Growth and Marketing Maturity Benchmarking Report 2025

Understanding how high-growth firms leverage technology, client relationships, and marketing maturity to drive expansion

Powered by agile market intelligence

A message from Intuit QuickBooks

In our dynamic and ever-evolving marketplace, understanding how to drive sustainable growth and benchmarking against peers are crucial for maintaining a competitive edge.

This report provides an extensive analysis of the current practices in growth and marketing among Australian accounting firms. By leveraging data from 460 firms, we offer a comprehensive benchmark that allows practices to compare their marketing maturity, client acquisition strategies, and technology adoption against industry standards.

The findings presented in this report highlight critical aspects such as the shift to strategic advisory, the effectiveness of digital marketing, and the growing adoption of technology and AI. These insights confirm that a firm's growth is increasingly tied to its ability to leverage a connected technology platform to optimise its practice.

At Intuit QuickBooks, we understand the challenges that accounting professionals face. This report highlights major hurdles like finding time for business development and managing capacity constraints. These are precisely the challenges our ecosystem is designed to solve – freeing up time through intelligent automation and providing a single view of your practice and clients, so you can move from managing tasks to driving strategy.

We are proud to support the accounting community with valuable resources like the *Growth and Marketing Maturity Benchmarking Report 2025*, alongside the integrated tools to act on these insights. Our goal is to foster a deeper understanding of industry benchmarks, enabling firms of all sizes to thrive in a competitive landscape.

We hope this report serves as a valuable tool for your practice, providing the insights needed to make informed decisions and drive your business forward.

As you explore the findings and recommendations, we encourage you to consider how they can be applied to your own practice. This report is more than just a benchmark; it is a roadmap for achieving marketing maturity.

We hope that this report will inspire you to innovate, adapt, and thrive.

Meagan Wood
Principal Product Marketing Manager
Intuit QuickBooks

Table of contents

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive market, accounting firms face the choice between maintaining status quo or pursuing strategic growth. While 10% of Australian accounting practices are charting an ambitious path toward significant expansion, the majority navigate somewhere between deliberate stability and guarded optimism. This report aims to uncover what differentiates firms with a high-growth outlook from the rest.

The *Growth and Marketing Maturity Benchmarking Report 2025* provides accounting practices with a data-driven roadmap to accelerate their growth trajectory. The findings in this report are grounded in extensive quantitative research conducted between September and October 2025. By examining the behaviours, investments, and strategic choices of 460 Australian accounting firms, we reveal the specific, actionable practices that distinguish high-growth firms from those with moderate or conservative outlooks.

Faced with similar challenges such as capacity constraints, pricing pressures, and rapid changes in regulations, some practices manage them differently to ensure competitive advantage. The study identifies the concrete differences in how firms approach client relationships, marketing channels, technological adoption, and resource allocation.

The report allows accounting practices to identify their own growth and maturity stage, and provides a clear roadmap for practices to advance. Produced by Agile Market Intelligence for Intuit Quickbooks, the findings are designed to equip firms with specific actions that move them toward higher growth.

As you read through the findings ahead, consider how your firm measures up against these benchmarks and which practices you can adopt to move closer to your growth goals.

Michael Johnson

Michael Johnson
Director
Agile Market Intelligence

Key findings

10% of firms
aim for significant expansion

6 in 10 high-growth firms
are strategic advisors for clients

High-growth firms are 3x more effective
for digital client acquisition

Majority (61%) of high-growth firms
actively ask for referrals

High-growth firms show highest adoption
and diversity for marketing channels

61% of high-growth firms
leverage their tech stack for competitive advantage

83% of accountants use AI
28% of high-growth firms use AI for over an hour daily

About the research

The *Growth and Marketing Maturity Benchmarking Report 2025* was designed to provide accounting firms a clear view of how their peers are approaching growth, marketing and client acquisition in 2025.

We surveyed 460 accounting professionals between 2 September to 13 October 2025 to benchmark marketing and growth maturity across the industry, examining key areas including strategic planning, positioning, referral systems, digital marketing, technology adoption and time spent with clients. The goal was to establish a baseline that allows firms to assess where they stand relative to their peers and identify their current stage of maturity.

The insights in this report are intended to serve as a roadmap. Whether your firm is refining its messaging, building a structured referral process, strengthening its digital presence, or evaluating new technology, this research offers clear, data-backed guidance on where to focus your efforts next.

Which of the following best describes your organisation?

92% Accounting firm

8% Bookkeeper

Which of the following best describes your role?

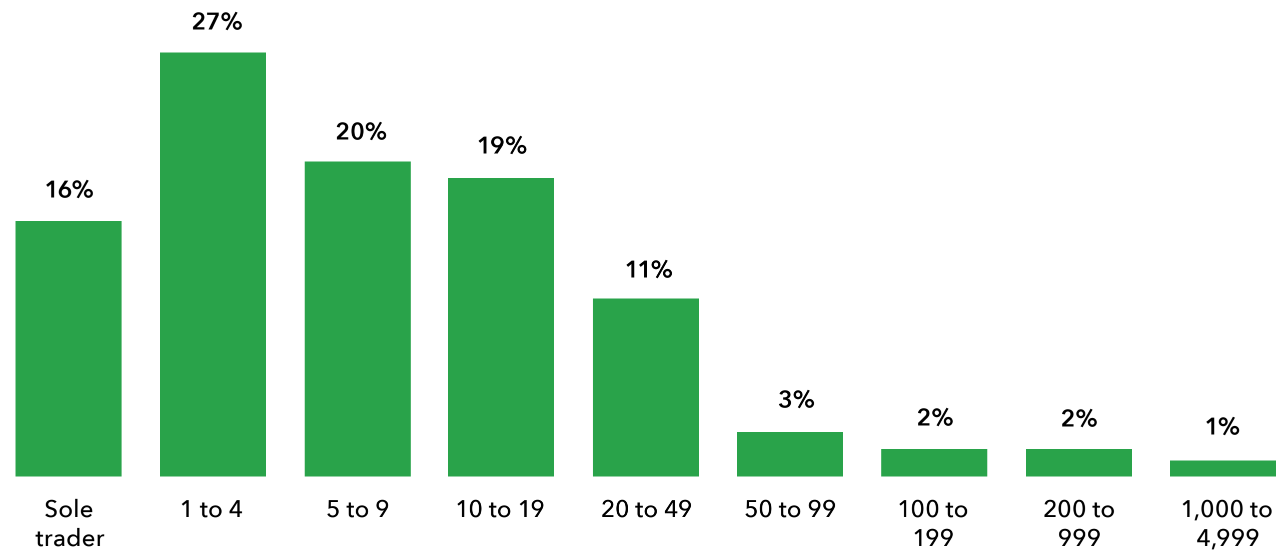
62% Partner, Business owner, Executive or Director

17% Senior manager

10% Manager

11% Employee

How many people does your practice employ?



Due to rounding errors, some figures may not equal 100%. All figures have been rounded to their nearest decimal for the purpose of this report.

SECTION

01

Growth Outlook

This section establishes the current growth outlook of Australian firms, identifies barriers to growth and puts forward solutions from accounting professionals.

Growth outlook of accounting practices

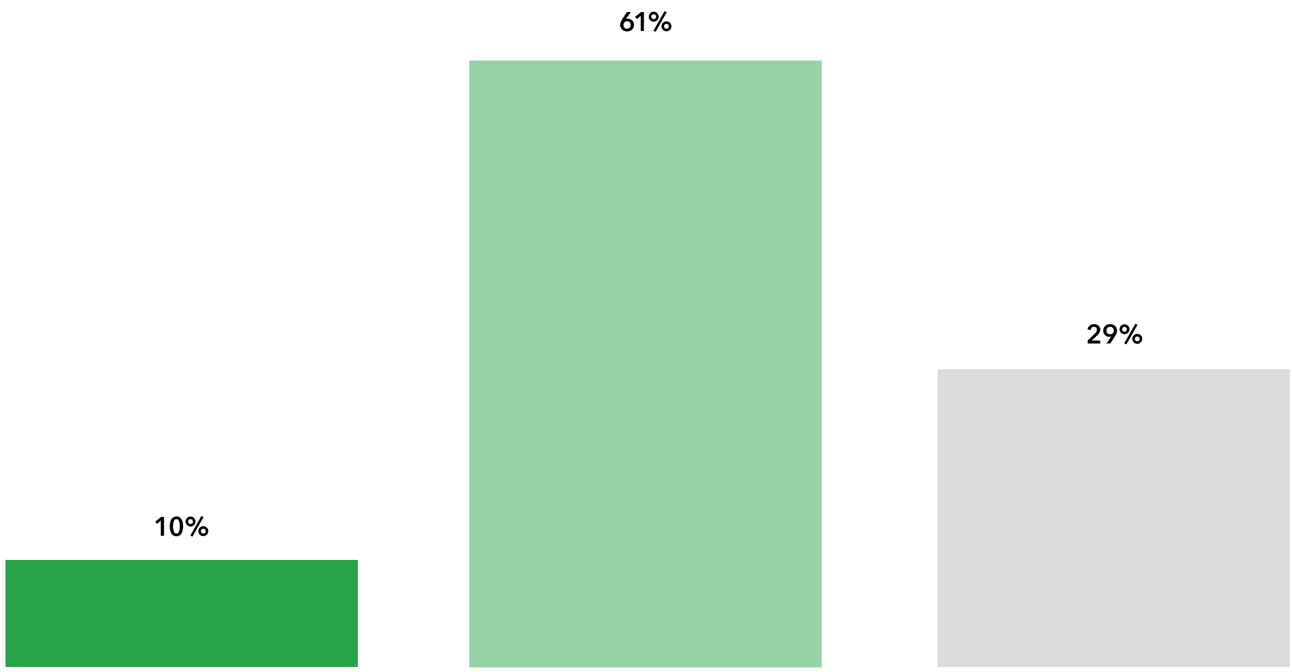
10% of firms aim for significant expansion in the next 12 months

To understand the growth and marketing maturity landscape, firms were first asked about their outlook for the next 12 months. The majority of firms (61%) are planning to moderately expand their client base in the next 12 months. These firms have growth ambitions, indicating a general optimism but with a cautious approach. We refer to these firms as having a growth outlook or a moderate-growth outlook.

The high-growth segment, though only 10%, provides a natural experiment. While they also operate in the same regulatory environment, same client expectations and are in the same market, they've chosen a different strategic posture. We will refer to this group as the high-growth outlook firms. By comparing the behaviours between the two segments, we can identify specific, replicable actions that can enable acceleration.

Meanwhile, 26% of firms are adopting a conservative approach, choosing to maintain a consistent client base, and not actively seek out any direct growth opportunities. An additional 3% are at the retirement stage, where they are planning to either sell or leave the practice. As neither group is seeking to expand their client base, we refer to them together as having a conservative growth outlook.

Which of the following best describes your practice's current outlook over the next 12 months?



High-growth outlook
Plan to significantly expand our client base through a combination of organic growth and acquisition(s).

Growth outlook
Plan to expand our client base moderately with client retention and organic growth through advertising, referrals or other activities.

Conservative outlook
Plan to keep our client base relatively consistent and will not seek out any direct growth opportunities (including retirement).

Growth outlook and organisation size

Firms with high-growth outlook tend to be larger

When dissecting different growth outlooks by organisation size, 41% of high-growth outlook firms have more than 20 employees, compared to only 19% of all firms.

On the contrary, 69% of conservative outlook firms are either sole traders or firms with up to four employees. In the middle, we find moderate-growth outlook firms with almost uniform distribution across firm sizes.

In this study "growth outlook" refers to the plans firms have regarding their client base.

However, having a high-growth outlook also implies growing the firm's capacity, which includes hiring the right people.

High-growth firms recognise that expanding their client base requires a sufficiently skilled and resourced team. The connection between growth targets and workforce expansion suggests that firms anticipating significant client growth also invest in organisational infrastructure.

Which of the following best describes your practice's current outlook over the next 12 months?

	All firms	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Sole trader	16%	11%	8%	35%
1 to 4	27%	15%	25%	34%
5 to 9	20%	20%	21%	17%
10 to 19	19%	13%	25%	8%
More than 20 employees	19%	41%	21%	6%

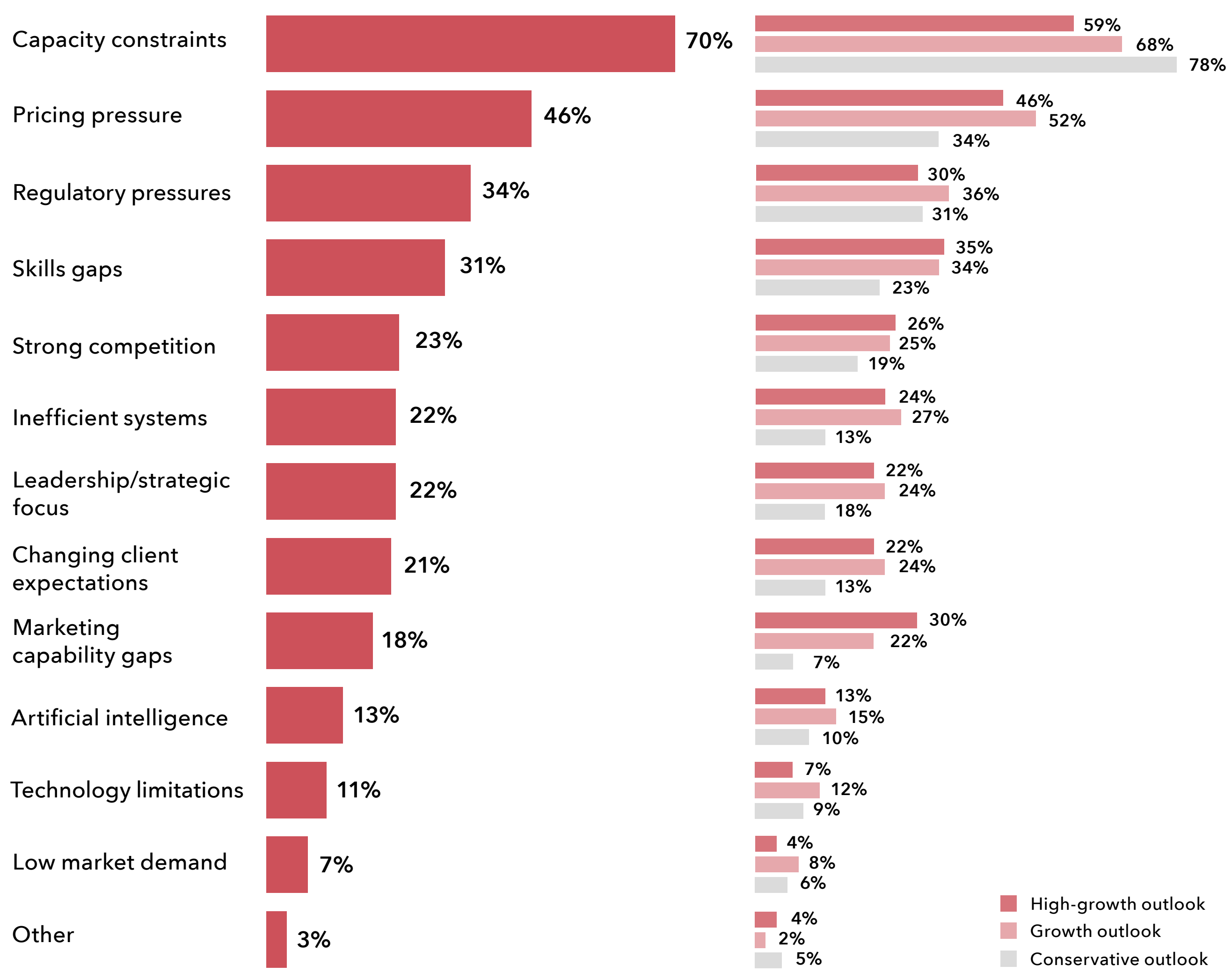
High-growth firms have the lowest percentage saying capacity constraints hinder growth

When asked about the barriers to growth 70% cite not having enough time or resources to take on more work. The number of accountants feeling capacity-constrained far outnumbers any other group, no matter the growth outlook. However, only 59% of high-growth firms report constraints as a barrier, compared to 68% of moderate-growth firms.

More firms with a moderate-growth outlook tend to feel the growth barriers compared to the high-growth, or even conservative outlook firms. The only stark exception is identifying marketing capability gaps, which is felt by more high-growth outlook firms (30% vs 22% of moderate-growth firms). It indicates a different point of view that stresses marketing as a capability worth building for high-growth firms.

Skills gaps and strong competition are closely tied between the two segments, but the rest of the barriers are felt by more moderate-growth firms overall.

What are the biggest things getting in the way of growing your firm right now?



Solutions to top internal barriers to growth

Human talent augmented by technology is the solution for internal growth barriers

The top 2 internal barriers to growth were capacity constraints (70% of firms) and skills gaps (31%). Accountants were asked "What do you think would help your firm overcome these challenges and grow more effectively?"

Capacity constraints: A staffing crisis

Capacity constraints are overwhelmingly a staffing issue. Roughly 55% of accountants emphasised the need to hire more staff (including outsourcing). Using AI and offshore hiring were also suggested to address talent shortages.

> *Hire more qualified staff.* **(Employee, 10 to 19 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Access effective tools either online or through subscription.* **(Partner/Principal, 5 to 9 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Internal growth, efficiencies, utilising OS resources, AI.* **(Partner/Principal, 5 to 9 employees, high-growth outlook)**

> *Use of AI and/or outsourcing to save time and resources.* **(Partner/Principal, 1 to 4 employees, conservative)**

> *Recruit more qualified people which is a bit hard to do due to lack of supply with the right work experience.* **(Senior Manager, 5 to 9 employees, high-growth outlook)**

Skills gaps: Training or talent acquisition

Addressing the skills gap is straightforward: invest in training and development of current employees. Some suggest recruiting experienced staff to fill the gap. However, time and other constraints pose a barrier to training.

> *Upskill current staff through targeted training and workshops. Encourage internal knowledge sharing and mentorship to build well-rounded, agile teams.* **(Partner/Principal, 20 to 49 employees, growth outlook)**

> *We are addressing this by investing in structured training programs for our staff, focusing on both technical tax/accounting knowledge and soft skills (e.g., client communication, use of technology). We also plan to use AI-supported tools to accelerate learning and fill gaps more efficiently.* **(Partner/Principal, 5 to 9 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Make our firm more attractive to established talent instead of relying on internal training.* **(Partner/Principal, 10 to 19 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Hire staff in skill areas required.* **(Partner/Principal, 20 to 49 employees, conservative outlook)**

> *Due to our capacity gaps, we're finding it hard to find time. Having more hired talent to delegate would allow us to upskill within the team members.* **(Manager, 5 to 9 employees, growth outlook)**

Solutions to top external barriers to growth

External barriers require strategic positioning and industry advocacy

Accounting firms also face external pressures that limit growth. Pricing pressures affect 46% of firms, while regulatory burdens impact 34%. Practitioners suggest strategic approaches to sustaining profitability and managing compliance demands.

Pricing pressure: Value over volume

The most common theme is communicating the value of services, rather than competing on price. Many practitioners advocate for being selective with clients, and letting go of those who don't value their services. Technology adoption can be a complementary strategy to reduce costs while maintaining quality.

> *Clearly explain how your advice saves money, reduces risk, and creates opportunities – clients are less likely to push for discounts if they see ROI.* **(Manager, 5 to 9 employees, conservative outlook)**

> *Improving efficiencies with use of systems/AI.* **(Partner/Principal, 200 to 999 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Nothing - if clients aren't willing to pay, they're not our target clients.* **(Manager, 10 to 19 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Decline work if not fairly priced.* **(Partner/Principal, 1 to 4 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Show clients how our services save them time, reduce risk, or improve compliance to justify fees. We are niche in experience.* **(Partner/Principal, 100 to 199 employees, growth outlook)**

Regulatory pressures: Calls for simplification

The most prevalent solution is a call for government and regulatory bodies (ATO, TPB, ASIC) to reduce excessive compliance requirements and simplify regulation. Small firms voiced frustration over regulations that burden all practitioners for breaches committed by larger firms. Where regulatory relief is unlikely, firms turn to internal solutions, such as targeted training or automating compliance tools.

> *Too many rules from the government, accounting bodies etc. Now we are supposed to record all conversations with clients.* **(Partner/Principal, 5 to 9 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Keep pushing our accounting professional bodies to finally stand up for us and lobby properly.* **(Partner/Principal, 10 to 19 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Training and delegated person for in-house compliance review.* **(Partner/Principal, 20 to 49 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Internal training to cover all bases.* **(Manager, 20 to 49 employees, growth outlook)**

> *Automated compliance solutions.* **(Partner/Principal, 5 to 9 employees, high-growth outlook)**

> *Small firms stop being punished.* **(Senior manager, 10 to 19 employees, growth outlook)**

SECTION
02

Existing Client Growth

This section dissects how accounting firms engage with their current client base, obtain feedback, and their influence on their clients' decision-making.

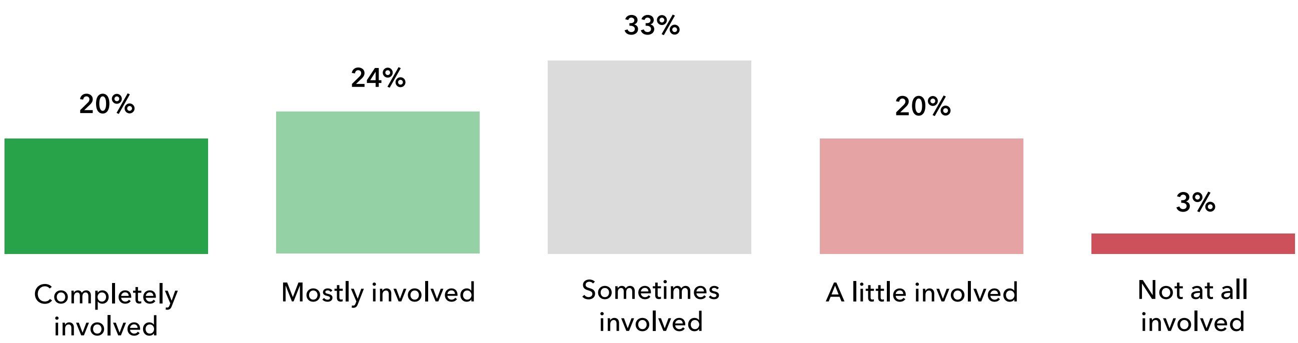
Strategic advisory position

Over 6 in 10 firms with high-growth outlook take strategic advisory positions with their clients

The strategic advisory relationship between accountants and their clients varies significantly by growth outlook. Firms focused on high-growth are nearly twice as likely to be deeply embedded in client decision-making with 61% being mostly or completely involved in their clients' key business decisions, compared to 35% of firms with a conservative outlook. In between are firms targeting moderate-growth, with less than half (46%) positioned strategically.

This strategic positioning scales with outlook. High-growth firms show the strongest engagement: 28% are completely involved in client business decisions and another 33% mostly involved. Moderate-growth firms follow with the majority being mostly or sometimes involved. The conservative outlook firms tend toward lighter relationships, with 42% only sometimes involved in decisions.

To what extent are you involved in your client's key business decisions?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Completely involved	28%	18%	22%
Mostly involved	33%	28%	13%
Sometimes involved	26%	30%	42%
A little involved	13%	21%	18%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Being 'completely' or 'mostly involved' in their client's key decisions is observed in

61% of high-growth firms

46% of growth firms

35% of conservative firms

Obtaining client feedback

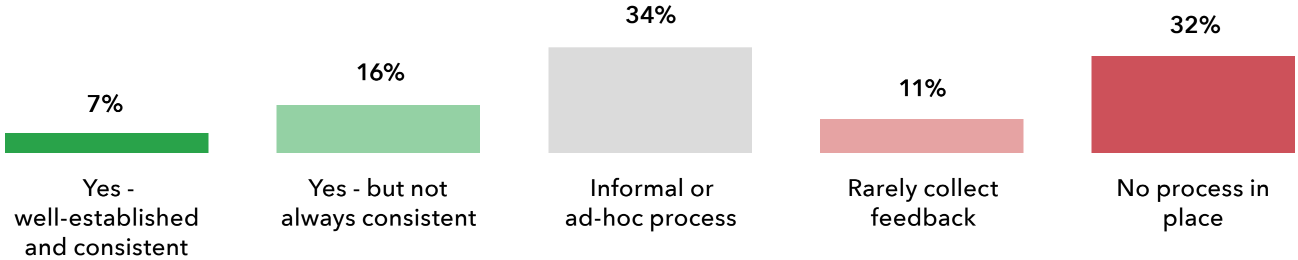
High-growth firms are twice as likely to have consistent client feedback systems in place

Client feedback systems separate high-growth firms from the rest. While 39% of high-growth firms have established processes to consistently collect and act on client feedback (either well-established or regular but not always consistent), only 26% of moderate-growth firms and just 10% of conservative outlook firms reach this level.

The gap widens at the most established feedback system. High-growth firms are more than twice as likely to have well-established and consistent feedback processes (17%) compared to moderate-growth firms (6%) and over four times more likely than conservative firms (4%). Meanwhile, nearly half of conservative outlook firms (48%) have no feedback process at all, compared to 27% of moderate-growth firms and 17% of high-growth firms.

As firms build more structured approaches to understanding client needs and satisfaction, they position themselves for stronger growth. Firms looking to move from moderate to high-growth should prioritise establishing consistent feedback mechanisms as part of their client relationship infrastructure.

Do you have a formal process to collect and act on client feedback?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Yes - well-established and consistent	17%	6%	4%
Yes - but not always consistent	22%	20%	6%
Informal or ad-hoc process	39%	36%	28%
Rarely collect feedback	4%	11%	13%
No process in place	17%	27%	48%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Consistent client feedback systems have been established in

17% of high-growth firms

6% of growth firms

4% of conservative firms

Engaging with high-value clients

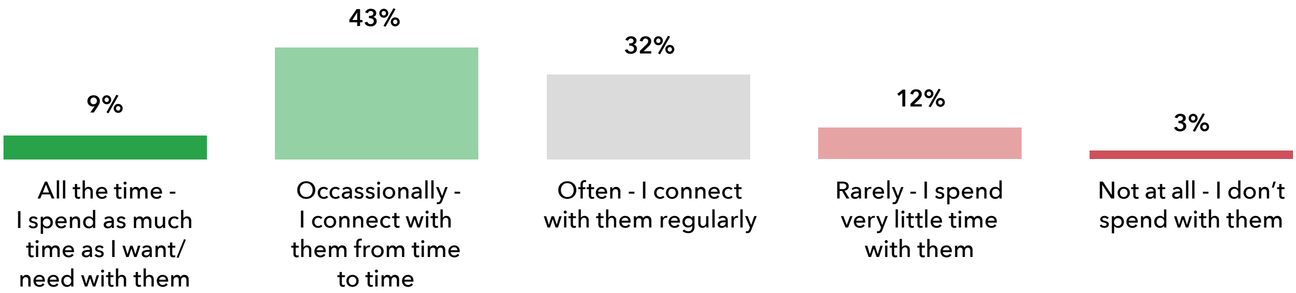
43% of accountants engage with high-value clients occasionally, while 32% connect regularly

Asked how often they spend time talking to high-value clients, or those with high-growth potential, 43% of firms respond 'occasionally', and 32% respond 'often'. Just 9% report engaging 'all the time'.

In terms of regularly engaging with high-value clients, all the time or often, high-growth outlook firms (52%) and conservative outlook firms (46%) outperform the moderate-growth outlook firms (38%). High-growth firms engaging with clients can lead to service expansion, referrals and advocacy through deepening relationships. Conservative outlook firms, by contrast, may be channeling their limited capacity toward their most valuable existing relationships. This also reflects the reality that 69% of these firms have fewer than 5 employees.

The moderate-growth segment shows the weakest performance, with 46% engaging only occasionally at most. The gap suggests that firms with growth ambitions haven't established systematic client engagement behaviours.

In your current role, do you feel you spend enough time talking to high value clients or clients with high-growth potential?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
All the time - I spend as much time as I want/need with them	11%	6%	16%
Often - I connect with them regularly	41%	32%	30%
Occasionally - I connect with them from time to time	30%	46%	41%
Rarely - I spend very little time with them	13%	14%	8%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Spending 'all the time' with clients or 'often' connecting with clients is observed in

52% of high-growth firms

38% of growth firms

46% of conservative firms

SECTION

03

New Client Growth

This chapter explores how accounting firms use their digital presence for client growth, which marketing channels they use and their strategies for obtaining client referrals.

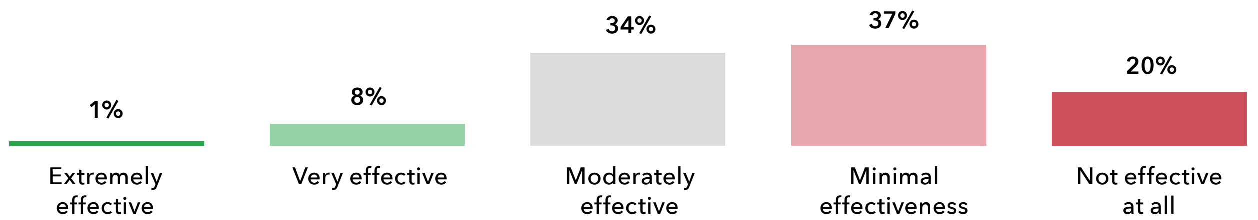
High-growth firms are 3x more likely to rate their digital presence as very or extremely effective than growth firms

A digital presence can provide an avenue for client growth, its effectiveness strongly scales with growth outlook. High-growth firms are more likely to describe their digital presence as very or extremely effective (29%), with an additional 37% saying it's moderately effective. Together, this makes up nearly two-thirds of high-growth firms with a functional digital presence that enables client acquisition.

Growth firms have a lower opinion on their digital presence, with 40% saying it's moderately effective, followed very closely (37%) by firms who say they're minimally effective. Even those who say it's not effective at all (15%) outnumber those who think it's very or extremely effective (9%). It likely reflects having websites and social media accounts that aren't optimised for growth strategies. Digital presence exists, but doesn't usher in new clients.

Results indicate that a firm's digital presence can be strategically positioned to capture and convert demand. High-growth firms are showing that they've systematically addressed digital effectiveness as a strategic priority.

How effective is your firm's digital presence and outreach in attracting and converting new clients?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Extremely effective	7%	1%	
Very effective	22%	8%	4%
Moderately effective	37%	40%	22%
Minimal effectiveness	22%	37%	42%
Not effective at all	13%	15%	32%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Rating their digital presence as 'extremely' or 'very' effective is observed in

29% of high-growth firms

9% of growth firms

4% of conservative firms

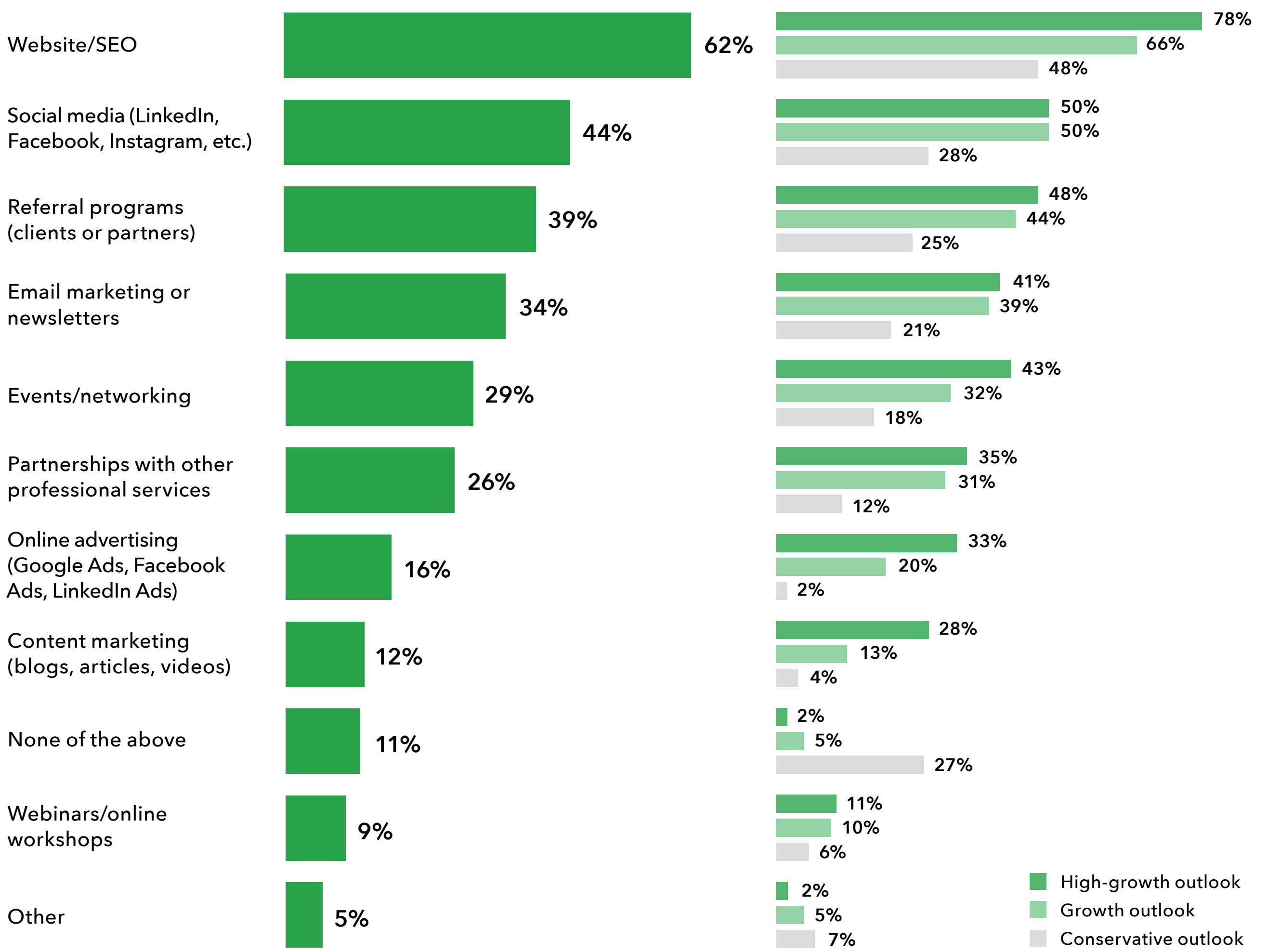
Marketing channels

High-growth firms diversify marketing channels and invest in relationship-building

While digital channels dominate across all firms, high-growth firms distinguish themselves through broader channel adoption and strategic investment in relationship-based marketing. High-growth firms are the highest investors in referral programs (48% vs 39%), events/networking (43% vs 29%), partnerships with other professional services (35% vs 26%). Among digital channels, they also outpace other segments in online advertising (33% vs 20% growth outlook, 2% conservative) and content marketing (28% vs 13% growth outlook).

Despite the diversified approach among high-growth firms, the industry overall shows a disconnect between proven effectiveness and actual adoption. Previous research has shown that referrals are the largest source of new clients for accounting firms[1], and yet only 39% of all firms have referral programs. Meanwhile, 62% invest in websites and 44% in social media, channels that show mixed results in effectiveness. Data suggests that firms looking to accelerate growth should invest more in relationship-building strategies which high-growth firms have systematically adopted.

Which of the following marketing channels does your firm currently use?



[1] Intuit Quickbooks, & Agile Market Intelligence. (2025, April). SMB Navigator Report (2nd ed.). **https://www.accountantsdaily.com.au/smb-navigator-report-2025**

Effectiveness of marketing channels

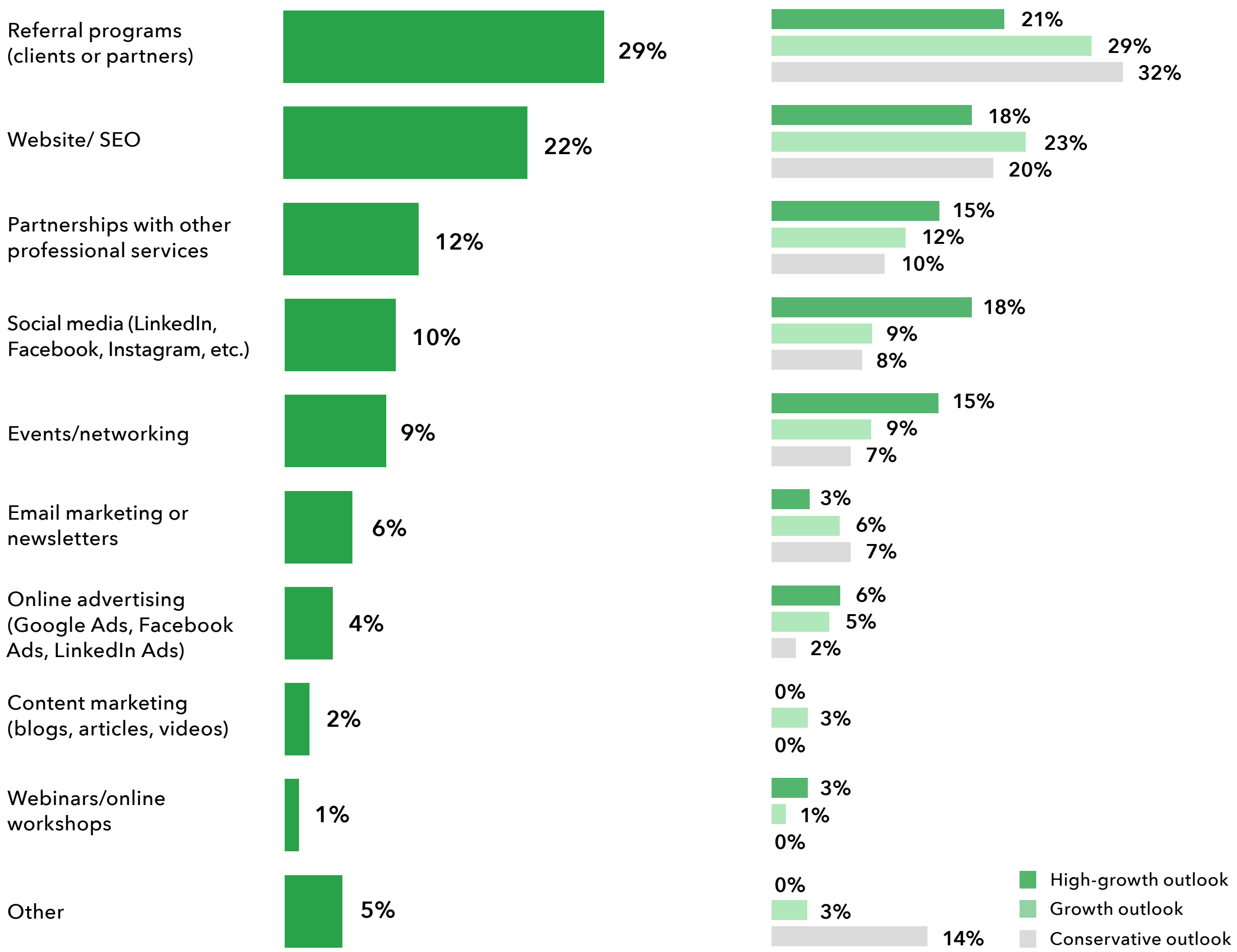
Referral programs are the most effective channel for client acquisition

When asked about the single, most effective channel for client acquisition, consensus among firms point towards referrals. It's the largest driver especially for conservative outlook firms (32%) and growth outlook firms (29%). For high-growth firms, referrals are still at the top of the list (21%), but websites (18%) and social media (18%) trail closely, bearing evidence that their diversified approach is working for them.

Overall, the data reveals a striking mismatch between perceived effectiveness and actual adoption. While referral programs are recognised as the most effective channel by all firms, only 44% of growth outlook firms and 25% of conservative outlook firms have a referral program (see page 19).

Meanwhile, websites present an execution challenge. Despite 62% of firms maintaining a digital presence, and websites being the second most effective channel overall, only 9% of firms consider it highly effective for client engagement, with majority (37%) describing it as minimally effective. The gap is not in adoption, but in execution.

Which of these channels are most effective in attracting new clients to your business?



Asking for referrals

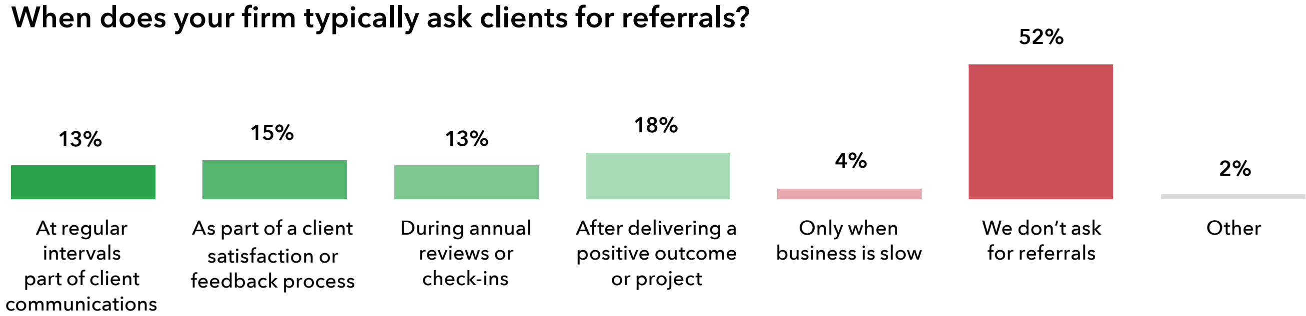
Most firms take a reactive approach to asking for referrals

Firms vary widely in their approach to asking clients for referrals. Overall, 52% confirm they don't ask their clients at all. However, this masks significant differences by growth outlook. Among conservative outlook firms, 66% never ask for referrals, compared to 48% of growth outlook firms, and 39% of high-growth outlook firms.

Among those who do ask, timing and approach reveal more distinctions. High-growth firms are more likely to create structured opportunities such as asking after positive outcomes (30%), integrating it into feedback processes (26%) and annual reviews (22%). The figures go down along with the growth outlook.

Even among firms that ask for referrals, most take a reactive, rather than proactive approach. Only 26% have systematised asking for referrals through regular intervals (13%) or annual reviews (13%), while the majority wait for moments such as the delivery of projects. The ad-hoc approach might explain why referral programs remain underutilised despite being recognised as the most effective channel for client acquisition.

When does your firm typically ask clients for referrals?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
At regular intervals as part of client communications	15%	15%	8%
As part of a client satisfaction or feedback process	26%	18%	6%
During annual reviews or check-ins	22%	13%	12%
After delivering a positive outcome or project	30%	19%	14%
Only when business is slow		4%	4%
We don't ask for referrals	39%	48%	66%
Other		4%	

THE GROWTH EDGE

Not asking for client referrals is observed in

39% of high-growth firms

48% of growth firms

66% of conservative firms

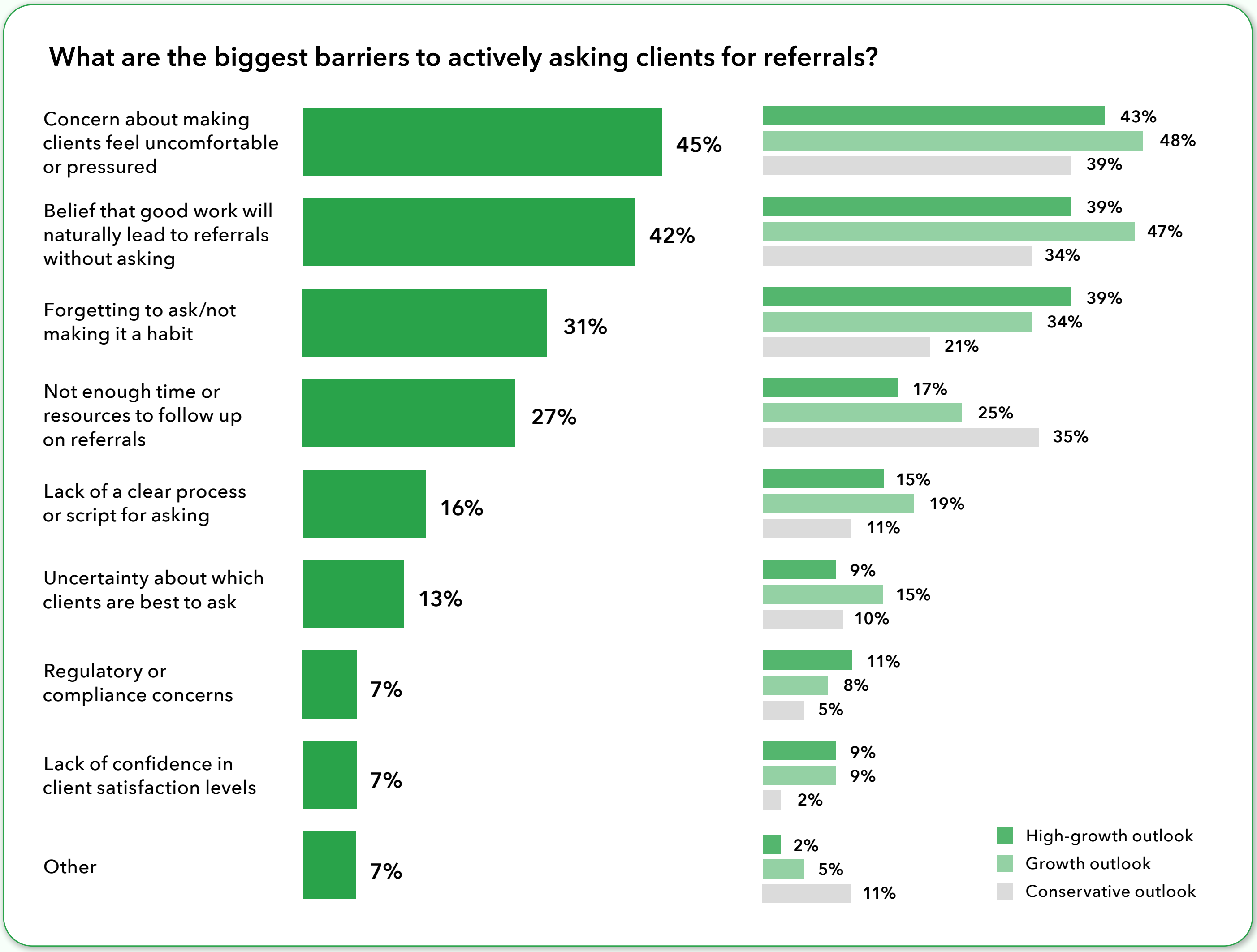
Reasons why firms don't ask for referrals

Accountants hesitate to ask clients for referrals, fearing it would make clients uncomfortable

For accountants who do not ask their clients for referrals, the top reason (45%) is out of concern that their clients might feel pressured or uncomfortable. The second most cited reason is a passive approach, thinking that good work will naturally lead to referrals without asking (42%). More growth firms identify this reason (47%) compared to high-growth (39%) or conservative firms (34%).

Others reasons are forgetting to ask clients (31%) or not having enough resources to follow up on referrals (27%). The rest of the reasons are decidedly about not knowing how to go about it, such as lack of clear process or script (16%), uncertainty about which clients to ask (13%), regulatory/compliance concerns (7%) and even lack of confidence in client satisfaction levels (7%).

It becomes evident that firms who do not ask clients for referrals have not yet developed a deliberate approach to this acquisition channel. The barriers identified – from discomfort, uncertainty, to lack of progress – are operational and strategic gaps, rather than fundamental obstacles. And for the majority of firms currently relying on organic referrals alone, formalising even a basic approach could transform their growth from relying on chance to becoming structured and intentional.



SECTION

04

Role of Tech/AI

This section focuses on how technology and AI are adopted and leveraged by accounting firms as tools for practice growth, time-savings and competitive advantage.

Tech adoption rates

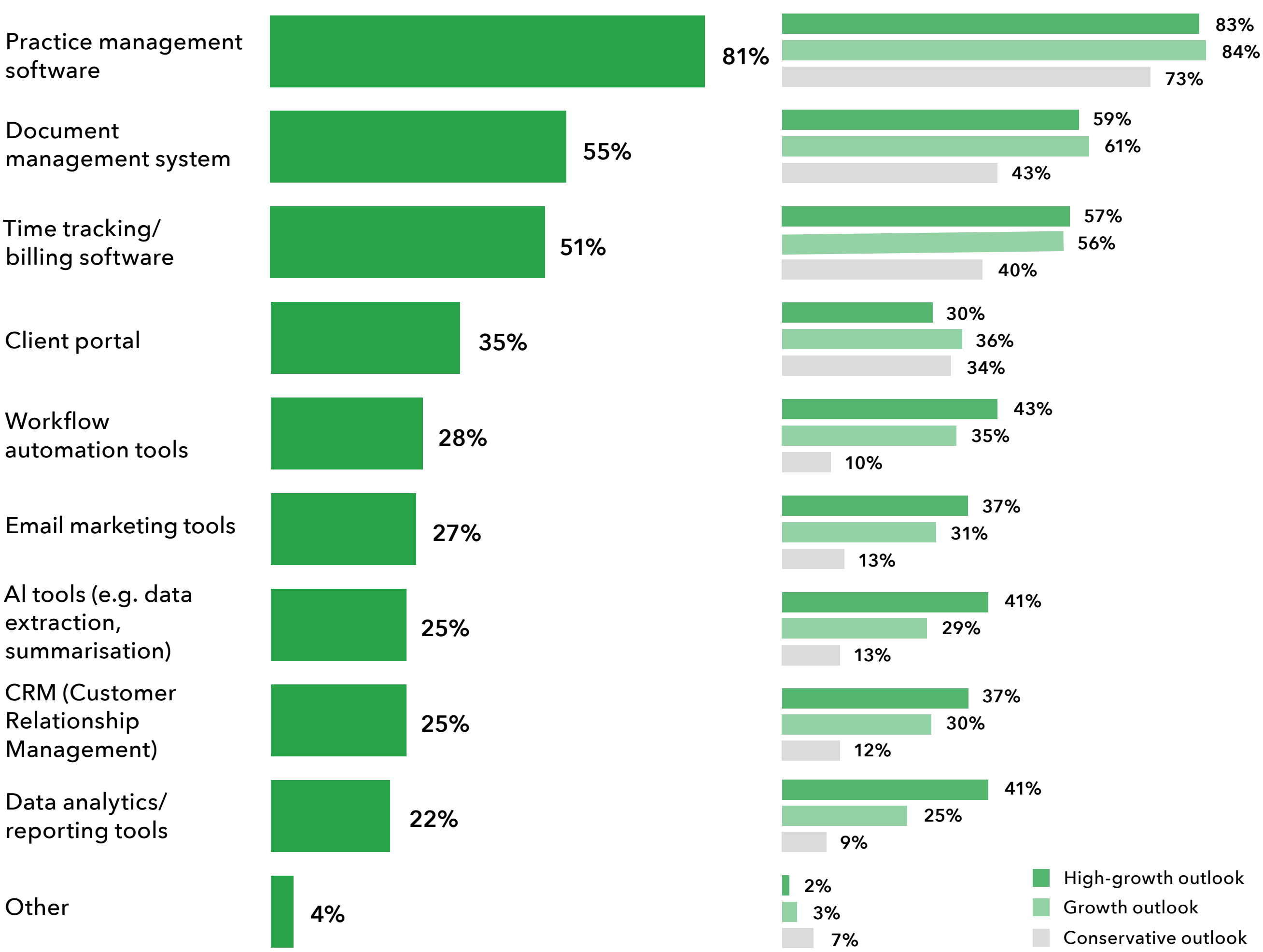
High-growth firms lead in technology adoption across nearly every category

Moderate and high-growth outlook firms have similar adoption rates for the core accounting tech stack, namely practice management software (83-84%), document management (59-61%), and time tracking/billing software (56-57%). But high-growth outlook firms differentiate through significantly higher adoption of strategic technologies that drive efficiency and insights.

The largest gaps emerge in tools that enable automation and data-driven decision-making. High-growth firms lead in data analytics/reporting tools (41% vs 25% growth outlook), AI tools for data extraction and summarisation (41% vs 29% growth outlook), workflow automation (43% vs 35% growth outlook), and CRM systems (37% vs 30% growth outlook). These technologies allow high-growth firms to work smarter, automate routine processes and leverage data for strategic advantage.

High-growth firms separate themselves by investing in automation, analytics, and client communication tools that enable smarter, more scalable operations.

Which of the following types of technology does your firm currently use?



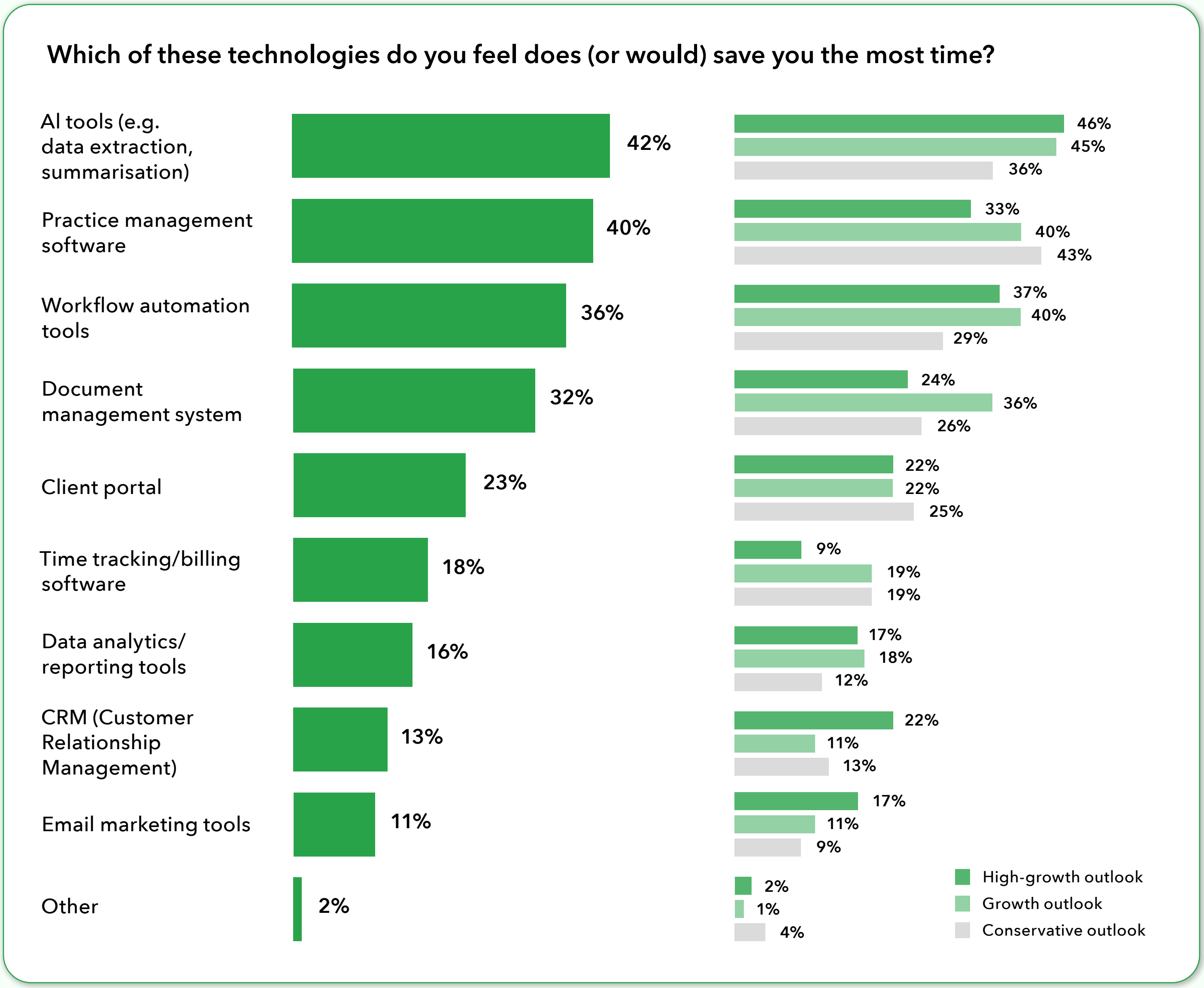
Time savings from tech

Accountants cite AI as the most time-saving technology

Presented with different tech solutions, 42% of accountants identify AI tools as the technology that's saving them the most time. AI even goes above practice management software (40%), which is the backbone of firm efficiency. The two are followed by workflow automation tools at 36%, suggesting accountants recognise the value in technology that reduces manual, repetitive tasks.

High-growth firms show distinct patterns in what they find time-saving. Beyond AI (46%), they place higher value on workflow automation tools, indicating they are systematically reducing manual processes. Practice management software ranks third (33%), compared to 40% of moderate-growth outlook firms, ranking it second, and 43% of conservative firms ranking it first.

Document management systems register as time-saving for around a third (32%) of accountants, while more specialised tools like CRM, data analytics and email marketing see recognition from fewer than 20% of firms. It remains that more high-growth outlook firms see these as time-saving tools.



Allocating extra time

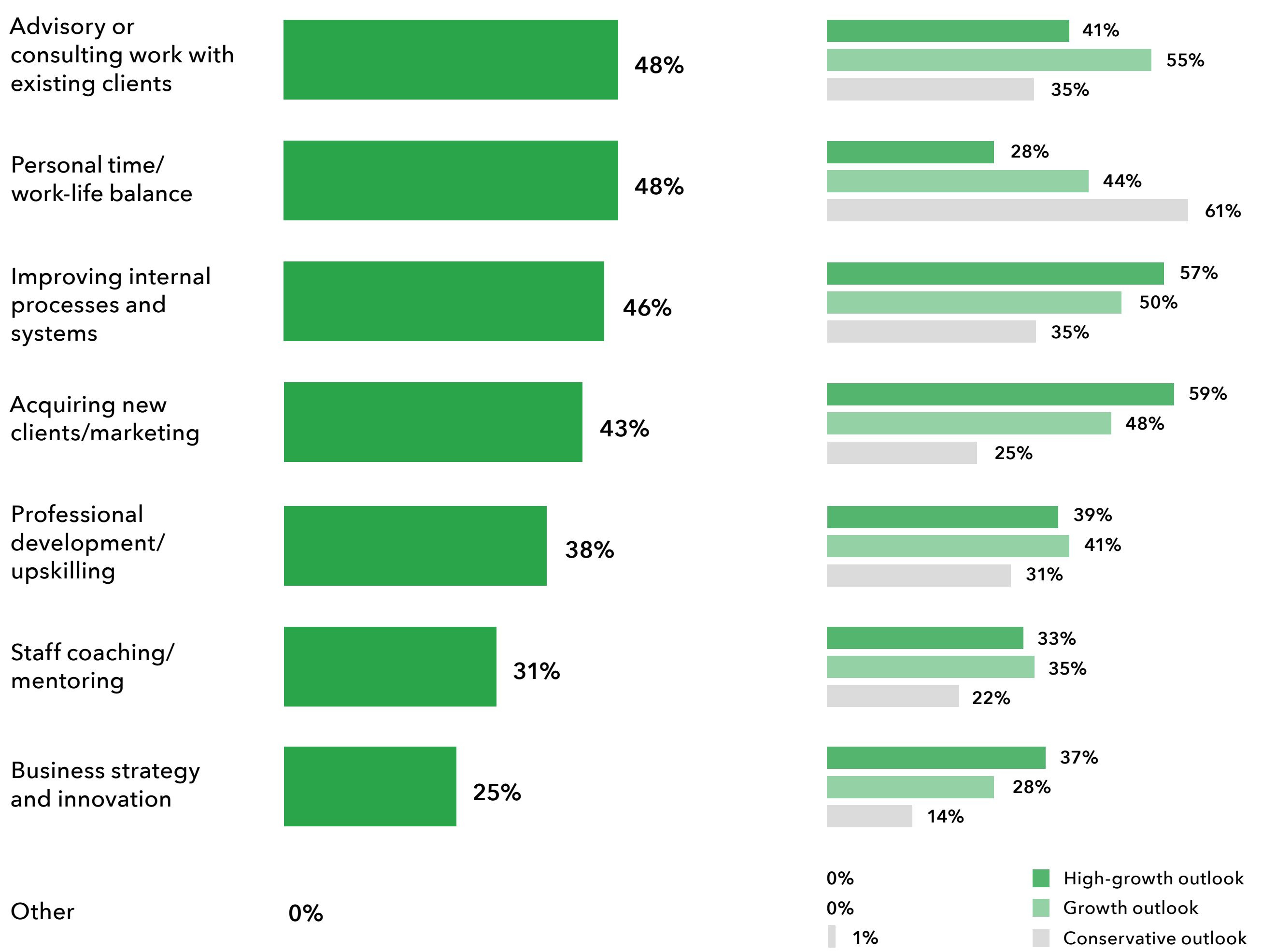
Time investment priorities reveal strategic divides across growth segments

If accountants have more time available, firms with different growth outlooks would spend it very differently. High-growth outlook firms would invest that time in acquiring new clients (59%) or improving internal processes and systems (57%). Moderate-growth firms will prioritise advisory or consulting work with existing clients (55%), deepening relationships with their current base. Conservative outlook firms, by contrast, choose spending it on personal time and work-life balance (61%), reflecting both capacity constraints and a deliberate choice to prioritise personal time over growth.

The differences reveal how growth outlook shapes not just business strategy but fundamental time allocation.

High-growth firms see time as a resource that can be harnessed for growth, moderate-growth firms invest in strengthening existing relationships, creating depth over breadth. Conservative firms would use additional hours to reclaim balance rather than expand operations.

If you had more time available, what would you spend it on?

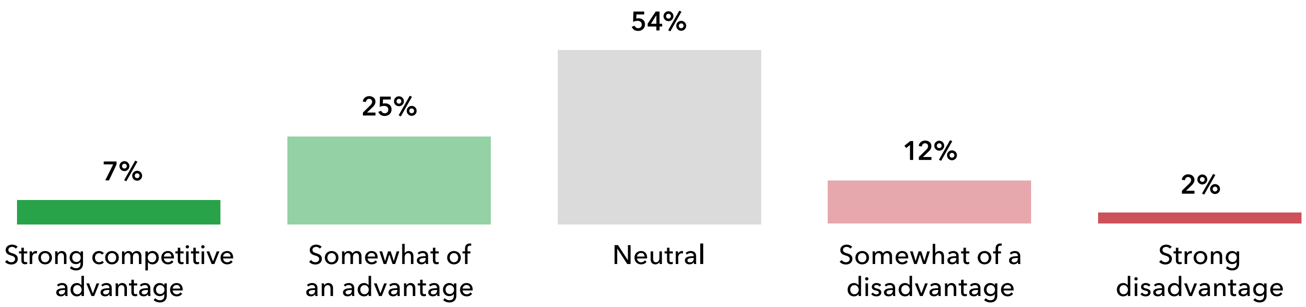


High-growth firms leverage technology as competitive advantage

High-growth outlook firms see their technology stack as a strategic differentiator. Six in ten (61%) believe their current tech puts them at a competitive advantage with clients, whether new or existing. This significantly outpaces moderate-growth firms at 37%, more so with conservative outlook firms (12%).

The sentiment can reveal different stages of technological maturity. More high-growth firms adopt platforms and integrations outside of the core accounting tech stack. Half (50%) of moderate-growth outlook firms are neutral about their tech stack, which suggests they're operating with functional technology, rather than tech that can differentiate them in the market.

Do you feel your current technology stack puts you at a competitive advantage or disadvantage when trying to attract new clients or retain existing ones?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Strong competitive advantage	20%	8%	
Somewhat of an advantage	41%	29%	12%
Neutral	24%	50%	73%
Somewhat of a disadvantage	9%	11%	13%
Strong disadvantage	7%	1%	1%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Using technology 'strongly' and 'somewhat' of a competitive advantage is observed in

61% of high-growth firms

37% of growth firms

12% of conservative firms

Technology's role in capability development

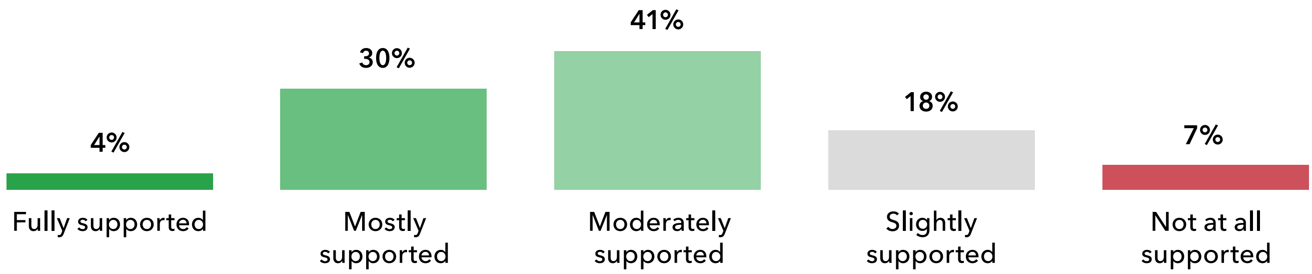
High-growth firms report stronger platform support for service expansion

High-growth firms feel better supported by their accounting technology platforms when it comes to offering or expanding services. Over half (56%) say their platforms fully or mostly support their ability to expand capabilities, compared to 37% of moderate-growth firms and 20% of conservative outlook firms.

The majority of conservative (49%) and moderate-growth (39%) firms lie in feeling moderately supported. This suggests that their platforms handle core functions adequately but may not enable the kind of service expansion or differentiation that drives growth.

The gap suggests that high-growth firms have already invested in more capable platforms. Another possibility is they're extracting more value from similar technology through better implementation and utilisation.

To what extent does your current accounting technology platform support your ability to offer or expand new services/capabilities?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Fully supported	15%	4%	1%
Mostly supported	41%	33%	19%
Moderately supported	30%	39%	49%
Slightly supported	11%	18%	19%
Not at all supported	2%	6%	12%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Feeling 'fully' or 'mostly' supported by their accounting tech platforms is observed in

57% of high-growth firms

39% of growth firms

20% of conservative firms

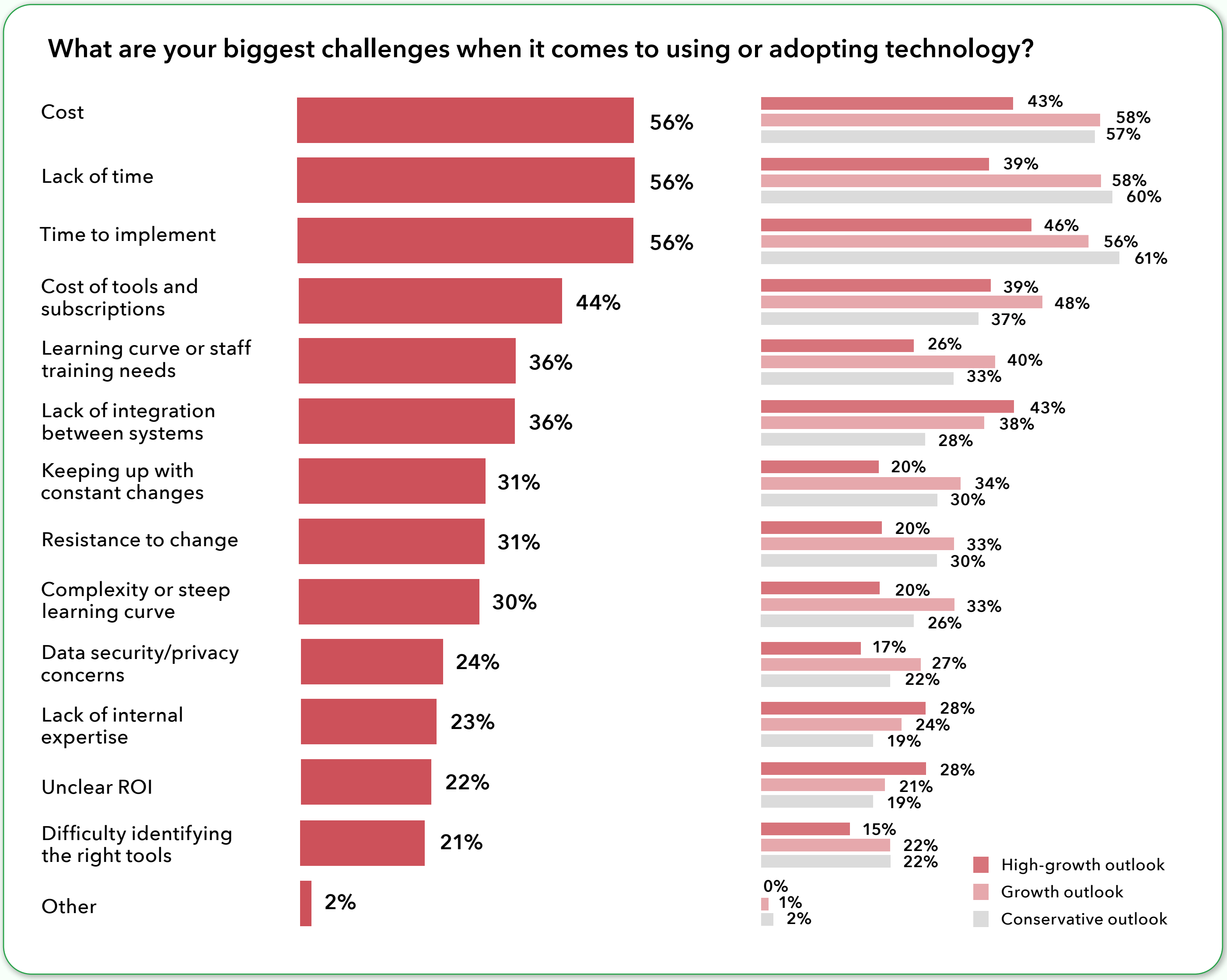
Barriers to technology adoption

Time and money prevents firms from tech adoption, high-growth firms deal with integration issues the most

Cost, lack of time and implementation time dominate as technology adoption barriers across all firms, each cited by 56% of respondents. However, the nature of challenges shifts by growth outlook. These weigh heavier on conservative outlook firms, compared to their growth outlook counterparts.

High-growth firms face some unique friction points. While they still contend with implementation time (46%) and cost (43%), they also deal with lack of integration between systems (43%). The integration barrier is one of the few challenges that more high-growth firms identify compared to moderate-growth firms (38%) and conservative firms (28%). This reflects the complexity of their technology environments.

Other barriers that affect high-growth firms more include lack of internal expertise (28% vs 24% moderate, 19% conservative) and unclear ROI (17% vs 21% moderate, 15% conservative). These barriers are indicative of a broader technology adoption of tech platforms, as well as higher appetite for experimentation.



Frequency of AI use

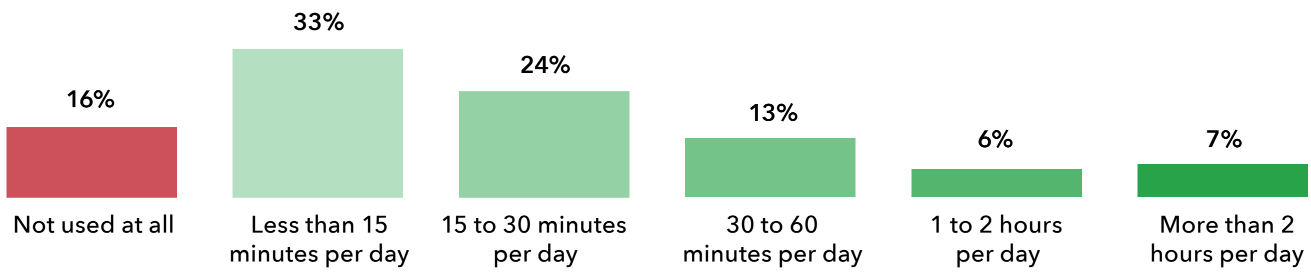
AI adoption reaches 83%, with high-growth firms using it most frequently

AI adoption has reached 84% among accountants, with only 16% reporting no AI use at all. The intensity of usage varies dramatically by firm growth.

Over a quarter (28%) of accountants in high-growth outlook firms are already using AI at least 1 hour daily – nearly double the number of accountants in moderate-growth firms (15%) and four times that of conservative outlook firms (7%). This pattern reinforces high-growth firms' openness to technology adoption.

Yet across all growth outlooks, the most common usage remains minimal, 33% of accountants use AI for 15 minutes or less per day, with the highest concentration in conservative firms (42%). Another 24% use AI between 15 to 30 minutes daily, suggesting many accountants are still in early experimentation stages, rather than deep integration into their workflows.

How often do you use AI in your day-to-day operations?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Not used at all	5%	14%	23%
Less than 15 minutes per day	33%	30%	42%
15 to 30 minutes per day	23%	25%	21%
30 to 60 minutes per day	13%	16%	8%
1 to 2 hours per day	20%	5%	4%
More than 2 hours per day	8%	10%	3%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Using AI tools for more than 1 hour daily is observed in

28% of high-growth firms

15% of growth firms

7% of conservative firms

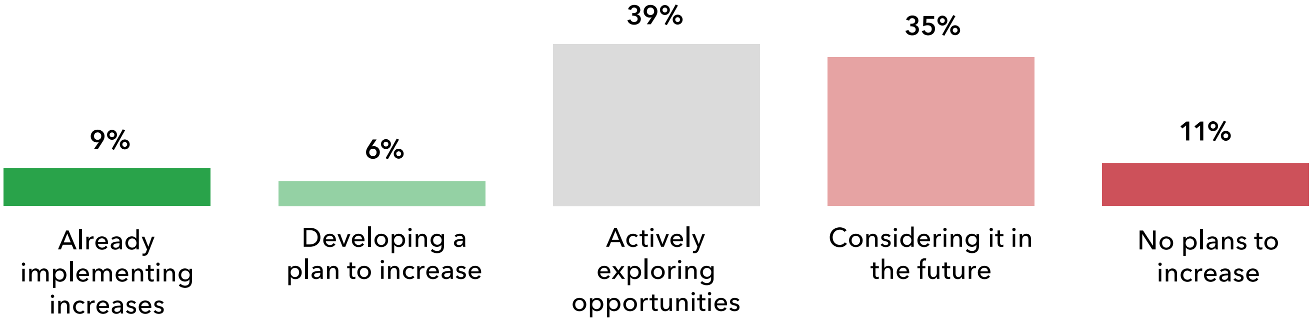
AI Adoption

High-growth firms take action on AI while others wait and watch

While 74% of all firms are either actively exploring opportunities or remain considering AI in the future, high-growth firms show that they're moving beyond just interest and into action. Over a quarter (28%) of high-growth firms are already in concrete implementation (18% already implementing increases and 10% are developing specific plans to increase). Another 60% are actively exploring opportunities, bringing the total in active mode to 88%.

By stark contrast, 40% of moderate-growth firms, and 69% of conservative outlook firms remain to only either consider AI in the future or fall in the group not planning to increase at all. The pattern shows the willingness of high-growth firms to act, while others are still deliberating. They are willing to experiment and iterate quickly.

Which of the following best describes your organisation's approach to increasing AI use in day-to-day operations?



	High-growth outlook	Growth outlook	Conservative outlook
Already implementing increases	18%	11%	4%
Developing a plan to increase	10%	8%	1%
Actively exploring opportunities	60%	41%	27%
Considering it in the future	10%	31%	52%
No plans to increase	3%	9%	17%

THE GROWTH EDGE

Implementing increases or developing a plan to increase AI usage is observed in

28% of high-growth firms

19% of growth firms

5% of conservative firms

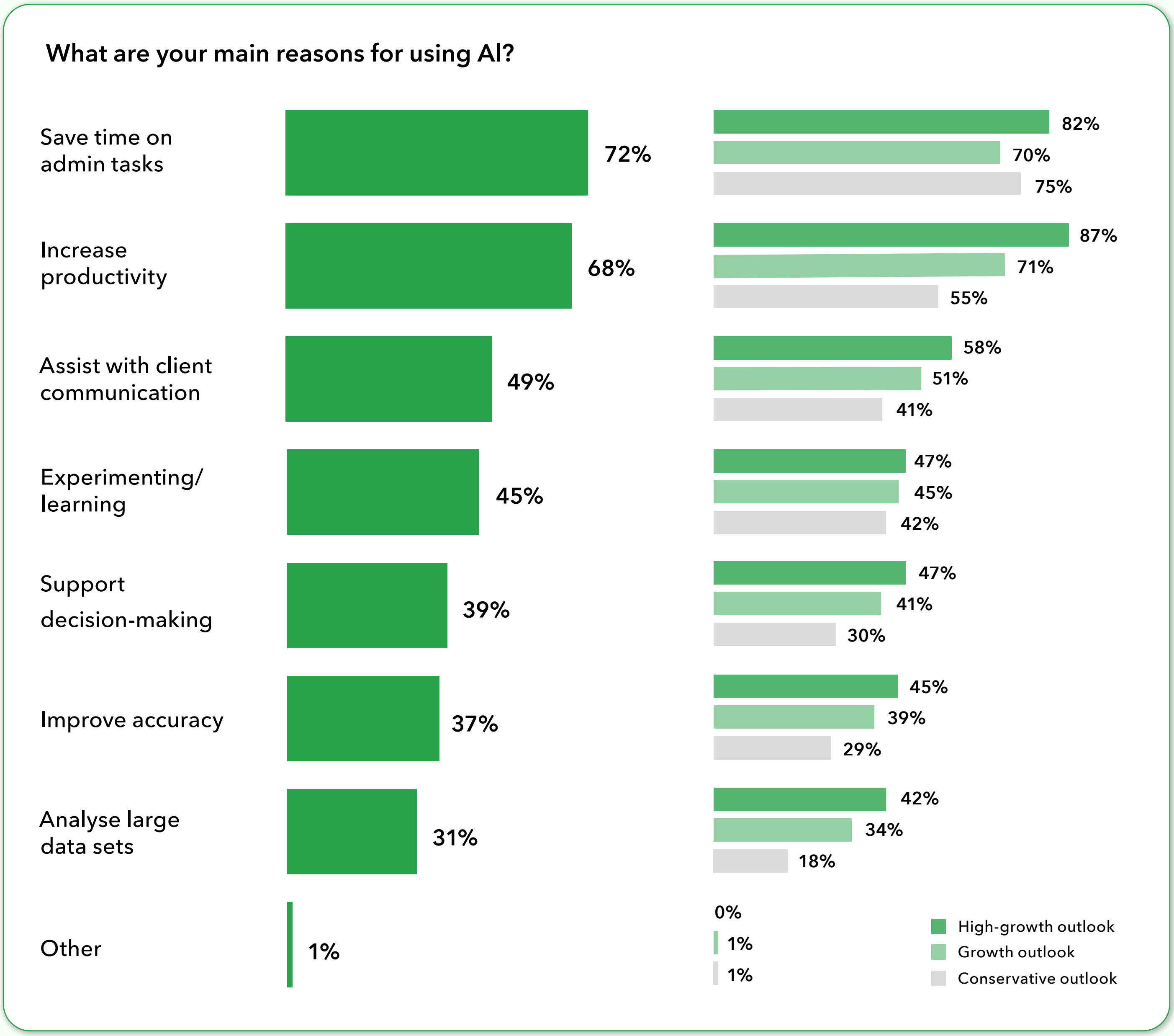
Reasons for using AI

Accountants use AI in business to save time on admin tasks and increase productivity

Saving time on administrative tasks is the universal driver of AI adoption, appealing equally across all firm types (82% of high-growth, 70% of moderate-growth, and 75% of conservative outlook firms). The broad consensus spotlights AI's immediate, tangible value in reducing mundane workload.

However, high-growth firms don't stop at efficiency gains. They're significantly more likely to leverage AI across multiple dimensions such as increasing productivity, assisting in client communications, and learning. Moreover, when it comes to supporting decision-making, analysing large data sets, and even improving accuracy, significantly more high-growth firms are reporting these as reasons for using AI.

Seeing AI as a multi-purpose tool rather than a simple efficiency hack is what separates high-growth firms from their peers. High-growth firms are exploring how AI can enhance every aspect of their practice.



Barriers to AI adoption

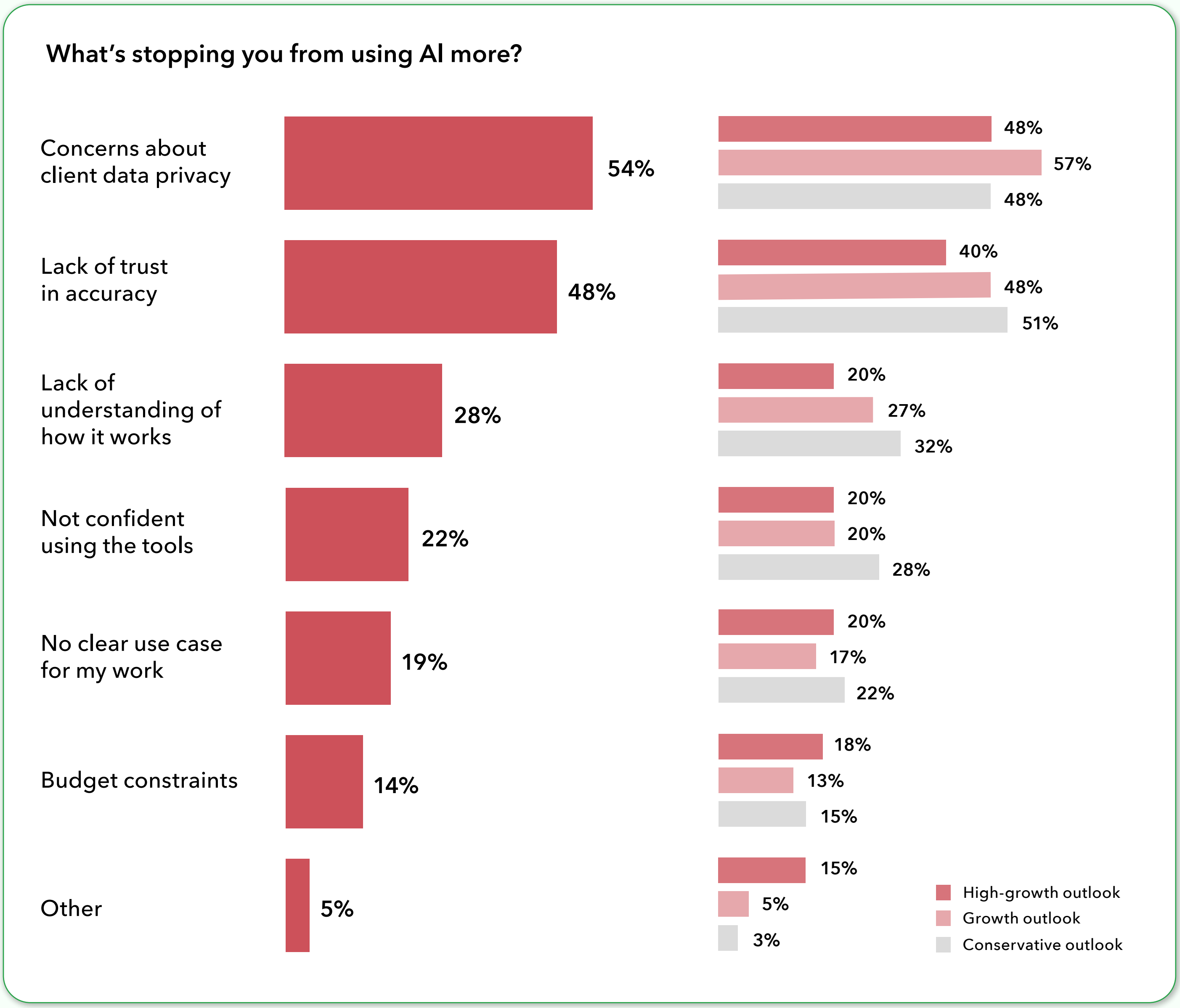
The top barrier to AI adoption is client data privacy

When asked about what prevents them from deepening AI integration into their work routines, concerns over client data privacy and overall accuracy emerged as top considerations.

Roughly 1 in 2 accounting professionals (48-57%) cited client data privacy concerns as a critical factor that prevents them from further expanding their use of AI. In a regulatory environment working with sensitive information, accountants are naturally concerned about how client data is handled, who can access information, and how vulnerable the data pipeline is.

Lack of trust in accuracy came in second overall as a top barrier for AI adoption. Accounting is a practice designed around accuracy. While data concerns might be due to lack of transparency, the concern over accuracy likely reflects the experiences of accountants with current AI tools.

Apart from these two barriers, other considerations don't bear the same weight. Factors around how AI works, or even budget constraints are identified by less than 3 out of 10 (28%) of accountants overall.



SECTION

05

Roadmap to High-growth

This section discusses data-backed steps accounting firms can take to move into a position of high-growth.

Best practices and marketing guide for high-growth

This benchmarking study revealed the best practices that separates high-growth accounting firms from their peers. Drawn directly from data, this section provides a roadmap for firms looking to accelerate their growth trajectory. Use this guide as a diagnostic checklist to identify where your firm stands and what steps to prioritise next.

Strategic client relationships

Self-assessment checklist:

Are you involved in your clients' key business decisions?

High-growth firms are 1.3x more likely to be mostly or completely involved in client decision-making (61% vs 46% moderate-growth). They take a strategic advisory position, going beyond a transactional relationship.

How often do you connect with your high-value clients or those with high-growth potential?

Fifty-two per cent of high-growth firms engage 'often' or 'all the time', compared to just 38% of moderate-growth firms.

Do you have a formal process to collect and act on client feedback?

Thirty-nine per cent of high-growth firms have established processes ('well-established' or 'regular but not always consistent'), versus only 26% of moderate-growth firms.

Is your feedback process well-established and consistent?

High-growth firms are 2.8x more likely to have well-established systems (17% vs 6% moderate-growth).

Key actions:

- Position your practice as a strategic advisor, not just a service provider. The shift from transactional service provider to strategic partner is fundamental to sustainable growth.
- Prioritise engagement with high-value clients through systematic touchpoints and regular strategic conversations.
- Establish systematic client feedback processes that transform feedback from ad-hoc conversations into actionable intelligence.

Best practices and marketing guide for high-growth

This benchmarking study revealed the best practices that separate high-growth accounting firms from their peers. Drawn directly from data, this section provides a roadmap for firms looking to accelerate their growth trajectory. Use this guide as a diagnostic checklist to identify where your firm stands and what steps to prioritise next.

Digital presence and marketing channels

Self-assessment checklist:

How effective is your digital presence at attracting and converting new clients?

Twenty-nine per cent of high-growth firms rate their digital presence as very or extremely effective, compared to just 9% of moderate-growth firms.

Are you using at least 5 different marketing channels?

High-growth firms diversify across both digital (websites, social media, online advertising, content marketing) and offline channels (referrals, events, partnerships).

Do you actively use referral programs, not just receive passive referrals?

High-growth firms are more likely to ask for referrals at regular intervals, client feedback processes, annual reviews or project delivery compared to moderate-growth firms.

Are you investing in relationship-building channels?

High-growth firms lead in events/networking (43%), partnerships with professional services (35%), and structured referral programs (48%).

Is your website optimised for client acquisition, not just information?

Despite 62% of all firms having websites, effectiveness is concentrated among high-growth firms who optimise and maintain their digital presence.

Key actions:

- Optimise digital presence for client acquisition beyond just having a website. Leverage social media (50% of high-growth firms), email marketing (41%), and online advertising (33%).
- Diversify marketing channels across online and offline strategies. High-growth firms lead adoption of almost every channel, from digital to in-person networking.
- Bridge the gap between adoption and effectiveness. Adoption alone doesn't guarantee results, but proper execution can.
- Formalise referral programs. It is the most effective client acquisition channel.

Best practices and marketing guide for high-growth

This benchmarking study revealed the best practices that separates high-growth accounting firms from their peers. Drawn directly from data, this section provides a roadmap for firms looking to accelerate their growth trajectory. Use this guide as a diagnostic checklist to identify where your firm stands and what steps to prioritise next.

Referral Systems

Self-assessment checklist:

Do you actively ask clients for referrals?
Sixty-six per cent of conservative firms, 48% of growth firm and 39% of high-growth firms don't ask for referrals at all, despite its effectiveness in growing client base.

Have you integrated referral requests into your workflow?
High-growth firms ask after positive outcomes (30%), during annual reviews (22%), and as part of feedback processes (26%).

Do you have a systematic approach rather than waiting for the "right moment"?
Only 26% of all firms have systematised asking through regular intervals (13%) or annual reviews (13%).

Have you overcome the discomfort of asking for referrals?
Forty-five per cent of firms who do not ask for referrals cite concern about making clients uncomfortable as the top barrier. In contrast, high-growth firms have developed scripts and natural integration points.

Is asking for referrals part of your client communication templates and processes?
Moving from passive (believing good work naturally leads to referrals) to proactive and structured.

Key actions:

- Build referral requests into your workflow by developing clear scripts and embedding them naturally after positive outcomes, in annual reviews, and linked to feedback processes.
- Be intentional about asking for referrals. Move from a passive approach to proactive. High-growth firms are more likely to actively ask for referrals. Move from passive approach to proactive engagement.
- Address the psychological barrier: the concern about making clients uncomfortable can be alleviated through professional scripts and natural integration into existing touchpoints.

Best practices and marketing guide for high-growth

This benchmarking study revealed the best practices that separates high-growth accounting firms from their peers. Drawn directly from data, this section provides a roadmap for firms looking to accelerate their growth trajectory. Use this guide as a diagnostic checklist to identify where your firm stands and what steps to prioritise next.

Technology strategy

Self-assessment checklist:

Does your technology stack provide competitive advantage beyond basic efficiency?
Sixty-one per cent of high-growth firms believe their tech stack gives them competitive advantage, versus 37% of moderate-growth and 12% of conservative firms.

Are you using technologies beyond core accounting software?
High-growth firms lead in data analytics/reporting tools (41%), AI tools (41%), workflow automation (43%), and CRM systems (37%).

How many hours per day do you use AI?
Twenty-eight per cent of high-growth firms use AI for over 1 hour daily, compared to 15% of moderate-growth and 7% of conservative firms.

Are you using AI for strategic purposes beyond time-saving?
High-growth firms leverage AI for learning (47%), client communication (58%), decision-making (47%), and data analysis (42%), and not just productivity (87%).

Have you moved beyond the exploration phase to active implementation?
Eighty-eight per cent of high-growth firms are actively exploring or already implementing AI increases, versus 60% of moderate-growth firms.

Key actions:

- Invest in technologies that provide strategic advantage, not just efficiency. Move beyond core accounting tech tools into automation, insights, and scalability.
- Leverage AI for purposes beyond time-savings. Use it for learning new skills, communicating with clients, data analysis, and accuracy improvement.
- Cultivate an experimental mindset toward technology. Eighty-eight per cent of high-growth firms are between 'actively exploring' to 'already implementing' AI; their adoption rates stem from willingness to experiment and iterate quickly.

Best practices and marketing guide for high-growth

This benchmarking study revealed the best practices that separates high-growth accounting firms from their peers. Drawn directly from data, this section provides a roadmap for firms looking to accelerate their growth trajectory. Use this guide as a diagnostic checklist to identify where your firm stands and what steps to prioritise next.

Time allocation and resource management

Self-assessment checklist:

If you had more time available, would you invest it in client acquisition and marketing?

Fifty-nine per cent of high-growth firms would, compared to 48% of moderate-growth firms who would focus on existing client advisory work.

Are capacity constraints preventing your growth?

Only 59% of high-growth firms cite capacity as a barrier versus 68% of moderate-growth firms, suggesting better resource management.

Have you identified specific solutions to capacity constraints?

Fifty-five per cent of firms recommend hiring quality staff; AI, workflow automation, and outsourcing are complementary solutions.

Do you have a structured training program for staff development?

High-growth firms invest in both technical knowledge and soft skills training to address skills gaps systematically.

Are you strategic about talent acquisition versus training?

Some firms upskill current employees through structured programs, while others recruit experienced staff to fill capability gaps quickly.

Key actions:

- Redirect time toward client acquisition. If given more time, 59% of high-growth firms would spend it on acquiring new clients/marketing and 57% on improving internal processes/systems.
- Address capacity constraints through strategic staffing and technology. The solution is multifaceted: hire quality staff, leverage technology and outsourcing.
- Invest in skills development through structured training programs for current staff or recruiting people who already possess necessary capabilities. Prioritising workforce development sets firms up for sustainable growth.

Immediate steps toward high-growth

For firms looking to accelerate their growth trajectory, here are three high-impact actions you can implement immediately:

Formalise your referral program

Client referrals are the most effective channel for accounting firm growth. Start by integrating referral requests into your existing workflow, such as after successful projects, during annual reviews or part of feedback conversations. Once your referral engine is running, you can optimise your other marketing channels.

Establish systematic client feedback

Implement a structured process for gathering client feedback consistently. This provides insights into which aspects of their services clients value, and which aspects can be improved. More importantly, responding thoughtfully strengthens relationships and becomes a foundation for strategic advisory relationships.

Audit your technology for strategic advantage

Evaluate your current tech stack to understand how your tools can go beyond time-saving. Leverage what solutions you have, and actively experiment with other available technologies to boost your capabilities.

Conclusion

This study has identified outlooks, tools and behaviours that differentiate high-growth firms from their peers. By assessing where your firm is positioned within the growth spectrum and identifying priority areas, you can take action to accelerate your growth. The gap between moderate and high-growth is about making strategic choices on where to invest time, talent and technology.


INTUIT
quickbooks