



## Shifting to Advisory Services: Accountant Case Study Series

# Going All In

## Cloud-based accountant brings a revolutionary mindset and unbounded enthusiasm to work in nontraditional way.

Jason Blumer was an audit manager at a large accounting company in 1997 when his dad asked him to join his small CPA firm in Greenville, South Carolina. The invitation was a tangible turning point for the younger accountant, who recognized the wave change in business ownership from Baby Boomers to Millennials. New technology was commoditizing manual accounting work and businesses were increasingly ready to take a chance with secure, “in the cloud” solutions.

He recalled, “My dad started to let me run Blumer CPAs, and I started testing ideas like solidifying the business niche we wanted to work with – primarily creative professionals striving to become mature businesses – how we should price, pay our team, and deal with lots of other details.” Over several years, Blumer told clients that the firm was going virtual.

They even sold off a portion of their base that wasn’t going to fit the virtual model. “Then we closed our traditional office and became what we had planned to be – a fully virtual accounting firm.”

## Going from the traditional to the cloud

Blumer explained, “We run like an entrepreneurial organization, one that is creative and willing to help clients in ways that traditional firms can’t. Being ‘virtual’ allows us to do work in any zip code. We don’t even think about geography when we agree to take on a new client. We just say ‘yes’ and then talk about the new products we are going to use to do their work. Nothing we do can be disruptive for them. We want them to say, ‘Wow, this is awesome! It’s easy to use and not confusing.’”

Zip codes are also a non-issue when it comes to employees, Blumer noted. “When employees move to a new location, their job with us moves with them. An example? We have some military spouses who are CPAs. One of them just moved from Texas to New York. The geographical move didn’t matter to us.”

Blumer meets with his partner (in person) a few times a week to do their management and planning. “We’re not in an office that has a person answering the phone because there’s no office phone to answer,” he explained.

## Quick Facts

Jason Blumer  
Founder & CEO



Firm Name	Blumer CPAs
Industry	Accounting
Established	1997
Employees	9
Locations	1
Headquarters	Greenville, South Carolina
Website	blumercpas.com



To counter privacy concerns, Blumer's virtual firm has some strict rules on the books. "You can't access cloud-based products for clients on public Wi-Fi, like at a coffee shop. We also use secure online portals to pass PDF digital paper back and forth."

In addition, the firm has no dress code and doesn't use timesheets. There's also no charging by a traditional accounting staple – the "billable hour."

### No billable hours pricing

"Billable hours pay for commoditized work not insights that provide high value," Blumer said. "Our work isn't about giving clients spreadsheets of information, but delivering creative ideas that provide insights that translate into results."

Under this approach, Blumer's firm offers services such as tax preparation and payroll, but charges significant fees for "non-commodity" accounting solutions – fees that a growing number of clients are willing to pay. "Special things that take valuable insight shouldn't be measured in the old standard, billable units of time," he said, adding, "When you unlock new value, that unlocks new prices."

Blumer offered up a recent example. "One company had their financial controller leave and wanted us to step in and do the job – virtually. The client is in Virginia. My partner and I are in South Carolina. One of our CPAs is in Pennsylvania. Being virtual allows us to take that kind of work and deliver big value in special non-commodity driven situations like this."

### Employees Not Contractors

Some firms that are virtual have a contractor-based model, where they'll feed tax business to CPAs that are contractors. Not so at Blumer CPAs. "For us, it's about hiring great employees," Blumer emphasized. "We ask our team members – our employees – to fully commit to our firm, our culture, and our clients. We strengthen our culture by building it around the right employees."

The "right" employees not only have to have professional talent, but also have to understand what it means to work virtually. "Some people that want to work for you might be working in a traditional office environment and they don't know the difference between working in an office and working virtually," said Blumer. "So, we have to talk a lot about what it's like to live at home and work at home with all the distractions."

"Operating in a virtual model, we can hire talented employees from anywhere, but we have to do a lot of education up front to help them be successful in our cloud culture. Some make it. Others don't. We're all learning along the way."

### The cloud isn't just reserved for start ups

Blumer noted that "some older companies that have been around a long time sometimes find it difficult to make the transition to working in new ways. Their products are legacy. They look old. They feel clunky – kind of 'boxy moxy.'" But he added the size or age of an organization doesn't automatically predict their level of success with the cloud.

"ADP is one larger and older company that is pretty innovative," he noted. "You can tell they've made important changes in product development. Their cloud products are well-designed and intuitive, which makes them more attractive and enjoyable to use – the type of products people want to use."

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In addition, the cloud isn't a neighborhood that is restricted to simple solutions to meet simple needs. Working in the cloud is increasingly presenting accountants and clients with opportunities to manage complex challenges. According to Blumer, some cloud products are designed to handle complex client needs better than others.

"Different platforms do different things. For example, ADP's small business platform can do more things like help with HR, benefits and retirement management that other small business platforms don't offer."

### Being a change agent

Introducing new ideas and transformation to one of the oldest professions on the planet doesn't come without its share of fits, starts, and rethinking along the way.

"When you are doing what we are doing, everything doesn't always turn out the way you want it to go. Sometimes things just get messed up," said Blumer. "I once tried to serve Spanish-speaking businesses, but it didn't work out because I didn't speak the language."

He also discovered that not everything in the virtual world is a perfect fit from the get-go. "We started out by having to use a brick-and-mortar process for tax filing," he acknowledged. "The tax process is really huge. The result is everything. If you mess it up, it drives a lot of fear in the client base. They want their accountant to take away the confusion and bring them clarity."

Blumer concluded with some entrepreneurial-based takeaway for others considering the role of change agent. "Figure out where your niche is. Know how you're going to serve them, then hire great people to make great things happen. Talk to your employees. Listen to them. Coach them. And always be open to taking a risk on a good new idea."

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## What is "Thriveal" – How Did It Get Its Name?

A prolific blog writer and coach, CPA Jason Blumer developed the Thriveal (pronounced "THRIVE all") network in 2010 – an online community of CPA firm owners that are interested in running their businesses in new ways. "An old business partner and I made up the name 'Thriveal' – it's the opposite of 'Survival,' or just staying afloat," said Blumer. "Thriveal has older practitioners who want to do things in new ways and younger owners who like to share new ideas." The network ([thriveall.com](https://thriveall.com)) has about 70 active members.



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