A Brighter Future

How accountancy firms will succeed in a new world
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INTRODUCTION
How to make positive changes to manage and grow your business
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The past year has been challenging for many businesses as the rules on how people interact with each other have been rewritten continually. Although restrictions on people travelling and moving around helped Australia and New Zealand avoid the worst of a global health crisis, the pandemic has had a major impact on our businesses. Accountancy firms have been on the frontline, helping their clients deal with the financial fallout.
A business sentiment report from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in April 2021, several months after many of the most stringent government restrictions were rolled back, showed:

- 30 percent of businesses were still experiencing supply chain disruptions
- nearly two-thirds of businesses (64 percent) reported they were adversely impacted by COVID-safe controls

But the same ABS report showed some businesses were emerging from the restrictions with a more positive outlook for 2021:

- more businesses (22 percent) reported an increase in revenue than those reporting a decrease (18 percent)
- 30 percent of businesses had their staff teleworking, with many experiencing more than one of the following benefits:
  - improved staff well-being (45 percent)
  - reduced overheads (27 percent)
  - increased productivity (26 percent)
  - improved staff retention (18 percent)
  - broader recruitment pool (6 percent)

That second sentiment, regarding the benefits of teleworking, reflects what many accountants already knew long before a global health crisis forced a major rethink of how business interactions are managed. That’s because accountants have effectively connected with businesses remotely ever since adopting accounting systems.

Along the way, accountancy firms have helped employees and clients get up to speed with digital technologies to improve communication, collaboration and decision-making.

The global pandemic simply helped accelerate adoption of digital technologies by several years. As an October 2020 survey by McKinsey noted, these changes are here to stay. People are not only more willing to interact with each other via digital systems, they are also more interested in new ways of doing business.
INTRODUCTION

This guide offers some ideas for positive changes you can make in the ways you manage and grow your business, including:

• **Getting the culture right**: how to adopt a growth mindset, set goals and create a winning company culture.
• **Building a high performing team**: how to attract and develop talent by embracing flexibility, diversity and transparency.
• **Equipping yourself to become a change leader**: how to improve your change-management skills and successfully apply them.
• **Generating more value with your current clients**: how to nurture higher-value client relationships and elevate the status of accountants as trusted advisers.
• **Differentiating yourself from competitors**: how to enhance your service offering with specialist services and partnerships.
• **Attracting new business**: how to effectively promote your business online so you reach the right people with the right messages. Knowing your staff and clients are now more comfortable with change means you can be more optimistic about having conversations about what comes next.

So, what future will you create for staff, clients — and your business?
PART ONE
Managing your team
MANAGING YOUR TEAM

Getting the culture right

ADOPT A GROWTH MINDSET, SET GOALS AND CREATE A WINNING COMPANY CULTURE
Most organisations had to seriously rethink how things were done during the pandemic, especially the ‘how’ and ‘where’ of teamwork. Perhaps a rethink is exactly what your team needed anyway.

THE VALUE OF A GROWTH MINDSET
Stanford Professor Carol Dweck describes a willingness to rethink how we do things and then do them better as a ‘growth mindset’. In a *Harvard Business Review* article in 2016, she summarised her research findings into growth versus fixed mindsets like this:

“Individuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies and input from others) have a growth mindset. They tend to achieve more than those with a more fixed mindset (those who believe their talents are innate gifts). This is because they worry less about looking smart and they put more energy into learning.”
FOSTERING A GROWTH MINDSET
If you can harness the energy that drove all those changes in 2020 because of the pandemic, imagine what you can achieve if you continue embracing change — and go for growth. Here’s how:

• Invite your team to contribute ideas for new ways of working that will help drive growth
• Make time for everyone to learn new technologies and techniques, without the pressure of always having to learn on the job
• Allow your team to take calculated risks — and learn from them

THE IMPACT OF A GROWTH MINDSET ON YOUR TEAM AND CULTURE
You might have adopted new technologies and ways of working faster than you liked, though the fact you’re already familiar with new features of accounting and other business technologies in the cloud is an advantage — and well worth building on to drive business growth.

John Rives, co-founder of the Growth Mindset Institute, says motivation, progress and, appropriately, growth are dramatically improved when you apply a growth mindset to anything.

“Starting to recognise when your fixed mindset is influencing you is quite critical, because it unlocks the potential of the business to innovate, to learn and to grow”

John Rives, co-founder of the Growth Mindset Institute
“Recognising your fixed mindset triggers, and managing them, is key to running a successful business,” he says. “People can start to recognise how these fixed mindset moments are influencing their decisions and they can stop, reflect and choose to go a different path toward growth.

“Starting to recognise when your fixed mindset is influencing you is quite critical, because it unlocks the potential of the business to innovate, to learn and to grow.”

Make it known you support experimentation. When people feel supported to take risks, they tend to be more motivated to discover better solutions.

It’s also worth encouraging collaboration among people who might not normally work together so they can learn from each other. By bringing different groups of people together you will help everyone feel more connected to the business – and your shared growth ambitions.

**SETTING COMPANY VALUES AND GOALS**

Every time your team has an opportunity to talk about ideas for taking the business forward, you’re helping develop a growth mindset. During these conversations, encourage everyone to contribute ideas that will improve both the company’s values and its goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY VALUES</th>
<th>BUSINESS GOALS</th>
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<tr>
<td>What are our shared principles, beliefs and attitudes?</td>
<td>Improved business relationships: team, clients and partnerships</td>
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<td>What can we learn from each other — and what do we need to learn together from people outside the business?</td>
<td>New revenue through innovation</td>
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<td>What can each of us do to improve our knowledge and skills?</td>
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<td>When people ask for feedback, what are the best ways to give it? Most of the time people want advice, not opinion</td>
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COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEAM
With remote working becoming the new normal, developing a healthy work culture with your clients and within your team is more important than ever. Here are some ways to support open communication:

• Hold weekly “ask me anything” meetings about the growth plans for the business
• Promote transparency and information sharing
• Recognise individual and team accomplishments

THE BENEFITS OF A GROWTH MINDSET
• Improved collaboration among your team members
• Employees feel empowered to try new technologies and techniques to improve the business – even if an experiment doesn’t quite achieve what you all hope, you all learn from it
• Everyone feels supported to contribute to, and give constructive feedback on, new growth strategies
• Individuals feel more connected to the team because they have more opportunities to work as a team

“With a growth mindset, you tend to believe you have the potential to succeed and improve and get better, and your focus is on learning and growth, not on the outcome”

John Rives, co-founder of the Growth Mindset Institute
Building a high performing team

HOW TO ATTRACT AND DEVELOP TALENT BY EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY, DIVERSITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Trust is the essential foundation of every high-performing team: it’s built on some of the best human behaviours and attitudes such as respect, honest communication, recognition and inclusiveness, plus important business behaviours such as accountability, transparency and competence. Many high-performing teams are made up of people with different talents, knowledge and experiences who are motivated to help each other learn, innovate and achieve.

>2/3 of prospective employees say a diverse workforce is important

35% of organisations that are more racially and ethnically diverse outperform their less diverse competitor
DIVERSITY MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE
One of the most straightforward ways to bring different ways of thinking into your business is to make your workplace attractive for more people with different backgrounds, identities and experiences.

Here’s why diversity matters:

- More than two thirds of prospective employees say a diverse workforce is important, reports workplace rating website Glassdoor.
- Organisations that are more racially and ethnically diverse outperform their less diverse competitors by 35 percent, notes McKinsey research.
- Inclusive workplaces are 1.7 times more innovative and deliver 2.3 times more cashflow per employee, reports Josh Bersin research.
- Ideally you’ll also attract leaders who are different from you, because, as a Boston Consulting Group study found, companies with more diverse management teams have 19 percent higher revenue.
- Fast Company reports that companies with a higher representation of women in leadership positions deliver 34 percent greater returns to shareholders.
THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNITION AND FEEDBACK

In the pre-COVID era, many aspects of employee performance were assessed on inputs and processes. Now the trend is for organisations to shift their focus towards outcomes and results. If you want to motivate your team to perform well, recognise and reward high performance — and provide useful feedback to help people develop.

Here are some suggestions from MindTools for giving feedback that boosts people’s confidence and ability:

• Be supportive and focus on improvement (check your motives for giving feedback)
• Focus on the situation, not the person
• Be timely and make it regular
• Prepare your feedback comments beforehand and be specific
• Talk about positives, too!
• Criticise in private, give praise personally and publicly
• Follow up with your employees on their progress

Employees also need to know when to check in for a progress update and when deadlines are scheduled. Cultivate a culture of accountability and personal responsibility.
SUPPORTING WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

Most employees now expect some degree of workplace flexibility. The shift to hybrid working in 2020 has also motivated more employees to take on part-time roles, which has benefits for both employer and employee. Robert Half research finds 45 percent of CFOs are offering part-time work in 2021 to support work-life balance, as well as job sharing, compressed working weeks (working full-time hours over fewer days) and flexitime.

Clients expect a seamless customer experience, regardless of where their accountant is based on any given day. Here is how you can make flexibility work:

- Develop new protocols for teamwork that support remote and part-time workers, including mutually agreeing that discussions must not exclude remote members of the team — even unintentionally. Phone them up, if need be.
- Help employees structure their workdays in a way that suits them. For those working at home, the start and end of the working day is no longer clearly demarcated, and it’s important that flexibility doesn’t become an ‘always on’ work culture, otherwise you’ll risk people becoming burnt out.
- Ensure everyone understands when to communicate, which channels to use, and how decisions come to be made and by whom.

Almost half of Australian SMEs intend to make remote working their ‘new normal’ beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, while as many as 82 percent of organisations intend to focus on how staff can work remotely or more flexibly.

45% of CFOs are offering part-time work in 2021

82% of organisations intend to focus on how staff can work remotely or more flexibly
MANAGING YOUR TEAM

SOFT SKILLS
Sometimes called ‘people skills’, interpersonal skills include communication and listening, time management and empathy. In an era when face-to-face meetings are reduced, listening is particularly important: make sure everyone you speak with gets your full attention. Your employees will feel more engaged and connected, and your team can deliver better and higher-value advice.

CHECKLIST - Do you have a high-performing team?

☐ A shared sense of purpose and ambition
☐ Diversity of talent leading to greater diversity of thought and improved performance
☐ A commitment to continuous learning
☐ Mutual trust, respect and support
☐ Open communication, including constructive feedback
☐ Agreed ways of working that are efficient, effective and flexible

If your organisation has several people in important leadership roles, learn more about building a high-performing leadership team.

EIGHT ESSENTIAL BEHAVIOURS TO BUILD TRUST

1. Honesty and transparency
2. Clear communication about goals, challenges and opportunities
3. Visibility and availability (being there for the team – and being part of the team to build credibility)
4. Inclusiveness and acceptance of diversity
5. Accountability (especially admitting to and committing to resolving mistakes)
6. Recognition of positive effort, attitudes, helpfulness and achievement
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8. Humanity

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If your organisation has several people in important leadership roles, learn more about building a high-performing leadership team.
Equipping yourself to become a change leader

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR CHANGE-MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND SUCCESSFULLY APPLY THEM
Most businesses were forced to quickly change how they operate when the pandemic hit in 2020. Some leaders were more successful than others at managing change because they did more than merely adopt new COVID-safe practices required under government rules: they conscientiously reviewed and updated internal and external processes throughout their businesses. And they kept their teams in the loop at every step, because successful change management is as much about the ‘how’ as the ‘why’.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP
So, what is a true change leader? How is change leadership different from change management. The difference is creating and implementing a strategic vision.
Change managers set out to effect change with the hope it will cause as little disruption as possible. Change leaders, on the other hand, inspire their teams to get on board with executing their plan. They identify the problem, understand the external and internal situations forcing change and define a vision of the future. Importantly, they can articulate their plan clearly and effectively. If you’re so busy running your organisation you only have time to direct people on what to do, then it’s difficult to be a true change leader. Successful change across an organisation starts at the top, so take time to develop a clear, realistic and evidence-based vision of success.

MYOB’s change management toolkit includes three keys to successfully motivating people to adopt change:

1. **Share the right information** — use business management systems to help you communicate the big picture of your vision and the details when needed.
2. **Communicate with empathy** — some people don’t like having change forced on them, so acknowledge their concerns and share evidence of the benefits for them in adopting any change.
3. **Tell a story** — while data is useful evidence, aim to humanise your vision for change so they can put themselves in the picture.
MANAGING YOUR TEAM

CHANGE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS
Active change management involves everyone in the business, starting with a clear vision for what needs changing, by whom and when. You can make it easier for everyone to keep up to date with any changes in the business by using cloud-based tools for communicating plans, supporting skills development, and tracking and reporting on progress.

THE ADKAR MODEL
One popular change management model is ADKAR, which was developed by consulting firm Prosci. It’s an acronym describing five goals employees must try to reach before they can achieve successful change:

- **Awareness**: Leading people to see the need for change
- **Desire**: Instilling the desire for change
- **Knowledge**: Providing employees with the information or skills they need to achieve change
- **Ability**: Applying knowledge and skills to bring about change
- **Reinforcement**: Making sure that people continue to use the new methods
MANAGING YOUR TEAM

ROLES REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL CHANGE MANAGEMENT
When implementing change management, it pays to appoint ‘people leaders’ to help steer new processes and systems. A people leader can:

- Oversee early engagement on projects and upcoming changes
- Build coalitions between peers
- Provide tools and frameworks to assist in planning, managing and reinforcing change
- Provide coaching and ongoing support
- Identify, analyse and manage resistance

THE ROLE OF FAILURE IN GROWTH
Change leaders set big visions for their organisations and understand things can get a little out of control. It’s important that you and your team have a healthy relationship with failure or setbacks for these reasons, thanks to Lifehack:

- Failure teaches you that success is never guaranteed
- Failure teaches you to embrace change
- Failure can be a great source of motivation
- Failure is not final
- Failure broadens your perspective
- Failure teaches you to stay humble
- Failure teaches you that not every idea is worth pursuing
MAKE TIME FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Being a change leader means giving yourself the time to look at the big picture and think deeply about the direction of your business. To free up that time, you need to review your schedule and identify which tasks you can delegate or delay. Automating routine tasks will also help.

Your personal development as a change leader will naturally include regular reviews of your business plan and opportunities to improve your performance.

“Remember to schedule in your calendar specific monthly or quarterly times to do nothing else but stop and critically evaluate your performance against your plan,” explains Andrew McIntosh in his guide to business planning for success. “Develop a scorecard and key metrics to regularly review. If you are off plan, you need to change what you are doing and/or change your plan.”
PART TWO
Growing a business
Generating more value with your current clients

**HOW TO NURTURE HIGHER-VALUE CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS AND ELEVATE THE STATUS OF ACCOUNTANTS AS TRUSTED ADVISERS**

Most accountancy firms want to broaden their client base, though it shouldn’t come at the expense of servicing their loyal customers. Bringing on new clients can be costly and difficult, given the sales and marketing processes involved in getting them on your books.

The bottom line is that growing a business doesn’t just mean finding new clients — it’s about deepening the relationship with customers you have already formed a mutually beneficial relationship with. You want to work with people who share your values — they are the ones prepared to work with your systems and tools and demonstrate behaviours that allow a partnership to flourish.

High-value customers are those who engage with your business the most and influence how others see it. They may not be the clients who bring in the most revenue right now, but they are easy to work with, allow you to work most efficiently, are open to your other services and generally align with your values.
IDENTIFYING THE BEST CLIENTS FOR YOUR BUSINESS
Many firms — even those who choose to go through a comprehensive Customer Value Assessment (CVA) process — are inclined to look at only billable time as a signal of client “value”. But if clients are poor at keeping up with their payments, are difficult to work with or incur heavy write-offs, their “value” might not reflect their impact on the daily running of the business.

But it’s possible to gain useful insights by looking at data on earnings and interactions, particularly by:

- Segmenting your client base and comparing client lifetime value
- Reviewing website and social media metrics
- Surveying clients

Once you’ve identified these high-value customers, you need to create a strategy to develop long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with them. Next, identify the clients with potential. You can do this in a few ways, including:

- Tracking their interest in and uptake of higher-value services
- Asking regular clients who haven’t increased their spend with you what problems in their businesses keep them up at night — and if they would like you to help solve them
- Rating your clients based on how much you enjoy working with them. Though this seems simplistic, you’ll want to put the effort in to grow the relationship if it’s a relationship you enjoy
HOW TO RATE YOUR CLIENTS AND UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT WHAT THEY NEED
A CVA tool can be useful when you want to:

- Define customer types and what they want
- Assess if your business is giving customers what they want
- Examine any gaps and their causes
- Close the gaps by making necessary changes

You may choose to rank your clients in a way that indicates quickly how much value they bring to your business, for example:

A. High-fee clients who use many of your services, always pay on time and are a joy to work with. (They may also be the best referral sources for your business.)

B. Regular clients who use a few of your services, always pay on time and are good to work with. (They may be open to using your top-value services.)

C. Clients who use some of your services, mostly pay on time and demand a reasonable amount of your time. (They could benefit from being offered services they are not using currently.)

D. Clients who use one or two of your services, tend to pay on time and can be demanding at times. (With some extra information, these could be open to more opportunities to engage with you.)

E. Clients who occasionally use your services, don’t often pay on time and can be difficult to work with. (They might be better as former clients — seriously review whether to retain them on your books.)
DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CLIENTS

Some clients are hard to handle but worth persisting with because the relationship brings in good revenue. Warwick Brown, founder of Account Management Tips, offers several useful ideas for turning difficult client relationships around, including:

- Remember: it’s business, not personal
- Listen more, talk less, so you’ll learn more about how you can help them
- Make notes during each interaction about things they like or activities they’re looking forward to — this knowledge can help you find a connection and could win them over with your attention to detail

A guide to finding the right clients in Entrepreneur magazine suggests not taking on non-ideal clients to start with. If a prospective or new client behaves in either of the following ways, don’t take them on:

- Makes unreasonable demands on your time, especially outside business hours
- Promises to become a big client sometime soon but starts the relationship by asking for discounts

Sometimes, clients will just not be a good fit for your business. When the relationship simply isn’t right for either party, it’s good to acknowledge this and let the client find another partner to work with. This can be an opportunity to create a mutually beneficial referral relationship with other practices, where you can help each other by re-directing clients appropriately.

More reading about valuing and charging for your services:

- Pricing strategy tips in difficult economic times
- How to price and sell business advisory services
- Pricing your services
COMMODIFICATION OF COMPLIANCE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVISORY

Automation has already had a big impact on the accounting function. However, machines aren’t taking away jobs — they are eliminating tasks, changing roles and freeing up staff to work on more engaging, higher-value jobs.

The nature of compliance work is changing rapidly. While it can still be financially viable for many accounting firms, only those that can work efficiently at scale — using the right technology — will be successful in the future. When they’re more efficient at compliance work, firms can free-up resources to put towards more valuable (higher fee) services such as advisory. This has the potential to transform their business.
UPSKILLING STAFF FOR ADVISORY CONVERSATIONS

The ever-changing business environment resulting from COVID-19 is escalating demand for data-insight-driven advice. Business leaders want people in the finance function to analyse business data and identify the risks and opportunities ahead.

“As advisers, finance professionals now need a commercial appreciation of the business and vast experience in project-related work and change management, as well as leadership, team building, interpersonal, presentation and other soft skills,” says Nicole Gorton, director at specialist recruitment firm Robert Half.

“A successful adviser will be able to show that he or she can analyse data, understand what both sides of a given partnership require, identify strengths and weaknesses across a business unit or entire company, and set company and individual goals.”

To upskill staff for advisory conversations, Gorton suggests a focus on data-led insights via tech platforms that include artificial intelligence, robotic process automation, business intelligence and enterprise resource planning systems. “Prioritise analytical experience and capabilities across financial planning, modelling and data analysis,” she says.

Firms planning to offer advisory services as a point of difference will not only need to recruit differently in the future — they will have to put greater emphasis on the professional development of their current team. People with excellent advisory skills are hard to find, so managers will need to assess if it’s easier (and cheaper) to develop their own staff rather than look for talent outside the business.

This comes with its own challenges. By upskilling staff, businesses run the risk of having them poached by competitors. On the flipside, a firm that invests in its staff not only has a competitive advantage — it gains a reputation for looking after its people.

“The real value of accounting in the future is going to be about connecting the dots by interpreting data and overlaying this with strategic and creative insights”

Nicole Gorton, director at specialist recruitment firm Robert Half
GROWING A BUSINESS

Differentiating yourself from competitors

HOW TO ENHANCE YOUR SERVICE OFFERING WITH SPECIALIST SERVICES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Accountants generally enjoy a great reputation. In fact, the accounting profession was rated one of the most trustworthy overall in the 2019 report “The Future of Trust: New Technology Meets Old Values” by Chartered Accountants ANZ.

Accountancy ranked as the fifth most trustworthy profession after doctors, engineers, teachers and police — well above bankers and lawyers.

The challenge in a widely respected industry is how to stand out in a field of around 35,000 accountancy businesses by developing trust-based relationships with your clients.
FINDING YOUR NICHE

Different industries have different accounting requirements. Becoming familiar with the needs of one or a handful of related industries can open new business opportunities.

Health professionals, for example, such as doctors and dentists, usually have higher incomes but also have specific insurance needs and contractual agreements, so a specialist health accounting firm could become expert in these.

THE VALUE IN SPECIALISATION

Research firm IBISWorld reports the following trends for the accounting services industry, which suggest opportunities for firms offering specialist services, particularly advisory:

- Growth in business confidence, private capital expenditure and the number of businesses is anticipated to increase demand for industry services
- Improved economic projections will likely support growth among a variety of downstream markets, contributing to rising demand for advisory services
- Technological advancements are anticipated to improve efficiency and value-added services. However, competition is projected to continue rising, limiting industry growth

Technology is not only freeing up your time, it’s providing clients with greater visibility of their financial data. Previously, finance teams focused on past performance, though more will adopt tools that capture and report on real-time financial data to improve timely decision-making and help establish business strategies.
IDENTIFYING GAPS IN YOUR SERVICE OFFERING

Clients relied on their accountants during the pandemic and many have come to view their accountant as a trusted adviser across many areas of their business. They want their accountant to help them with the right levels of insurance cover and provide advice when they’re deciding on business and reporting systems. Meeting these demands may open up new business opportunities and help strengthen existing client relationships.

As noted by IBISWorld, there will be more demand for advisory services and other ‘downstream’ services. According to Commbank Accounting Market Pulse (June 2020), most will channel more efforts this year into diversifying their offering beyond traditional accounting services, especially business advisory services.

You can free up more time for advisory and other services with cloud accounting and integrated business apps that automate administrative tasks, such as:

- Issuing engagement letters and document collation
- Reporting cost-and-earnings per shift in sectors reliant on efficient rostering
- Reporting on inventory and other supply chain activities

Practice areas expected to be in most demand

Which services in the accounting and consulting marketplace do you anticipate will be the highest demand in the next six to 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business advisory services</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business recovery &amp; insolvency</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax consulting</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth management &amp; financial planning</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management consulting services</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax compliance</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk management</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate finance (including M&amp;A)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cybersecurity / technology consulting</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External/statutory audit</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Commbank Accounting Market Pulse (June 2020)
PARTNERING WITH OTHER PRACTICES
Organic growth may be the most common way firms are considering diversifying their services, but many are looking at mergers and acquisitions or hiring staff with the relevant non-accounting skills.

If your business isn’t in a position to bring on more staff, referral partnerships may offer a viable alternative, with benefits including:

• Cost-savings on marketing through word-of-mouth direct referrals
• Opportunities to focus on higher-value services and/or services you enjoy more
• Opportunities for partners to help each other handle extra workloads when one is busier than the other, which also helps keep customers happy by remaining within their preferred timeframes
• The chance to recommend clients who are not a good fit to the other partner, which may offer more appropriate services and support
DIFFERENTIATING ON CLIENT RELATIONS

Business relationships of all kinds have become more scrutinised during the pandemic, as decision-makers have faced the need to cut costs, put staff on JobKeeper and pause some activities.

The pandemic has also highlighted which relationships are genuinely built on trust, transparency and the simple human quality of caring. Every time you communicate with a client you have the chance to reinforce the bond, explains business transformation educator Amy Vetter, particularly if you:

- Empathise before you scrutinise. Understand what clients are going through and tailor how you communicate (and which services you offer) accordingly
- Meet clients where they are comfortable. Some clients are happy to meet via video conferences, others might prefer phone calls
- Are willing to have tough conversations, such as applying for government support and organising extensions for tax and other payment arrangements
HOW TO EFFECTIVELY PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS ONLINE SO YOU REACH THE RIGHT PEOPLE WITH THE RIGHT MESSAGES

Word of mouth has traditionally been one of the most powerful ways accounting firms gain clients, because both parties know they’re getting a relationship they can trust. But relying on friends’ personal recommendations is no longer a good enough marketing strategy in 2021. Savvy accounting firms are looking to social media and using technology to stay in contact with, and provide greater value for, new and prospective customers.

Gaining client trust is about devising a digital marketing strategy that considers your web presence and social media use. It also needs to take into account search engine optimisation (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising on shared, paid, owned or earned media.

It’s also about being patient. It often takes 12-18 months for businesses to start building client trust and a positive reputation through digital marketing.
SHARED, PAID, OWNED AND EARNED MEDIA
Here’s a guide to how each type of media operates:

- **Shared** media includes content shared across third-party platforms, especially social media, from user comments to co-created partner materials.
- **Paid** media includes ads on third-party sites. This includes Facebook sponsored posts, advertorials, sponsored content and search ads.
- **Owned** media is content you create — for example, blog posts, podcasts, videos, images and infographics — on platforms you ‘own’ — such as a website or via email. Content marketing builds engaged audiences that may eventually turn into clients.
- **Earned** media is where your business or staff is featured in articles or press coverage, usually through public relations activities.

KEYWORDS
Keywords are simply the words and phrases people type into search engines. You’ll need to work out the best business topics and related keywords to feature on your website.

Putting more research into keywords lets you tailor your content better and appear in more relevant online searches.
SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO)
Search engine providers process input keywords and send software bots to find all the relevant web pages and present them on the results page. These bots use algorithms to sort the value of these searches and then rank the results in a list.

SEO helps put you at the top of web searches by anticipating variations of keywords a potential customer might use. This makes it easy for bots to trace your content and factor it into the engine’s ranking algorithms. Positive customer reviews, for instance, will help build trust and drive more traffic to your site.

UPDATING YOUR WEBSITE TO BUILD YOUR REPUTATION
Your website is your main digital presence, and in many cases it’s the only digital channel you can control. Your contact information should be SEO friendly, up to date (proving your business is active) and include links for how people can connect with you, such as following your social media channels or subscribing to your newsletter.

If you don’t update your website regularly, it’s easy for people to assume:

- You aren’t interested in sharing insights publicly
- You’re too busy with existing clients to want more clients
- You don’t have anything to say beyond the standard marketing messages about your services

Fortunately, it’s easy to highlight content you’ve created for social media and newsletters on your website, too. For instance, a social media post about changes to tax rules can link to an article comprehensively explaining what the changes mean for your clients’ industries, which helps prompt them to contact you for advice.
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
Used well, social media can be a useful tool for small- to medium-sized accounting firms to boost their visibility. Here are some of the most popular platforms and what they’re best for:

- **Facebook**: generating small discussions, sharing links and memes, and leaving reviews
- **YouTube**: great for video content
- **LinkedIn**: a professional social media site where industry experts share content and build their personal brand. It’s good for thought-leadership pieces
- **Twitter**: great for short, punchy messages linked to current events. It’s also powerful for customer service
- **Instagram**: great for photographs and images

UNDERSTANDING WHERE YOUR CLIENTS ARE LOOKING
Every digital channel offers an opportunity to connect with existing customers and gain referrals to new clients. Ask your clients which channels they prefer and develop a schedule to regularly share messages customised for each of those channels. While you’re at it, ask your best clients to create a testimonial, case study or review for you.
PPC ADVERTISING

Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising is the standard way businesses advertise on Google, Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms. As the name suggests, you only pay for ads someone clicks on. This advertising method is good for generating leads, increasing sales and promoting brand awareness.

With PPC on Google, you pay the search engine company to show your web page in the results when someone searches for your business. Paid results are marked as ‘ads’. Google charges you when someone clicks on your ad.
The pandemic has accelerated changes that were already taking place – in society, the workplace and the accounting industry in general. Firms who weren’t awake to the changing landscape are being forced to make the necessary changes to ensure their staff are safe, satisfied and productive and keep their business competitive. These include the ability to:

- Employ a more flexible and skilled workforce
- Use technology to drive more efficient workflows
- Give their clients more value by offering things such as advisory services

None of these trends is new. MYOB has been covering them for several years in its Radar reports. The pandemic, however, has brought them into sharper focus.

Over the past 18 months, your business, your team and your clients have demonstrated a higher capacity for, and resilience to, change than anyone could have predicted. MYOB believes there are many reasons to be positive about a brighter future for our industry. Now it’s up to you to make it happen.
MYOB’S 10-POINT CHECKLIST TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

- **Invest** in upskilling your people with new knowledge and technical know-how
- **Encourage** continuous learning because it’s the key to unlocking career advancement
- **Find** practical solutions to give people more flexibility in how and where they work. Consider broadening your horizons when hiring new team members
- **Automate** the tedious work that sucks time and energy from your business so you and your team can focus on higher-value work
- **Set up** efficient processes and clearly communicate your expectations for the outcomes of people’s work. Focus less on monitoring inputs and more on the results
- **Build** on the benefits of digital technologies by securely integrating more systems that improve communication and allow staff to work on higher-value tasks
- **Identify** high-value customers for your business and create a strategy to develop long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with them
- **Identify** gaps in your service offering or establish partnerships to create new business opportunities and strengthen client relationships
- **Understand** where your potential clients are and develop an appropriate digital marketing strategy, including a social media plan
- **Ensure** your website is up to date and contains information that builds trust and improves client knowledge

HOW ACCOUNTANCY FIRMS WILL SUCCEED IN A NEW WORLD

**By better managing their teams:**
- Getting the culture right
- Building a high-performing team
- Equipping leaders to deal with change

**By growing their businesses:**
- Generating more value from current clients
- Differentiating from their competitors
- Finding ways to attract new business
Talk to our team today to find out more about how MYOB can set your business up for success.

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