![CPA.com logo]

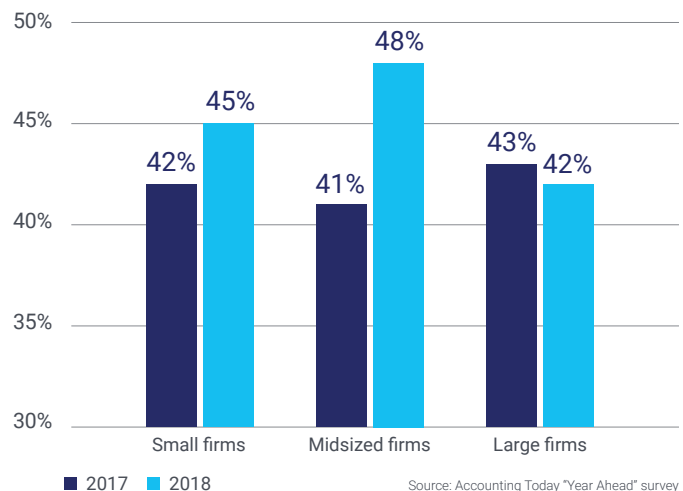# The CAS essential elements:
Plan, people, and technology

In many firms today, **Client Advisory Services (CAS)** is on a growth path to surpass more traditional offerings in areas such as tax and audit.

This rapid growth is happening at a moment in which the accounting profession is encountering massive changes, spurred on by developments in cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and other advanced technologies. The profession is moving to a digital-enabled business model that depends more heavily on outsourcing and automation – and CAS has a role to play in this evolution.

As with any significant new business opportunity, CAS requires a thoroughly considered business strategy to guide its successful growth – without it, for example, firms are at serious risk of making short-sighted investments in expensive technologies that are poorly matched to their needs and resources. That's why CPA.com offers intimate workshops that give participants the opportunity to closely examine their own ideas and plans for their CAS offerings before putting them to work. This at-a-glance overview offers key aspects of the workshops.

Growing interest

% of firms offering or planning to offer client accounting services

Source: Accounting Today "Year Ahead" survey

Legend: 2017, 2018

	Small firms	Midsized firms	Large firms
2017	42%	41%	43%
2018	45%	48%	42%

Business model: The foundation

What does your firm want to accomplish with CAS, and how will you do it? These questions lie at the heart of your business model and will guide large and small decisions on technology and many other aspects of your CAS plan throughout your journey. We focus on two key elements of the business model:

- **The business plan:** There are two layers of business planning required by CAS: Top-level business planning aligned with organizational strategy, and CAS-specific planning. At the top level, the plan should address

issues such as revenue goals, client needs, and fit with other current and future offerings. At the CAS level, the plan should identify pricing of individual CAS offerings, talent requirements, and technology investments.

- **Industry specialization:** Many successful CAS leaders point to their ability to distinguish CAS offerings to target individual industries as a key element in their success. Where do the industry strengths of your firm lie today? That's a good place to start – and as your CAS capabilities mature, you can build on your success to expand into other industries.

The People Factor

Talent needs in the accounting profession are already evolving quickly – and CAS talent requirements are no exception. The types of people you need to make CAS work are different than the talent your firm required only a few years ago. These considerations help ensure your people are ready for the challenges of delivering on the promise of CAS.

- **Changing skill sets, changing mindsets:** CAS staffing requires finding people who are comfortable with change – especially those who have a track record of serving as change agents, and are comfortable with technology.

- **A structure for success:** CAS requires a different type of organizational structure than more traditional accounting offerings. Perhaps most important, it requires dedicated resources – how can these resources be structured in a way that creates the maximum value for clients and the greatest impact for the firm? While the answer will be different for each firm, there are models emerging that are coalescing into the de facto standard for most.

Enabled by technology

The most efficient CAS strategy will always involve a technology strategy – one is dependent on the other. Once the business model and strategy are in place, it's time to move on to technology. CAS introduces a new and different set of requirements and cannot be approached as just another technology initiative. Here are some important considerations for making smart technology decisions on the CAS journey.

- **Assemble your own flexible stack:** Accounting firms used to purchase a suite of solutions through the same provider. But today it's possible to assemble your own technology stack using vendors who specialize in areas of special interest to your organization and its clients.

- **The evaluation process:** What does your firm need from CAS technology, and what do clients need – especially by industry vertical? These are the two most important questions to answer as you evaluate CAS technologies, and the good news is that there are already plenty of hands-on lessons from others you can use to inform your own strategy.

- **Standardization:** When building your CAS technology infrastructure, plan on relying on a range of purpose-built technology solutions, customizing as you go. At the same time, too much customization can lead to greater complexity. Standardization can play an important role in streamlining complexity and setting the foundation for CAS growth.

Let's get started

Looking for practical guidance to help ensure your CAS services succeed, from strategy and business model to talent and technology? We can help.

Get started by visiting **CPA.com**, where you can find "Setting the Stage for CAS Success," our guide to CAS strategy or email **workshops@hq.cpa.com**. We can help find a CAS workshop that's right for you and your needs – a and we can connect you with others who can help.

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