

## The Automatic Bookkeeper: A Genuinely Different Approach to Accounting

by *Diane de Garis*

I think I'm still in denial about being an accountant—and it's been my life's work. I've spent my entire career in accounting and the tools that set the industry standard continue to evolve. Nothing ever stays the same, and it's important to keep up with each new development.

Here, on the small island of Guernsey, we have quite a big finance industry. While I never really wanted to be an accountant, I do like numbers. I started to see that particular skill opened doors. I didn't know what else I wanted to do, so I thought I'd just try it out and see. But I can't quit something once I've started, so once I began the training, I had to see it through. I love that I can now add value and work with small businesses. I particularly like that we can use systems to do all of the monotonous tasks. We're better off doing more interesting things once we find out what we can do with the numbers.

### **Automate the bookkeeping and focus on doing a more interesting job. @degarisLtd @ReceiptBank**

We didn't even use laptops when I started in accounting. The industry's massively changed. It's critical to keep up with the times to stay successful (and sane) as your business keeps growing. Accounting is no longer all about manual, repetitive processes. It's automated, interesting, and dynamic! We used to do so much work in Excel, manually building spreadsheets that couldn't integrate with other applications. Now, I work with small businesses and I fix everything with systems. That's a big change.

### **Head in the Clouds: The Gold Standard**

For the past five years, I've run my own accounting firm. We offer businesses an outsourced financial director and cloud accounting services. We've found our niche as cloud experts who change how clients do their bookkeeping and accounts. We feel we sell them the gift of time (as well as friendly accounting services!). We have a diverse client base and each client gets a tailored approach. Some, we empower with training and tools to do everything for themselves until they need us at year-end. Others just need oversight. A few clients prefer to outsource everything to us except when it comes to doing their own scanning.

We are the first Xero gold partner firm in Guernsey and largely turn away businesses that are not interested in the new, efficient way of keeping their books in the cloud. But the reality has been that no one outright rejects our cloud-based systems. Most just hadn't considered their options. Potential clients actually seek us out because of our approach. When we say we won't work with their old desktop system, they listen to us and usually come over to the new way of accounting.

We're now working almost 100 percent with Xero accounting software, and we found Receipt Bank to be a stellar complementary application that helps our clients with their bookkeeping and accounting needs at the same level or even more. We regularly run free accounting software training sessions for many of our clients and began introducing Receipt Bank about two years ago. The concept is almost magic, but people are initially a bit sceptical that you can simply take a photo of your business receipt and it's officially logged in your books. They don't know how that works until they've seen it. Within five minutes, we can demo it and show them the difference.

### **The Big Integration: A Business Game-Changer**

The integration between Xero and Receipt Bank is quick to set up and incredibly smooth. To this day, I've not had it fail. We use Receipt Bank for both high and low-volume clients. It's actually so easy and straightforward to use that we probably didn't do enough training at first. And one of the things we found really useful, for example, was the flowchart that gives you the next steps for how you publish something when it's been paid. We had a few "oops" moments, so we learned that it's definitely a best practice to do the 10-minutes of training.

### **Free time is empowering. Data entry kills productivity. @ReceiptBank**

It was incredibly effective to get our clients' buy-in by doing the Receipt Bank training and telling people to call us if they have questions or a new need comes up. We've always encouraged our clients to see us as a business partner—from the smallest queries about the software to the person trying to analyze the books. We always encourage people to ask when they don't understand something because it's not going to run up a huge bill. This way people can just embrace it without fear of making costly mistakes. We're here for them.

I love going beyond data entry and doing the interesting management reporting and adding value to businesses. It's about discussing whether a business needs to recruit and grow their sales or cut their costs—it's much more interesting than spending all my time churning. It's difficult to recruit people in Guernsey, so we need the systems to do as much for us as possible. Cloud-based systems have not only changed the way we do business—it's changed how we live our lives. It's given us back that elusive work-life balance.

### **One Size Fits All: Crafting Bespoke Solutions**

We want to make our clients' lives easier. We'll set up their accounts for them and help with all the training so they feel comfortable with their new tools, whereas other accounting firms will simply agree to use whatever software they're already using. So our clients see us as experts in the field. Our Xero gold partner certification also proves we know what we're doing. Some people will come to us because they absolutely know they want Xero. They might be a startup with no prior bookkeeping or accounting experience and they've just heard that cloud

accounting is the best option for them. They ask around. Word-of-mouth is still a valuable way to learn what works for businesses or people like yourself. Others are doing things in a really old-fashioned way, on several different systems with nothing integrated or cloud-based. They will talk to us and we'll just map it out for them. It's an incredible moment when they realise what's now possible. People are coming to us for automation, but they don't necessarily realise how much better their situation is about to become.

At first, I thought Receipt Bank was just going to make a difference for the clients that were inputting a ton of supply bills, those who had high volume manual input. That was why I first used Receipt Bank—to fix a particular problem. But then I realized that even if a client only has 10 invoices a month, this is still a no-brainer. This is for everyone. Only the smallest percentage of clients who don't already put any bills in the system I would say don't need Receipt Bank. In fact, I'd estimate that Receipt Bank is essential for at least 90 percent of our clients. This is for two key reasons:

First, you can go paperless. And second, it makes it easier for you and your accountant when you want to look back to which accounts are connected to which banks. You have more awareness about your cash flow. With Receipt Bank the process is very visual, linking images for instant recognition. It's just so much more efficient.

### **A New Approach: Regaining Time and Control**

We've got clients who spent a lot of money on bookkeeping and invested a lot of time in the manual approach to bookkeeping. Receipt Bank has streamlined those processes. Our clients see major benefits in two key areas: time and control. To avoid the repetitive act of manually issuing and inputting dozens of invoices, many clients would choose to simply input a statement. But due to the high volume, there is a greater margin for error—especially when they're not doing their due diligence and double checking at invoice level because it takes up so much time.

There's an element of stress involved, regardless of how you choose to handle it. But using Receipt Bank to accurately document the invoices and reconcile them with the statements helps my clients regain both time and control over their transactions. They save money, time, and stress. Someone might currently be paying a bookkeeper to go in 2–3 hours a week. They could outsource it to us, for less than 2–3 hours per month. We can assess quickly and accurately how many hours bookkeeping a client will need because we're using these tools.

### **The Ultimate Business Gift: Your Weekends Back**

The benefits carry over to my firm, too. I know the work I like. I groan when I pick up an occasional QuickBooks Desktop job or something like that. I just don't like doing it, so I simply don't. I'm my own boss now, so I can make that decision. My plan was to get a better work-life balance, and if I turn away work, then I should have a better balance. Using digital tools like Receipt Bank and Xero also allow us to work with our clients on the issues that matter just as much—or more—than their bookkeeping. Granted, it's vital to their health of their businesses,

but when you're confident your accounts are in order, you can get back to focusing on growth! We help our clients with that aspect of their businesses as well and link up with local marketing company [thebestof Guernsey Ltd](#). Sometimes I think we want to be some sort of creative accountancy agency hybrid!

**Embracing the #cloud means an easier—and better—#accounting solution. #NoLookingBack @degarisLtd @ReceiptBank**

We teach our clients that there's a better way—they will come back saying we've changed their lives. They've got their whole weekends back, where they used to spend all their time doing all their books. We do have a good reputation. We live in a small place where referrals (especially first-hand referrals) have a massive impact on business growth. We collect reviews. People will look on our review system and see we have many satisfied clients. It's simply people explaining how they used to do their accounting and bookkeeping compared to how they do it now. We know that cloud accounting is the new industry gold standard. It's the future of accounting. But not all businesses know yet because they're still doing what works for them. Their system isn't broken, it's just several steps behind what's possible. We live for that golden moment of clarity and realization, when we show our clients what's possible and they have an excited epiphany. That's what we're all about at my firm, and that's what we'll continue to focus on.

**No Looking Back: A Great View from the Clouds**

There's plenty of business for all of us accountancy firms in Guernsey. But I think those who continue doing what they've always done will fall behind with that approach. The main thing we've done since we've started our firm has been to embrace these massive digital advances through the cloud. So, for us, it's easy to change people over. I think more and more businesses will come to learn that there's a better way to manage their accounts, especially if they're still using the old approach. Our clients will force the change, rather than the accountancy firms. It's so much better for us accountants as well.

It took me some time to realize that being in denial about being an accountant is not a bad thing at all. I just didn't like the churning, the endless data entry. I simply have a different perspective on what the industry can do for businesses, and finally the technology's arrived to help us take that vision to the next level. I love that today's technology means I can do the interesting bits and the system does the churning. Accounting is changing—don't fall behind. Just try it. There'd be no looking back.