

## **Ask SCORE**

*My beauty supply business has grown significantly in the short time we've been in business and I'm considering hiring an accountant. How do I find the right one?*

There are many responsibilities that come with being a small business owner, and everyone is critical to maintaining profitability and promoting growth. You can't risk letting a deadline slip or overlook an administrative requirement, yet there are only so many hours in the day to get things done.

To ensure you stay focused on the most important things, it may be a good idea to transfer some routine chores. Even though accounting software programs have simplified the process of routine bookkeeping and tax preparation, someone well-versed in this area can spot trends or problems you might miss. And the more complex your needs—preparing financial reports, invoicing, payroll, etc.—the more time-consuming accounting becomes.

If you decide you need the skills of an accounting professional, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) can help. The “For the Public” section of their website, [www.aicpa.org](http://www.aicpa.org), offers guidance in selecting the right CPA for your small business, including a searchable director of AICPA member firms.

Fees vary greatly among accountants, depending on location, expertise and services provided. Some firms will provide bundled services for a flat monthly fee, but may charge less for bookkeeping and other tasks that don't require CPA-level training. If you are considering a larger accounting firm, make sure you meet and get to know the people with whom you will be working. As with any business relationship, a “comfort level” of trust, confidence and communication with an accountant is a must.

Not sure you need a CPA? Then a professional bookkeeper may be just the resource you need. The free online “Bookkeepers Hiring Test” from the American Institute of Professional Bookkeepers ([www.aipb.org](http://www.aipb.org)) can help you assess candidates' qualifications.

Another option is an Enrolled Agent (EA), a professional licensed by the Federal government to prepare tax returns. Unlike CPAs, EAs must demonstrate their competence in all areas of taxation, representation and ethics before they are given unlimited representation rights before IRS. More information and assistance in finding an EA is available from the National Association of Enrolled Agents ([www.naea.org](http://www.naea.org)).

*This column is brought to you by the Merrimack Valley Chapter of SCORE, with nearly 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business mentoring and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit [merrimackvalley.score.org](http://merrimackvalley.score.org) for information on mentoring, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.*