

OUTSOURCE ACCOUNTING

Growthforce

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MARSHA GIBB
Onboarding Manager

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Core Business

Advanced outsourced bookkeeping and controller services to help drive business performance and profitability

Services

Advanced bookkeeping & accounting, controller services, systems design & optimization, management reporting

Homebase

Houston, TX

Business Launch

2004

Employees

41 Full-time

Technology of Choice

SmartVault, QuickBooks

What a difference a few years make...

An update to Growthforce's move to the cloud and the continued effort to take the work out of workflow

In 2009, Stephen King, CEO of Growthforce shared, in detail, his journey to the cloud and how it allowed him to build his highly successful bookkeeping and controller services enterprise.

In our original interview from 2009, King explained that at the time there were no outsourcing options for bookkeeping and controller tasks. He stated, “No one had the infrastructure in place to handle the work and keep a high degree of service quality, so firms either tackled bookkeeping on their own, or they just didn’t do it.”

King viewed this as an amazing opportunity. With an IT background, he knew that to make bookkeeping a profitable business he had to automate workflow from beginning to end. After two years of research, he built the proper infrastructure and launched Growthforce. Not only did King quickly corner the small business bookkeeping market in Houston, but his firm emerged as a core resource for CPA firms that wanted to farm out bookkeeping work.

He went on to say that in early 2009, with the emergence of SmartVault, he was able to take his firm to a whole new level—moving document management and other operations online and offering tools and best practices to business clients that were once only available through large-scale Fortune 100 companies. Using SmartVault as a document management hub allowed Growthforce clients to easily upload scanned source docs online for processing—eliminating manual delivery and cumbersome faxing. Based in the cloud, the system also offered clients the convenience of 24/7, real-time access to their documents.

Fast forward 7 years...

Today, Growthforce has not only grown its client base substantially, but has also continued to enhance internal systems to operate at peak efficiency.

Marsha Gibb, Onboarding Manager at Growthforce provided insight on how SmartVault has continued to help improve both internal operations and the client experience. “SmartVault has been integral in helping us standardize client services. We were able to create our own unique, uniform filing structure within the system, so now all we have to do is duplicate the file structure for each new client. It makes the onboarding process much easier.”

Built into the file structure are template workpapers. “When we duplicate the folder structure, our workpaper templates are part of it. This supports our standardization efforts, allowing everyone to work the same way,” said Gibb.

From the client’s perspective this all equates to a richer experience. “Using SmartVault we can get a new client set up on the system in a minute or less,” Gibb stated. “And it’s so easy to use that clients pick up on it quickly. It offers them immediate access to their files whenever they need them.”

Within the last few years, the firm implemented SmartVault’s Connected Desktop. “The mapped drive presents as if it were right on our own server, offering a familiar structure for document storage. This serves as a single point of access to files and makes it much easier on staff,” Gibb explained.

Over the seven years since implementation, SmartVault has continued to be at the core of Growthforce’s technology infrastructure—helping to support standardization of processes and bolster efficiency. In the words of Stephen King, “It has helped take the work out of workflow.”

Timeless tips for making the leap to the cloud

Seven years down the road King continues to urge firms to make the move to the cloud in order to properly support today’s online-driven clients. He also still firmly stands behind his original tips and truths to make the transition with ease:

- 1 Pick a point to go paperless and move forward—Many firms think going paperless means that they must go back years and scan in all client documents. King insists that this is not true. In fact, few clients need information that dates back more than a year, and most often clients want real-time data. King encourages firms to make it easy on themselves. When going paperless, start today and move forward from there.
- 2 Create team pods and assign scanning accordingly—Kings recognizes that scanning can be a time consuming task that may put firms off. Part of going paperless, he insists, is proper workflow management. King assigns his employees to team pods—combining bookkeepers, accountants, and administrative staff. Each pod is equipped with a Fujitsu ScanSnap (high-speed desktop scanner), opposed to a single centralized scanning area. Administrative staff scan client documents upon receipt and the workflow moves forward from there. This process is highly efficient and alleviates accounting staff of the task, freeing them for higher billable work.
- 3 Go with SmartVault—King recognizes SmartVault as a “best choice” for online document management. He asserts that for firms ready to go paperless, SmartVault is the obvious choice because it is incredibly intuitive. This means that there is virtually no learning curve for staff and no onsite IT support is required.
- 4 Maintain existing your existing file structure—SmartVault allows firms to preserve existing filing structures. Because SmartVault seamlessly integrates with QuickBooks, files are automatically linked to the client, so creating and learning a new filing structure isn’t necessary. This makes the move to paperless much simpler.
- 5 Don’t put it off because of pre-supposed cost—Pricing is NOT an issue! With SmartVault there is no up front cost. While some desktop-based systems can be costly, SmartVault is free for CPA firms. Firms can test the system to ensure it meets their needs without a large upfront investment.
- 6 Get past the fear of storing data online—The fact is that data is safer online than in the firm’s office. With the advent of the cloud, many firms are concerned about the movement of data out of the office walls and into the “cloud.” Cloud-based systems are backed up monthly and offer highly advanced data encryption. With SmartVault, firms can even burn their own nightly back-up disk.

Growthforce continues to be a leading firm in the areas of outsourced bookkeeping and accounting and controller services. Through adoption of SmartVault and with the determination to take operations to the cloud, Growthforce continues to reap the enormous value of a completely paperless, automated workflow. King reiterated, “Firms just need to go for it. Once they experience working in the cloud, they will wonder why they didn’t do it sooner.”