

Selecting a Professional Accountant



CERTIFIED
GENERAL
ACCOUNTANTS

We see more than numbers.

"The accountant you choose should become an important adviser and a valuable resource."



It's time to look for a professional accountant. Maybe you're an individual whose financial assets have grown too complex to handle on your own. Maybe you're the owner of a business where record keeping and payroll chores require too much time and attention. Or maybe your growing business is not taking advantage of every available tax deduction.

Needs arise at different stages in the lives of individuals and businesses — tax preparation, an unexpected windfall, the planning of a new business venture, the preparation of financial statements or even when it's time to change accountants. But how do you ensure that you select the right accountant to meet your needs?

Business requirements may differ but the criteria and selection of a professional accountant is universal. From large corporations to small businesses, government to not-for-profits, individuals to partnerships, the expertise of the accountant you choose should lead to productivity, efficiency, sustainability, savings and growth.

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CHOOSING A PROFESSIONAL

The term "accountant" is unregulated in the province of Ontario. Anyone can call him or herself an accountant, even with no formal training or experience. To ensure that your accountant is fully trained for the financial tasks and projects ahead, engage a professionally designated accountant.

Designated accountants have solid training and relevant experience. If problems are encountered during the course of a business relationship with a professional accountant, there is recourse. Professional accounting associations typically offer mediation services or have a disciplinary process for irregularities and infractions.

ESTABLISHING YOUR NEEDS

Assess your knowledge and identify your needs before engaging the services of a professional accountant. Take the following steps to save yourself both time and money.

Assess your level of accounting knowledge. If you have a limited knowledge of accounting, choose an accountant who can explain basic concepts in easily understood language.

Define your immediate timeframes. For example, if the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) is demanding your tax return, your timeframe will be less flexible than if you are starting a new business.

Determine how accessible your accountant needs to be. Will you travel to your accountant's office? Do you require your accountant to report to you personally? Remember: though it may be convenient for your accountant to come to your office, the billable time will likely increase accordingly.

Identify your accounting needs. What functions will you require of your accountant? Will you require accounting services such as the preparation, compilation, review or audit of financial statements? The preparation of income tax returns? Cash flow projections? Tax and financial planning? Will you require your accountant to meet with bankers, lawyers or the CRA?

Organize your financial papers. Doing your own organization and preparation will reduce the time (and billable hours) that an accountant spends on simple tasks. Organizing your financial papers may also help you to assess your knowledge and identify your needs.

PREPARING TO INTERVIEW A PROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTANT

The interview process is an important stage in selecting a professional accountant. The questions you ask will go a long way towards developing a solid relationship based on mutual trust.

Does the accountant have prior work experience with your type of business? Does the accountant make comments and suggestions that indicate an understanding of your business? Will the accountant provide the names of clients in a similar or related line of business? If so, verify with those clients as to whether the accountant is accessible, meets deadlines and completes work within the cost estimate.

Who will do the routine work, the accountant or other staff? Whether your accountant will be personally responsible for routine work may depend on your business needs, the size of the accountant's firm, and the nature and number of the accountant's clientele.

Is the accountant open to the idea of using other experts? An accountant dealing with smaller, privately-owned companies should be willing to seek outside advice if or when specialized business affairs warrant such action.

What is the accountant's standard billing procedure? An hourly fee is the norm when engaging a professional accountant. Once the nature and requirements of your business are detailed, can the accountant provide an estimate?

How was the personal "fit"? At the end of the interview, ask yourself how comfortable you felt. You want an accountant with whom you can speak freely. Someone who hears what you say. Someone who can explain their advice clearly. Compatibility is essential when selecting a professional accountant.



SELECTING A PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANT

Consider a certified general accountant (CGA) for your accounting and finance needs. Trained to offer professional accounting insight and services that go beyond tax and audit, CGAs adhere to a code of ethical principles and participate in mandatory continuing professional development to ensure that high professional standards are maintained.

CGAs in professional practice carry professional liability insurance and are subject to an inspection of their practice on a regular basis. The Certified General Accountants of Ontario can offer you assistance in engaging a CGA through its free accountant referral service.

Choose a professional accountant that sees more than numbers. Choose a CGA.



For more information about the Certified General Accountants of Ontario and its resources, visit cga-ontario.org or call 1-800-668-1454.

Certified General Accountants of Ontario

240 Eglinton Avenue East
Toronto, ON M4P 1K8
416-322-6520 or
1-800-668-1454
Email: info@cga-ontario.org
cga-ontario.org
cga-yourcareer.org