

## Advisor Spotlight

February 2002

**Bruce Downs, CPA**  
**Certified QuickBooks ProAdvisor**  
**Birmingham, AL**



*“Small business owners who are savvy and seek education regarding QuickBooks functionality will reap the most benefit and be in position to better grow and guide their businesses.”*

Bruce Downs is a CPA who received his degree in Business and Economics from Western Maryland College in 1980, and studied accounting at the University of Alabama in Birmingham's School of Business.

A Certified QuickBooks ProAdvisor, he is also certified by the IRS as an Electronic Return Originator and he is a member of the National Society of Tax Professionals, the Alabama Society of Certified Public Accountants and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Plus, Bruce is a contributing writer for the financial section of the Birmingham Business Journal.

### Rapid Growth

Bruce has been in business only three short years, but in that time he has increased his revenues by 50% per year. In the first year, he was a sole practitioner; now, he employs two full-time people. The secret of his success is his philosophy, “Do what is best for the client, and rewards will accrue. This sometimes is a walk of faith, and a walk away from revenue, but a core value of the company.”

Bruce is a “hands-on” CPA with a caring attitude and a desire to build solid relationships with his clients first. He views himself not simply as a consultant or a vendor, but as a business partner who can play an integral part in his clients' successes.

### Identifying a Niche

In the beginning, Bruce approached his practice like so many other CPAs do: “You give me data and I'll give you information.” Most of his clients did not have an accounting staff or a bookkeeper so Bruce's company assumed those responsibilities.

Though successful with this focus, he began to realize that more and more business owners were purchasing and using QuickBooks® in lieu of hiring or outsourcing accounting tasks. Given that QuickBooks is so cost-effective and user-friendly, business owners/operators could perform the accounting functions themselves.

Bruce discovered that “Gone are the days when small business owners had to wait until the 10th of the month for their financial statements. QuickBooks users who let their software work for them have powerful financial information at their fingertips—instantly—at any point during the month ... the paradigm shift is from historical to real time.”

Consequently, he found a new niche for his business, changing the direction of his practice to assisting clients in setting up, understanding and using QuickBooks. He believes that “small business owners who are savvy and seek education regarding QuickBooks functionality will reap the most benefit and be in position to better grow and guide their businesses.” Since that time, his more traditional engagements (“give me data and I'll give you information”) have fallen to 50% of his billable hours. The remaining 50% is represented by QuickBooks-related services.

Today, Bruce considers himself an educator. He targets owner/operator businesses or companies with three or less employees. He never tries to sell anyone on QuickBooks because he finds that most small businesses already have it. Instead, he offers to set up QuickBooks and train the owner on the full and proper use of the software.

Bruce believes that most clients can be trained in two to three hours per module, or navigator (in QuickBooks terms). He organizes each training session so that he and the owner concentrate on one navigator at a time. For example, if a client wants to learn accounts receivable, accounts payable and payroll, he allows three weeks in total for the training at three hours and one navigator per session.

*(continue...)*

## Working with Clients

Communication between Bruce and the client is critical and frequent in the first few weeks of QuickBooks training, but within a short period of time, the client becomes fully QuickBooks competent and communication decreases. At that point Bruce's role becomes one of business consultant and tax advisor.

He helps his clients define their business goals and the strategies they will implement to achieve them. Just as important, he educates them on how to read and interpret the various QuickBooks financial reports so they can use that valuable information to measure and drive the success and future of their businesses.

In short, Bruce teaches and encourages his clients to spend less time on administrative functions and more time marketing, selling and operating their core businesses.

## Promoting his Practice

Bruce markets his business in a variety of ways; he says the best thing he ever did was to hire his wife, Sallie. She is his marketing department. With 15 years of communications, marketing and public relations experience, she now helps Bruce grow their practice.

Other marketing methods Bruce has used and found success with include:

1. Advertising in the newspaper
2. Giving seminars at non-profit organizations and local business development agencies
3. Writing articles for the local newspaper
4. Maintaining a Web presence
5. Staying active in local organizations and becoming part of the community
6. Obtaining referrals from Intuit's QuickBooks Professional Advisor Referral Database

In the future, Bruce's growth plans include:

1. Expanding his solid relationships with owner/operator clients into personal financial planning using Intuit's Quicken®.
2. Further exploring the "great market potential" in teaching people how to use QuickBooks correctly. In his words, "that market has not yet been tapped."

You can reach Bruce via email ([bhdowns@bellsouth.net](mailto:bhdowns@bellsouth.net)) or visit his Web site at [www.bhdcpa.com](http://www.bhdcpa.com).