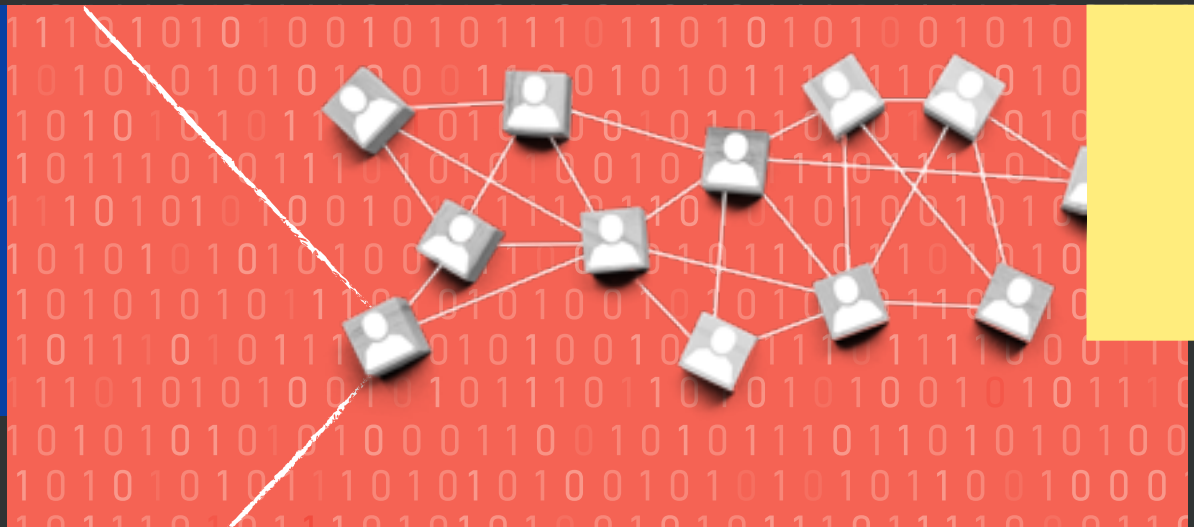




4 Ways Practice Intelligence can Benefit Your Accounting Firm



Introduction

Progressive accounting practices are always seeking a competitive edge. Often, the key factor in getting that advantage is intelligence: about your practice, your clients and your industry. When you have these kinds of rich insights and your competitors don't — such as industry-specific benchmarks and revenue growth opportunities — you are well-positioned for success. Intelligence is the magic ingredient that can help you make more efficient use of your resources and win new business.

Traditionally, it has been difficult to realize the true value of all the data your practice collects.

Today, however, a concept known as practice intelligence is allowing accountants to gain insights with just a click of a mouse. They can now improve their decision-making process by accessing a vast data pool they haven't been using to its full potential: the information locked away in their current and historic engagement files.

Practice intelligence tools built specifically to extract that data can comb through thousands of records to analyze business performance, discover new growth opportunities, and drive unprecedented levels of efficiency.

This eBook will examine how you can use this data to uncover key insights about your practice through advanced analytics and data visualizations, helping you discover a host of previously unknown benefits. We will examine those payoffs and provide advice on how you can quickly get on the road to realizing them.



Drive growth with complete data

Many accounting practices still rely on Excel to examine data and generate insights. But in today's constantly changing business environment, Excel isn't a sufficient data analysis solution. Datasets in Excel are often incomplete. They can offer a snapshot into a particular point in time, or into one specific engagement, but they don't always give you a complete picture based on all available data.

Another drawback with Excel-based data is that it is often compiled weeks or months after transactions and events have occurred. It doesn't generate a real-time perspective based on the most recent information.

Accounting practices seeking to gain a competitive edge are deploying practice intelligence solutions that look at all their engagement data in real time. Particularly popular are analytics systems that rely on centralized, cloud-based data warehouses that integrate seamlessly with existing engagement software. They offer a complete, up-to-the-minute picture of business performance and identify potential growth opportunities. Accountants who have used engagement software in the past can use practice intelligence solutions to quickly sift through mountains of historical data to uncover unexpected trends and opportunities.

Another big benefit of practice intelligence tools is their ability to visualize data in engaging ways. You don't need to spend additional time building out graphs, tables and charts. Advanced analytics software includes the ability to easily select the data fields you want to analyze and display the information graphically in a single click. This makes it simple to track key performance indicators (KPIs), flag risks and highlight trends for business improvement internally, or for a client.



Deliver informed advice to clients

Many accounting offices, be they private firms or departments within an organization, are looking to increase the amount of advisory services they offer their customers or the C-suite and board members they ultimately answer to.

For accounting firms, offering advisory services can set them apart from the competition and boost client trust and loyalty. They don't need to compete on price alone. They can promote their ability to offer accurate and timely insights that boost business performance. And the demand is clearly there: a recent study found consulting and advisory services are the greatest unmet need for accounting clients, with 29 percent saying they require the service.¹

For internal accounting teams, offering strategic advice allows them to flag potential risks and opportunities to senior management. This can give them a role in shaping strategic organizational decisions and raise the profile of their department.

However, the ability to offer sound advice that can truly make a difference is contingent on the information you are able to gather. This is where practice intelligence software comes in.

These solutions can spot trends and help you predict future performance on a wide range of metrics, such as expenses, revenue, liabilities and assets. Advanced analytics give you the data and visualization tools you need to clearly present findings to your intended audiences — and to wow them with unparalleled analytical depth. This process shines a light on potential pitfalls and ultimately makes decision-making that much easier for your clients and executives.

Analytics solutions use a combination of historical and real-time data to process transactions and other information much more efficiently than spreadsheets. They allow you to act as a true strategic advisor by spotting trends, risks and potential opportunities, giving you an intimate knowledge of your clients' businesses.

For example, you can comb through your engagement data to build out benchmarks for a specific industry and track how a client is performing against those benchmarks. If the client is trailing its competitors in a particular area, such as expenses or revenue per customer, you can drill down deeper to find the reasons why and propose a solution.



Boost efficiency with engagement information

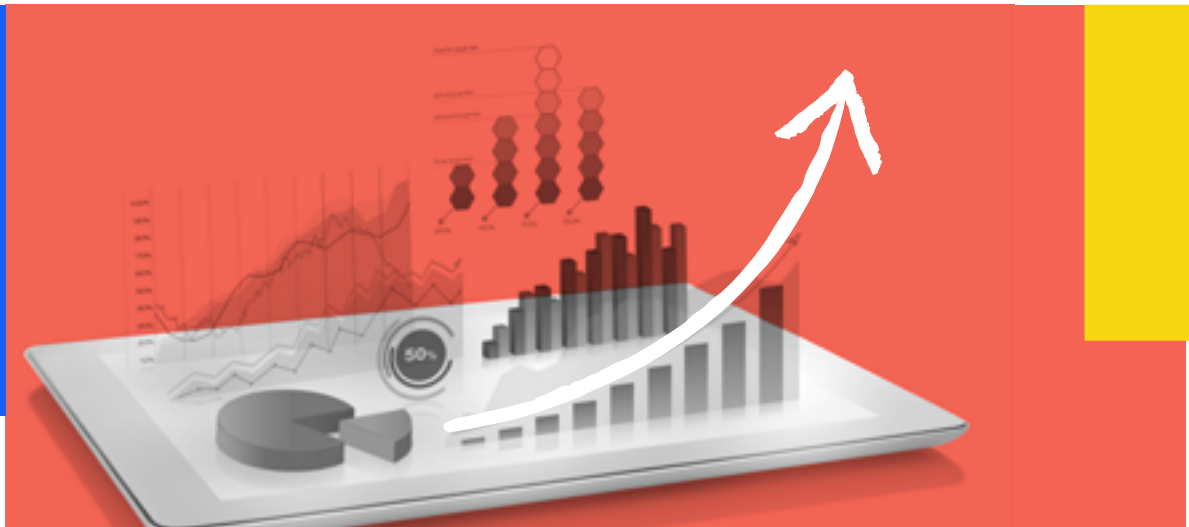
Practice intelligence is also useful for improving the efficiency of your accounting practice. Many practices currently use spreadsheets or manual reports to track the progress of engagements and documents, which is inefficient and doesn't always offer an up-to-date picture.

An analytics solution can give you all that information at a glance in real time, allowing you to be more productive. You can closely track engagements by looking into the status of deliverables in seconds, to see whether documents have been reviewed and by whom. This reduces the time you have to spend following up on engagements and frees up your time to work on more strategic matters.

Analytics tools can mine data and analyze it in near-real-time, reducing errors. And visualization tools embedded in analytics packages make it easy to see how your practice is performing, where hours are being spent, and if there are potential risks.

Practice intelligence gives you an edge when it comes to ensuring the quality of your work meets accepted regulatory requirements. It can actively monitor engagement quality by ensuring work corresponds to quality management standards, such as the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board's (IAASB) upcoming ISQM 1 standard on engagements. The solution can help you detect issues, such as inconsistent mapping or a failure to lock down the engagement, so you can resolve them quickly.

Practice intelligence can also suggest opportunities for internal process improvements. This boosts overall engagement quality and client trust, ultimately helping to increase client retention rates.



See engagement activity as it happens

Many accountants still rely on spreadsheets and manual reports to track and assess their engagements. In today's fast-paced, digital-first business environment, this puts them at a competitive disadvantage.

Adopting real-time analytics gives you a comprehensive view of your engagements, one with more depth and detail than has ever been available before. This allows you to offer insightful advice based on your clients' engagement data, differentiating your accounting practice from competitors and boosting client loyalty. Analytics software also enables unprecedented practice management efficiency, reducing manual effort, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring engagements stay on track.

A path to practice-wide insights

[Caseware Sherlock](#) is a specialized practice intelligence solution built for forward-looking accounting practices that want to be more efficient, competitive and profitable. It is a powerful, cloud-based platform that delivers automated, centralized data warehousing for all historic and ongoing Caseware engagements. With its advanced analytics and data visualizations capabilities, Sherlock represents an exciting new way for you to extract previously hidden data and use it to make faster, more informed decisions.

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