



Choosing an accountant

Finding the right accountant at the early stages of setting up your business can be a crucial factor in its success. It's important to find someone who suits the needs of your business and with whom you can develop a good working relationship.

You are likely to need an accountant when:

- starting, buying or selling a business
- expanding your business
- you have problems with creditors or debtors, or managing finance, expenses or stock
- you employ staff

The services of an accountant are essential to ensure:

- your business is financially sustainable
- you receive qualified advice before making financial decisions
- you can meet financial compliance requirements

Top tips

- Find an accountant before you start or buy a business so you'll have the right advice and structure in place to ensure a smooth business launch or takeover.
- Understand that only registered tax agents can lodge returns on your behalf with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). Check if your accountant or their firm is registered on the Taxation Practitioners Board at tpb.gov.au

Likewise, only Australian financial services (AFS) licence holders can provide financial planning advice. You can find licence holders at asic.gov.au

- Create a shortlist of companies and rate their services against your priorities (quality, reliability, price, location, and terms of business).
- Seek recommendations from family, friends and other small business owners. Also research online, including asking for recommendations through our Facebook group 'I'm a small business owner in Western Australia'.
- Make a list of the services you want from an accountant. Do you want your annual accounts and tax returns completed, help with your business structure, or want regular advice?
- Be comfortable with the approach of your chosen accountant. Keep looking and 'interviewing' until you find someone you feel comfortable with.
- Don't rely on your accountant for everything. As a business owner, you need to understand the financial basics of your business and have the necessary checks and balances in place so you know what's going on in your business's financials.

Running a business means having the confidence to make important financial decisions and to ask your accountant the right questions. Our practical 'Understanding Business Financials' workshop will help you understand key financial information so you can gauge how your business is performing, make financial decisions and spot problems before they get out of hand.

Questions to ask

What are their qualifications? Are they a member of a professional association?

To be a member of a professional association, an accountant must have an appropriate qualification, abide by certain standards and undertake regular professional development. You can find lists of qualified accountants at cpaaustralia.com.au, charteredaccountants.com.au and publicaccountants.org.au

Can they explain their business and it operates? Why should you choose this practice?

Their style of operating should work well for the needs of your business and they should be able to clearly articulate how they're best placed to assist with your particular circumstances.

What other services do they provide? For example, do they have a regular newsletter or hold information sessions to provide advice for small business clients?

It's important you keep up to date, particularly in relation to changes in legislation.

What are their fees and how are they calculated?

Find out the basis on which fees are charged, whether you will be billed monthly or annually, and if they bill for every phone call.

Do they have other clients in a similar industry to yours? Do they have other clients who have recently started a small business?

The advice they provide will be more relevant to your business if they are aware of issues impacting your industry and how other businesses, similar to yours, are overcoming these challenges.

Can you speak with current clients and businesses similar to yours?

This is an opportunity to see if clients are happy with the level of service provided.

Do they have examples of how they've been proactive with other small business clients: For example, have they helped draft financial forecasts, such as cash flow?

Find out if they are they able to practically assist with your needs and how their services will add value to your business.

Can they advise which business structure is best for you?

When advising which structure best suits your business, an accountant should take into consideration your personal assets, financial circumstances and the potential for future growth.

Are they familiar with the accounting software you plan to use?

Find out how they plan to access your records.

Can they recommend a bookkeeper?

An accountant should be able to recommend someone who can assist at a practical level to help you to manage your books on a regular basis.

Can they visit you at your premises?

How flexible are they about fitting in with your needs?

For more information visit smallbusiness.wa.gov.au or call 13 12 49.

Note: This information is not a substitute for legal advice.