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Spend Management Survey Report

From Expense Tracking to Spend Management:
The Next Client Advisory Services (CAS) Opportunity for Accounting Firms

New research shows evolving small and mid-sized business expectations around expense management. Here's how you can use this trend to grow your CAS practice.

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Introduction

Client Advisory Services (CAS) is the fastest growing practice area in the accounting profession, having seen a median growth rate between 12% and 20% in each of the last six years, according to the **CPA.com 2022 CAS Benchmark Survey**. This growth is a result of clients looking to their CPAs and accounting firms to create efficiencies and deliver the holistic insights they need to make proactive business decisions.

CAS helps clients outsource their accounting needs and provide services spanning a spectrum of financial, accounting, and advisory-related offerings, which in turn allows clients to focus on their core competencies and deliver on their value proposition to customers.

Now, there's opportunity for CAS practices to help their small and mid-sized businesses control spend, and use the insights from expense management data to proactively advise clients about forecasting, planning, and business-related decisions.

Spend management is the ability to view, control, and manage a business's cash flow in real-time and in one centralized location, providing actionable insights to key financial decision-makers. Its proactive approach differs from expense management, which focuses on after-the-fact work.

This survey report explores the opportunities presented by spend management, including the pain points experienced by small and midsized businesses (SMBs) and how accounting firms can help them. It also captures insights from accounting firms that showcased their knowledge of spend management and their plans for it.

How Card-Based Spend Management Differs From Expense Management

Expense management refers to after-the-fact work. Expenses are typically recorded 30 days or more after they have happened, which blurs visibility into an organization's cash flow. The process drains efficiency, and focuses on spending after it happens, and without prior approval.

Spend management takes a proactive approach. It offers an integrated platform and corporate cards. The cards are issued to clients and connected to pre-set budgets and spend caps. Employee card transactions trigger real-time alerts to submit receipts, and expenses are automatically categorized and synced daily to the client's accounting platform. Spend management technology also provides a web-based dashboard in which to track spend against budget at the department, project, or organization level.

Since the charge cards are linked to the software, spending can be consolidated and tracked as each expense occurs, which means expenses such as online advertising, software subscriptions, and more can be added. This also means clients may be eligible for cash-back rewards based on their spend.

Methodology

This survey opened for participation on September 29, 2022, and closed on November 1, 2022, after 4.5 weeks of open participation. The survey was administered online, conducted by CPA.com, a subsidiary of the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA), and Divvy, a BILL company. All participants were based in the U.S.

SMB responses were gathered through a third-party market research panel which consisted of businesses with between 5-500 employees. For accounting firms, the survey was marketed to firms and practices that opted to receive information from CPA.com.

In total, the survey gathered responses from 368 accounting firm participants and 763 SMB participants, for a total sample size of 1,131.

For more information on the participants, including titles and organization sizes, please visit the appendix at the end of this report

""Businesses are looking to their CPAs and accounting firms more than ever for the next level of advisory services. They want deeper business insights, proactive advice and a true partner in their trusted advisor.

Firms have an opportunity to lead right now, and those who level up their CAS offerings to meet the expectations, such as adding spend management as a service, will have a tremendous edge in the market.""

Erik Asgeirsson,
President and CEO, CPA.com

Key Findings

SMBs are looking for better ways to control spend. Nearly three out of four (72%) SMB survey participants say they are interested in a proactive approach to expense management, including matching anticipated expenses to budgets before the money is spent.

Accounting firms have the opportunity to expand their CAS offerings by meeting this need. 34% of accounting firm participants surveyed say they offer expense management as a service and another 24% are interested in offering it.

Accounting firms offering expense management services are realizing greater efficiencies and achieving higher profits. A majority of firms that say expense management provides a revenue stream (63%) agree that innovations offered by card-based spend management technology makes them more efficient and profitable. 74% of this same group agree that expense management services help them attract and retain clients.

Spend management has a substantial positive impact in helping SMBs stay within budget. 97% of SMBs outsourcing expense management agree that card-based spend management technology ensures they control spend and stay within budget (compared to 71% of those that outsource and use traditional expense management software.) In fact, 51% of SMBs who outsource expense management said their accounting firm implemented card-based spend management technology and it has been a gamechanger for their company.

SMBs combining outsourcing and spend management software are more likely to help accounting firms grow their client base and expand their offerings. 72% of SMBs who outsource expense management and use spend management software say they are interested in exploring additional services with their firms. Of that same group, 71% say they are actively referring their accounting firms to other companies and colleagues.

There is a growing spend management communication gap between firms and their clients. 72% of SMBs indicated interest in spend management. However, 42% of accounting firm respondents say they are not involved with expenses or they only recommend the technology. More than half of those not offering expense management services say it is because their clients are not asking for it, suggesting a communication gap between firms and their clients.

SMBs: Their Biggest Expense Management Challenges

Budgeting and Controlling Costs

For most small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs), watching expenses is always a priority. However, current economic trends such as inflation and a potential recession have driven an even stronger focus on reducing spend.

The survey results suggest SMBs are shifting to a more comprehensive approach to budgeting and controlling spend. More than half (53%) said their company is reducing costs, and 69% said they want new options to help control costs.

"The pandemic created an awakening for many small businesses when it comes to spend and resources," said Dan Luthi, partner at Ignite Spot Accounting Services. "It's about having an actual budget in place for your company as a whole. But it also means looking at how you're spending and how you're using each part of your business to

Desire to Move Beyond After-the-Fact Expense Management

A majority of SMBs (72%) indicated they were interested in a proactive approach to spend management, including matching expenses to budgets before the money is spent. This percentage increases to 80% for SMBs who are outsourcing their expense management.

These results imply that simply tracking expenses after-the-fact–which is the role of traditional expense management–may no longer adequately address SMBs' cash flow concerns.

As Luthi explained, "Tallying the results after the money is already spent does little to support a company's goals. Here's where a business needs a tool like spend management to capture what's happening on a day-by-day basis instead of 30 days after."

I want new options to help control spend.

69% of SMBs agree

Slower Employee Reimbursements

After-the-fact expense management can be time consuming for SMBs, due to manual processes such as compiling reports, following up for codes and documentation, and more.

This process can also result in slower employee reimbursements. While 25% of SMBs say they reimburse employees within seven days, 19% say it takes two weeks or longer and another 14% say it takes a month or more. This lag in reimbursement skews visibility into spend. This also represents a burden on employees, who are providing an interest-free, short-term loan to the business.

Lack of Real-Time Insight into Spend

While time-consuming processes may be top-of-mind for SMBs, their additional pain points speak to larger problems–getting real-time visibility into spend, closing the books accurately and on time, and lacking reporting around non-payroll spend. All three of these challenges speak to a need for timely, clean spend data.

"Our focus is to take a historical way of thinking or processing for our clients and help them to evolve into this more advanced, more developed experience. We want to move beyond boxes of documents and have them see their financial story and what's happening on a day-by-day basis. Spend management does this and it makes a massive massive change in the client experience," said Luthi.

Top-Five SMB Expense Management Challenges

57%	Spending too much time on expense management overall
50%	Accurately coding expenses
44%	Getting real-time visibility into spend
40%	Inaccurate month-end close and/or difficulties closing the books in a timely manner.
32%	Lack of reporting around non-payroll spend

Length Of Time It Takes SMBs To Reimburse Employee Expenses

25%	Less than 7 days
37%	7-14 days
19%	15-29 days
14%	30 days or more
5%	N/A since employees use company credit cards

Benefits From Outsourcing Expense Management

SMBs are outsourcing their expense management and reporting positive results.

In all, 41% of SMB participants said they outsource expense management to their accounting firm. Of that group, 64% said their accounting firm reduced the hours SMBs spend on expense management, 47% had new controls put in place to help deter expense abuses and fraud, and 43% streamlined their processes.

More importantly, a majority (51%) of SMB participants who outsource expense management said their accountant recommended card-based spend management and that it has been a game-changer for their companies. This data ties back to the interest expressed by SMBs for new ways to control costs.

For SMBs that do not outsource expense management, over half expressed interest in the idea.

"How can you make yourself more valuable? Clients love to have a good feel of their finances and if you can simplify it for them with card-based spend management, you will succeed," commented Jody Grunden, CEO and co-founder of Summit CPA Group.

Benefits Reported By SMBs When Outsourcing Expense Management

64% Reduced hours spent in-house managing expenses

51% Implemented card-based spend management technology, which has been a gamechanger for our company

47% New controls put in place to reduce expense abuses and fraud

43% Streamlined and improved our expense and spend management processes.

They spent what?!

Out-of-this-world expenses reported by SMBs and accounting firms

What do a yacht, a Christmas tree, and a multi-thousand dollar tab at McDonald's have in common? They're all expenses that survey participants have seen submitted for reimbursement. Whether it's fraud, mistakes, or a lapse in judgment, here is a list of some of the most outrageous and fraudulent expenses.

- An employee bought a new truck with the business credit card and quit the next day.
- Someone booked a yacht as a meeting room.
- An individual claimed a trip to Spain as a necessary expense to learn Spanish.
- Someone took a private jet for a golf outing.
- They tried to expense a $5,000 bottle of wine.
- $12,000 was spent at a McDonald's and submitted for reimbursement.

The State Of Accounting Firms And Expense Management Services

Expense management services are on accounting firms' radars, according to the research. For firms offering the service, how are they delivering it?

CAS practices take a variety of approaches in supporting clients with expense management. Firms that are able to offer a full range of standardized services, from selecting software and connecting it to daily processes, to advising on forecasts and budgets based on data from the system, may see that they are well positioned to offer this as a high-growth CAS service.

"Clients are coming to our firm because they know we offer cash flow management, forecasting, spend management, and all the things they need to have a good grasp on accounting. We can provide them with solutions that are going to help and improve their business while allowing them to operate their business in a much better position than before," said Grunden.

Title: How Does Your Accounting Firm Interact With Clients' Expense Management Programs?

26% We are not involved.

24% We are not involved but are interested in offering expense management as a service.

16% We only recommend expense management software to our clients.

12% We offer expense management services but do not advise on the technology.

22% We recommend expense management software to clients and offer them expense management services.

What Types Of Expense Management Services Are SMBs Interested In?

39% Basic (overseeing expense tracking, reimbursements, category coding, month end closes, data integration into general ledger)

38% Strategic (basic services plus budgeting, forecasting, cash flow analysis, and guidance around best practices in spend management)

16% Technology consulting (helping SMBs identify, implement and optimize expense management software and processes)

The delivery and pricing of expense management services

As expense management services gain more traction with accounting firms, firms seek to understand how they are structured and priced.

Spend management can play a variety of roles in powering a firm's CAS offerings and that is reflected in the way that firms choose to approach pricing and packaging.

1. Some firms don't charge for spend management as a standalone service. However, it's there in the background making their advisory services better and saving them time and money.
2. Some firms charge for it as part of a broader offering like technology consulting
3. Others charge for it as a standalone service.

How One Firm Structures Spend Management Services

Summit CPA Group is a fully remote firm that has been using their virtual CFO model since 2004. With more than 70 employees and 150 clients, the $9-$10 million practice has 72% gross profit margins. Here's how Summit leverages modern spend management to build a highly-profitable practice:

- It provides a tiered subscription services model, offering three levels that range from transactional to strategic. A subscription services model brings year-round recurring revenue from their clients, higher margins, and the ability to offer real-time client insights given their visibility into company financial data.
- It customizes pricing to a client's needs, where the firm identifies the priorities and does a deep dive to determine how to best help them.
- It uses a sophisticated financial technology stack including spend management that automates manual processes and frees the accounting team to offer strategic financial insights to clients.

How does your firm charge for expense management services?

34%	By the hour
34%	As part of an existing subscription for services
26%	A flat-rate fee every month
6%	Other

What does your firm charge for expense management services?

29%	Up to $1,000
11%	$1,001 to $3,000
5%	$3,001 to $5,000
2%	$5,000+
17%	Not sure
35%	We don't track expense management services revenue separately.
1%	Other

Reasons Why 42% Of Accounting Firms Surveyed Are Missing The Opportunity To Offer Expense Management Services

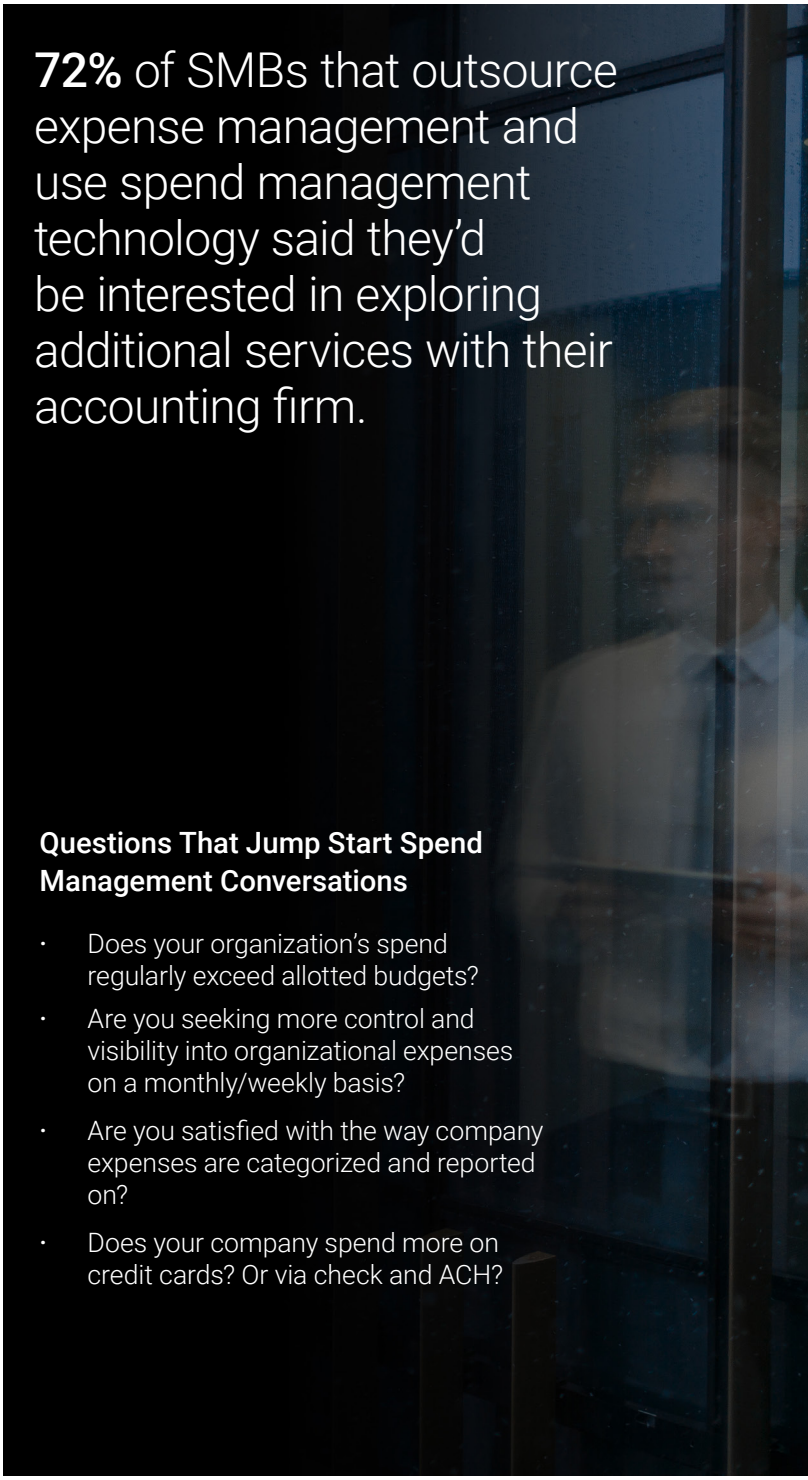
The 2022 CAS Benchmark Survey notes that firms can grow their CAS practices by raising prices, gaining efficiencies, expanding their client base, or offering additional services to existing clients. Spend management seems well-positioned to support growth for CAS practices who are offering these services. However, firms may need to consider practical solutions for these risks or potential barriers.

Bridging Services Gaps Through Spend Management Conversations

The survey asked firms who were not offering expense management for the reasons why. More than half said their clients are not asking for it - a data point that is at odds with the 72% of SMBs who said they would be interested in exploring expense management services.

The disconnect may stem from the fact that clients cannot always articulate what they need.

“When a client comes to a firm to say they are interested in your outsourced accounting services, they already have a problem. They can’t find the right talent. They don’t have the right process. That’s what the CPA, the trusted business advisor, is there for. Because not only do you have the people who are trained, educated, and knowledgeable, but you also have the processes, and the know-how. You are the experts. That’s why spend management is such an easy sell,” said Steve Chaney, owner of Chaney & Associates.



72% of SMBs that outsource expense management and use spend management technology said they’d be interested in exploring additional services with their accounting firm.

Questions That Jump Start Spend Management Conversations

- Does your organization’s spend regularly exceed allotted budgets?
- Are you seeking more control and visibility into organizational expenses on a monthly/weekly basis?
- Are you satisfied with the way company expenses are categorized and reported on?
- Does your company spend more on credit cards? Or via check and ACH?

Limited Resources

While client and firm awareness is a consideration, resource allocation can also be a challenge. 39% of the accounting firms that don't offer expense management services stated they don't have the people or expertise to support those services. Having dedicated staff supported by technology that leads to standardized processes can contribute greatly to the success of a firm.

Accounting firm professionals shared how much time they estimate they spend each month reconciling credit card expenses for the average client. About a quarter (23%) spend less than an hour each month on the average client's expenses, while another 38% said they spend 1-2 hours each month per client. More than a third (39%) said it takes three or more hours each month per client. When extrapolated across all expense management clients, these numbers can multiply quickly.

A lack of technology can result in choosing to not introduce expense management services. When asked why they aren't offering expense management services, 28% of the accounting firm participants said they don't have expense management software. Features like digitization, automation, and AI can help increase productivity without adding headcount.

"Our card-based spend management software saves me a tremendous amount of time and work every month," said Chaney.

Why Is Your Firm Not Offering Expense Management Services?

57%	Clients aren't asking for it
39%	We don't have the people and/or expertise to support it.
31%	We haven't considered it as an option.
28%	We don't have expense management technology.
9%	We don't see the value in offering it.
2%	Other

How Much Time Do You Estimate You Spend Each Month Reconciling Credit Card Expenses For The Average Client?

23%	Less than an hour
38%	1-2 hours
22%	3-4 hours

60% of accounting firms are looking for new options to control client costs.

How Spend Management Increases Revenue Growth And Client “Stickiness”

Expanding CAS to include spend management services and technologies may result in upticks in firm growth and client retention, according to the research.

SMB clients noted that spending an excessive amount of time on expenses was a top concern. Outsourcing helps address that, with 64% of SMBs who outsource expense management saying the experience has helped them reduce the time spent on that process.

Technology has the potential to affect these results. For example, 82% of SMBs that outsource and use spend management technology said they reduced in-house time spent on expenses. Yet, only 49% of SMBs that outsource and use traditional expense management software reported similar results.

The combination of accounting firm expertise and software can also affect client satisfaction and retention.

“We are finding that our average growth is at least double, if not triple, the median on our Client Advisory Services. Spend management is what our clients need the most,” commented Megan Bronson, advisory partner for Squire & Company.

According to Grunden: “Our subscription-based model involving spend management encourages our clients to stay with us. Our current retention rate is 92%.”

60% of SMBs outsourcing expense management said that they are interested in exploring additional services based on how their accounting firm has handled their expense management. That number jumps to 72% for SMBs outsourcing and using spend management software.

58% of SMBs outsourcing reported that they are actively referring their accounting firms to other companies and colleagues. For SMBs outsourcing and using spend management software, that number increases to 71%.

What Have Been The Results Of Outsourcing Expense Management To An Accounting Firm?

	SMBs outsourcing and using traditional expense management software	SMBs outsourcing and using card-based spend management software
They reduced the number of hours spent in-house managing expenses.	49%	82%
They helped us put new controls in place to reduce expense abuses and fraud.	42%	53%
They streamlined and improved our expense and spend management processes.	42%	45%

How Willing Are You To Do The Following, Based On Your Experience With Outsourcing?

	SMBs outsourcing and using traditional expense management software	SMBs outsourcing and using spend management software
Interested in exploring additional services	50%	72%
Actively referring their accounting firms to other companies and colleagues	46%	71%
More satisfied with their firms on a whole	34%	39%

The Benefits Of Spend Management Technology Vs. Expense Management Technology

Participants indicated a higher level of positive results when using spend management technology compared to expense management technology, including closing the books faster, staying in budget, and gaining greater visibility into spend.

They also overwhelmingly agreed on the importance of state-of-the-art technology overall. 86% of accounting firms and 80% of SMBs agree that modern accounting technology is now more important than ever.

"Technology makes a massive positive change in the customer experience," said Luthi. "Our focus with card-based spend management is taking the historical way of interacting with our clients and helping them to evolve into this more advanced, more developed technology-driven experience."

According to the survey, 79% of accounting firm participants say it is easier to close the books each month using spend management software, compared to 53% of those using traditional expense management software.

SMBs that combine outsourcing with software noted differences between spend management and expense management. Nearly all SMBs outsourcing and using spend management software agree that it helps them control spend and stay within budget, compared to 71% of those using traditional expense management software. 96% say that it provides on-demand spend analytics and reporting, where only 70% agree with expense management software.

Call-out quote: 79% of accounting firms say it is easier to close the books each month using spend management software, compared to 53% of those using traditional expense management software.

How Do Accounting Firms Rate Their Expense Or Spend Management Software?

	Accounting firms not using spend management technology	Accounting firms using spend management technology
	% of agreement	% of agreement
Ensures our clients control spend and stay within budget	**39%**	**60%**
Easier to close the books each month for clients	**53%**	**79%**
Provides an efficient process for managing expenses	**66%**	**83%**
Allows our clients to issue credit cards or virtual cards to appropriate employees quickly.	**44%**	**77%**
Gives our clients visibility into spend at any point in time	**65%**	**84%**

How Do Outsourcing SMBs Rate Their Expense Or Spend Management Software?

	SMBs not outsourcing expense management	SMBs outsourcing and using traditional expense management software	SMBs outsourcing and using spend management software
	% of agreement	% of agreement	% of agreement
Ensures we control spend and stay within budget	**53%**	**71%**	**97%**
Provides on-demand spend analytics and reporting	**61%**	**70%**	**96%**
Enforces expense guidelines	**63%**	**78%**	**96%**
Enables us to reimburse employees quickly	**71%**	**81%**	**95%**
Easier to close the books each month	**74%**	**74%**	**93%**
Provides an efficient process for managing expenses	**75%**	**76%**	**95%**
Helps prevent expense fraud	**65%**	**82%**	**95%**
Automates transaction coding/categorization	**64%**	**70%**	**94%**
Allows us to issue credit cards or virtual cards to appropriate employees quickly.	**61%**	**67%**	**93%**
Gives us visibility into spend at any point in time	**60%**	**71%**	**92%**

Next Steps for Accounting Firms

CAS, as one of the fastest-growing practice areas, continues to offer accounting firms more opportunities to create closer ties with clients and attract new business. As a component of CAS, spend management services offer parallel opportunities.

As SMBs face economic uncertainty and an increasing need to control costs, accounting firms can step in as trusted advisors. Instead of relying on after-the-fact expense management, accounting firms can shift the focus to a holistic, real-time view of all spend including online ads, software subscriptions, and more. At the same time, they can begin to reap the same benefits noted by survey participants–an increased SMB willingness to expand services and refer business, easier month-end close and streamlined processes.

For accounting firms interested in expanding their offerings with the next evolution of expense management, visit CPA.com/spend-management to access a breadth of resources to help shape that journey, including:

- **FAQs from accountants on spend management, including how it differs from expense management [NOTE: This document will be live on CPA.com's website soon.]**
- **The 2022 CPA.com and AICPA PCPS CAS Benchmark Survey to grow your knowledge of CAS and learn how firm leaders are improving strategies.**
- **7 Major Spend Management Challenges - Recognize the challenges and identify ways to solve them by reviewing this whitepaper from Divvy.**
- **Blog: How to prize, position and productize** insights from CAS leaders on how to build your spend

Join the Divvy Accountant Advisor Program

The **Divvy Accountant Advisor Program**, delivered in partnership with CPA.com, is designed to provide support and value to our partners at every step of the relationship. As a member of the program, your firm will be able to close your clients' books faster than ever, expand your CAS practice to include spend management, and become a strategic partner your clients can turn to for help growing their business.

Learn more about how Divvy can save your firm time and money by watching our On-Demand Demo.

About CPA.com

CPA.com brings innovative solutions to the accounting profession, either in partnership with leading providers or directly through its own development. The company has established itself as a thought leader on emerging technologies and as the trusted business advisor to practitioners in the U.S., with a growing global focus. CPA.com is a subsidiary of the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) and part of the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (AICPA & CIMA), the most influential body of accounting and financial professionals worldwide.

CPA.com serves as a catalyst in the development of virtual CFO/controller services by firms and is now shifting its focus to similar innovations

About our Sponsor

About Divvy, a BILL Company

Divvy, a BILL spend and expense management solution gives small and midsize businesses the credit they need and helps them save time and money by automating expense reports, budgets, and reimbursement processing — all in one place. Our free software and card combination provides real-time insight into employee spending, and better fraud protection with virtual cards. With Divvy, you can:

- Automate expense reports: Expenses are ready to upload immediately saving you time - no need to reconcile credit card statements with your expense management system.
- Improve employee spend management: Take control of your business budgets and say goodbye to the "spend now, ask forgiveness later" mentality.
- Manage payments and subscriptions: Create a separate card for each subscription, set a limit on each card, and quickly freeze at any time. That's fraud and overcharge protection in one amazing package.
- Track out of pocket expenses and reimbursement requests: With mobile receipt upload and push notifications for approvals, you can pay back employees in a snap.

About BILL

BILL (NYSE: BILL) is a leader in financial automation software for small and midsize businesses (SMBs). As a champion of SMBs, we are dedicated to automating the future of finance so businesses can thrive. Hundreds of thousands of businesses trust BILL solutions to manage financial workflows, including payables, receivables, and spend and expense management. With BILL, businesses are connected to a network of millions of members, so they can pay or get paid faster. Through our automated solutions, we help SMBs simplify and control their finances, so they can confidently manage their businesses, and succeed on their terms. BILL is a trusted partner of leading U.S. financial institutions, accounting firms, and accounting software providers. BILL is headquartered in San Jose, California. For more information, visit bill.com.

Appendix

Titles of accounting firm participants

- **24%** Sole practitioner
- **16%** Shareholder/owner
- **14%** Managing partner/partner
- **2%** CFO/virtual CFO
- **3%** Controller/virtual controller
- **8%** Director
- **20%** Manager
- **12%** Professional staff
- **1%** Other

Number of accounting firm employees

- **19%** Solo practitioner
- **35%** 2-10
- **19%** 11-50
- **7%** 51-100
- **4%** 101-200
- **5%** 201-500
- **3%** 501-1000
- **8%** 1001+

Services offered

- **85%** Tax return filing
- **83%** Bookkeeping and after-the-fact write-up and clean-up services
- **79%** Tax advisory services
- **71%** Monthly financial statement prep
- **60%** Real-time outsourced accounting services like AP, AR, payroll and cash management
- **48%** Virtual controller services like budgeting, comparative reporting, final reporting, and forecasting
- **42%** Virtual CFO-level services like financial strategy, modeling and market analysis
- **8%** Other

SMBs Participants

Titles of SMB participants

- **7%** CEO
- **16%** Business owner
- **10%** CFO
- **12%** Controller
- **5%** VP of finance
- **12%** Director
- **24%** Manager
- **14%** Other

Number of employees

- **16%** 5-9
- **40%** 10-99
- **21%** 100-250
- **15%** 251-500
- **8%** 501+

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