

A complete guide to successful accounting software integration

A Capium whitepaper for accountants.

CAPIUM



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Introduction

Accounting software integration in the accounting and bookkeeping profession has been groundbreaking. Technology can help you serve clients better, assist in resource management, accelerate the shift to advisory services and support smoother integration after a merger or acquisition.

However, regardless of how brilliant your firm's software is, its use and effectiveness in the firm will live or die on how successfully you can integrate it with the rest of the business. After all, if your employees aren't using the technology to its full potential — or at all, for that matter — or it doesn't work with your other processes, how can you ever get the most out of it?

What you need is a complete guide to successful accounting software integration for your firm, which is exactly what we've put together. From choosing the right software for your firm to building an effective delivery team and training programme, here's what you need to do to nurture a successful technological transformation in your firm.



Planning your digital transformation

The importance of planning

Like any other aspect of your firm, your digital transformation should always begin with a plan — introducing new software always involves a significant change in an organisation's business processes, operating models and culture, all of which require careful planning to ensure a successful outcome.

With a good blueprint for your accounting software integration, you'll be able to:

1. **Set clear objectives.** What do you want your transformation to achieve and when? This provides a clear direction for your firm and ensures everyone is clear on the desired outcome. Your best clients come from a specific industry.

2. **Identify potential roadblocks.** By identifying possible problems early on, you can develop strategies that mitigate the risks and ensure a smooth transition.

3. **Allocate resources.** Digital transformations require significant investments in technology, infrastructure and human resources. Planning helps allocate these resources to ensure you have what you need to achieve your goals — the last thing you want is to be forced to scrap your transformation halfway through the process.

4. **Manage change.** Digital transformations involve a significant change to processes, models and culture. Planning helps manage this change by providing a roadmap for how the organisation will reach its desired outcomes.

5. **Measure success.** Planning also helps define key performance indicators (KPIs) that you can use to measure the success of the digital transformation. Without a definition of success, how will you know if your transformation has been successful?

Choosing the right software

Accounting software and technology are great for accounting firms — you probably wouldn't be reading this if you didn't think so.

However, some firms choose software for the sake of it or to solve individual issues if and as they arise, which can end up with an expensive patchwork of software that could duplicate functionality in another system.

Therefore, you need to ensure that you're implementing the correct software from the very start. As such, the question that guides your entire plan should be: 'what's the specific problem we're trying to solve?'.

However, it's not enough to answer with something like: 'we're trying to fix low growth'; the point is to be as specific as possible. Would you try to fix it by attracting more of your best clients? If so, you might want to focus on client relationship management software first. Or, perhaps you'll concentrate on improving your team's efficiency. Cloud-based accounting software could be the answer — but again, be specific. So, which processes would you transform with technology first? Bookkeeping? Accounts production? Something else entirely?

While you think about the parts of the firm that you're trying to improve, make sure you have your clients in your mind's eye — digital transformation is a great tool to improve the customer experience, after all, from communication to transparency to faster project turnaround.

So far, this might all sound relatively straightforward. However, there are literally hundreds of applications you can integrate with the main accounting software providers to create a holistic online business experience. Some even offer very similar solutions, such as Futrli, Fathom and Spotlight Reporting, which are all great for management reporting. Choosing the correct software can therefore be quite difficult.

Yet, there are three useful things you can do right away.

1. **Read reviews online.** You'll be able to identify the pros and cons of the proposed software based on other accountants' experience with the software. Your best clients come from a specific industry.

2. **Talk to the software provider.** They'll be able to answer any questions you have and fill in the blanks that their website service pages might not divulge.

3. **Try a free demo.** Technology is definitely about features and processing power, but it's also about how it feels. You can only know if a piece of technology is right for you once you've given it a go with a free trial.

What type of rollout will you choose?

You can implement your new technological system in one of three ways. Some are fast but riskier than others, so you'll have to weigh up the pros and cons during the planning phase.

First is the 'big bang'. Under this approach, the switch happens all at once, so no one uses old systems unless they need to reference past data. An instant switch is great if everything goes well, but if it goes wrong, it can lead to delays, push you over budget and frustrate your employees.

The second is a phased rollout. This means implementing the new system in chunks, which is safer but can be a slow and costly method to pursue.

Finally, there is parallel running, which means having your team use your old and new systems at the same time. In doing so, they can gradually learn the new system while benefiting from the old system as a fallback. Plus, you can identify and fix problems while still having the old system as a safety net. However, you will have to input the same data twice using each method, taking up more of your time.

As you can see, accounting software integration isn't as simple as buying a subscription and getting underway — there's a serious amount of thought that goes into it.





Implementing & adopting your technology

With the right budget, you could implement technology into your firm tomorrow if you wanted to after a few subscriptions and downloads. But adopting technology throughout your firm is another beast entirely — and if your software doesn't catch on in your firm, then was your digital transformation even successful?

Delivery team and accountability

Successful technological adoption begins with an ambitious project management team that can deliver on your plan and roll out your new technology throughout the firm. It will also require some expertise and power to hold different parties accountable to ensure your technology is implemented on track.

First, you will need a project manager, who will be ultimately responsible for the project's completion. They will ensure it proceeds within the specified timeframe and agreed budget. Ideally, they would also be solely focused on the transformation, so it does not turn into a side project.

Next, you should consider a digital officer or similar to own the technical aspects of the project. You'll have guessed it: this individual will be monumental in the process, especially if you need to migrate data from legacy systems to new ones. They will also be integral for ensuring the integrity, security and backup of your data.

If you lack an in-house tech expert, you could hire an external consultant to get the most out of your technology without spending too much of your budget. Alternatively, you could talk to your software provider about help with the technological angle — at Capium, for example, we are more than happy to help our clients transfer their data to our cloud systems.

Then there are your project team members, who will work on one or more project phases. They will also test the new software; therefore, it's essential to strike the right

balance between giving them enough work to ensure your software works well and allowing them to focus on the core business.

You should also choose people from each team that the project will touch to ensure your entire firm is truly transformed. You could also designate 'mini-champions' of your project — select individuals throughout the firm who are excited about the coming changes. This will prove essential if you want everyone in the firm to get on board with a radical transformation and adopt the technology into their everyday work lives without slipping back into the old ways.

One project member should also become a 'software ultra user' — someone who knows how to use the software like the back of their hand for day-to-day tasks (in other words, the front end of the software; your tech expert should know the back end). They'll go above and beyond in the early days to learn the technology so you can start building a culture of digital expertise in your firm. If anyone needs help, they'll be the first port of call in-house.

Finally, there should be an executive sponsor — a senior manager who will be the visible champion of the project and the ultimate decision-maker. Not only is someone at the top important from a project-management perspective, but a champion in a senior position will persuade staff your firm is serious about digital transformation.

Software training

Before you go live, you'll want to train your employees to use your new software and get used to the new processes. That can be a daunting task, but there are some simple steps to take to make it a smooth process:

1. **Determine the training needs.** Before you start your training, you need to determine what specific skills or knowledge your team needs to be able to use the new software system.
2. **Develop a training plan.** Once you know what training is required, you can develop a training plan that outlines the objectives, content and delivery methods. Think about how you will deliver training, too, such as online learning or group sessions.
3. **Schedule the training.** Training must be extensive and in-depth but shouldn't interrupt daily operations. So, schedule training during off-peak hours and provide ample notice to employees.
4. **Provide hands-on practice.** Sometimes, the best type of training is getting used to something yourself. So, provide your team with early opportunities with mock or trusted clients to provide them with valuable experience and feedback.

5. **Provide ongoing support.** No one is going to retain absolutely everything they learned in training, so make sure to provide ongoing support. This can be sharing online resources, scheduling additional training sessions or contacting your software support officer.

Remember: everyone learns differently, so it may be helpful to offer multiple training methods and tailor the training to different learning styles.

Pay special attention to the older or tech-averse among your team who are used to the traditional working methods and might struggle with an accounting software integration. They might be the hardest to convince to stick with the new technology, and you need everyone on board to make the new process work — if someone stops inputting data into the new software, for example, there will be missing information in the system. Plus, technology is only useful if it's used correctly; if too many mistakes are being made in your firm because of inexperience, that's a serious problem that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

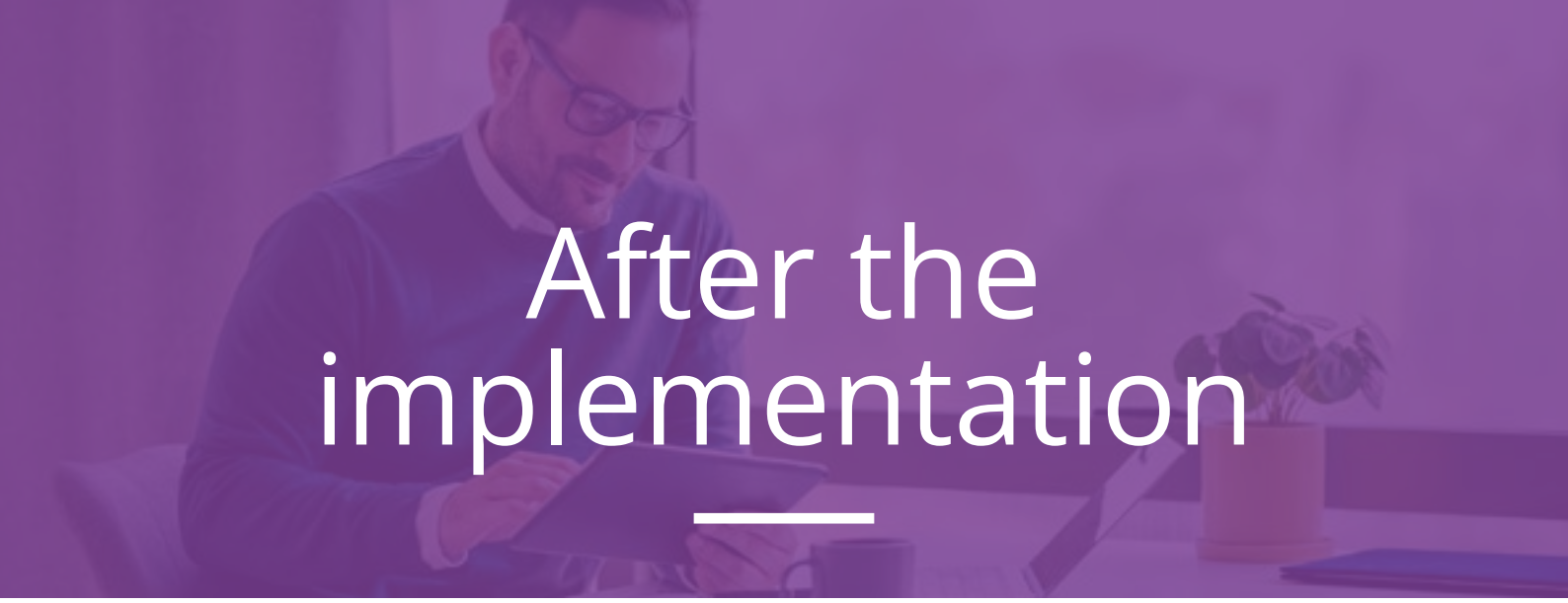
One solution is to 'bubblewrap' your less tech-savvy team members with individuals who are genuinely enthusiastic about the new technology you're employing. They'll be able to bounce off each other, and your tech-averse team member will never feel alone with the intricacies of a new technological system.

Testing the technology

Once you've implemented your technology and begun training, you're ready to test your new software — it's the quickest and easiest way to spot and iron out any kinks in the system.

It's important, however, to test your system properly. To do that, you should create a test environment that accurately simulates your production environment. You also need to test the new technology thoroughly, including the features, functionality, security and integration with existing systems.

At the end of the testing phase, make sure to collect and analyse feedback from your entire team to identify areas for improvement and refine the software and the way it works.



After the implementation

The importance of review

When it comes to accounting software integration, you can't afford to simply deploy and depart — you first need to review your digital transformation to assess whether you achieved what you set out to achieve and how successful your plan and implementation were overall. That will help you with the next part of your journey to becoming a digital firm.

The benefits you look at should come in various forms, including the time the technology helps you save, the number of clients you can onboard, and changes in client satisfaction. It may take time to see some of these benefits come through, so it's essential that you approach digital transformation as a whole with a long-term view.

The results of your review will show you two things that you'll benefit from taking into the future:

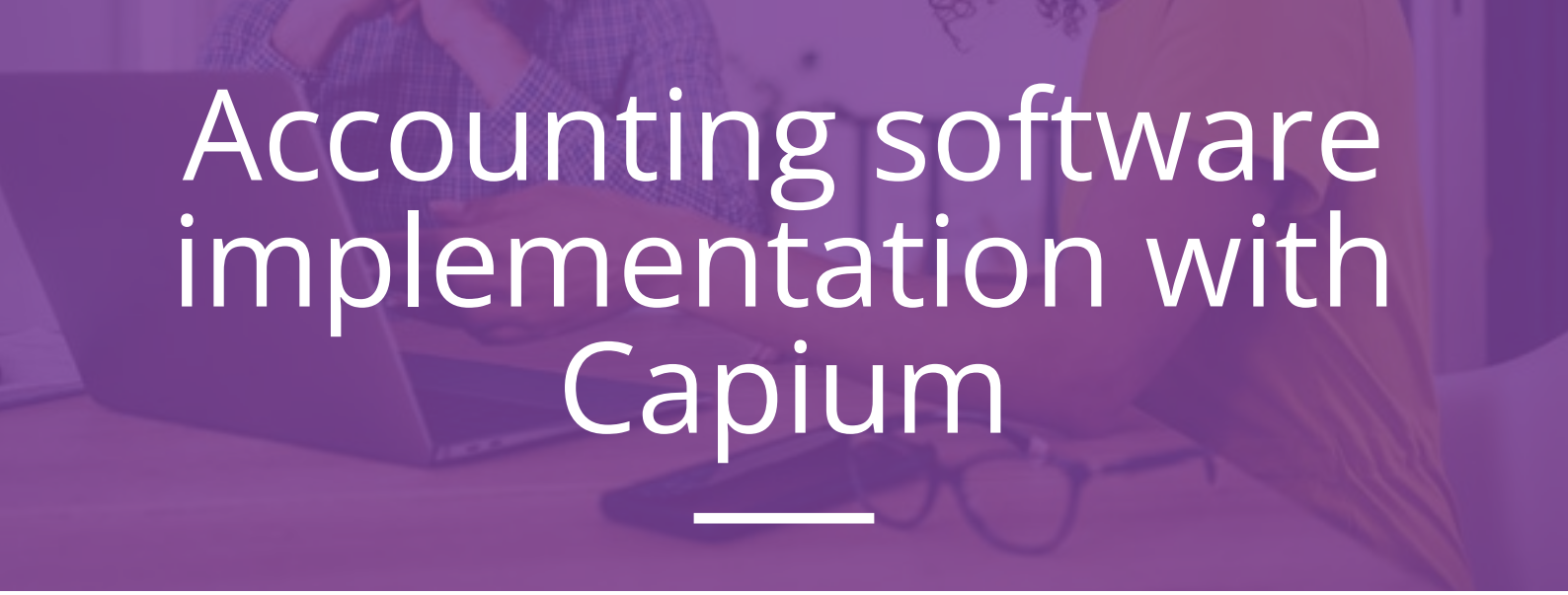
1. How you can improve and refine the software you've already implemented into your firm.
2. What worked and didn't work during the implementation so you can adopt additional software far more easily next time.

The importance of feedback

Lastly, you should make an effort to stay in touch with your software provider, as the proactive tech providers will be open to feedback and want to work with you to ensure they can modify the product to better support the needs of your firm and the wider accountancy sector.

It's for this reason that we opened up the **Capium Hub**, which is an online space for Capium clients to get together to discuss their software and make recommendations for improvements. Our clients are the ones using the software every day, after all, so why would we not listen to them so we can make the best accountancy software out there?





Accounting software implementation with Capium

We understand that integrating your firm's systems with a brand new type of software can be a challenge, especially from a technical and training perspective, which is why we've endeavoured to make accounting software implementation as simple a process as possible.

Here are just the highlights of what Capium can do for you:

- Easy-to-use
- Cloud-based
- Unlimited number of staff licences
- Reasonable prices
- Approved for MTD
- Optional modules that all integrate
- Free bookkeeping software
- Practice management software
- Attentive support team
- Assistance with data migration

Interested in learning more about Capium or looking for further information about your firm's digital transformation. Don't hesitate to get in touch with us to discuss your accounting system integration needs.

Interested in what you've read? Think we've missed something out? Get in touch for close assistance picking the right software solutions and growing your practice.

Call us on 0203 322 5578
or find out more at capium.com