

SafeSend**ONE**

UNRIVALED CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Busy Season Survival Guide

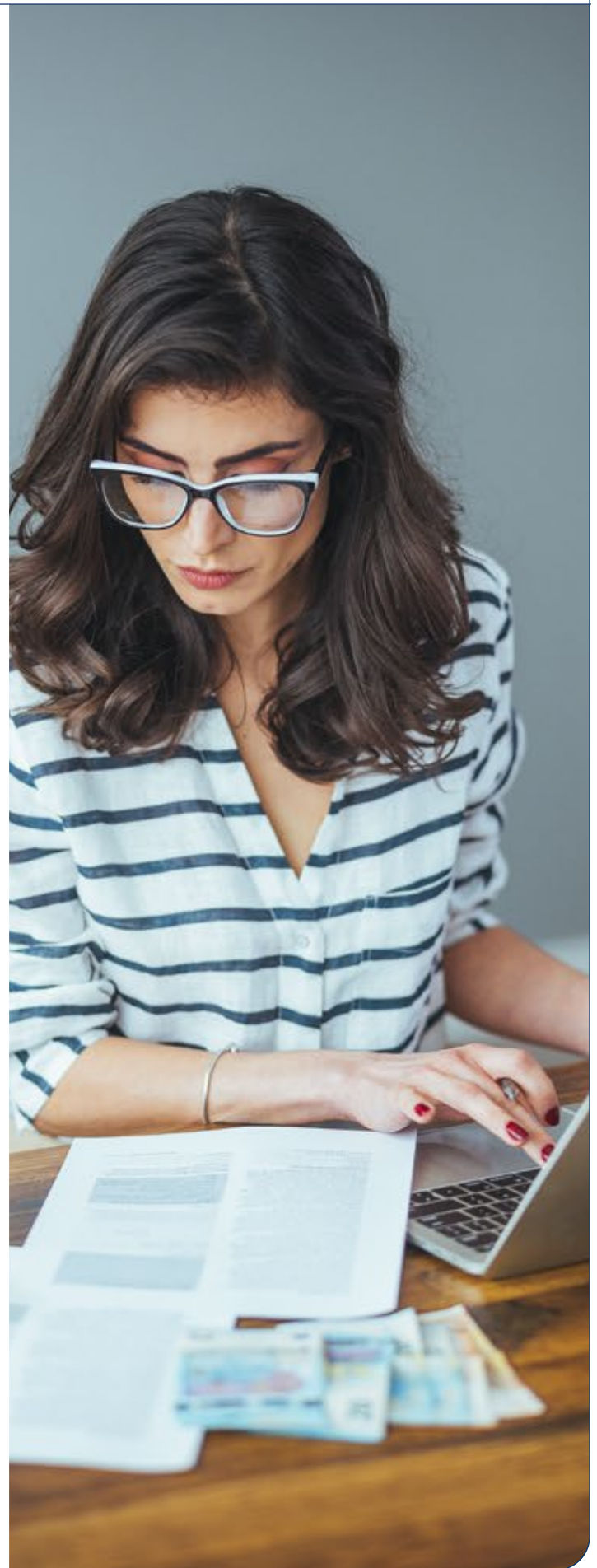
Challenges and Best Practices
for Tax and Accounting
Professionals

Tax Season's Human Impact

Everyone associated with the tax and accounting profession knows that busy season means a heavier workload to all involved. While this time of year brings an influx of income – the bread and butter for most firms – it also brings more challenges and trials, which can negatively impact health.

It's not unheard of for tax and accounting professionals to log 100-hour work weeks during busy season. That can mean working more than 16 hours a day, six days a week. Factoring in even the shortest of commutes, there's barely enough time to eat and sleep before repeating another grueling workday.

How do these demands affect professionals and firms overall? **What are some ways to combat the negative side effects** of busy season and stay healthy, both physically and mentally, throughout the first quarter of the year and beyond?



The 5 Major Challenges for Tax and Accounting Professionals During Busy Season

1. Long Hours

Many accountants already put in more time than the typical 40-hour work week. It's a fairly common practice for those in the tax and accounting profession to work 45-50 hours a week on a regular basis. Then tax season rolls around and the workload can increase to anywhere from 60-100 hours per week.

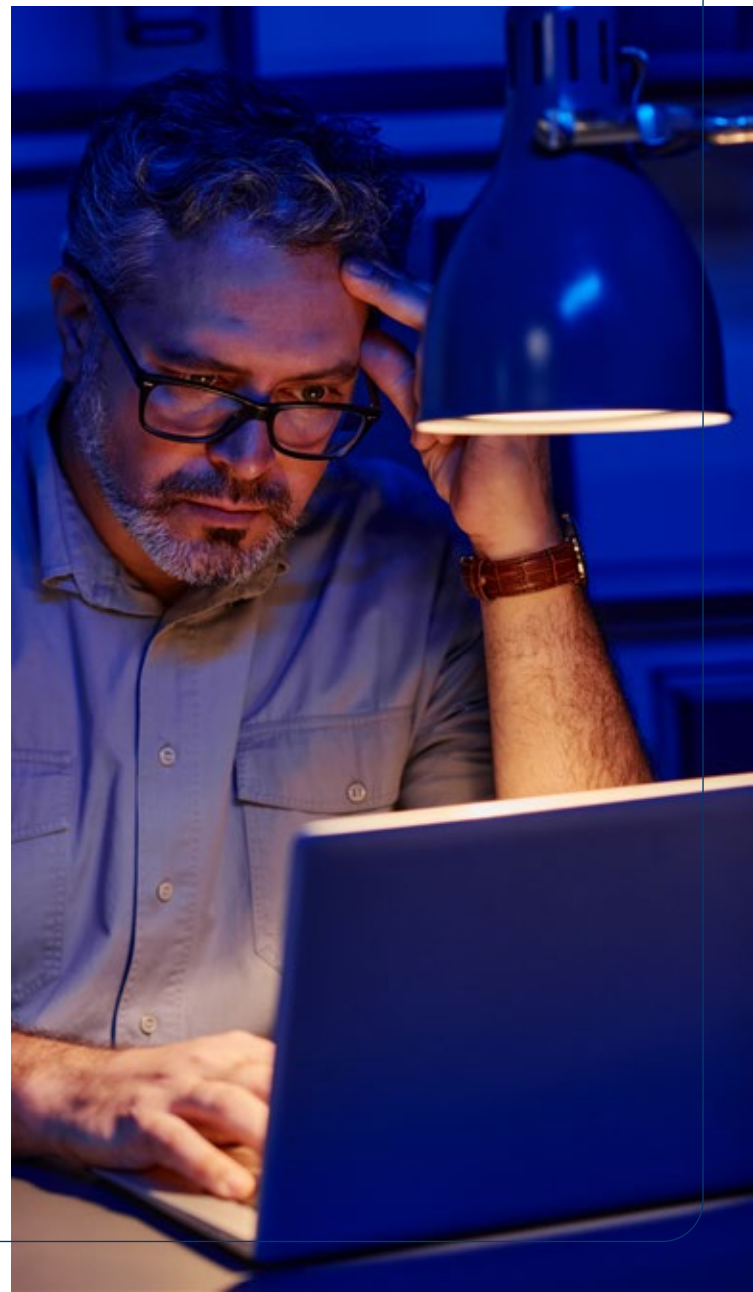
Six-day, 60-plus-hour work weeks abound in this profession through April 15th. One public accounting firm owner said that most of their staff works 55 to 58 hours per week during a typical busy season; that figure is 85 to 100 hours per week for partners.

There are long-term consequences to such elevated working hours. Adding 20-plus hours per week throughout the three months of busy season equates to an additional 240-plus hours at the office. It all can lead to issues affecting productivity and, more importantly, health.

2. Fatigue/Burnout

According to Merriam-Webster, fatigue is weariness or exhaustion from labor, exertion, or stress. Burnout is defined as exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation, usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.

Without a doubt, several weeks of working 20-plus additional hours can result in fatigue. When those weeks become months, it's a grueling routine that lends itself to burnout.



3. Sleep Loss

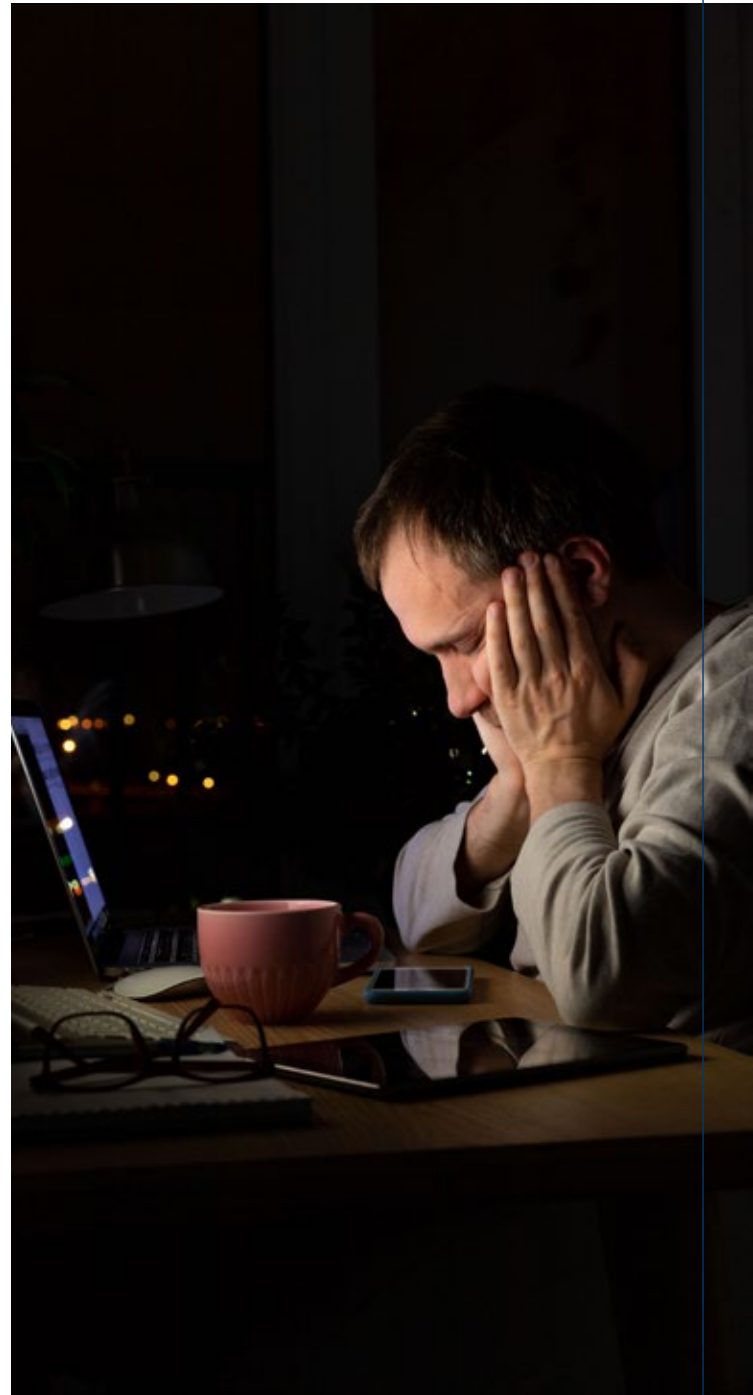
A contributing factor to both fatigue and burnout is loss of sleep. Simple math makes it easy to see that working 10-to-16-hour days six days a week doesn't leave time for much else. Unfortunately, sleep is easily and often sacrificed as a result.

There's no shortage of data showing that sleep deprivation can lead to many other issues. Sleep is essential to health, and long-term sleep loss is extremely detrimental.

The University of Chicago was home to the first sleep laboratory in the world, where Nathaniel Kleitman, known as the father of American sleep research, researched circadian rhythms, sleep and wakefulness regulation, and sleep deprivation. Today, there are about 7,500 board-certified sleep medicine doctors in the United States alone. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) has accredited more than 2,500 sleep centers, and the estimated total number of sleep centers nationwide is 4,700. The data surrounding sleep, its benefits, and the detriments of sleep loss is vast.

Our cultural tendency toward—or even pride in—lack of sleep dates back to the 1800s, when excessive sleep was seen as being slothful. However, modern conveniences from electricity to smart phones have created an environment ripe for such sleepiness. Lack of sleep can result in increased sloppiness and errors, something for which no tax and accounting professional wants to be known.

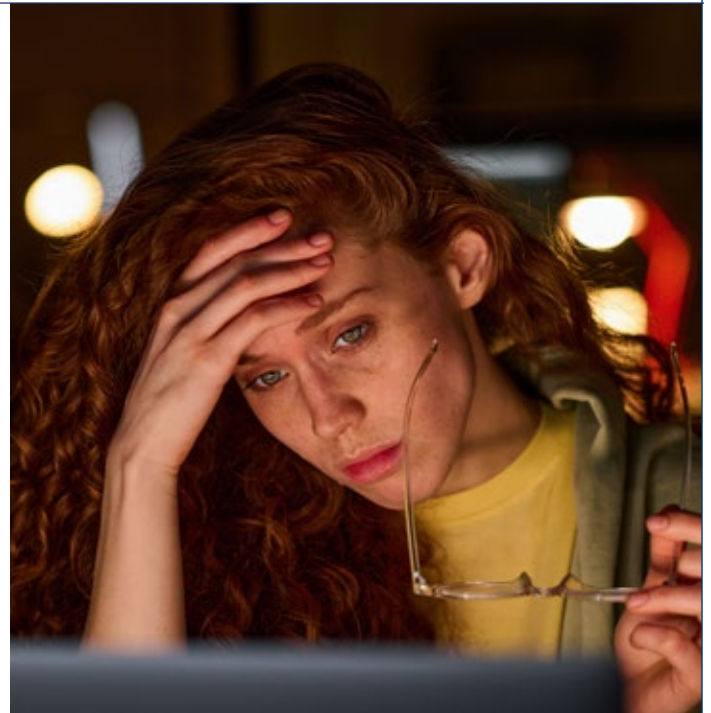
The AASM defines chronic sleep deprivation as curtailed sleep that persists for three months or longer, a timespan that's awfully similar to that of tax season. Repercussions of chronic or long-term sleep deprivation include depression and anxiety, obesity or reduced metabolism (which can contribute to diabetes), slow memory or memory loss, elevated blood pressure, stroke and heart attack, and weakened immune system, among other issues.



4. Stress

Working long hours for weeks on end under a looming tax deadline is stressful. Couple that with the reduced mental clarity from sleep loss and frustration levels can easily rise. AAT research found that only 10% of those who work in accountancy didn't feel stressed out by work. Among those who did experience workplace stress, 43% reported taking time off to mitigate the effects.

Stress, by definition, is a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation. The stressful nature of busy season contributes to a high burnout rate, making accountancy one of the most high-stress professions. No firm wants its employees living in a constant state of stress.



5. Increased Illness

Lack of sleep, less personal and family time, and even inadequate time to eat properly are all common occurrences during busy season. Something else that increases alongside workload is illness. Replicon, a time-tracking company, analyzed time off and sick hours from 74 accounting departments and found that, while taking time off in March is a rarity for accounting professionals, the number of sick hours in March is nearly 50% higher than in any other month of the year.

Another thing that has been shown to increase during busy season is accountants' cholesterol levels. Michael McKee, a Cleveland Clinic psychologist and president of the U.S. branch of the International Stress Management Association, said that many accountants drink too much coffee throughout the day, then rely on alcohol or sedatives to sleep at night.

He also noted that headaches, colds, sore muscles, upset stomachs, and even complaints of cardiac problems are known to increase among accountants during tax time.



The 5 Best Practices for Busy Season Survival

1. Music

William Gongreve's 1697 poem, *The Mourning Bride*, immortalized the saying that music calms the savage beast. While that phrase has been around for centuries, the fact that music does have tangible calming effects has been shown more recently.

Dopamine is known to increase the body's pleasure receptors when released. It's a chemical triggered as a reward when we eat or sleep. We feel good when dopamine is released, which encourages us to repeatedly seek out these rewarding activities. Listening to music has also been proven to release the dopamine hormone, suggesting that our bodies desire us to seek music to feel good.

Endorphins are naturally occurring hormones that create a sense of euphoria in the body. Music has been proven to release this chemical in the same way exercise triggers the so-called "runner's high." Endorphins make a person feel good and act as a pain reliever.

A hormone that acts in the opposite manner is cortisol. Known as the stress hormone, cortisol regulates many of the body's activities, such as blood pressure, inflammation, and the sleep/wake cycle. Its purpose is to boost energy to handle stress when needed, like increasing heart rate and blood pressure or temporarily shutting down immune or reproductive systems so the body is in optimal fight-or-flight mode.



Elevated cortisol levels drop back down once the danger or stress has passed. The body's systems return to normal functioning when cortisol levels are no longer elevated. However, prolonged stress is like the body's fire alarm going off all day long, putting the body in crisis mode all the time. When the body is living in a constant state of emergency and cortisol levels are perpetually elevated, health problems such as headaches, anxiety and depression, weight gain, trouble sleeping, digestive issues, challenges with concentration and memory, and even heart disease can occur.

The good news is that music has been shown to counteract the symptoms of stress. Music has even been shown to lower blood pressure. Listening to calm musical rhythms can relax the entire body and is something that can be incorporated into the workday during tax season to help counterbalance seasonal stress.

2. Laughter

The reduced personal and family time that tax and accounting professionals experience during busy season is so common that it's frequently the focus of satire. Science shows that making jokes about this unfortunate situation could be a good thing.

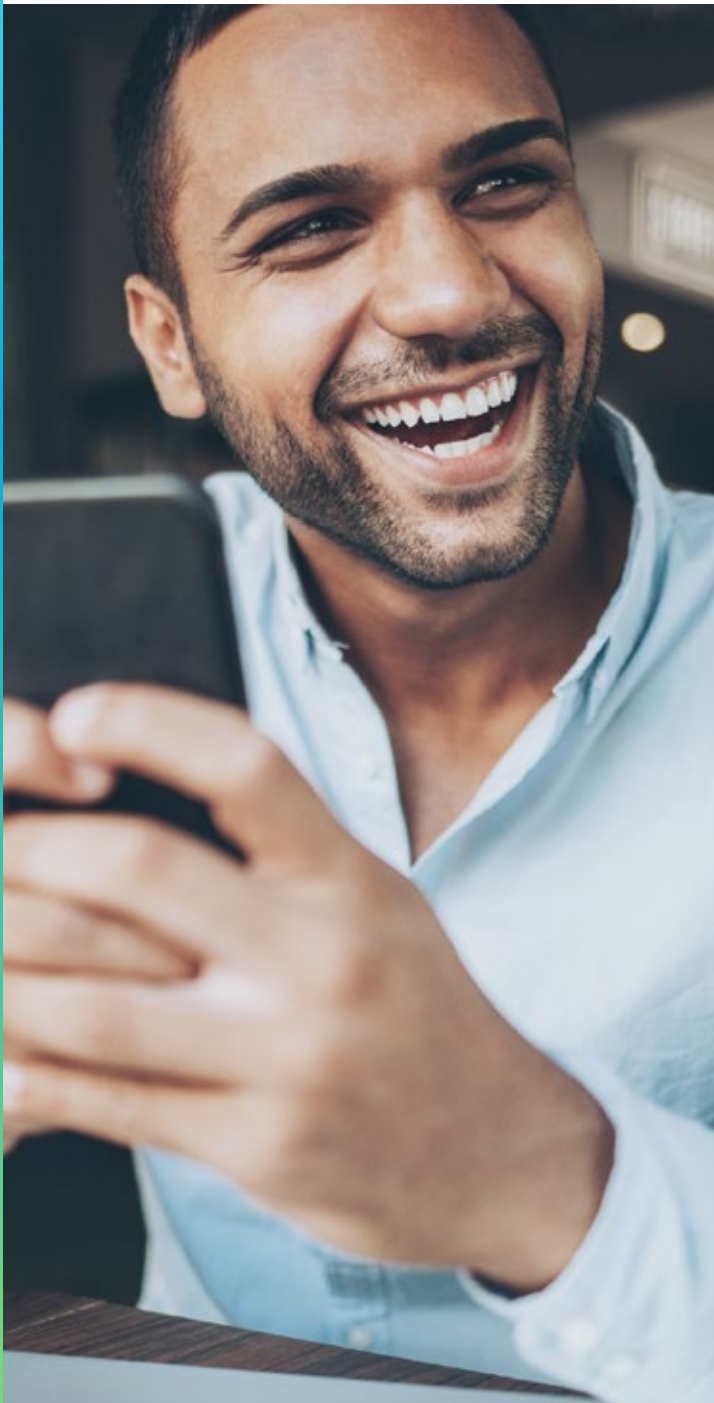
The benefits of laughter were supported by a study in which participants noted a significant decrease in levels of stress directly following exposure to humor. Laughter is a quick-acting stress reducer that also has long-term health benefits. Laughter doesn't require a prescription and is non-habit-forming (although it can be highly contagious).

When the stressors of busy season mount, letting off a little steam with laughter is a healthy solution. A study on the beneficial effects of laughter found a rapid decrease in cortisol levels in those subjects who laughed compared to those who didn't. Stress reduction may be achieved with even a brief stint of laughter, or literally "venting" stress with short bursts of laughter.

The health benefits of laughter, like the fact that it increases oxygen levels and activates the body's natural relaxation system – the parasympathetic nervous system – have led to the rise of newer methods of incorporating laughter into the day. Gaining popularity with a seemingly silly yet seriously effective way to combat stress is laughter yoga.

Stress hormones present in the bloodstream have been shown to lower in response to laughter. Laughter, therefore, reverses the effects of stress as it lowers the levels of cortisol, epinephrine, and other stress hormones. Laughter also secretes endorphins, which counteract the negative effects of stress hormones. Laughter therapy is effective, non-invasive, and supported by science, lending much credit to the claim that laughter is the best medicine.

For managing stress and frustration, laughter certainly is at the top of the list.



3. Streamlined Systems

Streamlining workflow processes means eliminating unnecessary steps. When tasks can be simplified, less time is wasted and procedures are optimized, resulting in the most productive way to achieve the end goal.

When systems are streamlined, processes are simplified and unnecessary steps are removed, then stress is reduced. Streamlined systems run more smoothly and improve productivity, which, in turn, reduces the stress associated with performing the tasks. How else can a firm benefit from streamlining? When less steps are involved in completing a task, the risk of errors or missed steps in the process are minimized.

SafeSend One is a tax workflow automation platform that addresses every client touchpoint – streamlining process from engagement letters and organizers to the assembly, delivery, and eSigning of prepared tax packages and extensions.

Simple, straightforward processes guide staff and taxpayers throughout the tax engagement process while automated tracking and reminders reduce the risk of an unreturned form falling through the cracks.

4. Organization

Organization may be a byproduct of streamlining systems, but, in and of itself, it's one of the best practices for surviving tax season and increasing productivity throughout the year. Being organized means saying goodbye to chaos and hello to more energy to complete tasks.

Stress levels are reduced in the face of organization as well, which makes an organized process a healthier one. Simply walking into an organized work area can bring a sense of calm as opposed to a chaotic and cluttered workspace. An organized workflow also improves efficiency, which results in better business outcomes.

One of the largest areas of disarray in the tax engagement lifecycle is the variety of methods for data collection. While jokes about the shoebox method of providing source documents may temporarily increase endorphins, stress levels rise sharply when it comes to actually sorting through these piles of documents.

What steps can be taken to organize this and other processes for your firm? By using the Organizers feature within SafeSend One, firms can easily send fillable PDF client organizers. This digital tool increases organizer return rate and decreases admin frustration.



5. Automate Manual Processes

Firms can combine organization with streamlined systems through workflow automation. Identifying manual tasks that can be organized and streamlined, or even eliminated, can significantly reduce the time spent inefficiently, as well as the accompanying stress and frustration.

In an Accountemp survey of over 2,800 US managers and workers, technology was cited as one of the top five greatest burnout factors. Automating processes throughout the tax engagement streamlines systems and brings the power of updated technology to the workflow. When monotonous, manual tasks are automated, the levels of frustration and stress are reduced, which lessens the chance of burnout.

Some of the most time-consuming manual tasks, such as gathering client information in the form of client organizers, can take countless hours. From planning and ordering supplies, printing and collating, to mailing, the client organizer process is a lengthy one that requires many hours of hands-on labor. And that only covers the up-front work. Once organizers are returned, a whole new set of manual tasks is involved.

Digitizing the client organizer process to eliminate the printing, collating, and mailing steps a firm goes through to get the organizer into the hands of clients is a step in the right direction for firms looking to eliminate time-consuming manual tasks.

A drawback that firms run into is that utilizing simple digitization puts the burden on the client to print out the PDF in order to fill out the forms – not to mention that they either have to physically mail it back to the firm or scan all the completed pages back into digital format to be able to transmit it back to the firm.

True automation of processes means utilizing innovative technology that fully streamlines manual tasks from beginning to end. SafeSend One automates every step of the tax engagement, from engagement letters to extensions.

The mark of a successful automation technology is one that not only digitizes and automates processes, but one that streamlines the workflow for the firm and elevates the experience for the client.

One Powerful Platform vs. Multiple Solutions

Recognizing the need for automation to maximize firm efficiency and improve client experience is a mindset many firms are embracing, driving them to seek out tools to fulfill their needs.

What happens when the best intentions result in multiple digital solutions? Often, replacing manual paper-based tasks with a hodgepodge of digital tools, each with different capabilities and instructions, may, in fact, end up making as much work for staff as before. In some cases, it results in even more work.

When all the tools needed to address every client touchpoint throughout the entire tax engagement lifecycle are available in one place through one synchronized system, the automation of manual processes is truly effective.

Stress levels are reduced, and surviving through tax season becomes thriving through tax season.



“SafeSend One is a **specialist in making this a seamless process** for your clients. Embrace the system, let the system do what it can for you, because there are so many efficiencies – huge time-savers – so the sooner you get started, the sooner you can solve those problems.”

Christopher Papin
Papin CPA

About SafeSend®

SafeSend's mission is to solve real-world firm problems through innovative automation technologies. We help tax and accounting practitioners work more efficiently and serve their clients better, while making their lives easier and work more enjoyable.

SafeSend offers several foundational automation software solutions within SafeSend One™. Our tax returns product is a multi-year winner of the CPA Practice Advisor Technology Innovation Award and has redefined the way accounting firms assemble, deliver, and capture eSignatures from clients for completed tax return packages.

About SafeSend One™

SafeSend One is the end-to-end solution that automates the entire tax process, from gathering to delivery, offering firms an all-in-one solution to provide an unrivaled client experience. A secure and easy-to-use product for engagement letters, file transfers, organizers, eSignatures, and tax return assembly and delivery, now with a new and innovative AI-driven gathering capability.

Visit the SafeSend One page of our website to learn more about automating your tax engagement workflow and schedule a demo!

Visit safesend.com to learn more about our technology solutions.