

Lessons Learned from the Bill.com Accounting Community

Moving to a Cloud-Based Practice

One success story from Cindy Henderson Magner, Founder, BBK

Tell us about your firm and what makes you unique.

My firm, BBK|beyond bookkeeping, positions itself as “new school bookkeepers.” We focus on a strategic approach: identifying issues, providing guidance and helping our clients apply their financial information effectively. In order to accomplish this, we have to deliver bookkeeping solutions that save our clients time and money while also creating peace of mind. The cloud plays a big role in this process.

But that wasn't always the case.

In March 2015 after my maternity leave, I sat down with the firm's director of operations to discuss the state of the business. We discovered that in order to create more efficiency and profitability, our firm needed to reevaluate the types of clients we worked with and we needed to move them to cloud-based solutions. We had grown slightly complacent as a firm, which meant in some cases we were working with the solutions, processes and preferences dictated by our clients. Was it profitable for representatives of our firm to receive paper checks in the mail at our office and deposit them at the bank? Did it make sense for us to print and mail paper reports because a client refused to review them electronically?

It became clear that, in order for us to move into our new school bookkeeping position, we needed to lead the way for our clients and show them the tools and processes they require to succeed.

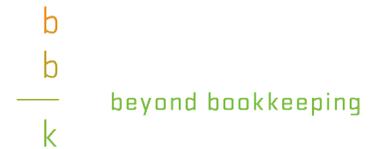
Here are five ways we converted our clients to the cloud:

1. Sell from the Inside Out

The most precious commodity during this transition was the firm's bookkeepers. If they were excited and supportive about cloud-based solutions, they would serve as technology ambassadors for our clients. We were using some cloud-based solutions. For example, we had a strong adoption rate for Bill.com. However, we knew we needed to expand.

We held a summit of all 13 bookkeepers in March, where we showcased cloud-based solutions and emphasized that the movement to the cloud was happening quickly for the firm. They needed to adopt now or get left behind.

Turns out, it wasn't hard to sell them on the cloud. The bookkeepers saw immediately that the cloud made sense. They were chomping at the bit to move forward.



Visit [Bill.com](https://www.bill.com) for more information.

As a follow-up, we asked the bookkeepers which clients would convert quickly and which might not. This helped us plan a tiered rollout.

2. Plan and Prepare the Clients

We identified three types of clients:

The first segment consisted of those who would move to the cloud easily. If a client had, for example, asked about what solutions we recommend or if they preferred to work from mobile devices, then we knew they were ideal targets.

The second segment consisted of everyone with access to bookkeeping through a desktop solution. There would be a bit of work required to convert them, but it wouldn't be overwhelming.

The last batch consisted of the clients who would require a greater effort, such as those who relied on the desktop version of QuickBooks Point of Sale that didn't integrate with QuickBooks Online. We also had several tech startups that created spreadsheet templates to import into QuickBooks Desktop. This would be the last group we'd target.

After identifying the targets, we set up a communications plan to introduce and navigate the process. This multi-touch program consisted of calls from me to introduce the firm's new vision and the cloud. Then we shared plans with the clients to outline the steps involved. We also provided toolkits for bookkeepers such as pre-written emails that explained critical components of the process.

3. Staff Appropriately

To successfully move our clients to the cloud, we knew we would need to supplement our staff. We hired an onboarding specialist who handles the actual conversion process. He accelerated the process significantly.

Prior to conversions, he reviews the databases and creates online subscriptions. After the conversion, he pulls reports and compares them to the desktop reports, checks on apps and then notifies the bookkeeper when everything is ready to go.

4. Redefine Your New Client Profile

We also had to redefine what type of new client the firm wanted to work with. We didn't want to be the firm that would work with just any business. That would ultimately impair the inroads we had already made toward instituting cloud-based operations.

If a business wants to work with us, we tell them that they have to work with cloud-based solutions. There is no compromise on that front. We explain the benefits, recommend solutions, convert them, train them and provide support on all fronts.

If they refuse the cloud or perhaps cling a bit too tightly to their paper-based operations, that's a tipoff that they might not be the right fit for BBK. We refer



Visit [Bill.com](https://www.bill.com) for more information.

them to another firm.

5. Don't Be Afraid to Fire Clients

While a majority of our clients joined us in the cloud, we did have some difficult conversations with existing clients who didn't want to make the move.

If the client didn't want to change, we made the decision to walk away. We had a thorough process: Send a notice, have a conversation regarding the direction the firm was moving in and then arrange to efficiently off-board them with referrals to other bookkeepers.

We took a hit—about 10 percent of our yearly revenue—but with the new model we are quickly rebuilding and replacing that revenue.

Results

To date, the firm has had great success by moving to the cloud. We have converted roughly half of our client base, with plans to convert the remainder in the next three months. Our goal is to be 100 percent in the cloud by the end of the year.

Funny enough, some of the clients we thought we'd lose were the ones who surprised us. One client whose retail business operated on a desktop point of sale system happily agreed to make the change to a cloud-based point of sale system. We didn't think he'd be willing to make such a significant shift. Now that he's made that switch, he's even more interested in cloud-based solutions, and we have plans to accelerate his adoption.

Sometimes there are options to ease anxiety. For example, if a client hesitates to move data 100 percent to the cloud, I offer solutions such as ordering a monthly CD of images from Bill.com that serves as a tangible backup. That extra layer of security, although not necessary, can help to convince them.

For the most part, our clients are happy to have things made easier with the cloud. For BBK | beyond bookkeeping, the cloud helps us cement our position as trusted advisors while reaping benefits such as profitable and efficient operations.

