

## Checklist questions you should ask your accountant

### Did you know?

Besides helping you with your tax returns, an accountant can also help you choose an appropriate business structure.

### Main topics:

- Why should I use an accountant?
- What can an accountant do for me?
- When should I contact an accountant?
- Questions you should ask when choosing an accountant

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### Why should I use an accountant?

Most people know they need an accountant to help with tax returns. But an accountant can do much more for your business, such as:

- help you choose the most appropriate structure for your business
- help you identify your goals and develop appropriate strategies to achieve them
- work with you to anticipate change and plan for survival and growth
- maintain an independent view of your business situation
- keep abreast of changes to complex financial legislation, such as taxation and superannuation

Not all small businesses can afford a full-time accountant. You can therefore make continual use of a qualified external accountant to help with decision making and with advice on the efficient day-to-day operation of your business.

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### What can an accountant do for me?

An accountant can provide various services such as:

- financial planning, and advice and auditing
- record keeping system design for your business
- business structure advice
- cost & pricing analysis
- taxation – federal and state
- cash flow management services
- investigating of proposed business acquisition and financing asset purchases
- government statistics
- estate planning
- staff recruitment and business support services

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### When should I contact an accountant?

You should contact an accountant when:

- starting, buying or selling a business
- changing business structure
- planning future expansion
- acquiring or replacing plant and property
- you have problems with creditors, debtors, finance, expenses or stock
- it is tax time or at regular monthly or quarterly intervals

## Checklist questions you should ask your accountant

Questions you should ask when choosing an accountant		
Checklist questions	Tips to get you prepared	Tick (✓)
What are your qualifications?	Qualifications in financial planning, accounting, finance or economics are useful.	
How long has the practice been operating and how long have you been with the practice?	Is the practice mature, how long have the partners been there?	
What kind of clients do you mostly see and can I talk to some of them?	Do they have clients in your sector? Do they have experience in your business' special needs? Are their current clients happy with the service provided?	
What kind of services do you most frequently offer small business clients?	Experience in the type of services that suit your business. Be aware of restrictions on the advice accountants can offer.	
How do you keep track of changes in client's circumstances?	Services should include check-ups on how the plan is going.	
Who will look after my business most of the time? How many partners are there? What areas of expertise do the partners have?	Consider choosing a practice comparable in size to your business. Sometimes smaller practices suit smaller businesses.	
How will your practice help me develop my business?	Consider choosing a practice that will partner you in the development of your business.	
What sort of access will I be given to the data you hold about my business?	Accountants are good sources of information that you might need e.g for updating your business plan or a tender document.	
Can you provide business advice and assist in the financial management of my business?	Consider practices that will provide regular financial reports on your business with additional commentary.	
Do you provide advice on investments and assistance with business & personal financing?	Consider practices that hold an Australian Financial Services Licence.	
Will you return my calls within a reasonable time? How long will you take to complete your work?	Clear processes should be established to keep you well-informed.	
Are you familiar with the accounting/software package I use in my business?	If not, establish how information will be accessed and shared.	
Do you have a newsletter or some form of communication to inform me of issues of interests to my business?	How will you be informed, particularly of any changes to legislation?	
What will I get for my money?	What is the basis on which fees are charged? Will you be charged for every phone call and also for travelling time?	
How do you do research? May I look at some of the services you use?	Subscribes to research journals and services. Even if you have never heard of them, flick through them and see if they compare.	
What additional services can you offer?	Consider practices that can provide you or help you seek assistance on issues important to your business such as bookkeeping, IT support, industrial relations assistance etc	

**Watch out – In making your choice, consider whether they are listening to your questions and answering them.**

Remember eliminate anyone who:

- tries to sell you products at the first meeting
- isn't listening to you and your goals
- promises great returns or tries to sell you 'get rich quick' schemes – this is bad advice
- displays body language that is not consistent with what they are saying

For more information:

- call Business Victoria on 13 22 15
- visit the Business Victoria website at [www.business.vic.gov.au](http://www.business.vic.gov.au)
- visit a Victorian Business Centre (VBC). For a list of VBC locations, go to [www.business.vic.gov.au/vbc](http://www.business.vic.gov.au/vbc)
- to find an adviser in your area, go to [www.business.vic.gov.au/findanadviser](http://www.business.vic.gov.au/findanadviser)

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