
Automation

Putting Accounting on
the Right Path



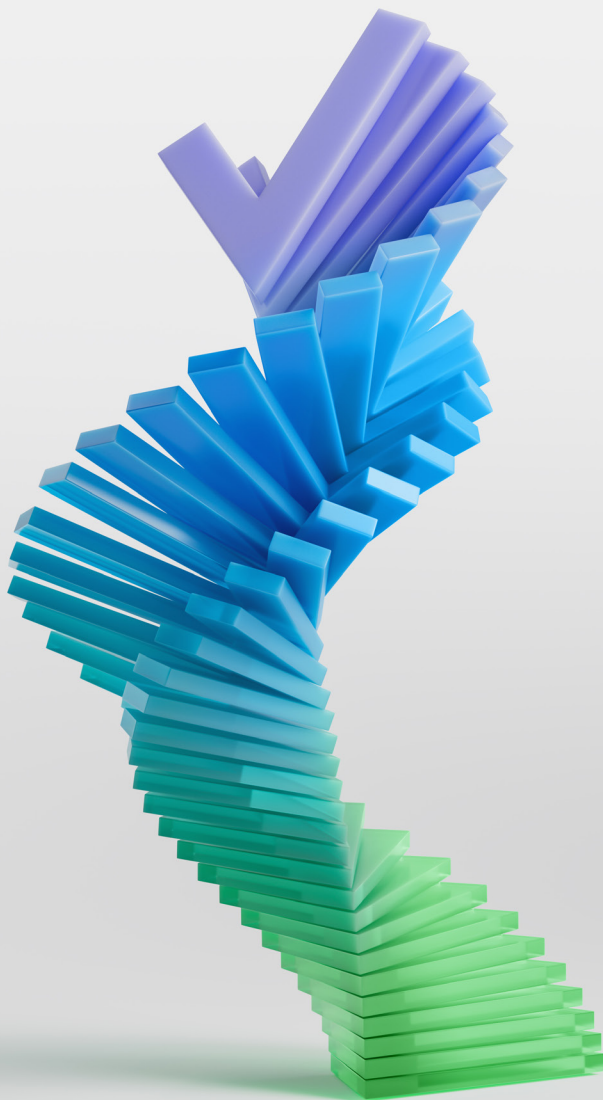
Introduction

Looking strictly at the bottom line, we should be in the midst of a golden era for the accounting industry. Demand for accounting services is more robust than ever as tax rules get more complicated and compliance requirements grow more mission critical every day. Accounting firms are traditionally among the more profitable small businesses, and revenues at the Big Four U.S. accounting firms have risen steadily over the past decade.

Still, media reports show that the accounting industry is struggling on several fronts. There's a **nationwide shortage of accountants**. CPAs are leaving their jobs in unprecedented numbers, and baby boomer accountants are retiring, leaving firms short on talent to handle all the work that keeps flowing in.

That's not all. Accounting has long had image problems that make it challenging to recruit young workers. And its relationship with technology can be complicated, with some perceiving the industry as slow to adopt new tech and others worrying that automation, broadly defined, could take away jobs and negatively affect the accounting field.

Given this backdrop, we decided to go to the source and ask accountants how they feel about their industry. Do they enjoy their jobs? Are they considering moves within or outside of their industry? Is the industry healthy? And will it remain so?



What we found was encouraging.

Accountants see automation as a lever for growth—not for displacement. Overall, 96% consider automation “important” to the accounting industry. While workers in many industries, including accounting, have long worried that AI and automation will lead to job loss, accountants look forward to its ability to handle monotonous tasks that reduce their productivity.

Accountants are generally satisfied—both with their work and their industry. They do have frustrations, which mostly center on the time-consuming tasks on their

plates, the heavy workloads they face and their ability to get things done with the technology tools they have. But the issues seem solvable, and accountants want to be there to solve them over the long haul.

Accountants are also bullish about the future of their industry. They’re excited to see how technology can help them do their jobs better. They’re optimistic that new tools will help them become more efficient and deliver a better client experience.

Here is a closer look at accountants’ views on automation, their jobs and the industry’s future.



Section 1

Automation? Bring it on

Any fears that automation will threaten accountants' livelihoods appear to be overrated. Nearly nine in 10 accountants in our survey (89%) say accounting professionals will never be replaced despite new technological advances.

Accountants said they would embrace automation wholeheartedly and feel it would greatly enhance the overall experience they provide to clients. The professionals also view automation to be important to the industry's future, and more than nine out of 10 feel it will enhance the experience accountants provide.

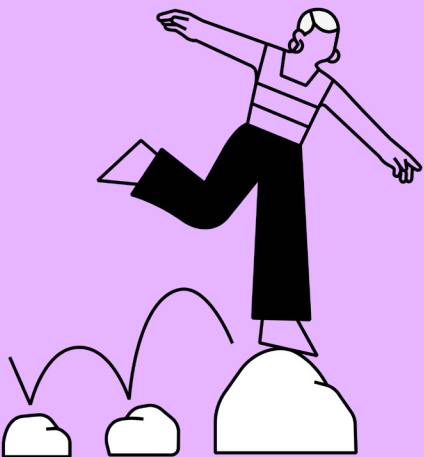
Automation is important

96%

consider automation "important"
to the accounting industry

51%

describe it as
very important



On the flip side, accountants believe a *lack* of automation at their firms is holding them back from doing their best work. Seven out of 10 say having to handle a large number of routine accounting procedures without the benefit of automation is a problem on a regular basis for them in their job.

Enhancing client experiences

95%

say automation will enhance the experience accountants provide

38%

said it will greatly enhance clients' experience

What this means

Automation can be a helpful tool for most industries, including accounting. For accountants themselves, it can offload menial tasks and allow them to focus more strategically on work that will benefit clients. For organizations, it can improve efficiency and reduce errors. To take full advantage of the benefits automation offers, organizations should look for tools that will help them automate not only those processes but their existing accounting workflows as well.

Section 2

Accountants are more satisfied than we thought—but they still have concerns

Although large numbers of accountants are leaving the field, accountants who are still employed seem surprisingly content. In general, accountants in the survey said they are satisfied—with their jobs, their companies, and the profession overall. Most aren't thinking of leaving, and most would encourage others to join the accounting world and would do it all over again, even knowing what they know now.

Over nine in 10 accountants (93%) said they're satisfied with the current state of the accounting profession. The satisfaction levels vary, with just 40% saying they are very satisfied, while over half (53%) are somewhat

satisfied. But when it comes to doing their job, over 90% of accountants are satisfied with their current job (95%) and the company they work for (94%).

Plus, most accountants interviewed in this survey are in no rush to leave their current situations. Only 10% have changed jobs within the accounting field over the past year. Another 11% of our survey respondents said they considered leaving the accounting field for another career, while 4% went back to school to pursue a new degree. That leaves just under two-thirds (62%) not looking for a career change.



An overwhelming majority of today's accountants, knowing what they know now, would reenter the field if they were just starting out. Over nine in 10 (92%) say they still would have become an accountant, with half (51%) saying they definitely would have.

If someone about to graduate college asked for their advice on whether they should become an accountant, nine in 10 accountants (89%) say they should become one and just one in 10 (11%) say they should not.

Friendly advice

Accountants say graduates should join their field because...

17%

There is career growth and advancement

22%

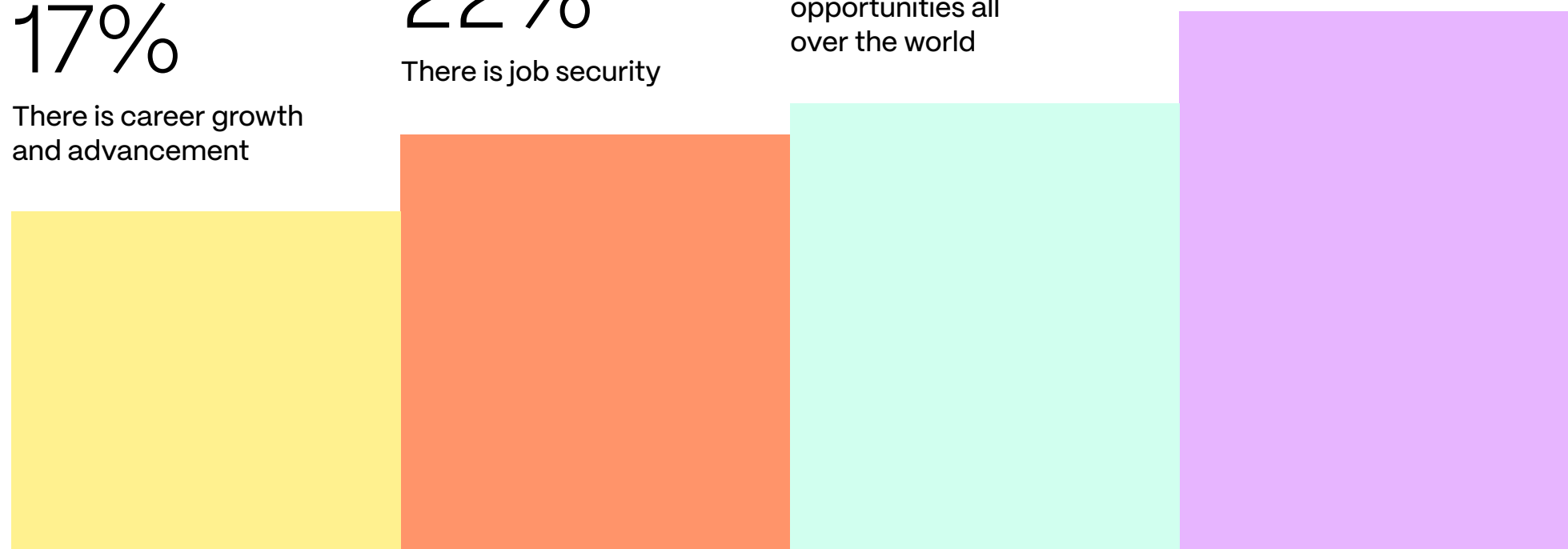
There is job security

24%

There are job opportunities all over the world

30%

Pay is good



Reason	Percentage
There is career growth and advancement	17%
There is job security	22%
There are job opportunities all over the world	24%
Pay is good	30%

Accountants are looking for help

That doesn't mean the world of accounting is perfect.

While the survey showed that accountants are generally satisfied, they still say they face ongoing obstacles that affect their ability to do their job on a regular basis. Overall, more than half of the accountants surveyed say that typically, they can perform their job effectively but not efficiently.

The reasons for this vary. Around seven in 10 (72%) say their efficiency is being held back mainly by having to do more with fewer resources. Meanwhile 70% blame constantly changing tax laws, 70% cite lack of automation to assist with routine accounting procedures, and 69% identify not having the right technological resources as problems, while over three in five (63%) say data security issues are big issues.

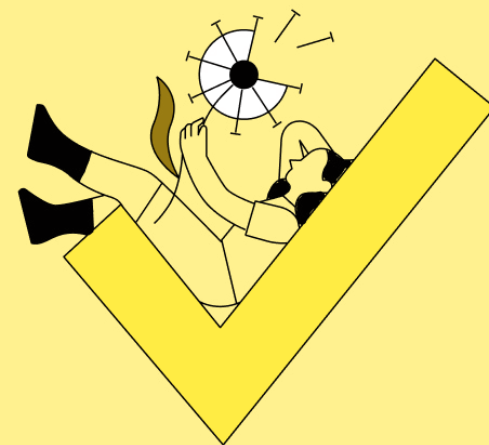
One of the more notable complaints accountants shared is about the tools themselves. Over half (56%) say having too many tools which require them to context switch for every task is a problem on a regular basis. Toggling between platforms to input data, check tax rules, make calculations and access related documents can slow down processes during busy times, like tax season, raising accountants' frustration.

**Effective, but
not efficient**

Typically, accountants are able to perform their jobs effectively but not efficiently.

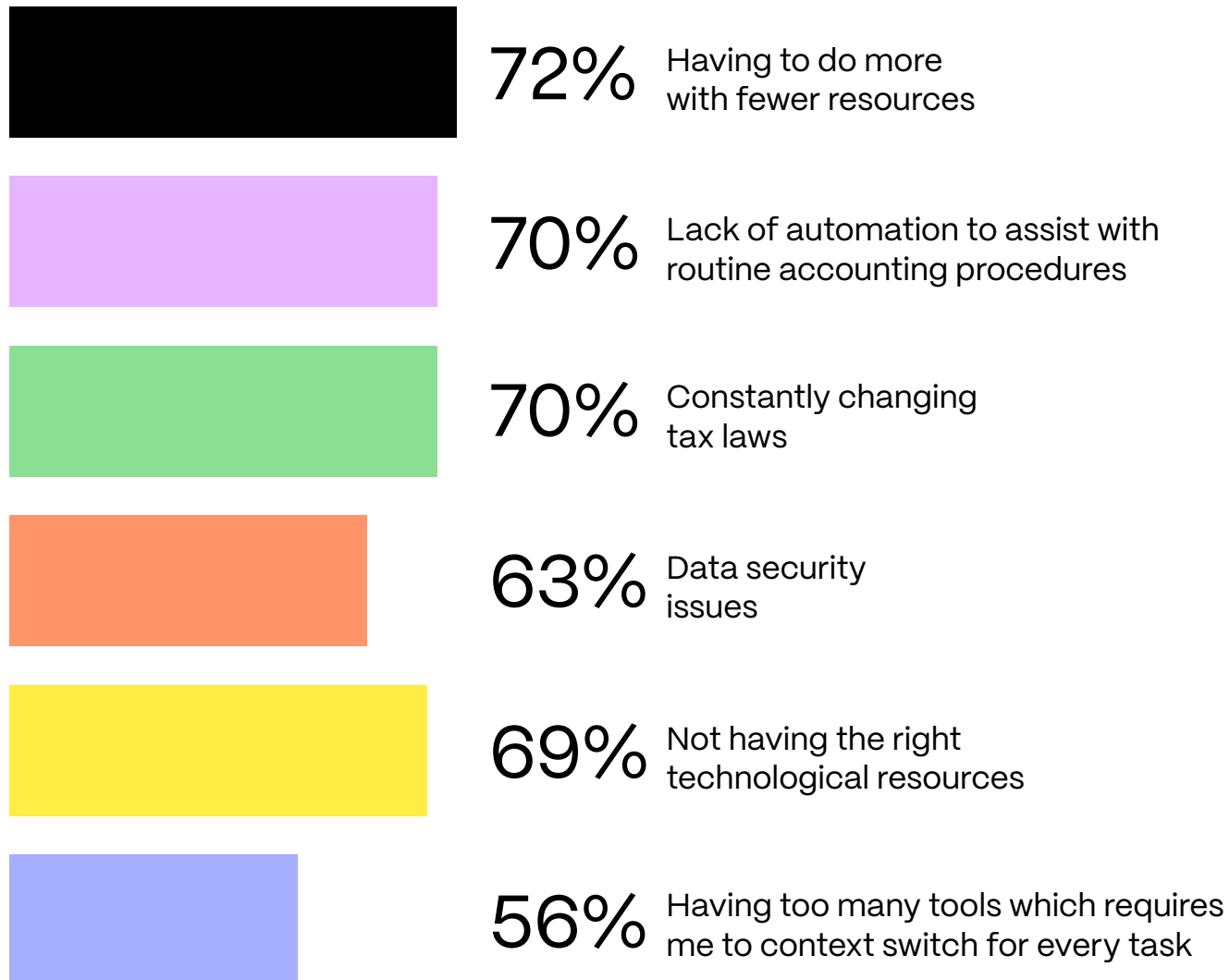
57% agree

22% strongly agree



Issues that impact their jobs

How much of a problem are each of these for accountants on a regular basis?



When asked which is the most significant problem accountants face in being able to do their jobs efficiently, no factors prominently rise to the top. One in five (19%) respondents say changing tax laws are the largest problem, and almost a fifth say having to do more with fewer resources (17%) are major issues. Over one in 10 say the largest problems are data security issues (14%), lack of automation to assist with routine accounting procedures (13%) and not having the right technological resources (13%). Almost one in 10 (8%) say none of these are problems for them.

Overall, accountants say their profession needs to be modernized and that they need to use technology in better ways to both streamline processes and support an improved client experience.

Context switching

Having too many tools which requires accountants to context switch for every task.

56% call it a problem

17% consider it a large problem

39% say it's somewhat of a problem

What this means

Accountants are happy with their jobs and their firms. But at times they still feel overworked and unable to work at their peak efficiency. Technology can help. If firms want to retain or hire accountants, having better technology in house can give them a competitive advantage. There are tools available that can boost efficiencies—especially in critical, time-consuming, manual processes like client onboarding and preparing document request lists.

Section 3

Working in house vs. at an accounting firm: Two sides of the same coin

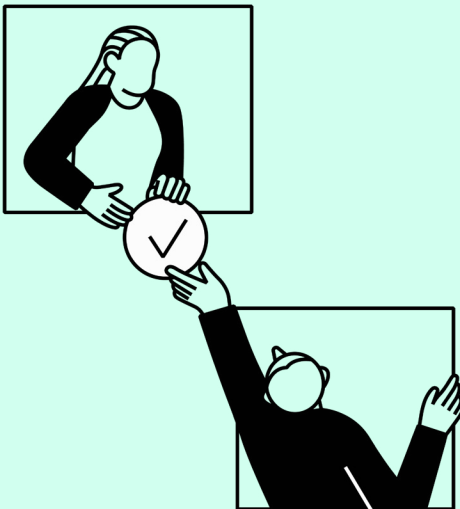
Looking at the two different types of accountants—those who work as in-house accountants for a corporation and those who work for an accounting firm—there aren't many differences between them. But digging a little deeper, those who work for an accounting firm are more likely than those who work in-house to be satisfied with the profession overall.

Those working for a firm are more likely to say they are adequately staffed. They also feel the technology at their firm is not only good but very good, and they are more likely to say each of the different technologies are important to the profession, especially AI/machine learning and blockchain.

Accountants who work for a firm are more likely than those who are in-house to say the accounting field is undergoing a transformational phase with new opportunities and evolving roles.

Accountants at firms are also more likely to say that, 10 years from now, there will be more accountants, while those in-house are more likely to say there will be fewer accountants.

In-house accountants are more likely to say they have thought about changing jobs within the accounting field and thought about leaving the accounting field for another career.



In their own words: the biggest barriers to success



Accountant in an accounting firm:

"Our company is short on manpower and there is little room for advancement."

"Backward technology and cannot work efficiently."

"Lack of appropriate tools to support automated tasks."

"Keeping up with the ever-changing tax legislation is a constant problem for me."

"Systems and processes are not perfect or do not adapt to rapid business change."



Accountant working for a corporation:

"It is the technology we use being outdated and making the work harder."

"Not being valued by the leadership."

"Difficulty identifying industry-specific accounting requirements."

"Not enough time to handle every client."

"Excessive workload affects the quality of work and results."

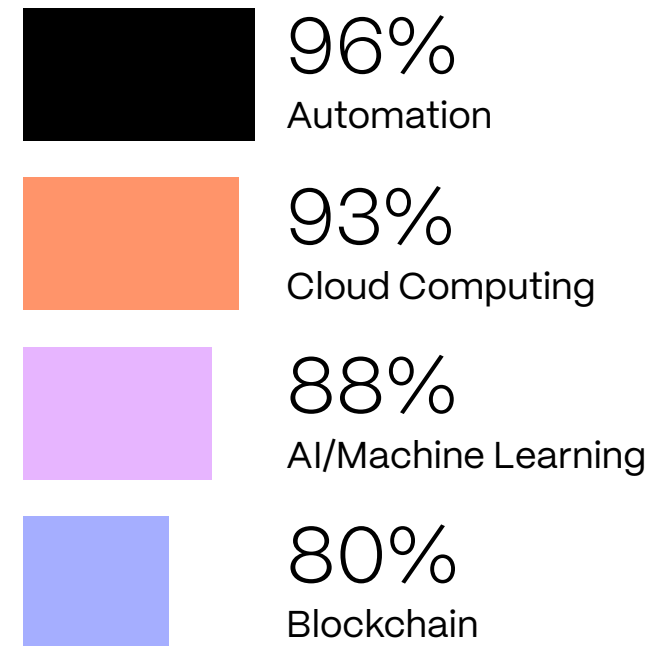
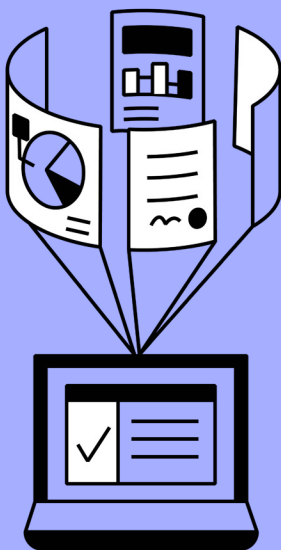
What this means

Although accountants at firms have more job satisfaction and are more enthusiastic about their work than in-house accountants, they face challenges as well. Many feel that a lack of advancement opportunities are holding them back. One issue that accountants across the industry seem to share is a frustration that technology can't be doing more to solve their problems. Accountants both at firms and inside corporations feel they would make more of an impact if employers upgraded "outdated" and "backward" technology. Upgrading systems and improving processes provides a clear opportunity for accounting employers to enhance the experiences for all.

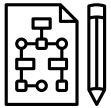
Section 4

Modern technologies will be important to the accounting profession

While automation leads accountants' list of technology preferences, survey respondents were excited about the contributions other technologies can make for their industry. Cloud computing, for instance, improves how accounting information can be processed and stored. It also offers lower prices, improved efficiencies, increased accessibility and improved data security. Accountants believe AI and machine learning can play roles, too. Machine learning can provide augmented analyses for auditors. Instead of sampling data, auditors can process an entire ledger through automated analysis.



But while accountants were optimistic about technology's future in their industry, their main focus was leveraging technology that could help them today. Throughout the survey, they pushed for strategic additions to help them work more efficiently and provide a higher level of client experience.



Efficient workflows

95%

Agree—we need to leverage technology that effectively streamlines processes and creates workflow efficiencies



Better experiences

97%

Agree—we need to use technology to support an improved client experience



Lack of resources

Not having the right technological resources

69% consider it a problem

23% say it's a large problem

46% say it's somewhat of a problem

What this means

Technology is becoming more and more pervasive. But it's not just about choosing technology to get ahead. Rather it's about choosing the right technology. Otherwise, employers across industries, including accounting, can end up with a bloated tech stack, which can hurt productivity. Organizations looking to upgrade systems and processes should be selective with the technology they choose. They should find technology that can be used with remote employees and users outside of their companies and find tools that integrate with their existing systems.

About ShareFile

The digital-first mentality is rapidly evolving the accounting landscape. Clients are expecting more modern and elevated experiences from organizations that extend beyond just delivering the expected service. In fact, 73% of people in a recent study point to client experience as an important factor in their purchasing decisions.

With this in mind, accounting firms must focus on improving the client experience to retain and attract new clients.

ShareFile for Accounting gives teams new automations and built-in workflows that keep work flowing. Client facing workflows are simplified and accelerated, creating better experiences. Plus, teams can deliver services faster and refocus on higher value tasks. ShareFile does all of this without sacrificing security—client/provider exchanges are protected by features like encryption and security alerts.

To learn more about how to modernize your client experience with ShareFile for Accounting, [visit our site](#).

About the survey

ShareFile, through its PR firm PAN Communications, commissioned Regina Corso Consulting to conduct a survey of accountants to better understand their thoughts on the profession, where it is going and how it is changing, or not.

This survey is among 303 accountants with 152 who work in accounting/tax/audit/bookkeeping firms and 151 who work in-house at corporations/companies.

Demographics

Age: 18–34 (20%); 35–54 (72%); and 55 or older (8%)

Gender: women (25%); men (75%); and prefer not to answer (*)

Title: Manager (40%); Directors (18%); Senior Accountants (26%); and VP or higher (16%)

Size of Company:
10–249 employees (34%);
250–500 employees (19%);
501–1,000 employees (30%);
and over 1,000 employees (17%)

Time in field: 5 years or less (12%); 6–10 years (50%); 11–20 years (25%); and over 20 years (14%)