

Intuit Online Payroll for Accounting Professionals

An Introductory Marketing Guide to Building a Client Payroll Business

You may be using Intuit Online Payroll for Accounting Professionals only for your firm's payroll. Or, you may have one or two clients on the service. You've seen for yourself: Intuit Online Payroll for Accounting Professionals *is fast and easy*. You *can* complete client payroll work in just a few minutes. If you need assistance, payroll experts *are* available to back you up. Best of all, the service *really* is a great value, providing the payroll features you need at a very affordable cost. The time has come. You're ready to grow your payroll business.

So now, you may be asking yourself: "How can I acquire even more payroll clients?"

This guide has been designed to give you guidelines, tips and suggestions to answer that question. It incorporates the successes and failures of other accounting professionals like you, and the experience of the Intuit marketing team. We have years of small business marketing experience, and are happy to share it with you.

The most important thing to remember is that marketing is more than a one-time project. It is an on-going commitment. You should always be consciously marketing your services. Marketing is about trying and evaluating different approaches and techniques. It never stops. Test a new program. Assess how it worked. Continue if it is successful. Improve whenever you can. Try something different if things aren't working. Never stop. In marketing, you will want to relentlessly try, try, and try again.

Choose a Unique Tagline—and Stand Behind It

Choose one to three key benefits you want to uniquely emphasize when you promote your payroll services. In marketing speak, this is called *positioning*. It means that compared to any other competitive offering, your clients can count on you to deliver the benefits you promise. This also means you will go above and beyond the call of duty to provide these highlighted client benefit(s).

Based on our research, some attributes business owners find important are:

- Top-notch service
- Accuracy
- Time savings
- Affordability
- Reliability
- Convenience
- Professionalism
- Completeness: "All business finances managed in one place"
- Bilingual staff

Likewise, specializing in a particular business type or industry may also help you acquire more clients. Some options to consider are restaurants, professional services, construction, medical or dental, etc.

Use the benefits you want to emphasize and/or a business type specialty in a tagline. Remember to choose only one to three key benefits. If you pick more, your message will be too long and difficult to remember.

Here are more than a dozen examples to get your own creative juices flowing:

	Highlighted Benefit(s)	Sample Tagline
1.	Top-notch service, accuracy	You can count on <Your Firm Name> payroll: we always get it right
2.	Top-notch service	<Your Firm Name>, guaranteed to please
3.	Top-notch service, reliability	<Your Firm Name>, delivering top-notch accounting services since <year>
4.	Accuracy, reliability and industry type	<Your Firm Name>, specializing in accurate and reliable payroll services for medical and dental offices
5.	Accuracy	At <Your Firm Name>, we prove our worth by eliminating your worries
6.	Accuracy	<Your Firm Name> means no payroll problems!
7.	Time-savings	<Your Firm Name> delivers time-saving payroll services
8.	Affordability	<Your Firm Name> for honest savings on payroll services
9.	Affordability	Get more for your money with <Your Firm Name> payroll services
10.	Reliability	Choose <Your Firm Name> for dependable, trouble-free payroll services
11.	Convenience	Choose <Your Firm Name> when you need anywhere, anytime, anyplace payroll
12.	Professionalism	At <Your Firm Name>, we're famous for our professional payroll services
13.	Completeness	<Your Firm Name> is your one stop shop for superb business services
14.	Bilingual	<Your Firm Name> for dependable, trouble-free payroll services-- Hablamos español

Remember that your tagline should be unique to your business. It's what makes you stand out from competition. That also means you shouldn't choose a tagline that is similar to another company (especially in the payroll or accounting services field).

Whenever you can, be sure always to include your company name, tagline, logo and contact information (address, phone and fax number, email address and Web URL). This includes letterhead; your capability brochures (including the one we provide you); business cards; signage; and imprinted give-aways.

Introductory Offers

When you're starting a payroll business, it can be essential to provide a compelling offer to acquire your first clients. Even if you have an existing client base, a good offer makes your message stand out, and it provides an added incentive for the client to switch services. Highlight your special offers in all your payroll promotions.

We have tested many offers. Based on our experience of what works and what doesn't, here are some offers you may want to try:

- One month free trial
- Introductory discounts
- Sign up for payroll services and get some other service (such as 1099 filings) free

- Free direct deposit, W-2's, and electronic federal tax payments and filings (include state if available)
- Free setup
- Free evaluation or price comparison quote

Getting Your Message Out

The next sections deal with one of the most challenging aspects of marketing payroll: getting your message out to your target clients. We've included a lot of suggestions. Most of these ideas come from our existing accounting professional customers. (We conducted an in-depth survey to find out how they have built their payroll business.) Other advice comes from our marketing team.

While some of these ideas seem obvious, we've included them because they are usually the things that work best. Other options are more creative. Hopefully, all of these suggestions will spark some fresh ideas of your own.

Let Your Current Clients Know You Offer Payroll

Make sure all your current clients know you offer payroll services. Although this may seem evident, sometimes accounting professionals are so focused on gaining new clients, they forget about the ones they have! You should make it a practice to promote all your services to your existing clients once or twice a year.

- Print the customized brochure we have for you and insert it in any on-going client paper correspondence.
- Do a separate mailing, announcing new payroll services. Make sure you include a letter and a call to action such as "call now for a free assessment of cost savings on payroll services;" or "call now to take advantage of a free set up offer."
- Send clients an email and attach the customized brochure we've prepared for you in your payroll account.
- When you schedule a review of overall client services, offer payroll during the meeting.
- Call clients to let them know you've recently added payroll services. Tell the client you want to make sure he/she knows about your new offering, and you also wanted to check in on how things are going, in general.

Get Referrals from Current Customers

This is the **#1** way accounting professionals grow their payroll business. Word-of-mouth is the most tried and true way to add clients.

Listed below are numerous ideas on how to encourage referrals. No matter what, the most important thing you can do to encourage word-of-mouth is to provide excellent service to your existing customers. Always exceed their expectations.

Here are some other ways to generate referrals:

- Put a small, pre-printed or handwritten note with a few extra business cards in the prepared paychecks, forms or reports you deliver to clients. The note should say something like: "Here is a reminder that <Your Firm Name> always appreciates referrals."
- Print "Referrals are always appreciated" on all client correspondence such as appointment reminders, etc.
- Have professional placards or signage made for inside your office. Make sure they are placed in locations easily visible to clients. The signs should say something like:
- Please remember to tell your friends about <Your Firm Name>
- Referrals are always appreciated
- Referrals are welcome

- Have packs of imprinted give-aways such as post-it notes, calendars, pencil holders, calculators, letter openers, etc. customized with your firm name, contact information and the reminder “Referrals are always appreciated.” Hand these out to existing clients.

Work Your Neighborhood

It could be that new payroll clients can be found right next door. Literally. Be sure to let the businesses in your office complex and neighborhood know you offer payroll services. They undoubtedly would welcome a nearby service provider, and they in turn may offer products or services that could be of use for your firm. Here are a few ways to work your neighborhood:

- Stop by and introduce yourself to each business. Be sure to bring a lot your business cards, payroll brochures, and imprinted give-aways. Let your neighbors know you’re just taking a few minutes to meet everyone in the area and to check in on any payroll or other service needs you may provide. You may want to provide a special offer just for those businesses in your geographic area.
- Host an open house. This is a warm and friendly way for you to get to know local businesses—and for other businesses to get to know you.
- If you don’t have time for door-to-door greetings, drop a letter with your brochure in the mail. Be sure to emphasize that you are located right in the area. A special offer would work well here also.

Let Your Sign Sell For You

Don’t underestimate the selling power of good signage. Remember the old business success adage: location, location, location? The second part to that principle is: good signage, good signage, good signage.

Make sure your business signage includes your tagline—in large, legible type. At the very least, your sign should include the words “payroll services.” Professional company signage often only displays the firm name. This is practically useless if the firm name is comprised of your last name, or a string of partner names. No one will know what you do.

The other common guideline is to make sure your signage is extremely readable. Choose simple fonts and bright, colors that contrast with your building paint, background or environment. Your sign should be easy to read from a good distance—say a half-block away or more.

If you’re in a location that doesn’t offer visible signage, try putting low cost “sandwich boards” or temporary signs on easels near a busy foot traffic area. With these options, you will still want to include your firm name, tagline and contact info. Also make sure it is easy to read the type at a distance.

Use Community Involvement to Build Your Business

A secret of many successful professional service firms is that the principals are often great at networking. This means they consciously spend a percentage of their time actively involved in local business organizations like the chamber of commerce; community-oriented clubs such as Lions, Kiwanis and Optimists; and other special interest groups such as youth sports, local schools, churches, and other organizations.

If you’re not actively involved in any of these gatherings, you’re missing out on a lot. First and foremost, all these groups embrace a worthwhile “mission.” On the business side, your active participation will lead to very visible as well as low key introductions to other professionals and business owners.

For the business-oriented organizations, you will have opportunities to directly promote your services in member directories, chamber Web sites, newsletters, and special events. You can meet other like-minded business leaders by actively participating in chamber-sponsored forums, discussions, meetings and social gatherings. These events always lead to small talk, and the most common question is, “So, what

kind of business are you in?" You can answer describing your payroll services, and mentioning the unique benefits your company delivers.

Although the community and social-oriented groups don't offer as many avenues for direct promotion, opportunities still exist. You can sponsor events or printed materials. Make sure your business name, tagline, and contact information are included. Don't be shy about carrying your business cards. You never know when you'll meet a business owner who's actively searching for a new payroll solution.

Personal Networks Also Work

Although they take time to build, personal networks are also an important source of new clients. Go out of your way to meet with local, community bankers. Introduce yourself to attorneys specializing in small business practices. Other accounting professionals, commercial real estate agents and financial advisors all have regular contact with small businesses. In these situations, make sure members of your personal network have a good stock of your business cards (and perhaps your firm brochures.)

The success of these networks depends on mutuality. Make sure you are also actively recommending the services of others. If you send a client their way, they are more likely to send a new client to you.

These personal network referrals are also a time to use special offers. Someone in your network will feel good knowing he/she was responsible for the client getting a better deal than anyone else.

Advertising

Advertising can be risky since it is often expensive. Local vehicles such as community newspapers or yellow page ads have the best track record. In general, here are some basic principles to help you evaluate whether or not an advertising opportunity is worthwhile:

- Estimate the likelihood of breaking even on the cost. In general, service-based companies will spend the equivalent of one year average customer revenue to acquire a new client. If your clients stick with you for four or more years, you can very likely afford to spend one year of revenue on acquisition and still have a profitable business.
- Don't count on any particular ad generating a flood of business. If you use local advertising, it probably will bring in between 1-10 new clients. Monthly yellow page advertising may bring in 1-5 new clients. You may have more success. Use these general response rates to evaluate the likely cost-effectiveness of an ad.
- Don't sign up for multiple ads, unless you get 1-2 customers from your first insertion. Sure, it may take multiple ads to reach all the potential new clients, and/or convince them to give you a try. Still, you should hear from at least 1-2 potential clients from your first ad. If you don't, it is unlikely that any subsequent ads will work.
- Talk to other current advertisers before you commit. Ask them how many new customers or clients they've gained from the advertising. If they don't know, then the advertising vehicle is probably not worthwhile.
- Make sure the advertising opportunity presents enough space for you to tout your company name, tagline and perhaps other benefits offered by your service. Include your contact information and a special offer for those responding to the ad. (These special offers are a mechanism to track ad success.)

Newly emerging, online, local advertising opportunities present some exciting possibilities.

Online Resources

Newly emerging, online resources present some exciting possibilities to help you build your payroll business, some of which may be free of charge to you. Here are some of the most popular resources to help you get started:

Resource	Description	URL
Search Engine Advertising	Purchase ads that are presented to potential buyers when they search online	Yahoo http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/marketing/
		Google adwords.google.com
Business Directory Listings	Make it easy for small businesses to find you through local business listings, or use these listings to find businesses in your area	Google ^{FREE} www.google.com/lochp
		Hoovers.com ^{FREE} www.hoovers.com
		SuperPages.com ^{FREE} www.superpages.com
		Amazon Yellow Pages www.amazon.com
		Respond Yellow Pages www.respond.com/directory/
		DEX Online www.dexonline.com
Accounting Directory Listings	List your firm on the most popular accountant directories	QuickBooks Pro Advisor ^{FREE for QuickBooks Pro Advisors} http://accountant.intuit.com/member_programs/qb_advisor/
		CPA Directory ^{FREE for CPAs} www.cpadirectory.com
		The Sleeter Group www.sleeter.com
		CPA Finder www.cpafinder.com/accountant
		1800Accountant www.1800accountant.com
		BookkeeperList www.bookkeeperlist.com
Community Web Sites	Easily disseminate information about your services to small businesses in your area	^{FREE} Craigslist.org www.craigslist.org
Online Networking	Find new leads through your network of family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances	^{FREE} LinkedIn www.linkedin.com
Business Lead Generators	Buy or trade contacts with others	^{FREE} Jigsaw.com www.jigsaw.com

Timing

The best time to promote your payroll services is at the end of the calendar year, for an early January start date. This is the easiest time for a client (and for you) to switch services, because there is little to no historical information to enter into Intuit Online Payroll for Accounting Professionals.

Promoting payroll during the month of January is still not too late. As you well know, many clients procrastinate. They will be looking for a payroll solution well into January—even February and March.

After March, just before each quarter end is a good payroll promotion time. Many clients will be open to a mid-year switch in June, and you can even catch a few more in September.

You will also be presented with the opportunity to pick up payroll business when your existing clients run into problems with their current solutions. (The most common occurrence is a payroll tax penalty notice.) Clients always turn to you to fix problems. This is a golden time to take over handling their payroll.

Finally, if you pick up new clients throughout the year, whether they are a new business or just a new client, make sure you promote payroll to them. Because of its year-round nature, payroll is a great way to build a close client relationship.

A Final Word

This guide has included some practical guidelines, and generally low-cost ideas for how to attract new clients. The most important advice is to be committed to marketing. It is an on-going venture. Don't be afraid to try new things. Ask other service professionals what they are doing to attract new business. Most people are happy to share advice on what has worked and what has not. Pay attention to your competition and borrow any good ideas they are using. Don't give up. Perseverance will eventually pay off.