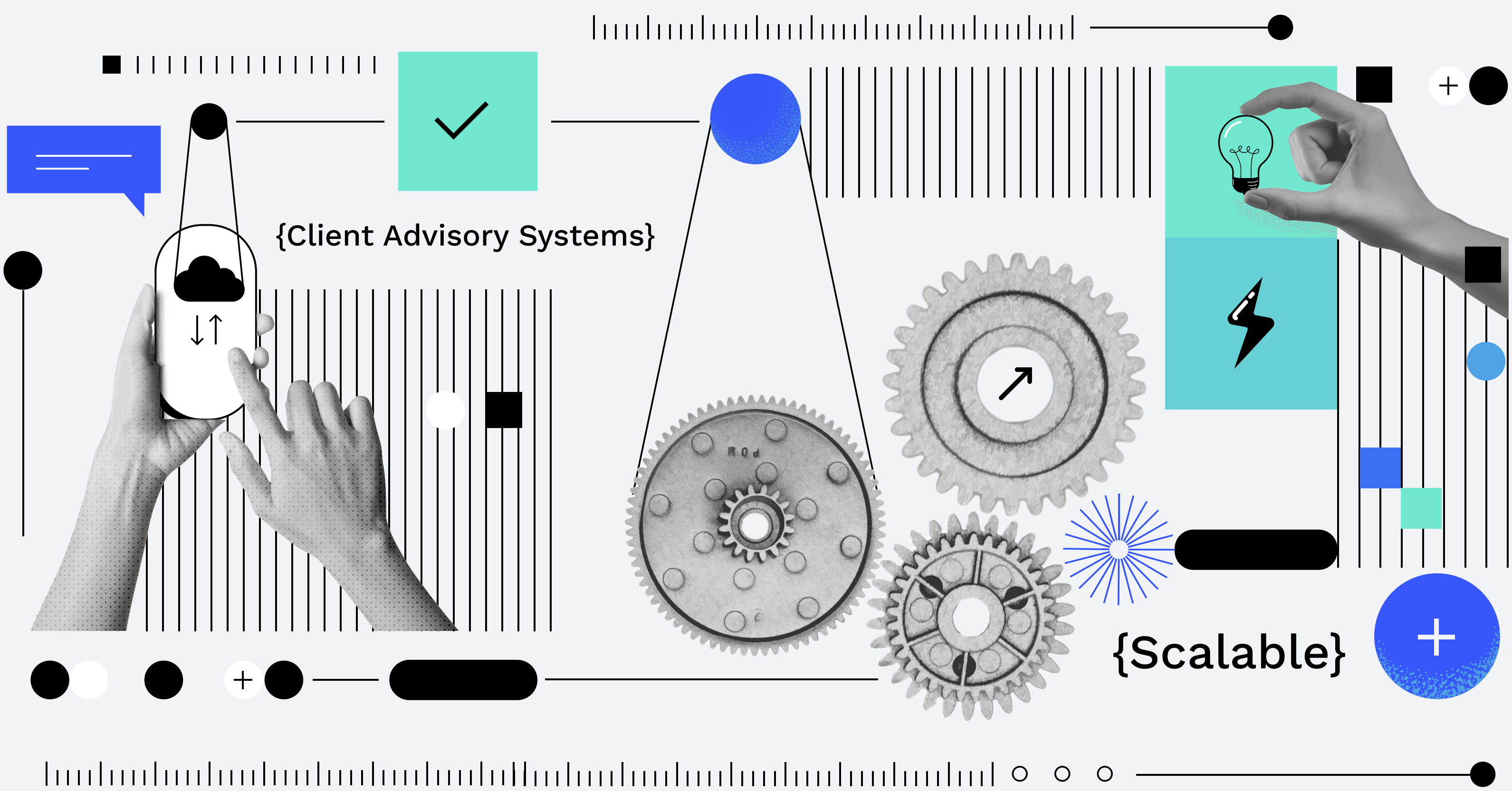
InfiniteTies

canopy

Designing a Scalable CAS Practice

A Practical Guide to Building a Modern Advisory Firm



Introduction

How Can Tax and Accounting Firms Transform Compliance Work into High-Value Advisory Services?

Client Advisory Services (CAS) has evolved from traditional bookkeeping and write-up work into a proactive advisory model that helps clients make better business decisions. As technology and AI automate compliance tasks, firms have an unprecedented opportunity to create profitable monthly revenue, deepen client relationships, and build scalable practices.

Featuring insights from Infinite Ties Co-founders:

Christine Triantos

Michelle Welch

Deneen Dias

Table of Contents

01 The Profession Is Pivoting

02 Why CAS Is the Future

03 Defining Client Advisory Services

04 CAS vs. Bookkeeping vs. Fractional CFO

05 The Mindset Shift

06 Designing a Scalable Business Model

07 Building Your Ideal Client Profile

08 Industry Niches and Specialization

09 Integrating CAS Into Tax Practices

10 Technology as the Growth Engine

11 The CAS Talent Challenge

12 Revenue Streams Beyond Monthly Fees

13 Pricing for Profitability

14 Reporting That Drives Decisions

15 Creating an Advisory Experience

16 Managing Scope and Expectations

17 Risk Mitigation and Engagement Letters

18 The Six Pillars of CAS Success

19 Building Your 12-Month CAS Roadmap

20 The Future of Advisory

CHAPTER 01

01

The Profession Is Pivoting

The accounting firm model that built the industry is being reinvented.

For decades, the accounting profession operated from a relatively predictable playbook. Tax season brought a flood of compliance work. Audit engagements followed structured annual cycles. Clients delivered information, accountants processed it, and reports were returned. The model was dependable, profitable, and familiar.

Then everything began to change.

Cloud technology transformed how businesses managed financial information. Automation reduced the time required to complete bookkeeping and compliance tasks. Artificial intelligence emerged as a force capable of accelerating routine accounting activities at unprecedented speed.

At the same time, clients began asking different questions. No longer satisfied with historical reports, business owners wanted guidance.

- They wanted help understanding their cash flow.
- They wanted to know whether they could afford to hire another employee.
- They wanted confidence before making major investments.
- Most importantly, they wanted someone they trusted to help them make better decisions.

This shift has created both an opportunity and a challenge for accounting firms.

The opportunity is significant. Firms can move beyond transactional work and establish themselves as indispensable business advisors.

The challenge is equally significant. Traditional firm structures were never designed to deliver advisory services at scale.

Many firms find themselves caught between two worlds: a compliance model that has served them well and an advisory future that clients increasingly expect. The firms that thrive over the next decade will be the ones that successfully bridge that gap.

Client Advisory Services (CAS) provides the framework to do exactly that.

KEY INSIGHT

The future of accounting isn't about producing more reports. It's about helping clients make better decisions.

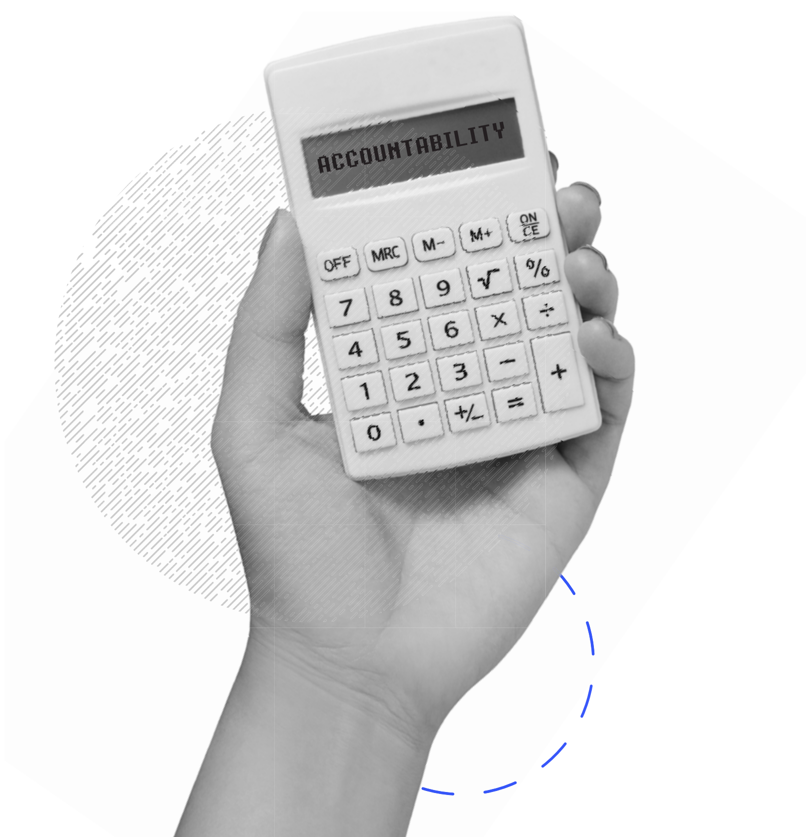
THE EVOLUTION OF CLIENT EXPECTATIONS

YESTERDAY

Tax Return – Financial Statements – Compliance

TODAY

Insights → Strategy → Guidance → Growth



02

CHAPTER 02

Why CAS Is the Future

Clients don't need more information. They need more clarity.

Firms are shifting from compliance-focused services toward advisory with new higher margin offerings such as forecasting, cash flow insights, and strategic decision support. These new profitable services have moved CAS into one of the fastest-growing service lines in the profession.

Every business owner today has access to more financial information than ever before. They can log into accounting software, review dashboards, run reports, and access real-time bank balances from their smartphones.

Yet despite having more information, many business owners feel more uncertain than ever. Why?

- Because information alone does not create clarity.
- Data does not automatically create decisions.
- Reports do not automatically create growth.

This is where CAS becomes transformational.

The most successful CAS firms understand that their value is not in producing information. Their value is in helping clients understand what that information means and what actions should follow.

Imagine a business owner reviewing a monthly financial statement. Traditional accounting financials might show what happened.

- Revenue increased.
- Expenses have increased.
- Profitability declined.

CAS is a monthly discussion with clients on:

1. Why did profitability decline?
2. What changed?
3. Is this temporary or systemic?
4. What should be done differently next month?
5. How does this impact hiring plans?
6. Should pricing be adjusted?
7. Should investments be delayed?

These conversations create tremendous value because the business owner is able to make real time business decisions that will directly impact their business outcomes.

As technology continues to automate transaction processing and compliance work, advisory becomes the natural next step in the evolution of accounting services. The accounting future belongs to firms that transform information into insights, which allows the business owner to turn those insights into action.

KEY INSIGHT

Clients don't hire advisors for answers they already know. They hire advisors for confidence in the decisions ahead.

CHAPTER 03

03

Defining CAS

More Than Bookkeeping. More Than Reporting.

One of the biggest challenges when building CAS is firm-wide alignment on exactly what it means.

Ask ten accounting professionals to define Client Advisory Services, and you may receive ten different answers. Sometimes it's described as:

- Outsourced accounting
- Virtual CFO services
- Enhanced bookkeeping
- A complete transformation of the client relationship

The reality is that CAS incorporates elements of all these concepts.

At its core, CAS is a proactive service model designed to help business owners achieve better financial outcomes. It combines technology, financial expertise, process management, and advisory conversations into a recurring monthly engagement that extends far beyond traditional compliance work. The distinction is important.

- **Traditional bookkeeping** focuses on recording transactions.
- **Traditional accounting** focuses on reporting historical results.
- **CAS** focuses on consistently helping clients understand where they are today, where they are headed tomorrow, and what actions will help them achieve their goals.

The conversation shifts from:

"What happened?" ⟶ *"What should we do next?"*

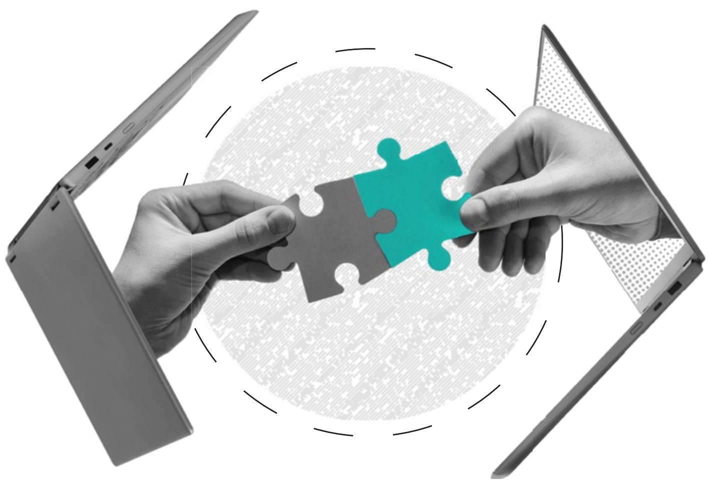
That shift fundamentally changes how clients perceive the value of the accounting relationship. Instead of being the professional they call once a year, you become the advisor they consult before making important business decisions.

That transformation is where the real value of CAS resides.

CORE COMPONENTS OF CAS

- Monthly accounting services
- Fixed-fee pricing
- Cloud-based technology
- Cash flow management
- Financial reporting
- KPI dashboards
- Strategic planning
- Advisory meetings
- Forecasting

The distinguishing characteristic is not the deliverable, it's the conversation.



CHAPTER 04

CAS vs. Bookkeeping vs. Fractional CFO

Understanding the Spectrum of Financial Services.

The most common request from prospects remains, "I need bookkeeping." Business owners don't call asking for CAS. So when asked for help with the books, accounting firms can answer, "YES, we can help you with the books to start, but that's not where we end."

CAS teams explain that they will clean up the books, ensure the monthly financials are accurate, and establish an ongoing goal of helping clients interpret the information and understand its implications. The CAS advisor's real value is to identify trends, monitor KPIs, evaluate profitability, forecast cash flow, and facilitate strategic discussions.

Fractional CFO services represent another level of engagement. At this stage, the advisor becomes deeply embedded in strategic planning, organizational growth, financing decisions, capital planning, mergers and acquisitions, and executive-level decision-making.

Think of it this way:

BOOKKEEPING
Tells you where you've been.

CAS
Helps you understand where you are.

FRACTIONAL CFO
Determines where you're going.

Many successful firms offer all three services through a tiered client experience.

As clients grow, their needs evolve. A client who begins with bookkeeping today may eventually require sophisticated advisory services and CFO-level guidance tomorrow. The key is designing a service model that allows clients to grow with you.

KEY INSIGHT

Business owners rarely ask for CAS. They ask for help making better decisions.

Once firms understand what CAS is—and what it is not—the next challenge emerges: How do you actually build it?

This is where many firms struggle. Not because they lack technical expertise. Not because they lack client demand. But because CAS requires an entirely different way of thinking about firm operations, pricing, staffing, and growth.

Next, we will explore the single biggest obstacle preventing firms from successfully scaling advisory services:

The mindset shift.

CHAPTER 05

05

The CAS Mindset Shift

Why most CAS initiatives stall before they scale.

Successful firms stop trying to fit CAS into a traditional tax-and-audit model. Instead, they design a scalable, repeatable, and sustainable business model built around standardized processes, ideal clients, and recurring revenue.

The challenge isn't accounting expertise. It's transformation.

For decades, accounting firms have been optimized around efficiency, utilization, deadlines, and compliance deliverables. Success was measured by returns completed, audit reports issued, and billable hours recorded.

CAS changes the equation.

Suddenly, the value is no longer tied to a completed deliverable. The value lies in insight, interpretation, and strategic guidance. That can feel uncomfortable.

Professionals who have spent years perfecting technical expertise often discover that advisory requires an entirely different skill set. It demands curiosity. It requires asking questions. It involves listening more than speaking.

Many firm leaders initially assume CAS can simply be added onto existing services. What often happens instead is that they create a second full-time job for themselves.

Without redesigning the business model, advisory becomes something squeezed into evenings, weekends, or client calls between tax deadlines. That's not sustainable. The firms succeeding in CAS understand a fundamental truth: They are not adding a service. They are building a business model. Once that realization occurs, everything changes.

CAS requires firms to think differently about:
- Revenue
- Staffing
- Technology
- Client relationships
- Capacity planning

THE QUESTION BECOMES:

"If you were building this practice from scratch today, what would it look like?"

CHAPTER 06

06

Designing a Scalable Business Model

Many firms grow because talented people work incredibly hard.

A scalable CAS practice is intentionally designed to produce consistent client outcomes regardless of who delivers the service. That begins with standardization.

Imagine onboarding ten clients that all require different processes, different reports, different technology, and different communication styles. Now imagine onboarding ten clients within the same niche, using the same workflow, the same technology stack, and the same reporting framework. Which practice is easier to scale? The answer is obvious. Scalability isn't about serving more clients. It's about reducing complexity.

The most successful CAS firms build operating systems rather than individual engagements.

- They document processes.
- They define service tiers.
- They create repeatable onboarding experiences.
- They establish clear roles and responsibilities.

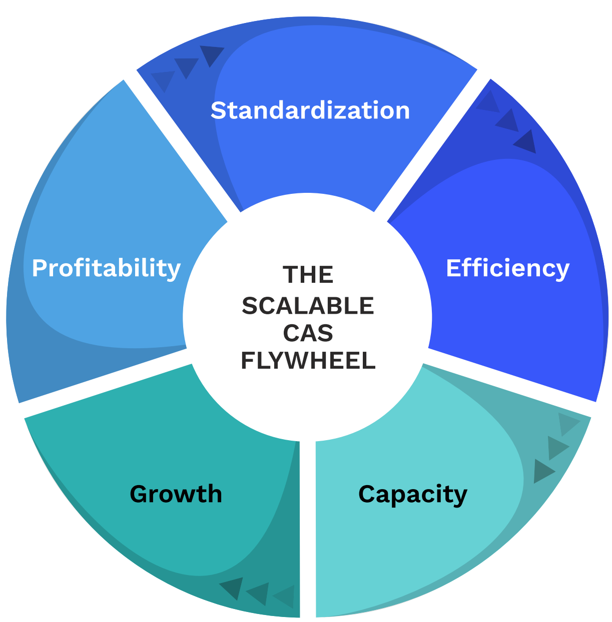
As a result, growth becomes predictable.

The goal isn't simply to grow. The goal is to grow without chaos.

Infinite Ties emphasizes three words:

SCALABLE | REPEATABLE | SUSTAINABLE

Every CAS practice should be built around those principles.



CHAPTER 07

07

Building the Ideal Client Profile

Not every client is the right client.

One of the hardest lessons for growing CAS firms is learning that saying “yes” to every opportunity often creates more problems than growth.

Early in the journey, many firms accept almost every client who expresses interest. Eventually, they discover a painful truth. Some clients consume enormous amounts of time while generating minimal profit. Others resist technology. Some refuse to follow established processes. Others constantly push the boundaries of scope.

The strongest CAS firms understand that growth begins with client selection.

An Ideal Client Profile (ICP) is more than a marketing exercise. It becomes a strategic filter.

- The best CAS clients share common characteristics:
- They value financial insight.
- They embrace technology.
- They view their accountant as a trusted advisor.
- They are willing to invest in growth.

Most importantly, they understand that advisory services create value.

When firms clearly define who they serve best, everything improves.

- Marketing becomes easier.
- Referrals become stronger.
- Processes become more repeatable.
- Profitability increases.

The right clients make scaling possible.

Focus on clients that align with your technology stack, communication style, and service model. Define barriers to entry and prioritize industry niches that allow you to build expertise and efficiencies.

CHAPTER 08

08

Industry Niches Create Scale

Expertise compounds faster than capacity.

One of the fastest ways to accelerate CAS growth is specialization. At first glance, specialization may seem restrictive. Many firms worry that focusing on a niche will reduce opportunities. In reality, the opposite often occurs.

SPECIALIZATION CREATES EXPERTISE.

EXPERTISE CREATES CREDIBILITY.

CREDIBILITY CREATES REFERRALS.

REFERRALS CREATE GROWTH.

Consider a firm serving multiple construction companies. Over time, the team begins to understand project costing, retention, labor allocation, and cash flow patterns unique to the industry. Those insights allow the firm to provide increasingly valuable advice. Soon, clients begin referring peers. Marketing becomes easier. The firm becomes known for solving specific challenges. That reputation becomes a competitive advantage.

Generalists compete on services. Specialists compete on expertise. And expertise is significantly harder to replicate.

NICHE EXPERTISE GROWTH CURVE

Experience → Knowledge → Authority → Referrals → Growth

CHAPTER 09

Integrating CAS Into Tax Practices

The fastest path to advisory revenue is often already sitting in your client list.

Many firms believe launching CAS requires finding entirely new clients. Often, the opposite is true. Their best CAS opportunities already exist.

Every tax season, firms gain a deep understanding of client finances. They see profitability trends. They identify tax-planning opportunities. They uncover operational inefficiencies. The challenge is that these conversations often happen once a year.

CAS transforms annual interactions into year-round relationships. Instead of discussing last year's performance, advisors begin helping clients shape next year's results.

A tax return becomes the starting point rather than the final deliverable.

- Clients receive more value.
- Firms generate recurring revenue.
- Relationships become stronger.

The result is a more resilient business model built around continuous engagement rather than seasonal activity.

KEY INSIGHT

The most valuable advisory opportunities often begin with tax conversations.

10

CHAPTER 10

Technology as the Growth Engine

Technology is the growth engine.

Technology is often viewed as a tool. Successful CAS firms view it as infrastructure. Infrastructure determines how efficiently work flows through the organization. Without the right technology, growth creates complexity. With the right technology, growth creates leverage.

Modern CAS firms rely on cloud-based systems that connect financial data, automate workflows, streamline communication, and provide real-time visibility.

The objective is not to replace people. The objective is to free professionals from routine tasks so they can focus on advisory conversations.

This is where practice-management platforms like Canopy and other integrated solutions become powerful.

- They reduce administrative burden.
- They improve client experiences.
- They create consistency.

Most importantly, they allow firms to spend less time gathering information and more time interpreting it.

Technology doesn’t replace advisors. It amplifies them.

A MODERN CAS STACK OFTEN INCLUDES:

CORE ACCOUNTING
- QuickBooks Online
- Xero

WORKFLOW
- Canopy
- Practice management platforms

AP/AR AUTOMATION
- Bill payment platforms
- Collection systems

REPORTING
- Dashboards
- KPI visualization tools

FORECASTING
- Budgeting software
- Scenario planning tools

MODERN CAS TECH ECOSYSTEM

CLIENT → ACCOUNTING PLATFORM → WORKFLOW → REPORTING → ADVISORY

CHAPTER 11

Solving the Talent Challenge

Building advisors, not just accountants.

Technology may be transforming accounting, but people remain the differentiator. One of the most common concerns accounting practice owners raise is talent. Finding skilled professionals is difficult. Finding professionals who can confidently advise clients is even harder. CAS requires a broader skill set.

Technical accounting knowledge remains important. But communication, leadership, business acumen, and relationship management become equally critical. The most successful firms don't simply hire advisors. They develop them.

- They invest in coaching.
- They encourage client-facing experiences.
- They create opportunities for team members to build confidence.

Over time, technical professionals become trusted advisors. That transformation is one of the most valuable investments a firm can make.

KEY INSIGHT

Clients remember how advisors make them feel, not just what they tell them.

CHAPTER 12

The Six CAS Revenue Streams

Most firms are leaving revenue on the table.

One of the most eye-opening moments for many firms is realizing how many revenue opportunities exist within CAS. Too often, firms focus exclusively on monthly recurring fees. As a result, they absorb significant work without compensation.

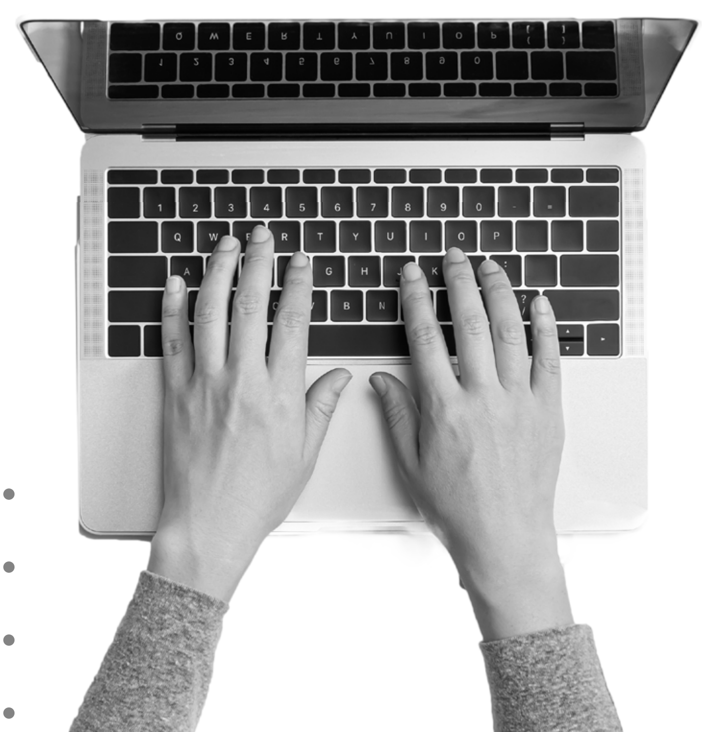
Every stage of the client journey creates value.

- Onboarding creates value.
- Knowledge transfer creates value.
- Cleanup projects create value.
- Custom reporting creates value.
- Advisory meetings create value.
- Strategic planning creates value.

When firms begin pricing each component appropriately, profitability improves dramatically. Clients benefit as well.

- Clear pricing creates transparency.
- Transparency builds trust.
- Trust strengthens relationships.

The goal isn't charging more. The goal is accurately pricing the value being delivered.



CHAPTER 13

13

Pricing for Profitability

Why hourly billing limits growth.

For generations, accounting firms relied on hourly billing. It felt logical. More time meant more revenue, but technology changes that equation.

What happens when automation reduces a ten-hour process to one hour? Under an hourly model, efficiency becomes a financial penalty. Under a fixed-fee model, efficiency becomes a competitive advantage. This is one reason CAS firms increasingly embrace value-based pricing. Clients aren't purchasing hours. They're purchasing outcomes. They're purchasing confidence. They're purchasing expertise.

Fixed-fee pricing aligns incentives for both parties. Clients gain predictability. Firms gain scalability. Everyone wins.

KEY INSIGHT

The goal isn't to sell time. The goal is to deliver value.

CHAPTER 14

Reporting That Drives Decisions

Data becomes valuable when it inspires action.

Business owners are drowning in information. What they lack is interpretation. CAS reporting is about creating meaningful conversations, rather than simply generating more reports. The best reports answer questions.

- What is driving profitability?
- Where are margins shrinking?
- How much cash will be available next quarter?
- Which services are performing best?
- What happens if sales decline?
- What happens if the company hires another employee?

When reports become decision-making tools, clients stop viewing accounting as an expense. They begin viewing it as an investment.

High-value reporting includes:

- KPI dashboards
- Cash flow forecasts
- Budget-to-actual analysis
- Industry benchmarking
- Scenario planning

Every report should answer: "What action should the client take next?"

CHAPTER 15

Creating an Advisory Experience

Great advisors ask better questions.

Many professionals hesitate to offer advisory services because they fear they won't have all the answers. The reality is that great advice is rarely about having perfect answers. It's about facilitating better decisions.

The most impactful advisory meetings often begin with questions.

1. What are your biggest challenges?
2. What opportunities are you considering?
3. What keeps you awake at night?
4. What would success look like twelve months from now?

These conversations uncover insights that financial reports alone never reveal.

The advisor becomes a strategic thinking partner. That relationship creates tremendous value.

KEY INSIGHT

Advisory starts with curiosity.

CHAPTER 16

Managing Scope and Expectations

Clarity protects profitability.

Scope creep is one of the fastest ways to undermine a CAS practice. It often begins innocently. A quick question. An extra report. A small request. Over time, those additions accumulate. Without clear boundaries, profitability erodes.

The strongest firms proactively define expectations. Every engagement should clearly define:

- DELIVERABLES
- RESPONSIBILITIES
- MEETING FREQUENCY
- REPORTING SCHEDULES
- ADDITIONAL FEES

Strong firms review scope regularly and adjust pricing as client complexity changes.

CHAPTER 17

Risk Mitigation and Engagement Letters

Protecting the practice while serving clients.

As firms become more involved in client operations, risk naturally increases.

CAS professionals may have access to:

- Bank accounts
- Payroll systems
- Vendor payments
- Financial records
- Sensitive data

Traditional engagement letters rarely address these realities. That's why risk management becomes a foundational element of CAS.

Strong firms establish clear agreements, cybersecurity protocols, access controls, and documentation procedures.

The goal is not to create barriers. The goal is to create confidence. Clients want to know their information is secure. Firms need assurance that responsibilities are clearly defined.

Well-designed engagement letters accomplish both.

CHAPTER 18

The Six Pillars of a Scalable CAS Practice

Building a practice that lasts.

After working with firms at every stage of the CAS journey, Infinite Ties identified six pillars that determine success.

01
FOUNDATION
Mission, vision, and goals

02
REVENUE STRATEGY
Pricing and packaging

03
PEOPLE
Hiring and development

04
PLATFORM
Technology stack

05
OPERATIONS
Delivery infrastructure

06
PROCESS
Repeatable workflows

These pillars work together.

A weakness in one area eventually impacts the others. Many firms focus exclusively on technology. Others focus only on marketing. The firms that scale successfully strategize on all six areas simultaneously.

The result is a balanced, sustainable business model capable of long-term growth.

CHAPTER 19

19

Building Your 12-Month CAS Roadmap

Turning vision into execution.

Every successful CAS practice begins with a decision.

- A decision to evolve.
- A decision to invest.
- A decision to build differently.

The journey does not happen overnight. It happens through deliberate, consistent action.

Over the next twelve months, firms should focus on:

- Defining their vision
- Selecting their niche
- Building service packages
- Implementing technology
- Training talent
- Launching advisory offerings
- Measuring results

Small steps, repeated consistently, create extraordinary outcomes. The objective is progress, not perfection.

KEY INSIGHT

The best time to start building CAS was five years ago. The second-best time is today.

CHAPTER 20

The Future of Advisory

The firms that thrive will be the ones that lead.

The accounting profession stands at a crossroads. One path leads toward increasing commoditization. The other leads toward greater influence, deeper relationships, and higher-value services.

Technology will continue to evolve. Artificial intelligence will continue to automate routine tasks. Client expectations will continue to rise.

Rather than viewing these trends as threats, look at them as opportunities.

The future accounting firm will not compete on compliance. It will compete on insight.

Technology will continue reducing transactional work.

The firms that thrive will become trusted advisors who help clients:

- Understand their numbers
- Plan strategically
- Improve profitability
- Navigate uncertainty

They will become indispensable partners in their clients' success.

CAS is more than just another service line. It is the evolution of the accounting profession. And that is why the future belongs to firms willing to evolve with advisory services.

Ready to Build Your CAS Practice?

Whether you're exploring advisory services for the first time or looking to scale an existing CAS practice, the journey doesn't have to be done alone.

The FanCAS-Kit provides proven frameworks, templates, pricing models, engagement letters, staffing resources, technology guidance, and implementation tools designed specifically for accounting firms.

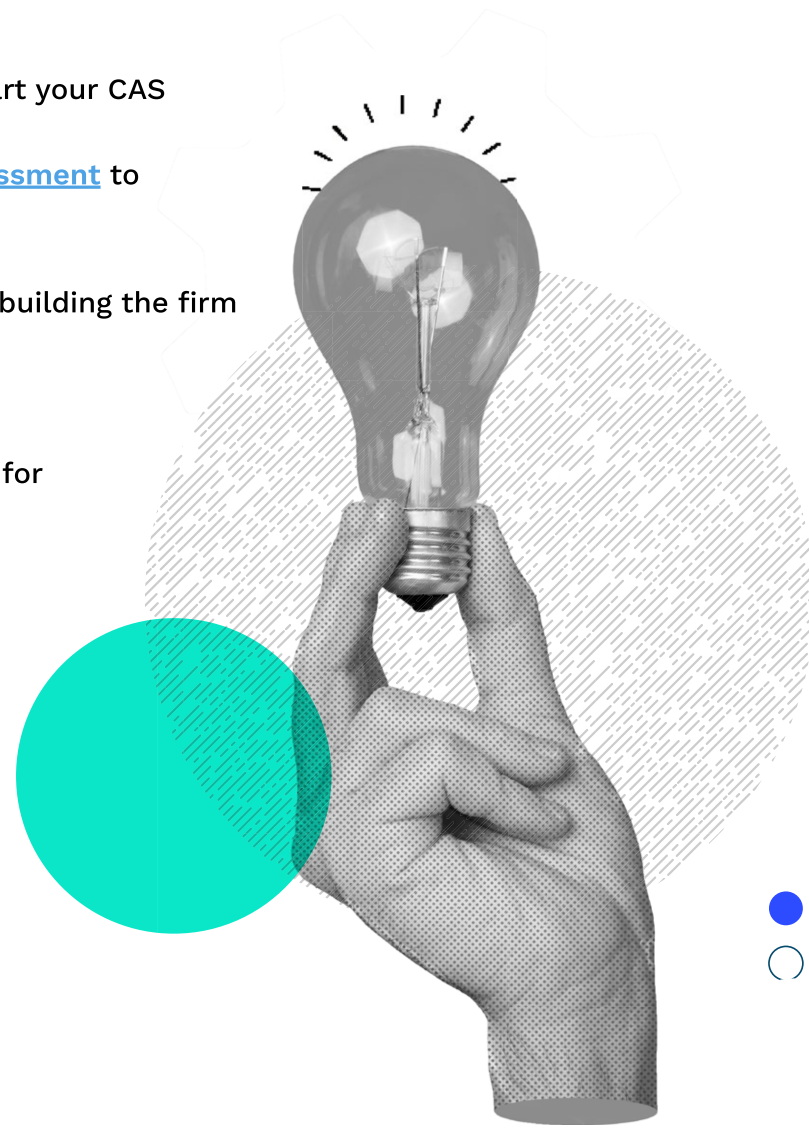
Build a CAS Practice That Is:

- Scalable
- Repeatable
- Sustainable

Explore the FanCAS-Kit and start your CAS journey today! Take the CAS Scalability Scorecard Assessment to get started.

Download this guide and begin building the firm of the future.

Contact: Deneen Dias at ddias@infinite-ties.accountant for an in-depth discussion.



About Infinite Ties

Infinite Ties helps firms build scalable Client Advisory Services practices through community, training, resources, and implementation frameworks.

About Canopy

Canopy is an award-winning, all-in-one practice management platform built to help accounting firms scale beyond compliance work. By streamlining workflow, document management, time and billing, payments, and client communication in one place, Canopy frees up the capacity firms need to deliver advisory services and grow recurring revenue.

REQUEST A DEMO