



Case study

CCH Accountants' Starter Pack

The Focus Partnership

Formed almost four years ago, The Focus Partnership has grown from a handful of clients to around 350 largely by word of mouth and referral. Director Ben Cuddington explains how the firm's choice of software has been an important factor in achieving this growth.

How and when did The Focus Partnership start?

Like a lot of people starting their own practice, I had experience of working in a local firm myself before going it alone. The Partnership was formed in June 2012 with three directors - myself, my wife and a third director, Mark Maplesden - although I wasn't able to join them full time until March 2013. We currently have one part-time employee - a qualified accountant and fee earner who worked at the same firm as I did - and we'll very shortly be taking on a graduate trainee who will be studying for their ACCA qualifications.

What made you consider the CCH Central suite?

The practice where I used to work had CCH Software so I was already familiar with it; in fact I was responsible for training other staff and supporting them to use the software. Although back then we were using CCH PROcap - an older version of the current Wolters Kluwer software - it was similar enough for me to feel confident with it and we'd always had good service from Wolters Kluwer, so it was a natural choice.

Why choose the CCH Accountants' Starter Pack?

It gave us all the features and functionality of the full CCH Central suite but at an affordable price for a start-up. In fact, when I initially looked at buying a standalone corporation tax package from a different supplier, they were quoting about the same as for the whole of the CCH Accountants' Starter Pack, so it was good value for money.

We got the central database, CCH Central, plus CCH Accounts Production, CCH Personal Tax, CCH Corporation Tax and CCH Practice Management (time and fees) in one bundle, licensed for just 50 clients to begin with. Over the years, as the practice has grown, we've increased the number of licences to keep pace with our expansion. That's a really handy feature and it makes it a very cost effective solution for a smaller firm like ours.

With CCH Central we only have to enter client and contact data in one place and it updates everywhere. That's vital for a smaller practice like ours because we can't afford to waste time on unnecessary admin - we want to spend as much as possible helping our clients. And because the suite is linked together through CCH Central, data passes through from one application to another - for example, accounts data transferring through for the CT return - which saves more time and eliminates errors.

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Did you have dedicated software from day one?

No. To begin with we used Word for accounts and the HMRC systems for filing personal and corporate tax returns. Because of my experience with the CCH PROcap software, I realised how much time we could save by using dedicated accounts production software. It would also significantly reduce the risk of making incorrect disclosures - financial reporting standards are constantly changing and it's a full-time job to keep up to date with all the requirements, but when you're using proper accounts production software you can forget about that because it's all handled for you.

So as soon as we got to the point at which we knew we could afford the software, it was a no brainer to buy it. It really has been a godsend. In fact, we wouldn't have been able to take on half the number of clients that we have now if we didn't use the CCH Accountants' Starter Pack, purely because of the time it saves. If you think about the time it takes to prepare just one set of accounts manually, to print them off, check the figures, check the disclosures... With the growth in client numbers we've had, it would have been impossible to keep up with all the work.

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What are your plans for the future?

Although CCH Practice Management is part of the package, until now we've not been making as much use of it as we might. Partly that's because we've only had the software running on a single, office-based computer which makes timesheet entry difficult for the team and that means we've been missing billable time. For example, you do a mortgage reference for someone but by the next day you've forgotten about it and it never gets billed. We've very recently started to run the software in the cloud over Citrix through a specialist third-party hosting company, which is a very simple way to achieve multi-user access without large infrastructure costs. So from the start of the next financial year in July we're going to be doing what we should have done from the start and accurately capture all billable time in CCH Practice Management - that will be a big improvement.

Any advice for anyone else setting up on their own?

I'd definitely recommend start-ups and smaller practices consider dedicated software like the CCH Accountants' Starter Pack, rather than try to get by 'manually' with Microsoft Word and Excel.

When I left my previous firm I probably only brought six or seven clients with me, so I wasn't exactly rushed off my feet to begin with! In those circumstances the advantages of computerisation may not be obvious - you think "I've got time on my hands, so why not spend it doing accounts, rather than paying out for software?" But think ahead: What happens when you've got 25 clients, 50, 100...? We've got almost 350 now, largely from referrals and recommendations, and we simply wouldn't have been able to expand at that rate unless we'd had software to help us, so the sooner you get it on-board, the better.

Find out how we can help



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