up manual processes, navigate across multiple lenders with disparate platforms, and often operated with limited guidance.

The CPA Business Funding Portal is a firm-wide solution, with integrated dynamic guidance, that enables CPA firms to offer Business Relief & Financing Advisory services that are scalable. With this platform, firms were able to support the PPP loan application process more efficiently for clients, and will be able to do so as well in the next phase of loan forgiveness.

# HIGHLIGHT TOP TECHNOLOGIES

## INFLO INGEST – BY INFLO

<https://inflosoftware.com/en-us/>

Access to data has become even more challenging for firms during Covid-19 as firms and business work remotely. Inflo Ingest is part of an innovative suite of cloud solutions from Inflo. The Inflo suite is opening never-before-seen opportunities for firms to instantly blend advanced technologies into their accounting and tax services, applying progressive new technologies to drive greater value for their clients. Traditionally, the biggest impediments to firms effectively applying data analytics throughout their client services were the complications and headaches of simply obtaining and cleansing the data. Inflo Ingest completely solves these challenges by taking the burden of data acquisition completely off the engagement team. And it can ingest data from 100% of accounting systems.

With Inflo Ingest, clients share financial and transactional data directly from their system to Inflo via secure connectors interfacing directly with their accounting system. The product carries out automated validation checks, and Inflo's highly skilled data team on hand to support. Once ingested, the financial and transactional data feeds into other Inflo modules which automate data analytics and AI-driven processes. You never have to re-key data, saving significant time and driving automation throughout the engagement.

## TRANSCRIPTS TOOL – BY CANOPY

<https://www.getcanopy.com/transcripts-tool>

Many tax professionals got a surprise in May 2021, as the IRS stopped using many transcript-pulling tools in an effort to improve the security of the process. This left many pros without an easy way to get their clients' transcripts. The good news is that Canopy was selected as an official IRS partner in the new, secure API that allows the safe retrieval of transcript data.

After working with the IRS and tax pros, Canopy implemented the API within its cloud-based Practice Management suite to ensure firms using Canopy had continued access to their clients' transcript data. The Transcript Tool was then publicly launched to new users in June 2021. This new and secure API allows users to instantly pull transcripts in a clean, easy-to-read format, complete with actionable recommendations and the highest level of security.

Canopy users successfully pulled 16,360 return transcripts in just the first 15 days after Canopy released the tool. Once accountants have established access to client records via a Form 8821 or Power of Attorney, they can work with transcripts entirely electronically with Canopy, from pulling transcripts to submission with

Canopy's e-sign capabilities. With this IRS-approved tool, Canopy eliminates the pain point of pulling transcripts and accountants experience benefits including:

A one-time setup process that makes pulling transcripts easier, instead of having to log in and authenticate every time

- Highest possible security for transcript data
- Improved reliability of data
- Increased tool stability
- Canopy saves previous versions of transcripts that were pulled for each client, which allows the accountant to compare the past to present.
- Access to entire transcripts plus a summarized version that is easily digestible and actionable

## VIC.AI – BY VIC.AI

<https://www.vic.ai>

Vic.ai is an AI platform for accounting productivity. Vic.ai's machine learning technology has been trained on more than 200 million live accounting documents and transactions. Already surpassing human-level accuracy for many tasks, Vic.ai helps accountants, CFOs, and accounts payable (AP) teams become more efficient and reduce errors on routine accounting tasks. Vic.ai saves companies, on average, 82% of their time on accounting tasks and between \$40,000-150,000/year in cost savings.

Vic.ai is an intelligent cloud platform that continually learns from the actions of accountants and gets progressively smarter, removing the more manual tasks from an accountant's plate. With the release of Vic.ai's groundbreaking Autopilot feature in 2020, the platform is capable of making accounting decisions without any human review. Normal automation can perform specific tasks based on rules that humans have to constantly create and edit. But Vic.ai proactively advises you on the right decision or actions to take in an environment free of rules.

In 2021, Vic.ai added the Autonomous Approval Flows feature, which determines the correct number of steps in the invoice approval process and who needs to review each step automatically. Now Vic.ai manages and autonomously automates all accounting decisions and approvals, creating a centralized workplace for team efficiency. Vic.ai partners with 100+ accounting firms worldwide, including four of the top 10 firms. Vic.ai was recently honored as one of the 2021 top new products by *Accounting Today*.

# 2021 INNOVATION AWARD FINALISTS

## AUDITFILE AI – BY AUDITFILE

<https://auditfile.com/ai.html>

AuditFile AI is a new product from AuditFile that incorporates artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to help auditors complete audits faster and with less risk. The system enables auditors to roll forward audits seamlessly from year to year, while gracefully handling updates to pronouncements and professional standards. It also enables auditors to classify a trial balance and build financial statements with just a click of a button, saving weeks of time.

## BPM LINK – BY BPM LLP

<https://bpmcpa.com/BPM-Link>

Intuitive and simple-to-use, BPM Link supports nimble communication among employees, facilitates an agile and efficient work environment and fills the gaps

between employee perceptions and organizational objectives. Encouraged for any business, including tax and accounting firms, BPM Link simplifies collaboration by connecting team members, clarifying expectations, aligning goals and strategic initiatives, and guiding communication between teams – thus driving overall workplace morale. BPM Link offers employee-driven goal setting and tracking, regular feedback and real-time insights on the status of organization's initiatives. Additionally, the tool engages employees in a clear understanding and appreciation of the organization's vision, purpose and values, leaving them feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness.

# CPA Practice Advisor TAX & ACCOUNTING TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD 2021 WINNER

ADVERTORIAL

## Transcripts Tool by Canopy

Canopy was selected as one of just a handful of companies to be an official IRS partner in their new, secure API that allows the safe retrieval of transcript data. As a result of this collaboration, Canopy implemented the API within its Practice Management suite in advance of the public release in June, making sure its customers had continued access to their clients' transcript data. This API allows users to instantly pull transcripts in a clean, easy-to-read format, complete with actionable recommendations and the highest level of security.

Within the first 15 days of releasing the tool, 16,360 successful transcripts have been pulled into Canopy. Once accountants have established access to client records via a Form 8821 or Power of Attorney, they can work with transcripts entirely electronically with Canopy, from pulling transcripts to submission with Canopy's e-sign capabilities. With this IRS-approved tool, Canopy eliminates the pain point of pulling transcripts and accountants experience benefits including:

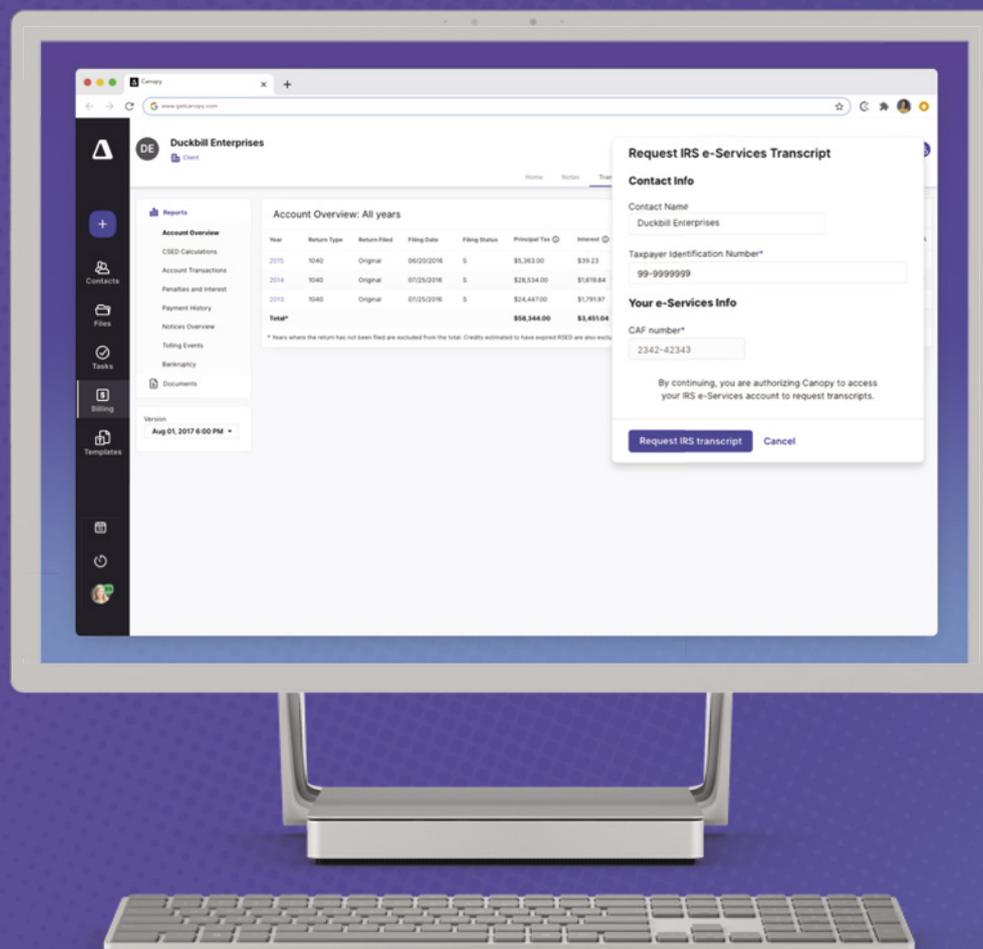
- A one-time setup process that makes pulling transcripts easier, instead of having to log in and authenticate every time
- Highest possible security for transcript data
- Improved reliability of data
- Increased tool stability
- Canopy saves previous versions of transcripts that were pulled for each client, which allows the accountant to compare the past to present.
- Access to entire transcripts plus a summarized version that is easily digestible and actionable



For more information visit  
<https://www.getcanopy.com/transcripts-tool>

# Pull Transcripts Instantly.

With Canopy's new award-winning tool.



855-534-3520

[getcanopy.com/transcripts-offer](https://getcanopy.com/transcripts-offer)

## CORVEE TAX PLANNING – BY CORVEE

<https://corvee.com>

Corvee Tax Planning software is a first-of-its-kind software that allows accounting and tax professionals to scan their clients' tax returns, collect vital information via custom individual and business questionnaires, analyze estimated tax savings across multiple entities and multiple years and prepare tax plan proposals and plans for their clients – all within a matter of minutes.

The individualized tax plans that tax and accounting professionals can create with the Tax Planning software include customized tax planning strategies and recommendations per client. The software even includes modifications from the COVID-19 relief bill packages that impacted a large portion of Americans and SMBs across the nation to help tax and accounting professionals navigate these changes. All individualized tax plans are created in a ready-to-send, professional and customizable PDF file that showcases previous year overpayment information, estimated current and future savings and a detailed list of strategies as well as estimated savings per strategy.

## FIELDGUIDE PLATFORM – BY FIELDGUIDE

<https://www.fieldguide.io>

Fieldguide is a modern workflow automation and collaboration software platform for leading audit firms. With Fieldguide, assurance and advisory practices increase margins, win new business, and build stronger client relationships.

- **Automate any workflow.** Fieldguide improves productivity and eliminates errors by automating every step of the engagement, from requests to reporting. While Fieldguide currently specializes in risk engagements (e.g., SOC 2, NIST CSF, ISO 27001, more), the platform powers other audit programs and agreed-upon procedures with flexible templates and customizable workflows.
- **Collaborate in one source of truth.** Fieldguide brings together the entire engagement cycle across practitioners and clients on a single, cloud-native platform. Auditors can act on insights at their fingertips, drive automation, and make requests and document testing, all from Fieldguide.

- **Enhance client experiences.** Fieldguide helps firms gain a competitive advantage by delivering a seamless and intuitive user experience. Clients are empowered with an easy-to-use central hub to upload files and view real-time status updates and progress metrics from the audit team.

With Fieldguide, top-ranked CPA firms, including Withum and Warren Averett, have saved significant hours of manual work and increased realization on every engagement. Eliminating routine tasks has allowed Fieldguide customers to focus on delivering exceptional client service. "Fieldguide is dramatically enhancing the client experience with their flexible approach and intuitive workflows," says Tony Chapman, SOC Services Market Leader at Withum. "Our team and clients are excited by the platform's capabilities and value." Fieldguide was also awarded AccountingToday's 2021 Top New Product for Audit Tools.

## INFLO DATA ANALYTICS – BY INFLO

<https://inflosoftware.com/en-us>

Inflo Data Analytics are part of an innovative suite of cloud solutions from Inflo. This Data Analytics suite includes modules to meet the full spectrum of accounting and tax practitioner needs, including the ability to:

- Perform high level data analysis at both the trial balance and general ledger levels, identify unusual variances and drill down into transactional detail to further understand underlying cause and assess risk. This replaces time-consuming manual analysis of summary financial information.
- Analyze whole populations to easily identify unusual transactions, including indications of fraud and management override of controls. This ability to efficiently test full populations instantly raises the quality and effectiveness of the accountant's work.
- Map large populations of transactions, such as sales and revenue transactions, to easily identify account codings which deviate from the norm, indicating potential errors or fraudulent activity. This allows accountants to understand large volumes of activity at levels never before available to the full profession and instantly raises the quality and effectiveness of the accountant's work.

Robust data visualization is built into all Inflo Data Analytics, including graphic depictions in heat maps, stacked bar charts, and bump charts. Users simply click through from visualization dashboards to drill into underlying detail. Inflo Data Analytics are powered by underlying 'Hybrid Intelligence' combining technologies such as process mining, robotic process automation, machine learning and AI. These capabilities save time and augment the accountant's professional judgement and expertise. With Inflo Data Analytics accountants can also provide monthly or quarterly 'analytics-as-a-service' subscriptions leveraging Inflo's value-add dashboards.

CPA Practice Advisor's digital and print publications offer independent practice management resources and technology information for tax and accounting professionals in public practice. [www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com](http://www.CPAPracticeAdvisor.com). The nomination period for the 2022 Innovation Awards will open in February 2022.

## HONORABLE MENTION GOES TO THESE OTHER 2021 INNOVATION AWARD NOMINEES:

Automated Tax Engine Testing

AvidXchange PO Matching Functionality

Avii: Unified Accounting Management System

Bloomberg Tax & Accounting Fixed Assets

CCH AnswerConnect Taskflow Tools

Client Hub Frictionless Workflow

.cpa Top-level Domain

DataRails

E-Signatures by AuditDashboard

Financial Cents

Inflo Collaborate

Inflo Dynamic Reporting

Intelligence-Based Billing by Anduin

Intuit Practice Management (Powered by Karbon)

OfficeTools Cloud

OnePlace Operations & Finance

ONESOURCE Indirect Tax

Paychex Flex Paycheck Protection Program Solutions

ProConnect Tax Online 1099B and 1099G Apply

ProConnect Tax Online Bulk Upload and Apply

ProConnect Tax Online eSignature Any Form or Document Integration

Sovos Sales & Use Tax Filing

Visual Lease Integrations Hub

# CPA Practice Advisor TAX & ACCOUNTING TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD 2021 WINNER

ADVERTORIAL

## Vic.ai by Vic.ai

Vic.ai is an AI platform for accounting productivity. Vic.ai's machine learning technology has been trained on more than 500 million live accounting documents and transactions. Already surpassing human-level accuracy for many tasks, Vic.ai helps accountants, CFOs, and accounts payable (AP) teams become more efficient and reduce errors on routine accounting tasks. Vic.ai saves companies, on average, 82% of their time on accounting tasks and between \$40,000-150,000/year in cost savings.

Vic.ai is an intelligent cloud platform that continually learns from the actions of accountants and gets progressively smarter, removing the more manual tasks from an accountant's plate. With the release of Vic.ai's groundbreaking Autopilot feature in 2020, the platform is capable of making accounting decisions without any human review. Normal automation can perform specific tasks based on rules that humans have to constantly create and edit. But Vic.ai proactively advises you on the right decision or actions to take in an environment free of rules.

In 2021, Vic.ai added the Autonomous Approval Flows feature, which determines the correct number of steps in the invoice approval process and who needs to review each step automatically. Now Vic.ai manages and autonomously automates all accounting decisions and approvals, creating a centralized workplace for team efficiency. Vic.ai partners with 100+ accounting firms worldwide, including four of the top 10 firms. Vic.ai was recently honored as one of the 2021 top new products by Accounting Today.



For more information visit  
<https://www.vic.ai/CPA>

# CPA Practice Advisor TAX & ACCOUNTING TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AWARD 2021 WINNER

ADVERTORIAL

## Avalara Managed Returns for Accountants

by Avalara

The newly released Avalara Managed Returns for Accountants (MRA) supports firms of all sizes as they work overtime to help clients solve for ongoing state-by-state economic nexus complexity, as well as increased remote and ecommerce sales resulting from COVID-19. MRA is a cloud-based sales tax returns solution designed specifically for use by accounting firms, enabling them to scale without adding resources, and automate their preparation and filing practices.

MRA gives firms an outsourced tax compliance solution, leveraging the same technology used to process returns and remittance for thousands of Avalara customers, from emerging online businesses to enterprise organizations. With MRA, firms can:

- Manage the sales tax filing process for all clients and their returns from a single dashboard designed for efficient accountant workflow, with customizable, multi-client views, all managed from one cloud-based system.
- Automatically prepare tax returns based on the appropriate government forms and state and local requirements.
- Remit payments on clients' behalf, with Avalara handling the filing, payment, and related notice management (at firm's request) on behalf of clients.
- Work remotely, with staff managing clients' returns from any location, keeping the firm nimble and efficient. Support omnichannel data imports, easily aggregating client sales information from multiple channels and marketplaces.
- Keep client data safe and private, with MRA providing strong security controls.

Avalara MRA enables accounting firms to offload the complex tax return filing process in order to focus more on audit preparation, nexus assessments, and other more profitable tax advisory services, contributing to meaningful firm growth in 2021 and beyond.

For more information visit <https://www.Avalara.com>

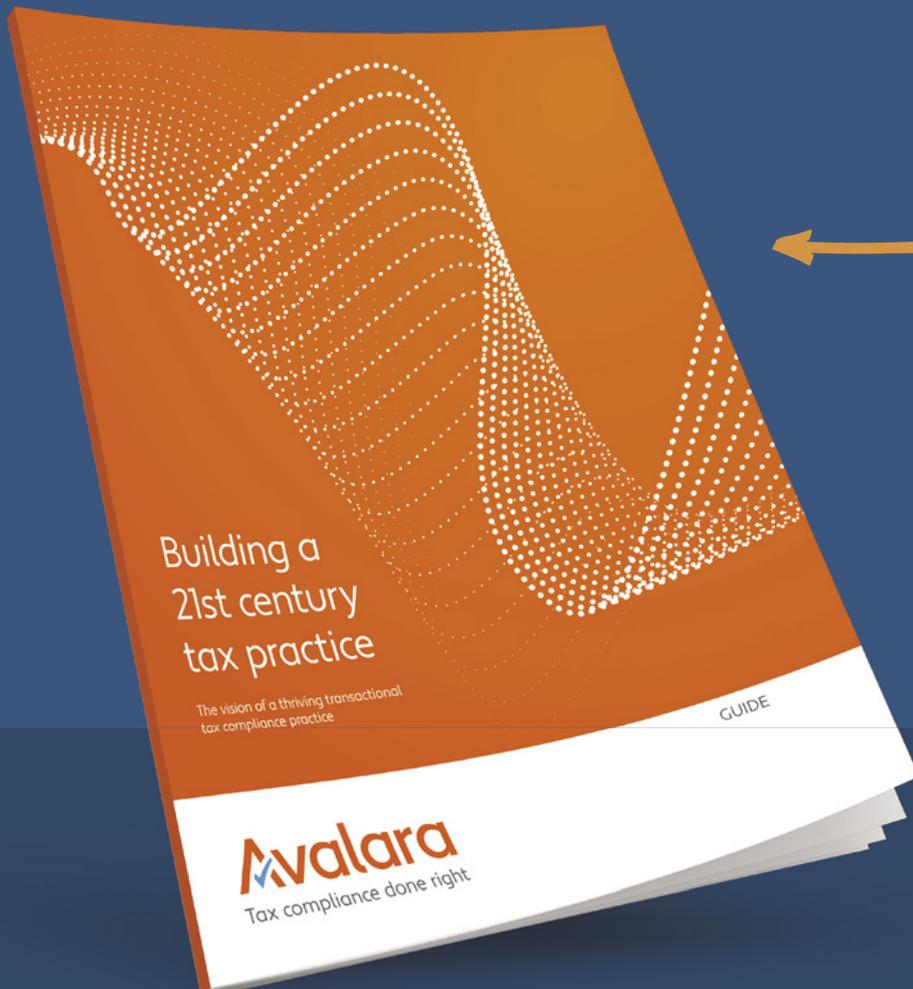


# Avalara for Accountants: *The best new tool in your kit*

Avalara for Accountants can help you grow your firm, scale to add new business, and reduce risk for clients.

- ✓ Returns prep and filing technology
- ✓ In-depth tax research
- ✓ Simplified license management

***Indirect tax compliance solutions.  
Designed for accounting firms.***



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**Avalara**  
FOR ACCOUNTANTS

## Employee Relations in Challenging Times

MOST WOULD AGREE that the majority of 2020 and the first half of 2021 has been one of the most difficult periods our country has ever endured. It is only natural to wonder what to expect for the remainder of 2021 and beyond. Despite the great progress made on COVID-19 vaccinations and the rapidly declining number of infections across the country, it appears that we may continue dealing with the Coronavirus and its effects for at least several more months. The best available estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and others indicate that it may be several more months before a sufficient number of people are vaccinated for the country to reach so-called herd immunity.

There is no question that in addition to taming the Coronavirus, considerable effort and discipline will be required to rebuild an economy struggling to overcome unprecedented challenges. With an unemployment rate of 5.9%, certainly lower than was anticipated as the pandemic raged, there are still millions of workers unemployed, some by choice but many due to business closures. Employees in essential industries that continued to work, as well as those that have returned

ment we have introduced a new administration that is much less business-friendly than the last. How will its policies ultimately impact our daily lives? Will there be the regulatory escalation that characterized the Obama years? Will they help foster or hinder the much-needed economic growth? Will their policies push us to 1980's style inflation levels? These are but a few of the numerous questions that are generating uncertainty, especially among workers.

In view of the myriad distressing circumstances, worker concerns about their ability to provide for their families in the future is to be expected. A concomitant impact on productivity and employee morale is a distinct possibility, if not probability, as well. Employees in some industries may even decide to leave their job if the prospect for a more stable employment situation presents itself. In fact, we are already seeing substantial job hopping. The remaining employees may become discouraged and disheartened, perhaps to the point of creating a workplace atmosphere where minor annoyances become major workplace conflicts.

A pre-pandemic Gallop poll

found that only 34% of workers were engaged in their jobs. That same poll found that 53% were not engaged, and 13% were actively disengaged. This last group of employees would rather be almost anywhere other than in their current workplaces. Additionally, it is generally acknowledged that millennials are the least engaged group of workers in today's workplace, and, for better or worse, they also currently comprise the largest segment of the workforce. Disengaged employees could easily become disaffected employees.

One of the greatest dangers for employers in these trying times is that a singular focus on restoring and/or maintaining their businesses, understandable as it may be, could result in employee relations being relegated to the back burner. That could be an unfortunate error. It could breed the employee disaffection we hope to avoid. Lack of attention could exacerbate potentially serious employee concerns over an uncertain future. The message to employees would be clear – you are not a priority.

It is a well-documented fact that employees want to feel appre-



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ciated for what they contribute to the success of the company. Equally important is the employees' need-to-know what is in store for them and their workplace, especially in these troubling times. Additionally, open and regular communications with the workforce by most employers during the pandemic has enabled virtually all employers to consistently comply with the COVID-19 safety protocols and limit the spread of Coronavirus in their workplaces. As we move forward in this period of uncertainty, frequent, clear, and consistent communication with their workforce will be even more critical. In fact, given the numerous challenges confronting us, it may be more important than ever before. Such time-tested communication methods as regular town halls with all employees, pre-shift meetings, and status updates should certainly be considered, and increased if already being conducted.

While no one really knows exactly how the remainder of 2021 will unfold, or when conditions will be such that they engender true confidence for the future by employees and employers, employee relations should receive every bit as much of the focus that is directed at maintaining and growing the business. It is really not an either/or choice. ■

to businesses that have struggled to resume operations, are uncertain about the financial security of their families. Predictions of when the economy might be restored to pre-pandemic levels, if ever, seem to be extended farther out on a regular basis. It is a moving target. Into this troubled environ-





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## Back to the Basics

*"Drastic Changes In The Accounting Profession!"*

*"Continued Turmoil For Accountants!"*

*"Increased Talent Shortage Hits All Time High!"*

### SHIFTING FOCUS

The first step in the process, hasn't changed from before. Frankly, every firm should have a huge poster hanging in the office and at everyone's home office, which simply says "It's about more than taxes!!!" That is the first step if you want to make a difference - you have to understand that making a real difference in someone's life is not about a tax return. It is about figuring out what that person is really struggling with, and what is holding him or her back. Each person, entity, organization, and client has something, we can help our clients clarify direction and figure out what that one thing is. There is a whole person behind the documents submitted for taxes - your job is to figure out who that is and what he or she needs help with, but that starts with caring enough to focus on *the client*.

### TEAM APPROACH

Once you look daily at your fancy new sign and accept that it is not just about the taxes, the next moment of realization is to understand that you can't do it all alone. That is right, we need to admit that we, as powerful as we accountants are, cannot do it all by ourselves.

We can do a lot, don't get me wrong, but simply not everything. That is why we need to bring in a high quality team around us. We are the center of the team, helping our client, driving the solution, but we must bring in the right team members around us to help achieve those goals. This is why virtual family office solutions have

become the go-to solution for accounting firms.

With the team of the right people both around you both internally and externally, not only can we help our clients identify the main challenges they are faced with, but we can also work to help them solve their problems at the same time. Best of all, by having the power of a bigger team, with a variety of individuals focused in niche specialties, you won't become overwhelmed trying to do everything yourself.

### FINISHING IT

Have you ever started a project, but not finished it? Of course you have. No matter how much you wanted to finish that project, for some "unknown" reason, it just never got finished. We are all used to this at the personal level, but this level of project fatigue extends to the organizational level as well.

Again, this is where our role as trusted professionals is about more than just tax returns. At this point, you have already clarified the client's direction to best understand his or her major roadblock, you've brought in the right people on the team to solve the problem, and you are heading towards the finish line. But then something happens - another fire drill.

You are left confused: why would the client not want to finish this project? You know that it will provide the client with not just what he or she really wants, but what the



client really needs. The reason: the challenges of everyday life get in the way. We all know how that goes, and this is where we can come in at the end and really make our mark. This is where we can help our clients stay on track, help them stay focused, and help them finish this project, whatever it may be.

Executing this plan is harder than it sounds, but the reward is remarkable. Seeing the look on your client's face when you make a real difference is not only financially rewarding, but personally rewarding as well.

So go out, get your "It is about more than taxes!!!" banners printed, bring on the team, and help get your clients over the finish line! This is why we do what we do, and this is what can make our profession so remarkable. We CAN make a difference in someone's life. If you are lucky enough to have experienced this before for yourself, you know what I'm talking about. If you still have not, don't lose hope - the path is waiting for you: Go get started! ■

These headlines and more are just a few examples of what seems to be a never-ending list of challenges and problems accountants have faced over the past year. We all have felt, without a doubt, the pain and struggles of the past year, given the constant challenges and immense difficulties. That, however, is why now is a great time for a change - it is a great opportunity to triumph in the face of turbulence. Now is the ideal time to shift our focus away from the major changes at the macro levels that don't seem to be going away anytime soon, and instead focus on the changes that are more personal, and most importantly, more impactful.

Before the world changed in March of 2020, one of our goals was to become the most trusted professional advisor for our clients. At the even more basic level, we sought to make an impact in our client's lives with the hope of helping in ways beyond getting the tax return done in time. That help is something different for each client, but when we were able to help them, it was highly rewarding. Let us look forward, and instead think about focusing on how we can make a difference for just *one* client in *one* moment in time. Bring back a little happiness, and a little bit of ease for them, even if just for a moment. That sounds easy enough, doesn't it?

After everything we have been through, doing a little good will make us feel even better than before.

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION IN CPA PRACTICES: Is Everyone Accounted For?

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & inclusion (DEI) in the workplace has come under heightened focus since 2020 as social unrest grew and the pandemic prompted many to reevaluate their lives. Accountancy firms are more committed than ever to making progress in this area. However, with many groups still underrepresented in the CPA profession, there is clearly still work to be done.

Savvy accounting leaders understand DEI runs much deeper than demographics, but many still wonder how they can implement lasting change. Whether you manage a small firm or a big department, here's why diversity matters and how finance and accounting leaders can create a workplace based around meaningful inclusion.

### WHY DIVERSITY DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN INCLUSION

Diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably, but they can mean different things in the workplace context. Whereas diversity is about the representation of employees with different backgrounds and beliefs — be it ethnicity, age, gender, religion, political views or sexual orientation — inclusion is how it actually feels to work at your firm. Do all team members feel safe being their true selves at work? Is everyone treated fairly with equal opportunities to progress? Does each individual feel valued and confident their views will be taken seriously? If your answer to any of these questions is “No” or “Maybe,” it's time to review your policies.

### WHY DEI MATTERS TO YOUR BUSINESS

Workplace diversity is often mentioned in the context of social responsibility or legal obligation. But not only is it simply the right thing to do, diversity management can take your company culture and business to a new level. Here are some of the benefits:

■ **Different perspectives** — A workforce that includes professionals from a

variety of backgrounds gives you access to a broader range of skill sets and experiences. You'll reap the benefits when planning and executing a business strategy for a diverse customer base.

■ **Increased creativity** — Bringing together people who see things differently creates a melting pot of fresh, new ideas and facilitates innovation.

■ **Agile decision-making** — When teams look at problems from different angles, they can make informed decisions and respond quickly to market changes.

■ **More potential candidates** — Firms that consider applicants from diverse backgrounds have a larger talent pool to choose from when hiring. What's more, diversity boosts a company's brand, so these firms are more likely to attract applications from top performers.

■ **Reduced employee turnover** — Diversity and inclusion in the workforce results in more loyal employees who feel a sense of belonging and desire to stay with the company. With accountancy talent in high demand, retaining employees is crucial.

■ **Increased productivity** — When workers feel valued and trusted, it boosts their morale and productivity. If the whole workforce feels this way, the performance of your firm skyrockets.

### TIPS FOR MOVING THE INCLUSION NEEDLE

Building an inclusive workplace culture is neither quick nor easy to achieve. Many equality issues are sensitive topics that can involve uncomfortable conversations. While

good diversity practices are developing across the accountancy world, CPA firms must make a continuous, conscious effort to address any shortfalls and improve the employee experience.

■ **Change from the top down** — Many firms include a diversity statement as part of their core values, but meaningful inclusion requires more than lip service. Firm leaders need to make it plain that every manager is responsible for understanding and living the company's values and setting an example for everyone on their team.

■ **Attract diverse candidates** — To build a diverse workforce, you'll need to make your recruitment process inclusive and appealing. Highlight your commitment to inclusion on the careers page of your website and feature photos and quotes from a broad range of employees or customers.

■ **Remove unconscious bias from the hiring process** — Bias can lead recruiters to make exclusionary hiring decisions, so replace gut instincts with objective criteria. Remove personal details such as name, age or address when shortlisting candidates and use structured interview questions to hire the best person for the role.

■ **Provide DEI training** — A one-off training session won't turn your firm into a beacon of DEI, but it can be a useful starting point for honest conversations. You can also allocate time for discussing diversity topics in your regular meetings and ask your team to identify daily actions or “micro behaviors” that strengthen or weaken inclusiveness in the workplace.

■ **Encourage diverse thinking** — Create



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an environment where views are challenged and openly discussing them doesn't seem like a personal attack. Being able to consider alternative viewpoints is one of the most important elements of critical thinking, which is vital for business success.

■ **Ask for feedback** — Set up an employee resource or networking group — an organization created and led by employees from traditionally underrepresented groups to share common interests — to review office practices through a diversity lens.

Whether it's workplace benefits, such as flexible schedules, meal choices or cultural celebrations, having a dedicated group looking out for inclusion will help inform company policies.

■ **Constantly reassess** — Unless you make your effort an ongoing one, it's easy for a firm to slip back into its old ways. That's why you must continuously measure your efforts and set ambitious goals for inclusion. Partnering with organizations like the National Association of Black Accountants, the Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance and Ascend Pan-Asian Leaders will give you fresh insight into DEI issues and keep the topic current.

Workplace diversity isn't about ticking a box or a token gesture of equality. It's about recognizing the limitations of a homogenous workforce and striving for more empowered employees. In today's global market, where companies can reach people all over the world, diversity isn't just a passing fad — it's a better way to do business. ■

## Using Traditional Marketing to Gain Leads

By Becky Livingston

**IF YOU FEEL like all you hear about is social media and digital marketing, you're not alone. According to Oberlo (<https://tinyurl.com/3n3924bn>), "Currently, there are 3.78 billion social media users – which equates to about 48% of the [global] population."**

Don't be discouraged. There are still plenty of opportunities to gain leads using tried-and-true traditional marketing methods. Did you know, "73% of American consumers (<https://tinyurl.com/xkyz6sc>) say they prefer for brands to reach out to them through direct mail because it's something they can hold in their hands and read whenever they want?"

Here are a several traditional marketing efforts that still get a rather high return on investment (ROI).

- **Phone Calls** – When it comes to client communication, lead generation might be just a phone call away. Rather than sending an email, give your client a call about a new service or information that may help them solve a pain point or save them money. They'll appreciate the call. And you'll know it didn't get caught in the spam filter.
- **Direct Mail** – Yes, the kind postal carriers deliver. In 2019, a USPS study (<https://tinyurl.com/aymsmdh2>) found that "millennials are more likely than Gen X and Baby Boomers to take action based on marketing mail. In fact, 67% said they frequently and occasionally use marketing mail as a prompt to go online."
- **Print Advertising** – For long-range campaigns, e.g., large conferences, consider print advertising. It could include magazines, newsletter, promotional mailers, and similar items.
- **Speaking Engagements** – Hinge Marketing (<https://tinyurl.com/jm6vm29k>) found that speaking engagements "generated about the same amount of leads as recommendations and referrals."
- **Networking** – Whether in person or virtually, networking is still a great way to generate leads. Even if it's among peers. You never know when someone will call for assistance.
- **Billboards** – If your firm sponsors a local sports team that offers billboard space, take advantage of that captive audience with a creative, memorable billboard.

### DIRECT MAIL EXAMPLE

Let's say you live in a community with an influx of new families. One way to get in front of new community members is to create a postcard introducing them to your services. Ask the town's welcoming committee to place it in their welcome kit. It could also be shared at community events and networking meetings. If you're not comfortable handing them out, put them on an entrance/exit table and collect the extras when you leave.



### BILLBOARD EXAMPLE

When it comes to billboards, you have seconds to make an impression. Get their attention with eye-catching graphics and an unusual turn of phrase. If your phone number is easy to remember (maybe it ends in 1040) or could be turned into a word or phrase, such as 1-800-CPA-4You, use that too.



### OTHER TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

- When sending direct mail, rather than blanketing a population, use a targeted approach. For example, start by sending information to existing clients or to people who've shown interest in the product/services.
- No matter the campaign method, use a code to help you track its success, such as PromoPC for phone calls, PromoDM for direct mail, etc.
- If you want to increase speaking engagement opportunities, let the AICPA, your state CPA society, and local chamber of commerce know you are avail-

able – especially as a last-minute, fill-in speaker. Develop a speaker deck for 3-5 different topics, that vary in length. Also, to be automatically notified when speaking opportunities are announced, add a "call for speakers" topic in Google Alerts.

- **Networking** is a tough nut to crack, especially if you're an introvert. Here are four suggestions offered by Charlie Houpert (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAPySGLL3gg>):
- Think outside the "networking" box. You'll be much more successful (and comfortable) if you turn everyday situations into networking opportunities. Consider your hobbies, places you frequent, and people you're comfortable with. Do they know what you do and how you can help them?
- Be a peacock (that's my phrase not Charlie's). Is there something subtle you can use to stand out in the crowd without feeling uncomfortable? Maybe it's a certain lipstick color, bow tie, glasses, jacket / blazer, shirt / blouse / t-shirt, hair color, shoe, etc. Use that peacock symbol on your social media profile, business card, tradeshow and conferences profile, etc. People may not approach you, but they will remember the peacock icon. Does anyone come to mind instantly? I can immediately think of a few CPAs who use this effectively.
- Get people talking about themselves by asking questions like, what brings you here; what do you hope to get out of the conference; what are you looking for; what are you working on right now; etc. It helps turn the attention away from you, while gathering information about them.
- Play match maker to connect people with each other, which helps you build your personal network. Keep in mind, traditional marketing efforts must do one thing – help you meet a business goal. Whatever approach you take, keep that focus in mind when it comes to creative, design, placement, target market, and use. I'd love to hear about a successful traditional marketing campaign your firm launched. Share your story in the comments. ■

*Becky Livingston is the President and CEO of Penheel Marketing, a NJ-based firm specializing in social media and digital marketing for CPAs.*

Images from Penheel marketing.



# NEW TECHNOLOGY

FOR OUR APPS We Love column this month, we are taking on the category of new technology. For a long time, apps themselves were the new technology. Now apps are evolving, and we're looking at examples of new types of technology we are seeing in your apps. Some of the members of our *CPA Practice Advisor* community shared their favorite new technologies, and we also explored online for additional examples.

**David Almonte**, CPA, CGMA, Financial Reporting & Analysis Manager at Amica Mutual Insurance Company, said, "Several months ago I picked up an **Oculus** system from a company Facebook now owns. It was a big step for virtual reality software and platforms in general. I have had so much fun playing World Series of Power with individuals all over the world, having my kids swim with sharks and ride roller-coasters, take educational helicopter tours of various countries, joined virtual workout and boxing classes, sat 'front row' for virtual concerts, among many other to dos. Highly recommend this as both a form of entertainment as well as a great additional tool in the education space for kids and adults alike."

**Sandi Leyva**, president of Accountant's Accelerator, told us, "I love my **Ourring**. It's a wearable ring that tracks heart rate stats, body temperature, sleep, and workouts. It gives me 3 daily scores: sleep, readiness, and activity. Not all that exciting or new, but useful."

We are accountants, after all, and **Dan Nicholson**, CPA, CGMA, CEO at NthDegree CPAs, told us about the modern finance app, **CertaintyApp.com** – "A tool that converts your clients goals into a solvable equation that shows how much more cash flow they need to fund all their goals. That then allows the CPA to show directly how their services are contributing toward funding their goals faster."

**Chris Frederiksen**, CPA, co-founder of Frederiksen-Crawford CPAs, said, "The most important new technology for me is being able to use my phone **hands-free**, by receiving and transmitting voice entirely through my hearing aids via Bluetooth. This same technology allows

me to listen to television sound through hearing aids and having total control of the environment."

**Brian Tankersley**, CPA.CITP, CGMA, director of strategic relationships at K2 Enterprises, shared his shipping experiences. "I've had to ship a number of packages to clients lately, and have been very impressed with a web service called **Shippo**. The product connects to your existing FedEx/UPS/USPS shipping accounts, imports orders/shipments from eCommerce solutions, lets you create shipment templates for common orders, compares prices from different carriers and services, prints shipping labels on your laser printer, and even passes through significant discounts on USPS, UPS, and DHL shipments. I saved about 25% off of USPS when shipping 14 packages this month, and it was much easier to get the documents out and track the packages in Shippo's web interface. The best part of this service is that it's either free or cheap depending on how you use it. If you use Shippo's freight service discounts, the service is free; if you use your rates, you pay \$0.05/shipping label to use this interface."

**Gary Boomer**, CPA.CITP, CGMA, MAcc, visionary and strategist at Boomer Consulting, Inc., said, "Data and accountability are the themes in medical devices and home automation. Some of the better medical devices I have utilized are: **Apple Watch** (EKG) and **QardioBase** (weight) and **QuadrioArm** (blood pressure). Home automation continues to grow with all the major players: **Apple Home**, **Google Assist** and **Amazon Alexa**. The integration with smart lights, music and temperature controls is growing in popularity. I utilize a **Brilliant Smart Home** control switch to integrate and manage all

of the above. The challenge with smart lights and switches comes with loss of an internet connection. Some devices are better than others about resetting automatically."

Here are some additional examples of apps representing new technology:

- Apps for getting around – beyond ride-sharing apps like **Uber** and **Lyft**, there are car-sharing apps including **Turo** and **Zipcar** and also the scooter and bike apps such as **Limebike** and **Bird**. More and more major forms of transportation (planes, trains, and buses) are providing apps as well.
- **Smartglasses** – you remember Google Glass and how that didn't seem to catch on in the marketplace? The concept is still there, however, and the newer smartglasses will actually look like glasses. Look for miniature video overlays, and features like an augmented Alexa allowing you to control your home, make calls, and listen to music, which only you can hear, navigation tools, and fitness add-ons.
- **Biometrics** apps for security not only include facial recognition and fingerprints, but also voice recognition and signature recognition.
- Look for **beacon technology** to change your retail experiences in the near future. With Bluetooth enabled, you can walk past a beacon in a store and see an ad pushed to your phone alerting you to a special sale or an intriguing purchase option. Beacons also notice that you're spending a lot of time browsing in the shoe department and can send you notices later when a sale is pending.

This is just a sampling of new technology in the apps world. ■

# 5 Ways for CPAs to Become Trusted Financial Advisors

By Justin Hatch

THE ACCOUNTING LANDSCAPE is changing rapidly as more CPA firms begin adding advisory services to their offerings. In one recent survey, 60 percent of firms reported offering strategic advisory services for clients. While professionals have known for some time that clients want more of these services, the transition is not one that is easily made overnight.

While advisory services are a valuable addition to CPA firms, it will take time for clients to see their CPAs in a new light. Firms will need to put in the work to show they are not just CPAs who provide financial advice but trusted financial advisors. These tips can help firms become trusted financial advisors for their clients.

## 1 SHOW CLIENTS YOU KNOW THEM

There is a reason businesses are interested in more advisory services. They need someone to give them a deeper look at their finances than just profits and losses and develop a roadmap to help the business advance.

Show clients you have deep knowledge of their business that will enable you to give them meaningful advice. Give them personalized financial reports to highlight trends, hiccups, and successes you have found, and collaborate on objectives and ideas for improvement. Giving a more personal look at the data distinguishes you as more than just the numbers person: it establishes you as a member of the team.

## 2 IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION

When you communicate well, your clients understand that you are putting their needs first, and you know what their business needs to thrive. With your knowledge of their financial data, you likely have great insights into what their company should be doing.

If you communicate those insights well, it shows clients you have done the legwork and can back up your advice. They will see that your goals are aligned and that they can trust that the steps you are taking are the best path. In good financial times and during crises, good communication lets clients know they have your support.

## 3 SHOW CLIENTS YOU ARE AVAILABLE

It's easy to think of a CPA as someone you go to when you need a financial report or have tax questions. It is important for CPAs to build a year-round relationship with clients so

they understand their CPA is always available to help. Take advantage of cloud technology to give your clients real-time updates on their financial situation.

As you transition to using the Cloud, businesses will come to rely on you consistently for financial advice, rather than the quarterly or yearly check-ins they might be used to. Communicate with them regularly to solidify their financial plan and determine whether there need to be any tweaks to keep them going in the right direction. Clients appreciate knowing you're always at their side to guide them.

## 4 MAKE THE SWITCH TO VALUE PRICING

Firms of all sizes are seeing the benefits of using a value pricing model for clients. The AICPA's 2018 MAPS report (<https://tinyurl.com/2wbffvem>) found firms used this billing practice for anywhere from 15 percent to 50 percent of their services. Value pricing allows your clients to pay you what you're really worth while seeing the bang they are getting for their buck. Rather than trying to keep the hours to a price they can afford, they know up front what they will be getting for their money, and they appreciate the value of what they are getting in return. Moving to this pricing model builds your clients' trust in you and your work as they feel they have more control over the finished product.

## 5 PROTECT CLIENT DATA

All of your expertise means nothing if your clients' data isn't safe with your firm. Don't forget about the most basic trust your clients put in you: to guard their data as though it were your own. Data security breaches frequently make headlines as major companies are targeted, and CPA firms aren't immune. An analysis of cyber attacks against accounting firms in Maryland found 132 breaches over a four-year period, with 90 percent affecting small businesses.

Highlight the steps you're taking to protect vital information so businesses know it is a priority and they can put their trust in you. Investing in more technology will enable your firm to offer the best financial services to your clients. As you upgrade your offerings, be sure to also invest in security measures to ensure your firm is not caught off guard by threats.

There are few people better suited to provide sound financial advice to clients than their CPA. If you do the work to establish trust with the businesses you serve, they will turn to you for advisory services. Let them know they can always lean on you to support them through struggles and lift them up to help them succeed. ■

*Justin Hatch is co-founder and CEO of Reach Reporting.*

*AICPA News is a round-up of recent announcements from the institute.*

## AICPA AWARDS \$766K IN SCHOLARSHIPS TO ACCOUNTING STUDENTS



The American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) has granted \$766,000 in academic scholarships to 150 students as part of the AICPA Legacy Scholars program.

“The AICPA is committed to fostering the next generation of CPAs. The Legacy Scholars program helps assure we’re attracting students from diverse backgrounds to meet the evolving needs of the accounting profession,” said Mike Decker, VP - CPA Examination & Pipeline at AICPA & CIMA (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants). “The Legacy Scholars program identifies talented accounting students and provides them financial assistance,

resources and guidance to help them begin their career. We look forward to welcoming this year’s Legacy Scholarship recipients into the profession in the coming years.”

The program helps students pay for college, easing their journey to becoming CPAs. Funded by the AICPA, the AICPA Foundation, and partners, the Legacy Scholars program consists of six distinct scholarships awarding between \$3,000 and \$10,000 per student. The scholarships provide support to a variety of students, ranging from those with liberal arts degrees pursuing graduate degrees in accounting, to minority and female scholars to those transferring from two-year to four-year institutions.

View list of recipients at:

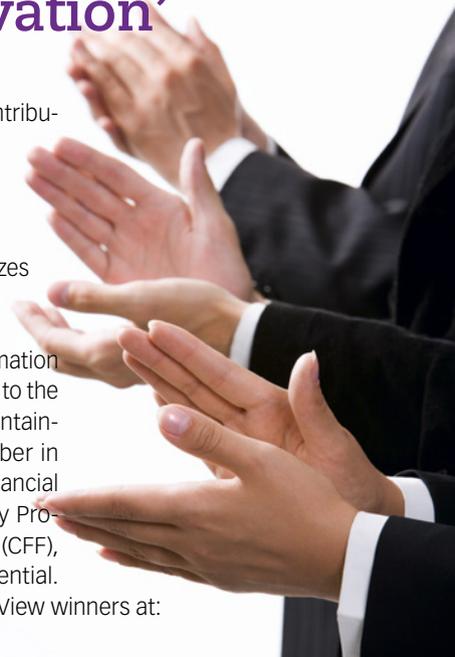
<https://cpapracticeadvisor.com/21232664> ■

## AICPA Announces 2021 ‘Standing Ovation’ Award Recipients

The AICPA has honored nine young CPAs for contributions to their specialty area with the sixth annual Standing Ovation award. The recipients, all talented CPAs age 40 and under, were acknowledged during AICPA & CIMA ENGAGE 2021.

The AICPA’s Standing Ovation program recognizes young CPAs who exhibit exemplary professional achievement in personal financial planning, business valuation and forensic accounting, and information technology. Beyond making a notable contribution to the profession, nomination requirements include maintaining an active CPA license, being an AICPA member in good standing and holding either the Personal Financial Specialist (PFS), Certified Information Technology Professional (CITP), Certified in Financial Forensics (CFF), or Accredited in Business Valuation (ABV) credential. Nominees must also be 40 years old or younger. View winners at:

<https://cpapracticeadvisor.com/21232436>



## AICPA PROPOSES NEW FORM AAR-EZ TO SIMPLIFY AND IMPROVE THE AAR PROCESS

The AICPA recently submitted recommendations to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to simplify and improve the administrative adjustment request (AAR) process under the centralized partnership audit regime (CPAR). The recommendations provide a simplified framework that the AICPA is referring to as a Form AAR-EZ.

The AICPA recommends the following:

- Short-term simplification measures under the existing AAR process
- Instruction changes, clarifications and attachments
- Long-term AAR simplification
- Proposed Form AAR-EZ process
- Deemed automatic extension request(s) under the superseding return rules
- Limited amended partnership returns in the case of retroactive changes

Completing and filing AARs can be a time-consuming, administrative burden for partnerships and practitioners. Making minor adjustments to previously filed partnership returns, including those that are not relevant in determining the tax liability of any partners, is unreasonably difficult due to the complexity of the AAR process.

## Accounting Profession is Well-Positioned for Change, Says AICPA CEO

The past year has been a defining time for CPAs and management accountants in their roles as trusted advisors to businesses large and small, with the profession proving its ability to adapt and thrive amid disruption and adversity, senior leaders of the AICPA and CIMA said during a keynote presentation at the AICPA & CIMA ENGAGE conference.

That resiliency will be needed going forward, with more changes to come from technological disruption, expanded categories of non-financial reporting, and the rapid evolution of new service lines and business opportunities, Association CEO Barry Melancon, CPA, CGMA, said during the panel session at the AICPA's ENGAGE conference in July. Clients and employers are also facing increased complexity on several fronts, many heightened by the pandemic, and they're looking for the profession to solve it for them.

"It's hard to argue with the notion that we are in a world reimagined," Melancon said, adding that the profession is nevertheless well positioned to capitalize on opportunities tied to change. Key topics discussed during the session included:

### Digital Transformation.

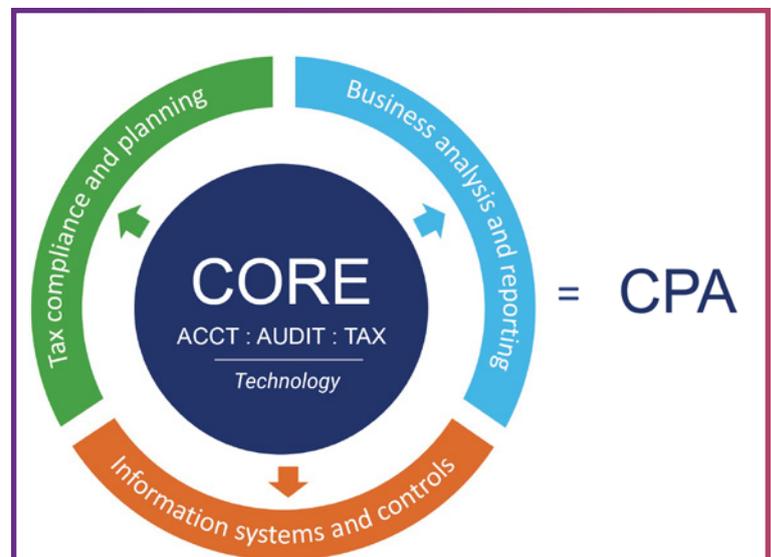
The shift to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated uptake rates for cloud solutions and related technology. Client advisory services (CAS) practices that embraced the cloud before the pandemic fared well during workplace shutdowns, and many firms showed great creativity in areas such as remote auditing that can have application in the post-pandemic world. The leap forward that many firms and employers had to take on technology upgrades due to the

pandemic sets the profession up well for the next level of changes involving artificial intelligence, particularly machine learning, panelists said. This will be manifested in such initiatives as the Dynamic Audit Solution, an AICPA and CPA.com effort that is transforming the way audits are performed.

### Business Model Evolution.

One of the great successes of the profession over the past 18 months was its work in small business relief, and it can have an enduring impact for clients as firms deepen new relationships with lenders, particularly the fintech sector, said Erik Asgeirsson, president and CEO of CPA.com. The Association's leaders also noted growth in CAS and other advisory services, as well as emerging areas of non-financial reporting bearing on sustainability, data integrity and supply chains, among others.

■ **Focus on Talent.** Ensuring a robust pipeline of new CPAs and Chartered Global Management Accountants (CGMAs) and promoting diversity and inclusion are critical, panelists said. To ensure newly licensed CPAs have the skills and competencies required today and into the future, the AICPA is collaborating with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy to update the CPA licensure model. A new exam for the model, called CPA Evolution, is expected in early 2024 ■



## CPA EXAM PRACTICE ANALYSIS SOLICITS FEEDBACK

The AICPA is soliciting feedback on the draft content proposed in the new Core and Disciplines CPA Examination structure. This request for input is the next step in the CPA Examination Practice Analysis, which is designed to determine the knowledge and skills that newly licensed CPAs need to protect the public interest under the CPA Evolution licensure model. Stakeholders are asked to provide feedback on preliminary content through September 7, 2021. This valuable input from the profession will help guide the development of new CPA Exam blueprints and Exam design, which will then be shared via an Exposure Draft, which is planned in July 2022.

Under the CPA Evolution licensure model, all candidates will be required to take three Core sections that will assess the knowledge and skills that all newly licensed CPAs need in their role to protect the public interest covering: Accounting, Auditing & Attestation, and Taxation. The three Disciplines are Business Analysis and Reporting, Information Systems and Control, and Tax Compliance and Planning. Due to its central role in the profession, technology concepts will be incorporated into all Core and Disciplines sections.

More information on the current practice analysis to develop a CPA Evolution-aligned CPA Exam, include general information, timelines and FAQs is available online and will be updated regularly. ■

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CPAEvolutionDraftContentOutline>



# The Digital Nomad Client

By Nellie Akalp

DO YOUR CLIENTS want help setting up their new business as a “digital nomad”? Digital nomads are people who use tech to work remotely from anywhere they hang their hats, whether it be a beach, a foreign country, or a recreational vehicle. To help your clients navigate the world of becoming a digital nomad, here’s what you need to know about digital nomad entrepreneurship and the legal structures that work best for a digital nomad business.

## THE RISE OF THE DIGITAL NOMAD

Although the digital nomad concept has been around for many years, in the past year, the world significantly embraced the “location independence” lifestyle when the pandemic necessitated a shift to remote working. According to MBO Partners’ report, COVID-19 and

the Rise of the Digital Nomad, the number of Americans proclaiming their digital nomad status grew 49%—to 10.9 million in 2020.

The report describes digital nomads as “people who choose to embrace a location-independent, technology-enabled lifestyle that allows them to travel and work remotely, anywhere in the internet-

connected world.” Typical remote workers usually stay in one geographic area, while digital nomads travel around while working and running their businesses.

The extent of the digital nomad’s journey is as varied as the types of businesses run by these traveling entrepreneurs. While some may travel for years across the globe, others may only be nomadic for short stints, returning to their home base intermittently before taking off again.

As the name implies, typical digital nomads tend to have strong tech skills and are first adopters of new technology. The MBO report also found digital nomads work in various industries such as information technology, education, training, consulting, coaching, research,

sales, marketing, P.R., and creative services. So really, any business that can be run remotely using digital tools is a good fit for the digital nomad lifestyle.

## DIGITAL NOMAD ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Although starting a business in the U.S. and running it from anywhere in the world is entirely possible technologically, many digital nomads still need to know how to do it legally and stay in compliance.

The first step, which may seem contrary to the spirit of the digital nomad, is the requirement to claim permanent residency for the business. No matter what state your client decides to call “home,” the law looks at several factors when determining the entrepreneur’s



where the entrepreneur is domiciled. For example, many business owners register their business in a state with no state income tax or fewer regulations like South Dakota or Delaware. However, if the business opens a warehouse or has employees in a state other than where it is registered, it must file for foreign qualification. Foreign qualification is when the state determines a company conducts enough business to be registered in the state. As the conditions for foreign qualification vary by state, it's essential your client check with the Secretary of State to find out if filing is necessary.

If your client's business has employees residing and/or working in a state different from the business's home state, the business must also register with that state's Department of Revenue and Department of Labor (or similar office) to withhold payroll and unemployment taxes.

The key legal factor for digital nomads, no matter where they have roots or register their businesses, is where they make their sales. Whether the sales occur in the U.S. or a foreign country, in most cases sales taxes need to be collected (and paid) wherever the sales are made. In addition, the kinds of sales that constitute taxable items also vary by state and country. To register for sales tax collection, your client should visit the state's Department of Revenue website, find the sales and use tax section (or "new business activity") and fill out the information about the company.

Finally, digital nomads must determine if the countries they visit require a visa to work in and whether the business needs to be officially registered in that country. Many digital nomads aren't in one location very long, so it's easy to stay off the radar. However, it's better to keep on the right side of the law—especially if some sales occur in the country where the digital nomad is traveling.

## LEGAL STRUCTURES FOR DIGITAL NOMADS

Although many digital nomads prefer to be sole proprietors, there are many reasons a more formal legal structure can be advantageous.

**Sole Proprietorship.** All states consider businesses owned by a single-owner business or a married couple to be a sole proprietorship by default unless the company is registered as another legal entity. There is no legal separation of the business in a sole proprietorship—sole proprietors are not considered employees and do not file separate business taxes. Other than required licenses or permits, there are no formal document requirements. One of the primary downsides for a sole proprietorship is the risk involved if the business is sued. Because there is no separation from the company, the sole proprietor is entirely liable and his or her personal assets are at risk.

**Partnership.** There are digital nomad partnerships that function as a sole proprietorship, although the duties and financial responsibilities are shared among the partners. The partners might both be digital nomads traveling together, separately, or there might be a mix of partners who are digital nomads and others who stay put. Legally, like the sole proprietorship, there is no legal separation between the business and the partners. All profits and losses are passed on to the partners, and if there are any legal disputes, the partners are equally liable.

**Limited Liability Company (LLC).** The best legal structure for a digital nomad might be the limited liability company (LLC). Without the formality of the corporate structure, the LLC combines the liability protection of the C Corp with the tax benefits of the sole proprietorship. Profits and losses flow through to the digital nomad and are taxed at the personal income tax rate. In an LLC, the business is considered separate from the owner, and there-

fore, in most cases, the entrepreneur is protected from personal liability. Registration and compliance occur at the state level, so it's important to know what the business's home state requirements are for an LLC.

**C Corporation.** The C Corp offers the best protection from personal liability but has the most compliance requirements and is the costliest business structure option. In a C Corp, the business is its own entity and files its own taxes. The owner of a C Corp is an employee of the business. The most significant burden is double taxation, as the business income is taxable, and then the owner is taxed again on income distributed in the form of dividends. Because of the demanding filing requirements and required annual reporting, most digital nomads don't need to incorporate unless they decide to take on investors.

## NO PERMANENT ADDRESS?

Today, not having an actual physical office space is not detrimental to business success. As long as the digital nomad entrepreneur has a place to receive mail (a P.O. box will do) and a place to meet with clients in-person, when necessary (rented meeting space), a digital nomad can run a business without a hitch.

One special consideration for digital nomads who own an LLC or C Corp is to appoint a registered agent in the business's home state or in the states where most of their business is conducted. A registered agent is a person or company officially recognized by the state and designated by the business to deal with official correspondence, such as legal documents or tax notifications. ■

*Nellie Akalp is a passionate entrepreneur, business expert, and mother of four. She is the CEO of CorpNet.com, a trusted resource and service provider for business incorporation, LLC filings, and corporate compliance services in all 50 states.*



domicile vs. residence. A residence is a home the entrepreneur lives in, so for digital nomads, the residence will frequently change. A domicile is the place your client considers their permanent home, where they return after traveling. The business's "home state" is where the entrepreneur started and/or registered the company with the state, opened its bank accounts, and where the taxes are filed.

Even digital nomad sole proprietors (who aren't required to register their businesses with the state) have a domicile. In the eyes of the law, their domicile is a question of intent, the place where the entrepreneur has the most roots established (voter registration, utility bills, etc.).

Deciding where to register the business does not necessarily parallel

# LEASE CHANGES ADD COMPLEXITY TO ACCOUNTING & 2021 AUDIT SEASON

By Sarah O'Sullivan

**ALTHOUGH THE COVID-19 pandemic has already introduced several challenges for accountants, the 2021 audit season is bringing new ones to the forefront.**

Economic and consumer changes disrupted financials and altered business strategy, in many cases, permanently. In fact, 31% of companies reported they were reducing their overall real estate footprint as a result of the pandemic, according to our COVID-19 Lease Impact Report.

Now accounting professionals are reckoning with the impacts of these changes during the 2021 audit and financial reporting season. While accounting for government relief programs like the PPP and discussing material impact of the pandemic on financials and operations will be critical this year, companies should not overlook the significance of major modifications to their lease portfolio, new lease accounting standard compliance, and the need to optimize collaboration and communication in a remote audit environment.

## CLARIFYING CONCESSIONS

Office space, storefronts and restaurants spent much of 2020 closed or with lower traffic. In the fall, 31% of companies said they were renegotiating leases for more favorable terms. Another 29% asked for rent concessions. Now that flurry of lease concessions and contract changes due to the pandemic need to be accurately reflected on the balance sheet. While concessions were a short-term solution, finance personnel should be reevaluating their long-term real estate and equipment leasing needs given the market change. Many companies may look to build in more flexibility to their lease arrangements or reduce their overall footprint or exposure. Others see prime opportu-

nity to expand and take advantage of reduced rates or incentives.

No matter the path selected, accountants will need to perform a thorough review and take inventory of all leases, making sure to document and account for changes in terms and concessions. While the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) issued a question-and-answer document in April 2020 aimed at reducing the burden on accounting for rent concessions, clear documentation and compliant reporting will still be essential.

## CONTINUING FOCUS ON LEASE COMPLIANCE

The FASB's new lease accounting guidance (Accounting Standards Codification Topic 842 Leases) has been in effect for public companies since 2019, but the impacts on both the balance sheet and audit process remain. The new standard tracks operating leases as liabilities for the first time, skyrocketing average lease liabilities on the balance sheet nearly 15x in the first year.

Auditors will feel this significant impact as well. In fact, last year, half of public companies reported that additional effort was devoted to their audit due to the lease accounting transition. It will be necessary to design new testing procedures to address risks, ensure proper adoption of the new standard as well as continued correct application and accounting in subsequent periods.

Last year, the FASB extended private companies' compliance to January 2022, allowing them more time to prepare for the remote auditing process which requires time,

resources, staffing and technology. After a reprieve in the deadline, private companies should now be full throttle ahead in planning for implementation. Accounting professionals should work closely with internal teams and auditors to begin the process now in order to ensure on-time compliance and also reduce burdens and issues during the next audit.

Working with auditors to better understand the organization's current lease accounting processes and ASC 842 implementation plans is more critical now than in the past. In addition to the resources, tools and technology companies need to comply with the new standard, companies will also benefit from additional time to be trained and educated. Issues such as how to identify embedded leases, which can hide in contracts and cause significant issues if missed, present a crucial opportunity for coaching. Private companies can learn from the mistakes of public companies—44% said their auditor had no involvement in the transition process, which is a missed opportunity for optimization and a more streamlined audit on the other side.

## COLLABORATING IN A REMOTE SETTING THAT'S HERE TO STAY

Many companies have been working in a remote environment for most of the past year, but that does not mean their processes have caught up. Some auditors may find paper lease agreements that aren't accessible via a cloud system or breakdowns in communication that could cause additional challenges.

While vaccine distribution offers more of a return to normalcy in the near-term, the old ways of working will not revert back. Accountants

should focus on building new best practices and enhancing communication and collaboration across teams and with auditors with the assumption that remote work and remote audits are here to stay.

When it comes to proper lease management, organizations should be proactive in starting cross-departmental collaboration with accounting and finance teams on lease agreements in order to mitigate risk. For example, some departments like procurement and IT may directly manage contracts, creating the risk for overlooked changes or missed embedded leases if not properly communicated to the accounting team.

Accountants should create internal controls and establish a central, cloud-based location to store all leases to remain organized and transparent for compliance and auditing.

## CONSIDERING WHAT'S NEXT

After a year where survival and resilience drove decision-making, it may be tempting to regard lease accounting and changes to the audit as lower-level priorities. However, both should be critical factors in long-term planning and in establishing new processes for better business insight.

While new standard implementation and audit process updates can be complex and time-consuming, they can also bring greater visibility into leases, value, financial health and even unlock hidden liquidity—which has never been more critical. ■

*Sarah O'Sullivan is an Accounting Director at LeaseQuery, a purpose-built, CPA-approved lease accounting software solution for the most comprehensive regulatory reform in 40 years. For more information, visit [LeaseQuery.com](http://LeaseQuery.com).*



# How to Help Your Clients Sleep Better at Night

By Jason Stine and Jim Buffington

*Jason Stine is tax and accounting education leader at Intuit. Jim Buffington is advisory services leader for Intuit Accountants.*

**DO YOUR CLIENTS** sleep better at night because of your partnership? If so, that is thanks to the fact that you are providing advisory services.

The accounting industry is moving away from solely giving clients their tax returns, then stepping away until next year's returns are due. Taxpayers want more from their tax pros. In a recent survey Intuit conducted, 79% of taxpayers are willing to pay more for a tax professional's service if it will result in improved financial outcomes. Offering advisory services helps set your clients up for success long-term and offers a partnership that allows them to go to bed feeling better about their finances, and can lead to more revenue for your firm. There is no time like the present to start this new partnership in advisory services and below are several questions to keep in mind while you're getting started.

## FOCUS ON THE GROWTH POTENTIAL OF YOUR CLIENTS

It's time to stop measuring success by how many tax returns you have completed, and start measuring against the growth your clients have had since working with you. Advisory services is more about helping solve financial problems that keep clients up at night, rather than checking the amount of

money in their bank accounts. The introduction into advisory services with each client is essential to understanding their concerns, as well as showcasing your expertise. Sit down with your clients and ask them: What keeps you up at night? What are your biggest financial stressors? What contributes most to these stressors? Investigating their concerns further will allow that relationship to grow far beyond just tax returns. Your clients will gain more trust and come to you for advice more regularly.

After you've started to work on a solution with your client, to provide the best advisory services and help them succeed you also need to ask yourself: Is the new meeting cadence mutually beneficial? Do they feel like they can ask more questions and have them answered? Are your clients getting more out of advisory services to help them succeed in the long run? By offering advisory services and exploring these key questions, you are letting your clients know you are there to offer expert recommendations, help them overcome financial concerns, and grow and succeed in their aspirations.

## CREATE LONG TERM GOALS

With advisory services, you and your clients have more time to focus on setting long-term goals rather than focusing on the next tax return. This helps you stay in-tune with your clients wants and needs, and allows you to get a better understanding of what they want or need out of this partnership. Do they want to franchise their business? Are they focused on paying for their kids' college education without taking out loans? Do they want to retire with a summer house? Getting a better understanding of what they are working toward will allow you to offer more tailored recommendations, and meeting regularly will help you keep them on track. Advising on long term goals can help clients achieve all of their aspirations, and more.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

It's important to continue to check your progress throughout the year, as you continue to work with clients. At least once or twice a year, explore whether your clients have made good progress, and how your advisory services have contributed. Did they accomplish what they wanted to? Have they invested based on your recommendations and succeeded in it? Have they grown throughout your

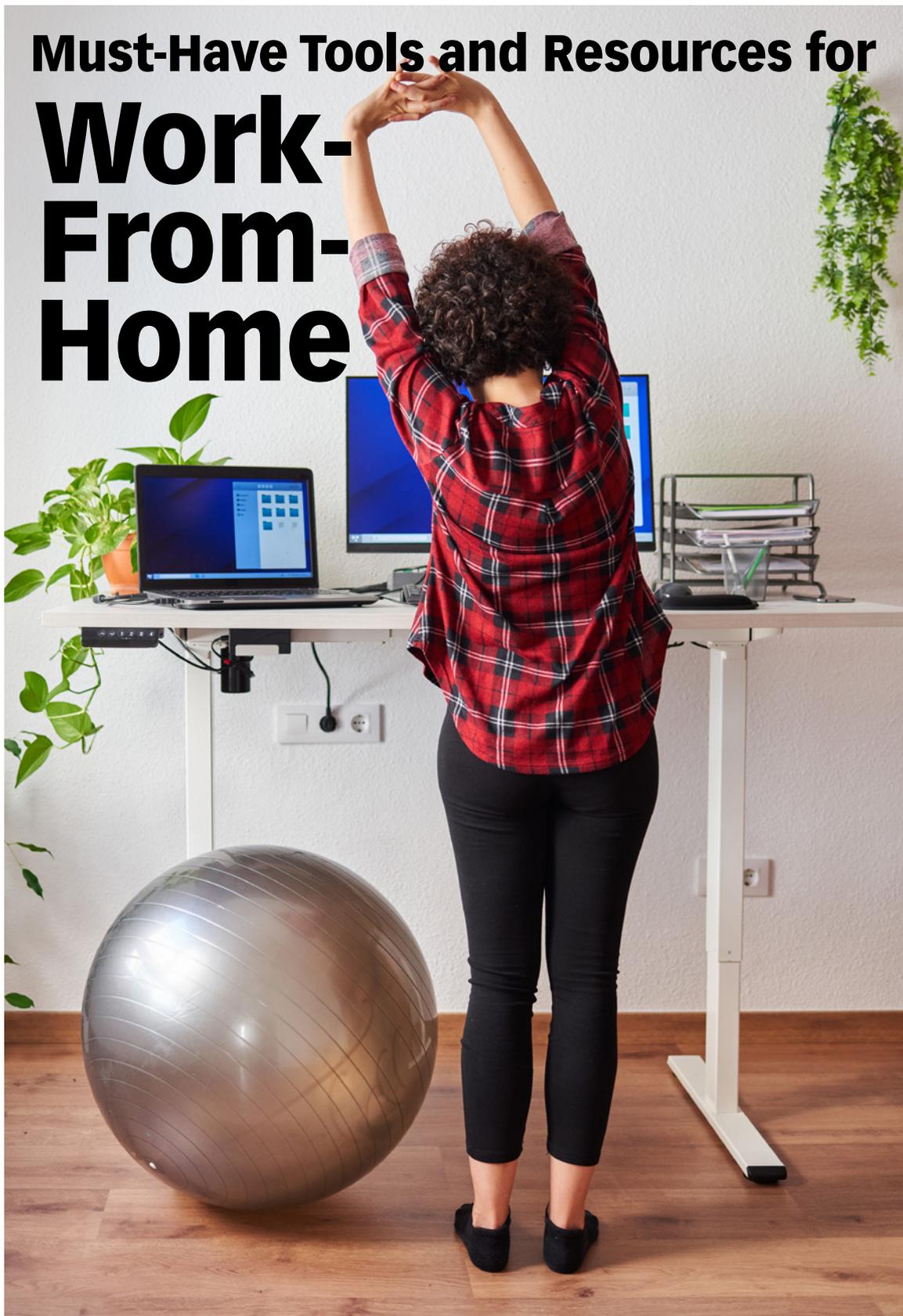
partnership with them? Working through these answers will not only help your clients feel successful, but it will also foster their trust in your services.

## KEEPS THEM PREPARED FOR ANYTHING

With the constant ability to ask for advice and have goal setting meetings, clients will be better equipped to handle anything thrown at them. A pandemic? Financial crisis? Unforeseen tragedies? With the plan you put in place to help them succeed, they are as prepared as they could be. Start having conversations with your clients about advisory services and the benefits of keeping close tabs on their ongoing financials and goals. By asking what they would do in each situation, and planning to improve those baseline outcomes, you can help your clients be ready before the crisis strikes.

Your clients will have a better night's sleep when they know you are as invested in their financial health and success as they are. By offering advisory services, you will build better relationships with your clients and be able to relish in their success as well. ■

# Must-Have Tools and Resources for Work-From-Home



**AMANDA WILKIE**  
Consultant, Boomer Consulting, Inc.

THE DRAMATIC RISE of remote work in the past 18 months is almost certain to have lasting effects on the accounting profession. Of course, many firms have welcomed staff back to the office, but according to a recent PWC poll, 69% of financial services firms expect at least three-fifths of their workforce to continue telecommuting at least once a week going forward.

By now, most of us have settled into the routine of remote work. But based on the conversations we've had with our clients over the past few months, there's still a need to establish minimum technology requirements for remote workers.

## CONNECTING REMOTE EMPLOYEES TO THE TECHNOLOGY THEY NEED

As an employer, it's your responsibility to ensure your team has the tools and resources to succeed while working remotely. Some of that may



**MARC STAUT**  
Chief Innovation & Technology Officer,  
Boomer Consulting, Inc.

be purchased by the firm, some by the employee. But, no matter who foots the bill, here are some of the minimum requirements and must-have tools we recommend.

### 1. PROPER MONITORS

Extra screen real estate is always a plus. While having two or three monitors in the office is pretty standard, having one ultrawide monitor offers several benefits. For one, it takes up less space on the desk, yet one 36" curved screen feels like more real estate than two 24" monitors.

With a curved screen, you also get a feeling of immersion that just isn't attainable on a dual monitor setup. This keeps your peripheral vision engaged more comfortably than looking at dual monitors. It's also more convenient to manage settings, such as brightness and other display settings, on one monitor rather than two or three.

If you're worried about it being difficult to manage windows on one monitor, the Windows Snap feature in Windows 10 offers similar window management functionality on one ultrawide monitor. You can easily snap windows to certain areas of your ultrawide screen to have various applications or browsers opened up side by side seamlessly.

At the start of the pandemic, many employees brought home travel monitors and used them as their full-time second monitor. Now that people aren't traveling,

it's time for an upgrade. Travel monitors can still be useful – for example, when employees need to move their workspace temporarily while another family member is on a video conference. However, they're not ideal for a permanent, long-term setup.

### 2. A DOCKING STATION

Nobody wants to deal with a rat's nest of cables and connectors every time they sit down to work in a home office. One way to avoid that is by using a dedicated docking station designed specifically for your laptop hardware.

A dedicated docking station powers the laptop, connects to a wired network, drives one or more monitors, and keeps USB devices, such as a full-size keyboard and mouse, attached. Just plug in a single connector to get to work.

There is a lot of variety in docking stations, so try to match the one people have at home to their office. Otherwise, you'll inevitably run into driver and compatibility issues.

### 3. RELIABLE (AND FAST) HOME NETWORK

If your employees are using the modem issued by their cable provider four or five years ago, they're working on outdated hardware; that's likely causing internet speed and/or connection issues.

At Boomer Consulting, Inc., we've upgraded several of our people to a Wi-Fi 6 mesh network. A good mesh system automatically routes your connection as you move through your home, steering you from band to band with a single, unified Wi-Fi network. It also decides when to route your connection through a satellite device and when to send your signal straight to the main router. That's better than using a simple range extender for your Wi-Fi. It also gives you more consistent speeds throughout your

home and fewer, if any, dead zones.

Mesh Wi-Fi systems are more expensive than range extenders, but costs dropped quite a bit last year. You can find them on Amazon for around \$200 – even less if you catch the right sale.

### 4. HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO AND VIDEO CAPABILITIES

We're all doing a lot more video conferencing these days, and two of the most important aspects of video conferencing are audio and video quality. Unfortunately, if your computer has a slow processor, your audio and video quality will suffer.

Just a few months ago, an i5 processor might have been good enough. But to handle the level of video conferencing people are doing while working remotely, you really need at least an i7. The more cores there are inside your processor, the more tasks it can handle simultaneously. When you're meeting with a client over Zoom, sharing your screen to present a slideshow in PowerPoint, and taking notes in Box or another application, having that fast processor makes a world of difference.

After the processor, the most important elements of quality audio and video are your camera and microphone. Unfortunately, most laptops don't have a high-quality built-in camera and microphone. So they're preventing you from coming across as professionally as possible on video conferencing calls. Investing in a standalone webcam and a good headset or microphone makes a world of difference. Upgrading your webcam and headset are fairly easy from a technical perspective and relatively affordable.

If you have a private home office, a Yeti mic is sufficient. However, if you share your space with coworkers (of any age or species), you might need noise-canceling headphones. You might also want to consider

acoustic room dividers if you're sharing your home office with a family member. With an acoustic room divider and noise-canceling headphones, it's almost like having a private office.

### 5. A STANDING DESK AND QUALITY OFFICE CHAIR

Working from the dining room table or couch is fine for short stretches, but spending hours hunched over and uncomfortable is sure to negatively impact your productivity and possibly lead to physical strain.

Having a convertible standing desk and a quality office chair can make a world of difference. Of course, it might take some trial and error to find the right setup, but the Mayo Clinic's Office Ergonomics Guide recommends:

- A work surface at or below elbow height
- A screen that's an arm's length away and viewed at a slight downward angle
- Knees about level with your hips while sitting
- Lumbar support to ensure you're sitting at about a 90-degree angle to your hips – not hunched forward or leaning back

If you want to see the exact equipment and accessories we use, we keep an updated list at [www.boomer.com/mobile-cpa](http://www.boomer.com/mobile-cpa). This isn't an exhaustive list, but it should give you a good idea of the minimum requirements. Encourage your IT teams to put together their own version of this resources list and share it with your team. You may not be able to outfit everyone on your team with everything on this list immediately, but a few strategic upgrades can ensure everyone is productive and comfortable while working from home. ■



## Payroll Relief® promises: More profit, less work. Positively!

**Our promise is simple. No matter what payroll software you're currently using, you'll generate more profit with Payroll Relief® from AccountantsWorld – all while reducing your firm's workload.**

The math is straightforward.

Payroll Relief reduces staff hours to a bare minimum by performing complex and time-consuming payroll tasks **automatically**, on time, and with 100% guaranteed accuracy of calculation:

- ✓ Direct deposit of paychecks, child care payments, and payment of virtually all payroll taxes
- ✓ E-filing of payroll federal and state forms
- ✓ Year-end processing, including e-filing of all W2s, 941s, 1099s, and more

Furthermore, Payroll Relief makes it extremely easy for your clients to enter payroll data and print paychecks in their offices.

**When you add it all up, you'll see why 75% of our users experience at least 25% improvement in their practice after switching to Payroll Relief.**

Equally important, unlike most payroll software providers, we will never compete with you or sell our payroll services directly to your clients. Our sole focus is to help you become more successful.



Visit [AccountantsWorld.com/Payroll](https://AccountantsWorld.com/Payroll) to schedule a one-on-one demo of Payroll Relief.

