SmartVault

Intuit ProConnect™ Guide:
Proven Strategies to Maximize Client Collaboration

+ How to *Save 10+ Minutes Per Return* with the ProConnect-SmartVault Integration

Running a CPA firm would be a dream, if it weren't for all the clients, right?

We kid, we kid — of course CPAs and accountants love their clients. There would be no business without them! No reason to get out of bed, no reason to lose inches of hairline at tax time.

But as a software company that primarily serves CPAs, SmartVault speaks to thousands of accounting professionals every year. And we have noticed a common thread — **CPA firms have one of the most uncollaborative client bases** in the professional services space.

Contents

The Problem of an Unengaged Client Base

Nearly every firm has the same burning question — **"How do I get clients to return my calls and emails? Submit forms and documentation in a timely manner?"**

This isn't an inconsequential problem, either. Lack of client engagement can lead to:

- Late document submissions to state and Federal taxing authorities.
- Incomplete forms submitted, resulting in rejection.
- Overtaxing of your already limited staffing resources as you pull all-nighters to make deadlines with last-minute client submissions and change requests.
- Tangible penalties, including monetary fees and penalties that your clients will owe.
- Blame for those consequences diverted to the CPA, rather than the client who waited until the last minute (or *past* the last minute).

Every CPA feels the pinch — unanswered phone calls, unreplied emails, ignored pleas to just attach one missing document or fill out one measly tax preparation survey. The flood of documents at 6pm on April 15, frantic clients expecting you to work miracles, and then complaining and threatening when they face extra fees and penalties due to their own procrastination.

If this sounds like you and your firm, **you're not alone**. This client-engagement crunch is a rite of passage for *every* firm. Even established firms have to deal with the problem of unengaged clients ... but SmartVault has heard the cry and set to work on solutions.

Why Unengaged Client Bases Happen to Good Firms

To solve the problem of an unengaged client base, it's important to understand why the problem arises in the first place.

On the one hand, it's obvious — **no one wants to think about doing their taxes**. Even if they expect a big refund, they would rather spend their time doing almost anything else, up to and including that long-delayed dental appointment.

Not all of this is your fault as the accounting firm, but CPAs need to take ownership of some of the problems. Tax time may not be fun, **but there are things a CPA can do to make it easier on their clients. Have you done everything in your power to absorb some of the complexity yourself** and make the whole process a little less unpleasant for the client? Isn't that what they pay you the big bucks for?

This guide tackles the problem of an unengaged client base head-on — how CPA firms like yours, regardless of size and resources, can foster engagement, cooperation, even collaboration with their client base. The result — happier clients, happier staff, happier life!

Assess Current Client Engagement Levels

Before you can start building a more engaged client base, let's start by assessing how engaged your clients are in the first place.

Survey Your Clients

Start by sending a short survey to all your clients. How many of them even answer the survey may start to give you insight into how responsive of a client base you even have. You may think none of your clients will answer a survey, but they may surprise you! It could be that your team was the more unengaged party, and your clients were just waiting for you to take the initiative!

Send the survey by email, text, or both (text gets more opens and responses) and emphasize that you are trying to find out ways to serve them better. Ask them what's working and what's not working about their services. Find out what pain points they faced in the last tax season. Simply showing that you care, that you want to hear from them, may be enough to goose a sizable portion of your client base into higher levels of engagement.

Survey Your Staff

Don't stop at client feedback — get team feedback too! They will be more responsive (since you sign their paychecks) but they may still have valuable feedback on what's working and what isn't.

Find out what strategies have worked for the team to get clients to engage; what strategies haven't worked. See if someone on the team has a brilliant idea (possibly held over from a previous job) on how to do better.

Update The Tax Season Workflow

Let's continue the process of getting your own house in order. The quest for better client engagement is a perfect time to audit your tax season workflow and see if it's due for an overhaul.

Create a clear, client-friendly process

Do you have a step-by-step process that takes each client from end-of-year (or onboarding) to tax day? And if so, whom does that step-by-step process serve? Yourself and your team? Or the client? Too many professional service providers center themselves and their own convenience in their process — "Here's what I need from *you*, client."

This is the backward approach. Look at each step and think "How can I make this easier on the *client* rather than on me? How can I take on *more* with this step to make client participation a no-brainer for *them*?"

By developing this kind of process, you create fertile ground for increased client engagement. After all, you're creating a process that is easy and productive for them to engage *with*!

Set and communicate deadlines

It can be hard to enforce boundaries. Essentially you are setting terms by which people can do business with you. This means you will end up turning *some* people away.

Nevertheless, setting and communicating deadlines is a boundary worth enforcing. It takes strain off your staff and allows you to serve your clients better, leading to more satisfied clients, a happier staff, more referrals, and *more clients* without the added stress.

Nick Boscia of the firm Boscia & Boscia is a perfect example of this. "We communicated to all our clients that we're implementing an April 1 deadline. If all your documents are in by April 1, that gives the team two weeks to get everyone prepared and filed for April 15," Boscia said, stressing that missing this deadline puts the client automatically on the extension path. "I also pitch that this isn't just to help me – it's beneficial for the client."
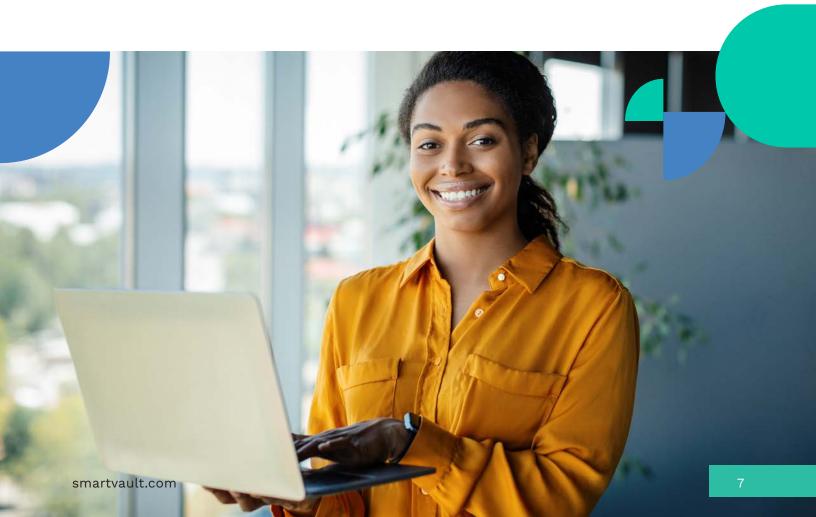
Implement a source development checklist

If you haven't yet, consider creating a standardized list of documents you request from each client. Hand that list over to the client and provide them with resources on *where* to find or request each document, since they may not know where to look or which pile to dig under. Not all of your clients will need to furnish the same documents. Best practice is to leverage software that lets you create customizable templates that clearly indicate which documents are required per client. This lets your clients easily understand, in one place, what is needed from them.

SmartVault makes it easy to request, collect, track, and manage source documents. You create custom checklists per engagement or client type, digitally share it with one client or thousands at a click of a mouse, enabling clients to see what's required and leave comments. As clients upload their documents in the easy-to-use, secure client portal, their documents are automatically saved in the correct folders every time, letting you say goodbye to manual organization and misfiling errors. This modern workflow also *reduces phone time by up to 75%,* making it easier for clients to get the documents you need, with less busywork for you or your staff.

Leveraging Technology to Boost Engagement

Technology is your best friend when it comes to increasing client engagement. Dozens of tools can help improve collaboration without adding to your workload — perhaps even subtracting from it! Before you get overwhelmed by the bevy of choices, here are a few of the most important functions you can implement to improve client cooperation (all of them offered by SmartVault!)

Client Portal

A one-stop shop clients can access 24/7, at their leisure, to interact with numerous functions of your firm.

Learn More >

Document Management System

Allows clients, and the team to access documents uploaded by the client.

Learn More >

Enterprise-Grade Encryption

Nothing less will do for your client's personal files.

Learn More >

File-Locking and Version Control

Ensures that only one person can work on any given document at the time, as well as making sure everyone always works on the most current version.

Learn More >

Automated Workflows

Automate the creation of engagement letters, requests, and folder structures, reducing the need for personnel time expenditure, as well as the likelihood of human error.

Learn More >

Templatized Onboarding

A standardized digital onboarding that automates the process of acclimating your new client to the portal, training them how to be a proactive partner in their own accounting and tax preparation.

Learn More >

Educating and Empowering Clients

We tend to avoid what we don't understand. Most people are overwhelmed by tax time, and can you blame them? If you want your clients avoiding you, by all means leave them in the dark about the tax preparation process, maintaining an air of mystery.

But if the goal is to engage clients who submit documents on time, the much better course of action is to have the most educated client base possible. Make the process easy for a layperson to understand. Ask yourself of every piece of client-facing material — could a sixth-grader understand this? Make sure your clients can understand as many parts of the process as possible — it will turn them into warriors on behalf of their own finances. And warriors are engaged.

Empowerment is just as important as education. Your secure client portal can be a powerful tool in this regard. Make sure your clients can access their own documents and monitor the process of their own tax preparation 24/7. Give them guides to help them help themselves through their role at tax time.

Managing Difficult Clients

If you establish good communication practices early and position yourself correctly, you will hopefully have few problem clients to deal with. However, unresponsive or uncooperative clients happen to the best of us. Here are some strategies to deal with problem clients when they arise.

Strategies for Following Up with Unresponsive Clients

- **Use automated reminders** by email, text, or whatever channel of communication you have so you don't burn too much personnel time following up with a brick wall.

- **Set escalation protocols** to initiate more formal follow ups if the automated reminders produce no response.

- One of the best ways you can stoke client cooperation is by **incentivizing early responders**. Come up with some sort of discount or reward for proactive and timely clients. Clients will feel twice as good about helping you to do your job — not only do they get a prize, they also get the satisfaction of having it over and done with.

Handling Last-Minute Rushes Effectively

- **Plan for emergencies** by building buffer time into your staff schedules to accommodate last-minute rushes.

- **Triage workloads** so urgent tasks can receive priority, even if they arrive late.

- **Automate as many processes** as possible to quickly complete repetitive tasks.

- **Have trusted outsourcers on call** in case you need to divert overflow work. Build this rolodex *before* the next rush if at all possible.

When and How to Set Boundaries

- **Identify problems** early and respond proactively and collaboratively to solve them. Adopt a "can-do" attitude — "How can we fix this?

- **Communicate and enforce boundaries**, including communication protocols, online portal usage, and deadlines.

- **Walk away if necessary.** If a client relationship is more trouble than it's worth, don't hesitate to cut ties. Remember the 80/20 rule — 20% of your clients are probably responsible for 80% of your problems. Think of the outsized relief of being rid of that problem.

- **Protect your team.** Make sure your team is insulated from the problem client as much as possible. Remember, you depend on your team to serve all your clients, not just this one.

Building a Client-Centric Team Culture

It's not enough for client engagement to be important to *you* — it has to be a value that redounds through your entire team. After all, your team will probably handle many of the nuts and bolts of client collaboration.

Hold specific team training on the importance of a client-centric culture to foster client cooperation. Consider establishing an award or incentive system for excellent customer service.

Make sure your processes and messages are consistent. Discuss consistent greetings, active listening techniques, and response structures. No matter which team member your client is talking to, he should feel like he's interacting with the same team — the same brand.

Measuring Success and Continuous Improvement

You can't improve what you don't measure. If you want more collaborative clients, start tracking your results and look for areas of continuous improvement to apply to next tax season.

Key metrics related to client engagement to track during tax season include:

- Client response rate
- Client response speed
- Timing of document submission

- Revenue per client
- Staff productivity
- Client satisfaction scores

At the end of each tax season, use the breathing room to conduct internal reviews of these metrics. Celebrate your strengths, and brainstorm avenues of improvement for any weaknesses. Even consider how you might improve on areas where you are already doing well.

Interview your team and see how they think you did; where there is room for improvement. Survey your clients for constructive feedback as well. Check client retention and missed opportunities for upsells.

Take the lesson from these internal and external reviews and come up with a plan of action for the next tax season. Consider adding client education, automation, technology, and better client segmentation into the process. Most of all, set clear goals for the next tax season and make sure each item of your action plan is in service of those goals.

SmartVault: The Only DMS Directly Integrated with ProConnect Tax

Before we dive into how SmartVault helps ProConnect Tax users with their entire workflow, let's finish what we started: Will your firm be the one that develops a foolproof system for making clients excited to interact with their CPA at tax time? If so, write it in a book — every CPA on earth will buy it, and you can retire!

Until then, getting clients more engaged at tax time will be a constant process of improvement, trial and error, devising big initiatives to move the needle small distances. Bending over backwards to remove even the tiniest bit of friction that may be holding a client back from simply submitting a simple document so you have one less headache.

Fortunately, you don't have to go at it alone. SmartVault is your dedicated partner in what often seems like an uphill hike. SmartVault offers a host of features designed specifically to increase client engagement, including but not limited to:

Secure client portal	**Secure document management system**	**Client notifications and reminders**
Automated backend workflows for your team	**Document lock and version history to prevent errors**	

Your Entire Tax Prep Workflow: Powered by Automation

SmartVault has established itself as **the first and only document management system fully integrated with Intuit's ecosystem**. This decade-long partnership extends across ProConnect, Lacerte, and ProSeries, reflecting Intuit's confidence in SmartVault's ability to deliver secure, high-value document management solutions for tax professionals.

So, what does this mean for your firm? You will save hours per return while keeping your documents organized, secure, and accessible.

Strategic Integration. Exceptional Results.

Save hours per return while keeping your documents organized, secure, and accessible.

▸ **Automate Setup:** Eliminate manual entry with automatic client, folder, and permission creation.

▸ **Smart Routing:** Documents automatically filed in correct folders, saving time and reducing errors.

▸ **Efficient Tracking:** Monitor tax returns, organizers, and client interactions via intuitive dashboard.

▸ **Unlimited Growth:** Scale your practice with unlimited document storage and client users.

▸ **Centralized Management:** Access all documents securely from any device.

▸ **Enhanced Security:** SOC 2 Type 2 compliant with encryption, MFA, and granular controls.

▸ **Client-Friendly:** Modern, branded portal for secure sharing, e-signatures, and payments.

A Deep-Dive Into the Integrated Workflow

SmartVault

This infographic illustrates the seamless process from client onboarding to archiving returns. ⌄

Adding Clients from Intuit to SmartVault

Firm — Creates client in Intuit and prints Organizer to SmartVault

→

SmartVault Automation — Creates the client, user, permissions, and engagement folders in SmartVault

ENGAGE
Automate Client Onboarding and Engagement

Firm — Build quote and engagement letter and send to client via a link in text, email, or webpage

→

Client — Review, approve, and eSign

→

SmartVault Automation — Signed document is automatically saved to the correct folder and firm is notified

COLLECT
Simplify Document Requests and Tracking

Firm — Create any fillable document and send to client via a link in text, email, or webpage

→

Client — Complete and sign, 100% online from anywhere

→

SmartVault Automation — Signed document is automatically saved to the correct folder and firm is notified

→

Firm — Create document request list and send to client

→

Client — Upload requested source documents

→

SmartVault Automation — Submitted documents are saved to the correct folder and firm is notified

Track progress and send reminders in a robust dashboard

PREP & DELIVER
Tax Prep and Secure Return Review & Delivery

Firm — Complete tax return in Intuit and print the return to SmartVault

→

SmartVault Automation — Auto-routes return to the correct client's folder

→

Firm — Send tax return to the client(s); request approval, eSignature, and payment

BONUS FEATURE: Send returns individually per client or in bulk!

→

Client — Review, eSign (completing KBA), and pay invoice from anywhere and on any device

→

SmartVault Automation — Signed document is automatically saved to the correct folder and firm is notified

Track & manage returns, organizers and more; see progress (printed, sent to client, filed, etc.)

ARCHIVE
Stay Audit-Ready and Compliant

Secure, accessible, and compliant cloud storage — For every stage, forever unlimited

- Built-in compliance, verstion control, and audit tracking
- Retain tax documents securely for required retention periods
- SOC 2 Type 2 compliant for rigorous data protection
- IRS 4557 & FTC Safeguards Rule compliance for tax firms
- Advanced search & retrieval for archived documents
- Audit logs & role-based access permissions

Security You Can Trust: We're Soc 2 Type 2 Compliant

SmartVault employs advanced security measures to ensure the safety of data during transit and storage:

Encryption: Files are encrypted both in transit and at rest.

Access controls: You can set granular permissions to control who can access, view, edit, or download specific files or folders.

Audit trails: Automatically maintain audit logs of file access and activity, making monitoring and supporting compliance effortless.

Compliance: Meet the rigorous security standards of IRS Publication 4557 and the FTC Safeguards with a secure DMS for all your documents.

SOC 2
ASSURANCE

Learn more and schedule a demo:
smartvault.com/proconnect

Tailored Services for Intuit Firms

With over 15 years of experience, we understand your unique needs, challenges, and workflows. This lets us offer services and support that truly make a difference:

Migration: Our migration services are based on best practices from moving over 5,000 Intuit firms to SmartVault.

Onboarding + Training: Get up to speed quickly with custom onboarding, flexible training options, and SmartVault Academy.

Support: Get help through our extensive Help Center, dedicated Customer Success Managers, and U.S.-Based Customer Care team.

SmartVault is a document management and client portal platform built for accounting professionals.

15 years+
in Business

18,000+
Intuit Users

3 Million+
Global Users

97%
Retention

500 Million+
Docs Stored

Soc 2 Type 2
Compliant

SmartVault

Visit us at
smartvault.com/ProConnect