

# 2025 Accounting Buyer Insights Report

# Section One

## Welcome Letter & Report Overview

# 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 to better serve your clients and thrive in today's competitive landscape.

Sincerely,



Darreon Day

*Director of Analytics & Research*

ClearlyRated



Many thanks to our sponsor:



# What's in the report?

- Executive Summary
- 2025 Survey Findings: **Eight Accounting Buyer Trends**
- Final Guidance for 2025
- Acknowledgements

## Executive Summary

**Accounting firms must stay updated on what their clients are facing and what they most care about. When they do, they're better positioned to attract and retain clients with the right marketing messages, sales strategies and account management. This report aims to help firm leaders do just that.**

After surveying nearly 500 accounting buyers, ClearlyRated analysts reviewed the data and identified **eight key trends** that can guide accounting firm leaders. For each trend, our report highlights relevant data, explores why it's important, and shares the most important takeaways for accounting firms.

For the first time, survey respondents included buyers from the UK, Canada and Australia. Look for each country's flag under "Market Insights" to discover differences between or important notes relevant to a specific country's buyers.

- 1 Accounting buyers remain concerned about the economy.
- 2 Buyers seek to de-risk their purchase.
- 3 "Day one firms" have the best chance of winning business.
- 4 Buyers vet firms extensively online, looking for both expertise and areas of specialization.
- 5 Buyers and clients place a high value on thought leadership.
- 6 Buyers want clarity on – and help with – AI.
- 7 Effective onboarding plays a critical role in client satisfaction and retention.
- 8 The worst service failures point back to cost overruns.

# Survey Methodology

For more than a decade ClearlyRated has conducted annual industry-specific research to establish client satisfaction benchmarks, identify emerging trends, and analyze topics of importance in each industry we serve.

The survey questionnaire delved into key themes involved in accounting client satisfaction: the current and ideal accounting client experience (CX), perceptions of technology and AI, and differences by market. Market differences of particular interest are highlighted throughout the report.

ClearlyRated’s in-house team of data analysts and client experience experts have analyzed this year’s results to highlight key takeaways.

Fielded in October 2024,  
the overall study surveyed

1,155

buyers and users of  
B2B services.

497

of which identified as  
accounting firm clients.

This year marks the first time this research was a global effort, gathering responses from buyers of accounting services in the

US	UK	Canada	Australia
n = 157	n = 113	n = 116	n = 111

# Section Two

## Eight Accounting Buyer Trends

Learn more about buyer trends and expectations, including how they vet potential vendors, and explore how these affect both purchasing decisions and client satisfaction. For each trend, get key takeaways that can guide improvements toward earning and retaining business.

# Trend 1

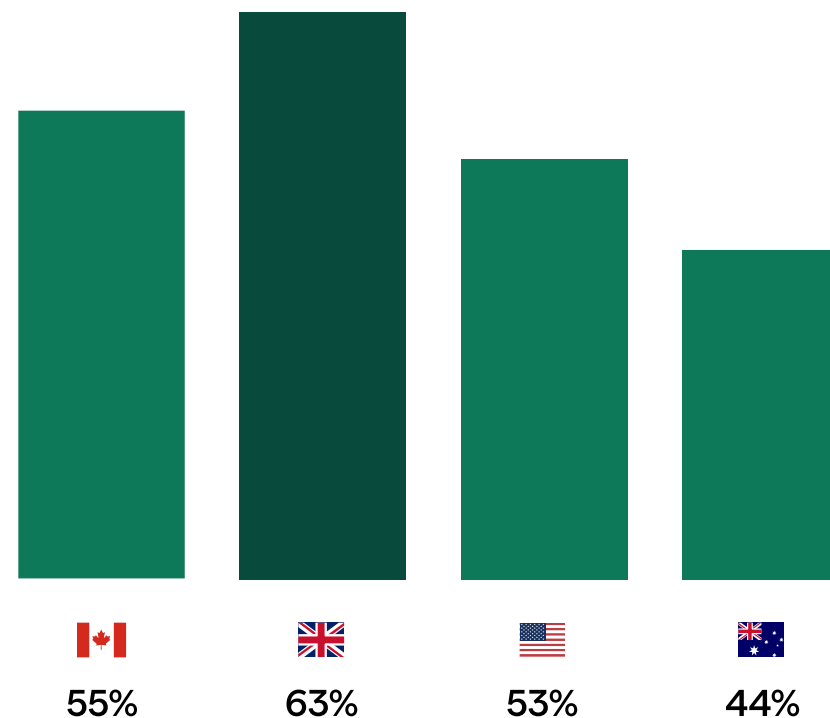
Buyers of accounting services remain concerned about the economy.

Economic uncertainty continues to weigh on accounting firm clients.

**54%** rate the current economic conditions in their country as only “fair” or “poor.”

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q32

## Market Insight



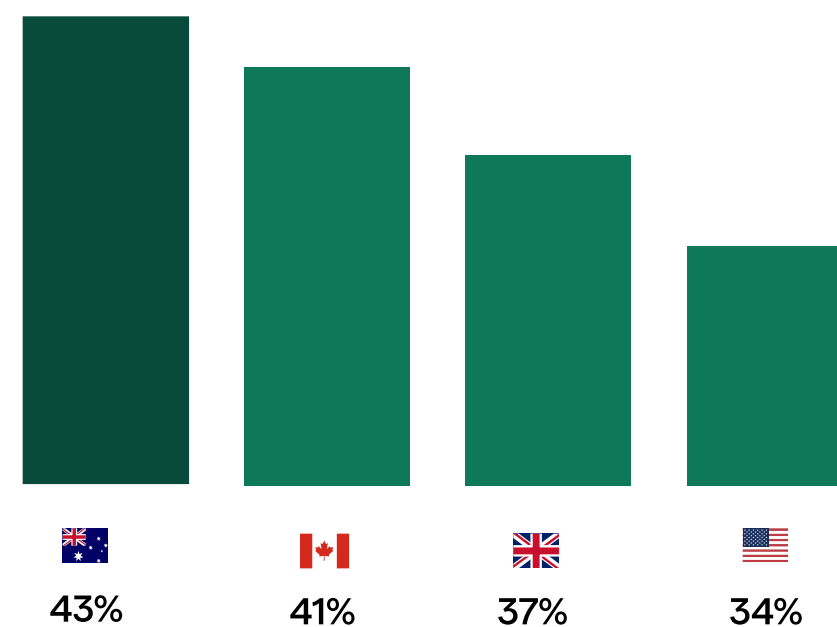
UK-based buyers report the bleakest expectations, while Australian buyers have the sunniest outlook.



39% believe the economy is getting worse in their country.

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q33

## Market Insight



While fewer Australian buyers report fair or poor economic conditions, more of them worry that their economy is headed for a downturn. American buyers, on the other hand, are less likely than their counterparts to expect a worsening economy.

## Why it's important

Most buyers grow increasingly wary of perceived risks when they have low economic confidence—and they're more likely to restrict budgets. In fact, this year's buyer survey revealed that many accounting clients are bracing for budgetary changes with 41% already focused on reducing internal costs.

**41%** of all buyers are already focused on reducing internal costs

**48%** anticipate re-evaluating budgets to reduce internal costs

# Takeaways

01

As current and potential clients reduce internal costs, they may choose to downsize in-house accounting teams. This adds pressure to staff members who remain which increases the risks of mistakes. Position your firm to relieve some of this pressure by:

- Making sure your experts are available to ensure nothing falls through the cracks even while their internal teams shrink and must do more with less.
- Expanding your services with current clients.
- Acting as a new extension of the accounting team with new clients.

02

**Take buyers' growing risk aversion into account when planning your messaging for their marketing campaigns. Communicate that your services help clients mitigate risks and, should economic policies shift, your experts stand ready to help them navigate those changes. You can achieve this with thought leadership content such as whitepapers and case studies.**

03

Of course, if their budgets come under further fire, buyers may turn toward reducing spend with external vendors. This means it's essential to position your firm to make the cut. Proposing evolved services that relate to lean economic teams, such as budget reviews and cost tracking, can help ensure that your services are too valuable to remove from clients' vendor lists.

## Tip

Make the most of your content and further your reputation for helpful guidance by promoting your content via email campaigns, organic social media posts, and paid social media advertising.

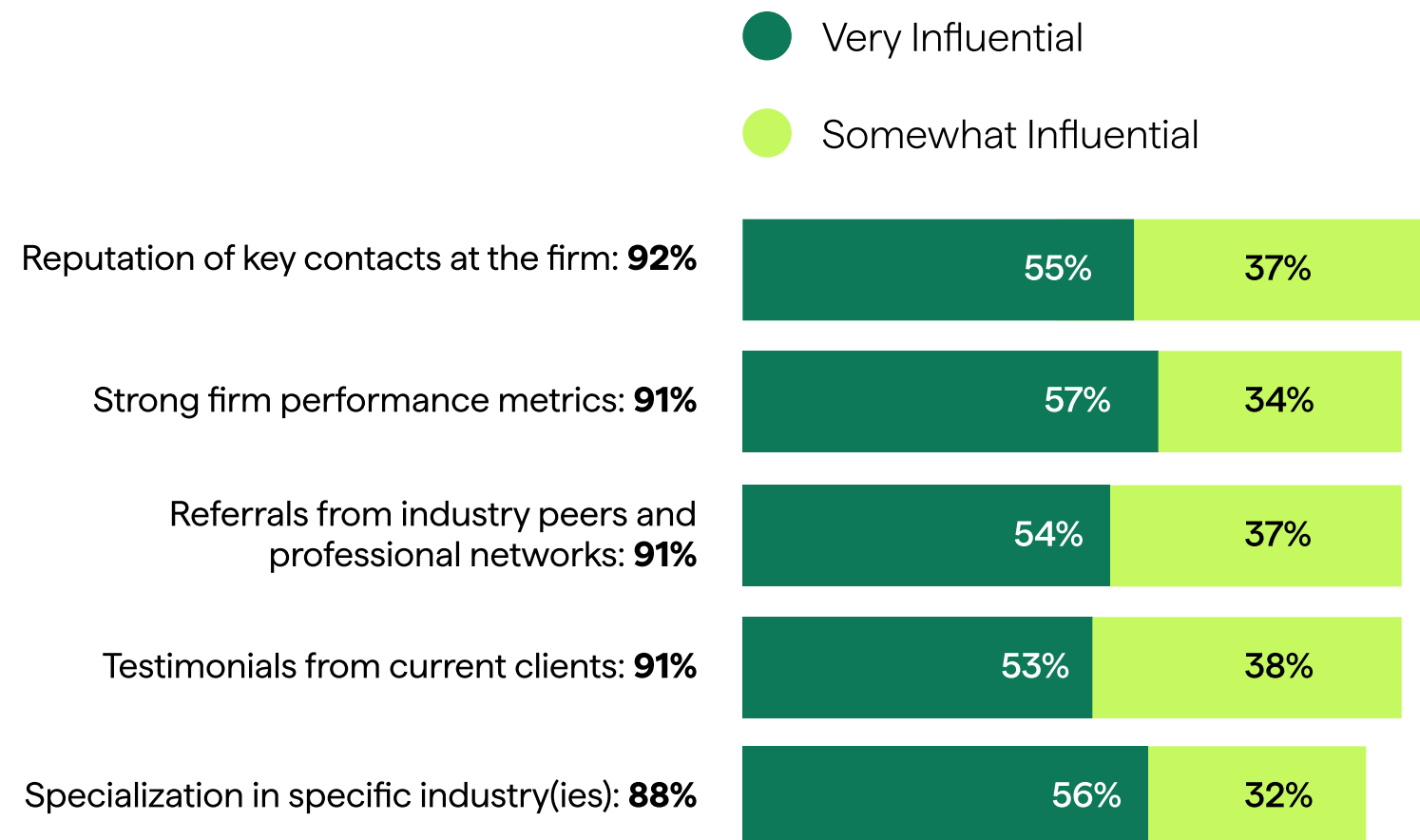
# Trend 2

Buyers seek to de-risk their purchase.

Buyers want to see evidence that they're making the right purchasing decision.

When vetting accounting firms, the most influential factors buyers consider while making their purchasing decision include:

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q42



# Takeaways

Your firm will find more success landing new clients and expanding current accounts when you can de-risk their decision to work with you. Give them proof that they're making the right decision. This could be in the form of your online reputation, testimonial library, case studies that quantify strong results, and a robust referral network. Take a look at your marketing materials, both print and digital, to see how well they would help your potential clients answer the following questions about your firm:

- Does this firm prove that it can deliver what it promises?

**Tips**

- Gather a list of client contacts who are willing to provide references.
- Source relevant testimonials and case studies that provide your messaging points.

- Can this firm help my business specifically?

**Tips**

- Show evidence of industry or sector specialization on your website—and don't bury it. Make it easy to find.
- Sort your library of case studies and testimonials by industry and client type (small, medium, large) so your sales team can easily find and share relevant examples of your strong track record.

- Is this firm established and stable?

**Tips**

- Share your firm history, testimonials and performance metrics trends.
- Provide a clear path to help them review your reputation with links to third-party verified reviews.

# Trend 3

“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.

According to a recent Bain & Co. general survey of B2B buyers, between 80% and 90% start with a short list of potential vendors before they even begin their research, and 90% of them end up selecting a company from that initial list.

ClearlyRated attempted to replicate the study specifically for buyers of accounting services and found very similar results. Nearly two-thirds of organizations started their search for an accounting partner with a day one list of potential firms, and nearly all (96%) chose a firm from that list.

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

## Why it's important

Without earning their spot on a buyer's initial consideration set, accounting firms have an exponentially lower chance to prove themselves during the vetting process. This is why it's imperative they build strong brand awareness and a positive reputation that will secure their spot on many potential clients' day one list.

# Takeaways

## 01

**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 specificity. Without both, it becomes easy to get lost in the noise of competitor marketing efforts.
- Beef up online brand awareness with search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM). Doing so will help ensure that 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. They're also more likely to hire a firm that responds to reviews—both good and bad. Doing so shows that your firm is serious about its client experience.

## 02

**Keep in mind that while compiling their day one list, some leaders will ask peers for suggestions. Enter: Word-of-mouth comments and direct referrals. These grow ever more powerful when your firm delivers a good client experience. Happy clients are more likely to suggest your firm, offer their time as references, and even make referrals.**

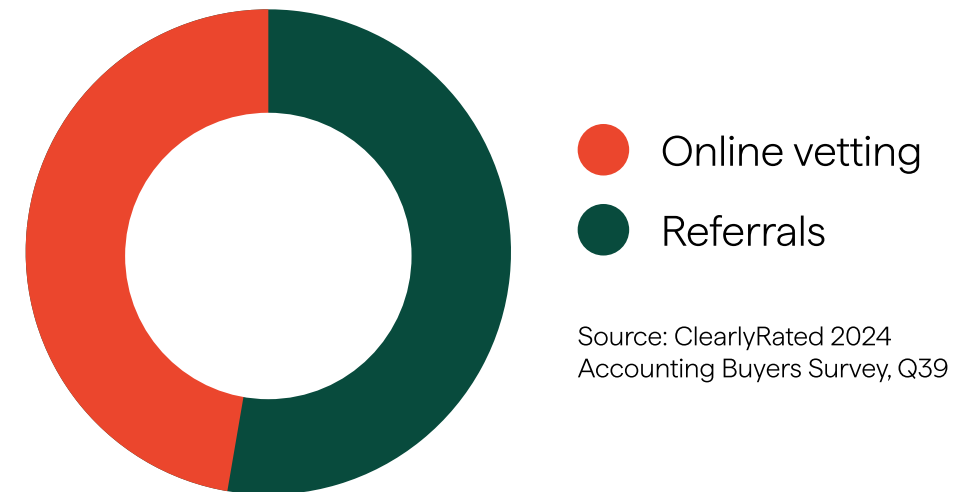
# Trend 4

Buyers vet firms extensively online, looking for validation of both expertise and areas of specialization.

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

When buyers of accounting services begin the process of assessing potential accounting firms, nearly half first turn to online sources before asking a peer or their professional network for a referral as the first source of information in that process.

48% Online vetting  
52% Referrals






Source: ClearlyRated 2024  
Accounting Buyers Survey, Q39

## Market Insight

American buyers tend to buck this trend. 

66% of U.S. buyers seek out referrals first.

<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:

**61%** Firm expertise

**49%** Satisfaction ratings from existing clients


**58%** Evidence of specialization in their industry

**44%** Testimonials from existing clients

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q40

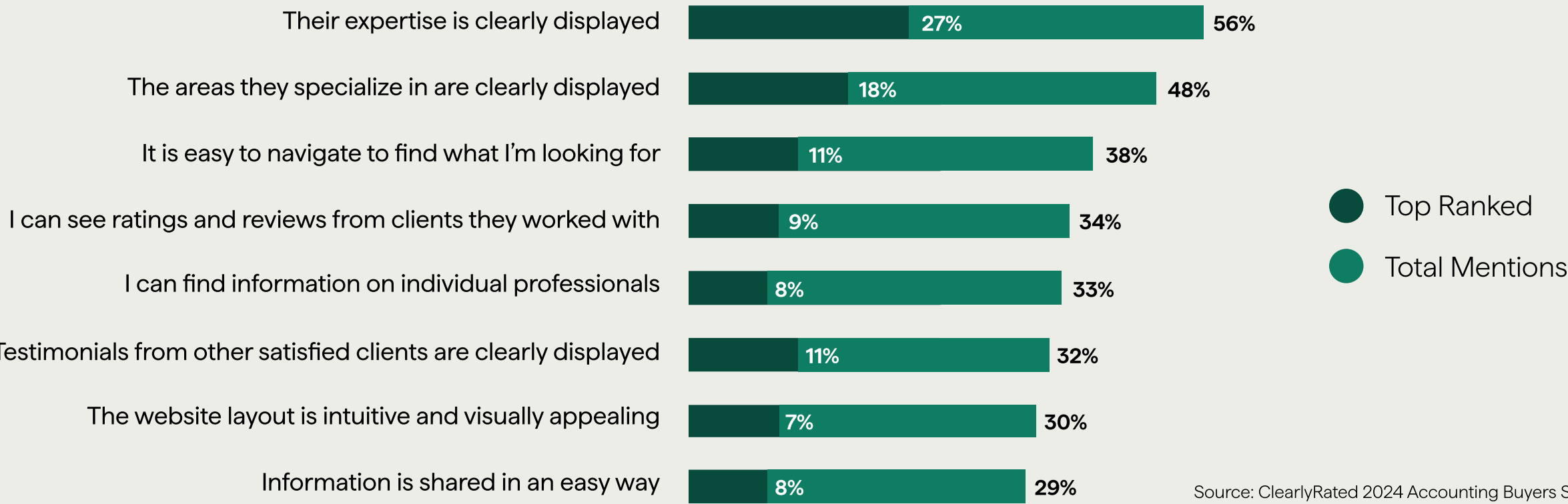
## Market Insight

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%**.



# Most important aspects of an accounting firm website



Above all, buyers want to see a firm’s expertise and specialization clearly displayed on their website.

27% of buyers say “Firm expertise”

18% say “Firm specialization”

## Why it’s important

Buyers of accounting services extensively vet firms online, often before reaching out to the firms, themselves, or even to their own peers for referrals. Most often, buyers use search engines and review specific firms’ websites while evaluating online. Accounting brands that want to rise to the top during a buyer’s consideration stage must ensure that the most important information is front and center on their website.

# Takeaways

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.

Look for improvements that can boost both SEO and your site's user experience (UX). Consider whether your site map is intuitive and well-organized, and that important information isn't buried in too many sub-sections. Ensure your homepage design makes it easy to find key information as described above and that your website provides both clear navigation options on the top and side of your page, and offers links to verified third-party sources.

# Trend 5

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.


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 Five Most Valuable Thought Leadership Topics



According to accounting buyers, the topics they most want to read about are:

- **Cybersecurity and data privacy**

This topic especially interests American and UK-based buyers.  


- **Tax reform and strategy**

- **Risk management and resilience**

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

- **Innovation in financial reporting**

- **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

### Why it's important

Relevant, high-quality thought leadership can influence clients and buyers on whether to continue or begin partnerships with accounting firms. Current accounting clients value content on a variety of accounting topics, which they use for the education of their own organization. This type of content has a strong value-add effect, impacting buyer decisions and client loyalty.

# Takeaways

Prioritize client and buyer education as part of your marketing strategy and loyalty programs. Chances are, you already have a good start. 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. Be sure to check 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 which can 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.

# Trend 6

Buyers want clarity on, and help with, AI.

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

## The state of AI adoption among accounting 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

## Uncertainty persists related to AI's potential benefits.

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

**51%** agree that AI's impacts are overstated.

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q49

## Market Insight

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



## Market Insight

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

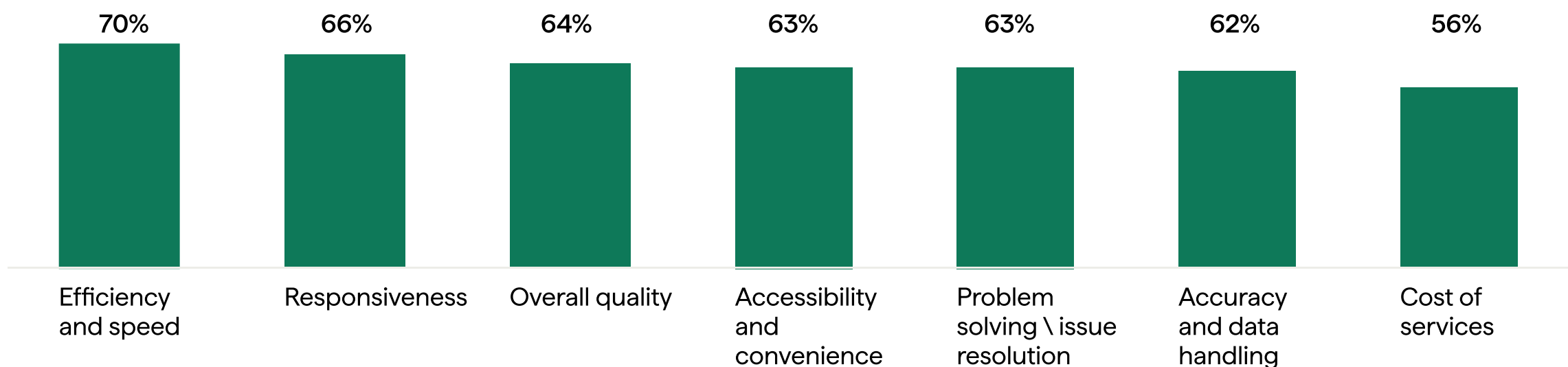


American buyers are most confident: **71%** say they're able to use AI to solve accounting challenges.



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



Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q48

### Why it's important

AI seems to permeate everything these days, and accounting firm clients are increasingly familiar with its implementation in their own organization. They're also expecting more from their external partners due to the benefits AI promises. While these higher expectations can present a challenge to firms, the most innovative ones have an opportunity to capitalize on AI's benefits and act as visionaries in leading the way for their clients.

## AI Impact

"In the age of AI, efficiency is the new currency that unlocks time better spent building deep, meaningful client relationships. Firms that embrace AI tools gain a competitive edge by freeing up their professionals to focus on strategic advisory services and high-value client interactions."

**Eric Gregg** Co-Founder & CX Strategist, ClearlyRated

# Takeaways

Buyers and clients will increasingly expect your firm to act as their subject matter expert when it comes to applying AI to accounting. Establish your firm's reputation for AI excellence with transparent AI usage and AI-powered operational improvements. Here's how to get started:

- Identify and implement AI advantages if you haven't already.
- Ensure your marketing and business development teams stand ready to offer clear examples of how your firm uses AI to improve communication, service and accounting outcomes. Their goal: Make sure clients and buyers realize that hiring your firm can help them check the box when it comes to the challenge of applying AI to accounting.
- Develop messaging and plan content that positions your firm as an expert guide in using AI to improve accounting. Share real-world examples that shed light on AI's actual effects and benefits. Client testimonials, infographics and case studies can help tell the story.



# Trend 7

Effective onboarding processes support client satisfaction and retention.

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

How the most common onboarding missteps affect client satisfaction, as measured by Net Promoter Scores® (NPS)<sup>[1]</sup>

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 Insight

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



## Why it's important

Satisfied clients are more likely to become long-term customers. In fact, a report from Salesforce shows that not only will customers who receive good service spend more, but **88% are also more likely to be retained as customers**. So, how does onboarding come into play? Client onboarding is one of the earliest impressions of your firm once a client has committed. Clear, efficient onboarding kicks off great service and can improve customer retention and, because keeping customers is less costly than acquiring new ones, firms that deliver great onboarding can improve their bottom line.

## Effective Onboarding Impact

"When I consult with our accounting partners regarding their client onboarding process, I emphasize the importance of being responsive, setting clear expectations, and truly understanding the client's needs from the start. Without this foundation, you're already falling behind. Taking the time to connect, communicate, and align at the outset shows care and professionalism—it's the key to building trust and long-term success. Do not rush this step, document everything and communicate frequently and success (and growth) will follow."

**Bridget Harper** VP of Customer Success, ClearlyRated

# Takeaways

If your firm hasn't yet established an effective, repeatable onboarding process, it's time to design one and train your staff on it. Implement a process that ensures you'll avoid the common mistakes highlighted above. Make sure it includes 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.

Not only did accounting clients and buyers identify the worst onboarding mistakes firms have made, but they also shared what factors were most important to them. Ensure your onboarding process checks these boxes to deliver client satisfaction early in each relationship:

- Confirm your understanding of their needs and objectives.
- Establish trust and credibility.
- Provide consistent communication.
- Demonstrate security measures and confidentiality.
- Set clear expectations on deliverables and timelines.

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q29

# Trend 8

The worst service failures point back to cost overruns.

In the realm of service failures, cost overruns are exceptionally impactful, resulting in the largest relative NPS decreases.

Cost overruns are not only the most impactful, but they're also the most common – and the most damaging – issue clients report about their partnerships with accounting firms.

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

Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q31

37% NPS

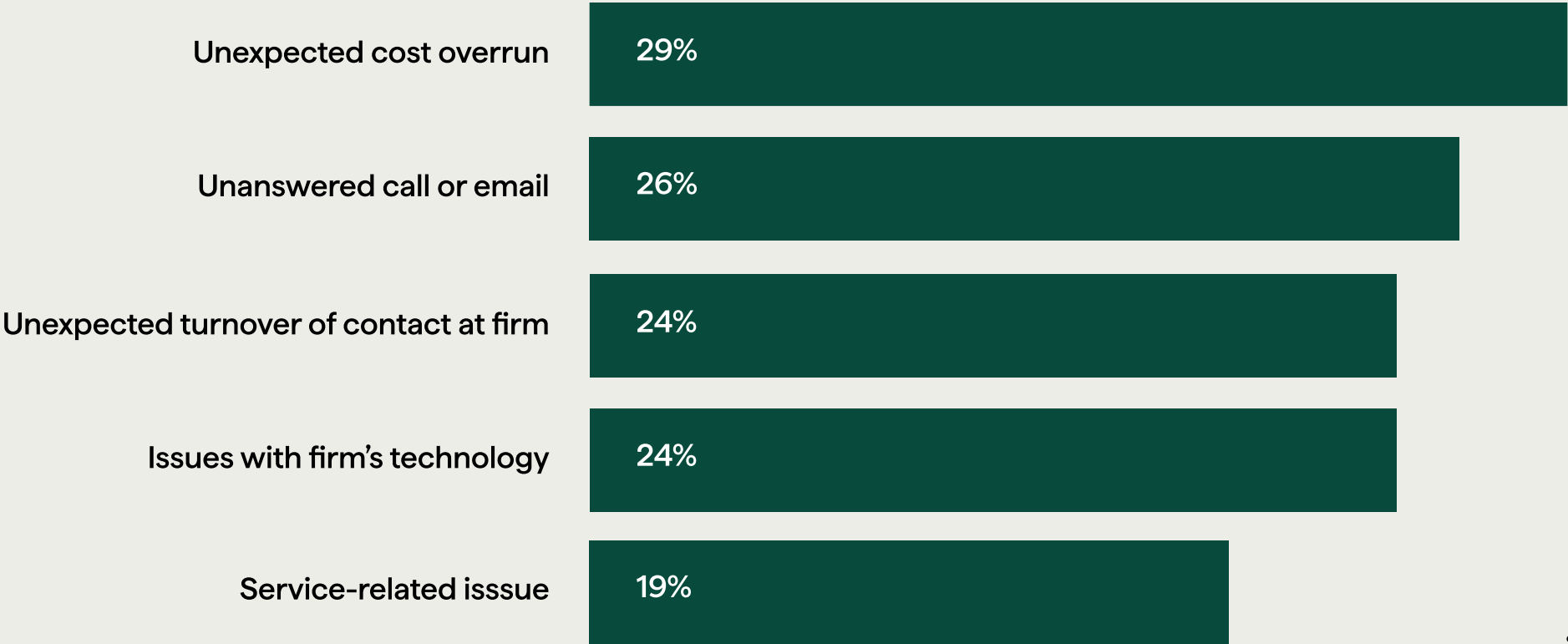
Accounting Firm Client  
Benchmark

21% NPS -16 points

Average for Firms with  
Cost Overruns

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

# Percent of Clients Who Say They Experienced The Following



Source: ClearlyRated 2024 Accounting Buyers Survey, Q31

## Why it's important

In a cost-conscious environment, clients are hyper aware of any impacts to their budgets. Accounting firms that run over with costs and fees risk poor client satisfaction that leads to increased client churn. In fact, while the NPS benchmark for accounting firms sits at **37%**, firms that take up more budget than expected earn just **21%** NPS—a 16-point plummet.

# 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.

Understanding each of these eight trends can help accounting firms outline how to create more success in their marketing and sales strategies—and how they can deliver a remarkable CX that nurtures customer loyalty and improves long-term client retention.

## **Firms can inform their marketing messages and sales strategies by understanding:**

- Buyers' economic concerns. (See trend 1)
- How buyers identify and vet potential accounting partners. (See trends 2, 3 and 4)
- Which thought leadership topics buyers and clients find most valuable. (See trends 5 and 6)

## **Firms can deliver a better client experience by:**

- Providing a smooth onboarding experience. (See trend 7)
- Acting as an expert guide on how AI can improve accounting. (See trend 6)
- Educating clients on important industry topics. (See trend 5)
- Proactively sharing budget updates. (See trend 8)
- Avoiding cost overruns. (See trend 8)

# Section Four

## 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 to:

- 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](https://clearlyrated.com) to learn more.

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to our  
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## Thank you to our contributors

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