



2025 Accounting Trends

Six Essential Insights to Elevate Your Client Service & Drive Growth

Welcome Letter

In the rapidly changing world of accounting, it's essential for firms to stay current on how client expectations and needs are evolving. To support those efforts, each year ClearlyRated taps its survey capabilities and research experts to draw out buyer sentiment, identify key concerns and expectations, and analyze how those will play out in the accounting industry.

This data-driven report aims to equip accounting firms with essential insights that can help them enhance client relationships and drive success. Our goal is to empower you with the knowledge needed to navigate economic uncertainties, build trust, improve service delivery, and embrace technological advancements like AI.

We hope this report serves as a valuable resource in your journey.

Sincerely,



Darreon Day

Director of Analytics & Research
ClearlyRated



Many thanks to our sponsor:



What's in the report?

- 2025 Survey Findings

1. “Day one firms” have the best chance of winning business.
2. Buyers vet firms extensively online.
3. Buyers and clients place a high value on thought leadership.
4. Buyers want clarity on – and help with – AI.
5. Effective onboarding plays a critical role in client satisfaction and retention.
6. The worst service failures point back to cost overruns.

- Next Steps

Insight 1

“Day one firms” have the best chance of winning business.

When a buyer’s leadership team brainstorms its “day one list” of potential accounting firm partners, those on the list are significantly more likely to win the business.

The Data

Buyers of accounting services follow this trend.

63% report starting their journey with a day one list

96% of those buyers ultimately select a firm from their day one list

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q36 & Q38

The typical buyer’s day one list includes three brands.

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q37

Takeaways

Having a well-known, reputable brand can achieve much during the early stages of your sales funnel. You could even say it does the early selling for you. Here are three ways to support brand awareness while promoting a strong reputation:

- Thought leadership is a critical tool to build awareness and bolster your reputation. The most effective thought leadership combines both industry and subject matter expertise.
- Beef up online brand awareness with search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM). That way, if buyers do a quick online search, they'll see your brand in the top results.
- Manage your online reputation by asking for and responding to reviews. Nearly 9 in 10 B2B service buyers read third-party reviews prior to making purchasing decisions, and they're also more likely to hire a firm that responds to reviews—both good and bad.

Insight 2

Buyers vet firms
extensively online.

Accounting firms that demonstrate expertise
and specialization online will win more business.

The Data



● 42% Online Vetting ● 58% Referrals

(Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q39)

Market insights

 American buyers tend to buck this trend.

66%

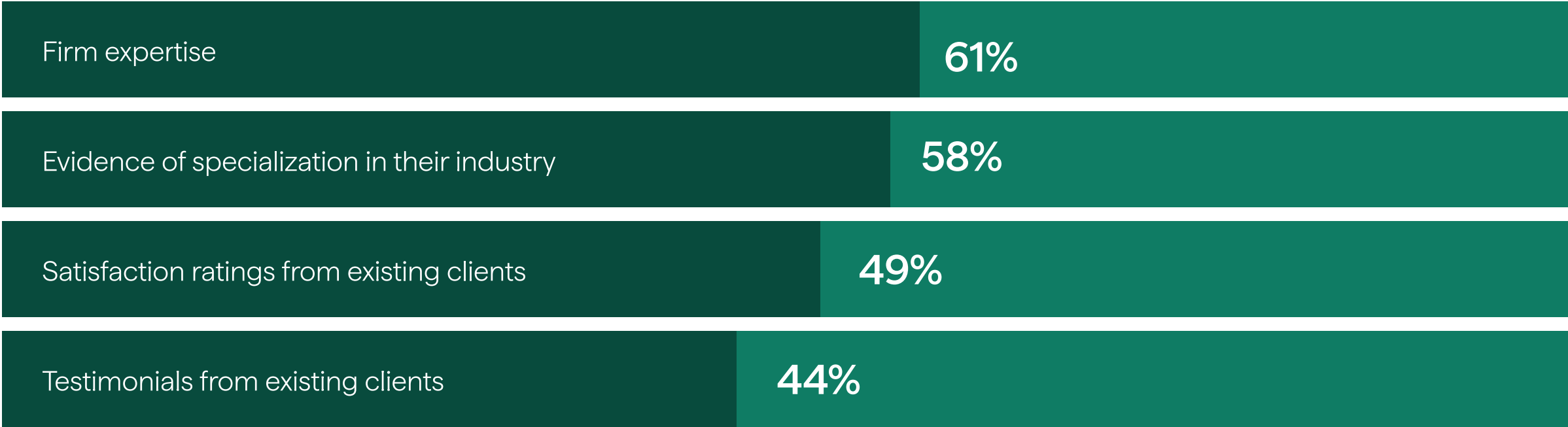
of U.S. buyers seek out referrals first, bringing the overall average.

<50%

of buyers from Canada, the UK, and Australia favor referrals over online vetting as their first source.

What are buyers looking for online?

When searching online for information on accounting firms, most buyers are looking for:



(Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q40)

Market insights



American buyers are more likely to seek out testimonials (58%).



UK-based buyers are more likely to search a firm’s expertise (78%) and client satisfaction ratings (64%)

Takeaways

Accounting brands must ensure that the most important information is front and center on their website. Highlight your firm's expertise and specialization (both in services and in industries served) to buyers.

Those two pieces of information are most likely to move the needle in your favor. Perform a website audit with close attention on how well it helps buyers check the following boxes—and how easy the information is to find:

- Firm expertise
- Specialization in their industry
- Satisfaction ratings from existing clients
- Testimonials from existing clients
- Available services

Insight 3

Buyers and clients place a high value on thought leadership.

By covering the most important topics, accounting firms can position themselves as the most valuable partners.

The Data

When deciding which accounting firm to partner with, 86% of buyers say a firm's thought leadership or industry insights influence their decision.

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q42

Top 5 Most Valuable Thought Leadership Topics

01 Tax reform and strategy

02 Cybersecurity and data privacy



This topic especially interests American and UK-based buyers.

03 Risk management and resilience



UK- and Australia-based buyers, who are less certain of their economy, are especially interested in this topic.

04 Innovation in financial reporting

05 Digital transformation in accounting



UK-based buyers are more interested in this topic than buyers in other countries.

(Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q45)

Takeaways

Relevant, high-quality thought leadership can influence clients and buyers. Prioritize buyer and client education as part of your marketing strategy and loyalty programs. Begin with a content audit to see what you've done well and where there might be gaps. Organize your existing content by format, topic, and date, checking against the top topics listed above.

Once your content audit is complete, follow this process to make meaningful improvements:

- Repurpose thought leadership content to create varied formats to be used in multiple ways by your sales, marketing and account rep teams.
- Update and re-promote high-value thought leadership content to generate leads and support your brand reputation as experts.
- Identify where you have content gaps, either in format or topic, and create new thought leadership content to fill them in.

Insight 4

Buyers want clarity on
– and help with – AI.

AI is here. While expectations are high,
its impacts are often unclear.

The Data

The state of AI adoption among buyers:

52% claim to have adopted at least some AI into their internal accounting processes.

26% are actively exploring options for implementation.

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q45

Market insights



The UK leads the way with 68% of clients claiming some sort of AI implementation.

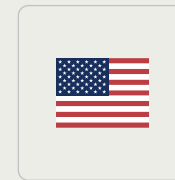
35% of all buyers don't feel confident in their organization's ability to use AI to solve accounting challenges.

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q49

Market insights



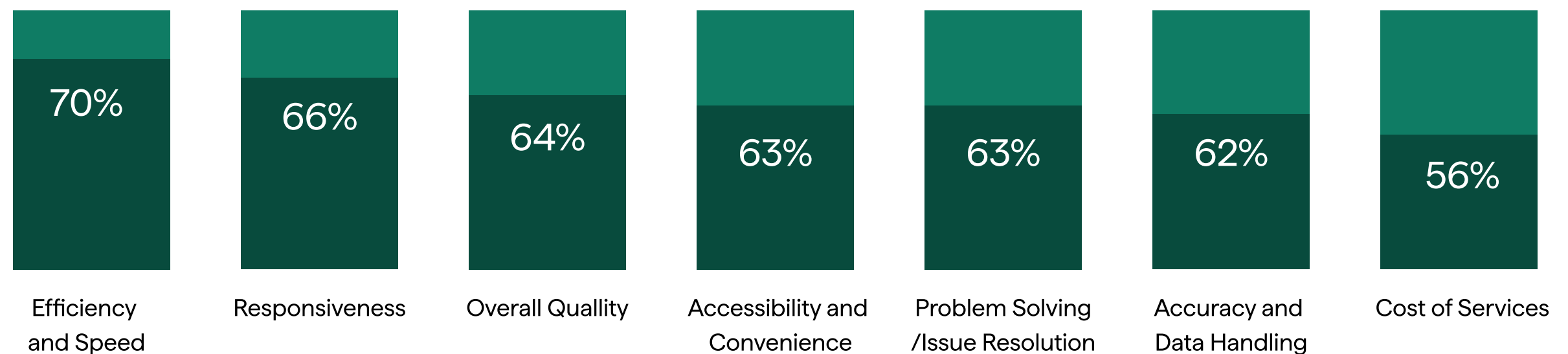
Canadian buyers are most skeptical of AI: 45% aren't confident in their organization's ability to use AI to solve accounting challenges.



American buyers are most confident: 71% say they're able to use AI to solve accounting challenges.

While buyers may not feel confident using AI for accounting on their own, they increasingly expect their accounting firms to expertly wield AI to improve the following:

Accounting Firms Client Expecting AI to “Somewhat” or “Significantly” Improve Each Attribute



Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q48

Takeaways

Buyers and clients will increasingly expect your firm to act as their subject matter expert when it comes to using AI in accounting. Establish your firm's reputation for AI excellence. Be transparent about how you use AI, especially for operational improvements. Here's how to get started:

- Identify and implement AI advantages if you haven't already.
- Ensure your marketing and sales teams stand ready to offer clear examples of how your firm uses AI to improve communication, service and accounting outcomes.
- Develop messaging and plan content that positions your firm as an expert guide in using AI to improve accounting. Client testimonials, infographics and case studies can help shed light on AI's actual effects and benefits.

Insight 5

Effective onboarding plays a critical role in client satisfaction and retention.

Clients report that poor, disorganized onboarding is common and can sour their relationship with accounting firms from the beginning.

The Data

How the most common onboarding missteps affect client satisfaction, as measured by Net Promoter Scores® (NPS)

<https://www.netpromotersystem.com/resources/trademarks-and-licensing/>

Onboarding Mistake (% firms that are guilty)	Effect on NPS
Failing to establish clear expectations (10%	-34 points
Failing to establish timelines or project roadmaps (19%)	-28 points
Failing to provide updates throughout the onboarding process (15%	-21 points

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q26

Market insights



Australian accounting firms are least likely to provide new clients with timelines and project roadmaps (29%). Those that do will stand out.

Takeaways

Client onboarding is one of the earliest impressions of your firm. If your firm hasn't yet established an effective, repeatable onboarding process, it's time to design one and train your staff. Implement a process that prevents the common mistakes highlighted above. Include an onboarding roadmap with set timelines, clear expectations about who does what and when, and a way for your staff to track milestones, updating and communicating with clients along the way.

Insight 6

The worst service failures point back to cost overruns.

Cost overruns are the most impactful – and the most damaging – issue clients report about their partnerships with accounting firms, resulting in the largest relative NPS decreases.

The Data

29% of clients report that costs had exceeded their anticipated budget.

Firms that take up more budget than expected damage their NPS:

37% NPS

Accounting Firm Client Benchmark

21% NPS

Average for Firms with Cost Overruns

(Sources: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q31; and ClearlyRated's proprietary NPS benchmark data)

Takeaways

Cost overruns could cost you business. Don't over promise at the beginning. Instead, use reliable forecasting and share accurate budget expectations with your clients. Go a step further in mitigating this major client satisfaction risk by offering transparent budget tracking with a regular frequency so there aren't any unhappy surprises.

Next Steps

By following through on takeaways from each of these insights, accounting firms can create more success in their marketing and sales strategies, while also delivering a remarkable CX to nurture customer loyalty and improve long-term client retention.

Firms can inform their marketing messages and sales strategies by understanding

- How buyers identify and vet potential accounting partners (see Trends 1 and 2)
- Which thought leadership topics buyers and clients find most valuable (see Trends 3 and 4)

Firms can deliver a better client experience by

- Providing a smooth onboarding experience (see Trend 5)
- Acting as an expert guide in how AI can improve accounting (see Trend 4)
- Educating clients on important industry topics (see Trend 3)
- Avoiding cost overruns (see Trend 6)

About ClearlyRated & Acknowledgments

About ClearlyRated

ClearlyRated® is a leading provider of client satisfaction surveys and service quality research for professional service providers. We help accounting firms leverage the Net Promoter® Score survey methodology to measure the client experience, differentiate on service quality, and build online reputation. Accounting firms partnering with ClearlyRated have access

- Proprietary client satisfaction survey tool, specifically designed to support client survey best practices for accounting firms.
- Real-time response data and issue tracking to ensure proper follow-up and support client retention.
- Segmentation of client response data by client, practice area, affiliated partner, office location, etc.
- Accounting industry research, benchmarks, and trends on topics including (but not limited to) client satisfaction, buyer behavior, and online reputation.
- An online profile featuring client testimonials and client-based ratings - available to (and searchable by) the public on ClearlyRated.com.
- Eligibility to participate in the annual Best of Accounting award program - which recognizes accounting firms that have demonstrated exceptional service quality based exclusively on ratings provided by their clients.

Interested in leveraging client satisfaction as a strategy for growth?

Visit clearlyrated.com to learn more.

Acknowledgments

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