Accounting is not a profession that attracts daredevils. “If there’s anything we’re hell-bent on, it’s minimizing risk for our clients,” smiles CPA Robert Cowen. “Naturally that breeds a cautious nature, and a bit of an in-the-box mentality.”

But Cowen’s own business mentality never followed the herd. “Early on, I knew I wanted my work to be based on relationships, not just numbers. I wanted the healthy growth of my own business to be founded on really caring about, and avidly concentrating on, the growth of my clients’ businesses.”

Enter the Mac
To achieve that goal, he opted for an out-of-the-box computing solution. “I chose Mac because, despite the prevailing wisdom, I saw it as a clear competitive advantage,” says Cowen. “Because I wanted to focus on accounting, not computing. I use computers because they allow me to make my living, to do my best for my clients. But I don’t want to be a technician.

“So, building my practice on Mac was a no-brainer. First, it’s clearly easier and more inspiring to use. Smart people love to use Mac, because it just gets out of the way and lets them be smart. Second, Macs just work. I don’t have to hire an IT person. Ever. I don’t have to give a second thought to the tens of thousands of Windows viruses out there. I just take a Mac out of the box, plug it in, and get down to running my business, and keeping my clients happy.”

Out of the Box, Onto the Bottom Line
As a result, the practice of Robert A. Cowen, Certified Public Accountant, has evolved from a home-based, one-man operation in 1984, to a five-person firm serving approximately 100 small and medium businesses in 2006. “My clients range from sole proprietors making a couple hundred thousand dollars a year, to companies with 50-plus employees making 10 million a year. They’re a diverse and lively and interesting bunch—and I love working with them on every aspect of their businesses,” he says.
From its colorful, sun-dappled San Diego office, Cowen's firm offers a wide array of services, including tax preparation and planning, bookkeeping and accounting, compilations and reviews, financial statements, and business consulting. "I'm proud to say my clients don't just come to us at tax time," says Cowen. "They look to us for advice on a day-to-day basis."

And they certainly don't judge his firm by the computers on its desks—indeed, just a third of Cowen's clients are Mac users themselves. "When we share information across platforms, it's invisible. We've created an environment where our clients' choice of PC or Mac has no impact on the service we provide. Most of my clients don't even know, or care, because they're hiring us for our expertise, not our technology."

Exceeding the Standard
When Cowen does consult with clients on buying their own accounting software, he recommends MYOB AccountEdge. "I've been using AccountEdge for over a decade. It's powerful, reliable, and completely cross-platform. So our PC-based clients can use it. And our Mac-based clients can use it. And we can swap data between platforms flawlessly."

"I'm aware that QuickBooks is considered a standard, a safe choice. But I know both programs pretty intimately, and MYOB AccountEdge is just as powerful as QuickBooks Premier. There's very little you can do in QuickBooks that you can't do in AccountEdge, and vice versa."

The Real Cost of Computing
For Cowen, "playing it safe" has always meant seeing beyond the conventional wisdom. "Look, my entire business is predicated on crunching the numbers, analyzing the trends, and saving my clients money in the long run," he says. "Well, what's more cost-effective than using Mac? I'm saving money every day with Mac—and it's my business to know."

"People say Macs cost more money than PCs. But Mac is really far more cost-effective over time, because there's so much back-end cost in using PCs. Suddenly you're bringing in consultants to battle viruses, or recover lost data, or troubleshoot network issues. So many businesses spend a fortune maintaining their PCs."

"We don't spend anything on maintaining our Mac platform. No consulting costs. No downtime due to viruses. You plug a new Mac into your network, it configures effortlessly, with no technical know-how—and runs forever. We never turn our machines off. I've used Macs for 20 years, and I can't think of one that's gone down on us. We have a couple of PCs on our network, and we run through a PC every other year due to speed and support issues. I've never had to replace a Mac due to a support issue. We upgrade our Macs because of technology advances, not because something goes wrong with the hardware."

Taking Stock of the Intangibles
"As for productivity, well, my employees love using Mac—and that means a lot to me and my business. It's easy to train people, and they enjoy their work. Even those who've been trained on PCs overcome their reluctance quickly—and they never want to go back."

“I chose Mac because I saw it as a clear competitive advantage. Because I wanted to focus on accounting, not computing. I use computers because they allow me to do my best for my clients. But I don’t want to be a technician.”
Robert Cowen
“That aspect of Mac use—the simple enjoyment—is intangible but crucial. Because it’s all about human relationships at this firm. I have great relationships with my employees. And I always tell them that we’re selling relationships, not services. It just so happens that we’re accountants, but what our clients want is a relationship they can rely on.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that, in so many ways, the Mac platform helps our firm focus wholeheartedly on client relationships. And that’s what gives me a competitive edge.”

Hardware
• 1 Power Mac G4
• 3 eMac
• 1 iMac
• 1 17-inch PowerBook
• HP and Brother printers
• Fujitsu ScanSnap color image scanner

Software
• Mac OS X Tiger
• MYOB AccountEdge
• Microsoft Office
• Safari
• Address Book
• Mail
• SnapMail
• AppleWorks
• iPhoto
• iCal
• Now Up-to-Date
• Stickies
• Transmit
• Timbuktu

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