

## **“Not Just for Accounting Anymore”**

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Can you remember 1985? That was the year New Coke flopped, Madonna went on her Virgin Tour, and the first seat belt law went into effect.

If you were a CPA back then, you may have missed out on some of the pop culture, being too busy with your clients' bookkeeping, which back then meant working with fat ledgers and processing hundreds of pages of data sometimes recorded *by hand*. You looked a lot younger in 1985, and being a CPA meant something altogether different than it does now.

The accounting profession has evolved drastically in two decades, and on the whole clients are better served by CPA firms today. Throughout the eighties and into the nineties, most business clients turned to CPA firms primarily for tax work and routine accounting. The latter in particular was time-intensive and could be expensive for small or medium-sized companies.

Advances in computer technology and accounting software have empowered companies to manage much of their routine accounting work in-house. Meanwhile, CPA firms have diversified, becoming capable of treating a client's overall financial health, from short-term accounting issues to long-term business strategies.

Today a quality CPA firm can provide comprehensive services that include tax planning and preparation, management and technology consulting, business valuation, litigation support, and wealth management. Firms with so many resources under one roof offer advantages that should not be overlooked.

The relationship between a business owner and his or her accountant is inherently based on trust. An accountant, particularly one that has been with the client for several years, will know the business intimately. His or her understanding of the company is based on knowledge of intricate financial detail *and* on a personal perspective that comes from watching a business develop over time.

If a long-term client becomes entangled in litigation and suddenly needs a valuation analyst, the CPA firm may be the first number the owner dials. If the company wants to update its computer system and business processes, the CPA firm can save it time and expense by providing insight into the options, particularly as they relate to accounting functions. Similarly, if an entrepreneur wants a financial planner who is familiar with his or her company, the CPA firm may be the best place to start. Many firms today have accountants who are licensed security and insurance professionals and experienced in wealth management.

Finding capable consultants can be extremely time-consuming, so having one phone number to call instead of ten can be a plus for busy people. More importantly, an accountant who knows a business from the ground up will have a better sense of what options are appropriate than someone with a more narrow perspective.

Of course, upon occasion matters will arise that demand more specialized counsel, and in those instances CPA firms can make helpful referrals. But for many private businesses, the efficiencies and added value inherent in turning to the same trusted source for comprehensive financial service can't be beat.

Thus, within the walls of many CPA firms today, one can find business analysts, financial advisors, management consultants, and technology specialists, all of whom are also experienced CPAs maintaining close relationships with clients. By combining decades of tax and accounting expertise with a breadth of services, such firms can efficiently assist a business with many aspects of its finances.

Twenty years ago this fall, the firm that was to become KBST&M was founded in Towson, Maryland. We have been happy and proud to take part in the evolution of our profession. Accounting today is an industry that sees the big picture, and businesses are serviced better because of this. Though we may not look as young as we did in 1985, we are very much looking forward to another decade of progress.

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