



Selecting Professional Services

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The use of professional services is essential to the success of a small business. Professionals can provide knowledge and expertise in areas where you may have little. They can also round out your management team to ensure that your business is operating efficiently.

As an entrepreneur, there are four main areas of professional services that you may wish to consult:

- accountant;
- lawyer;
- banker; and
- insurance broker.

When seeking out professional help, choose carefully. Find someone with whom you feel you can establish a good working relationship. When searching for names, ask family members, friends, and business associates as well as consulting the business pages in your telephone directory.

For first time meetings, be prepared to explain your situation and what you are looking for. Ask what services the firm provides and how it can assist you. Do not forget to ask how much the firm charges for its services.

Selecting an Accountant

Accountants are highly trained professionals who deal with business records, financial matters, and other aspects of planning and running a business. Accountants can:

- help you put a business plan together and provide financial advice;
- advise you on the form of business organization that is best for you;
- do your bookkeeping and/or provide bookkeeping training;
- prepare your financial statements and explain them;
- prepare corporate and income tax returns and other information required by government.

Hourly fees may vary depending on the kind of work, complexity of the work and the accountant's professional experience.

If you need someone to simply keep your financial books updated, you may want to consider hiring a bookkeeper. This may be a less expensive alternative.

Listed below are types of professional accountants:

- Chartered Accountant (CA) -- specializes in taxation, the development of overall financial reports for external users and the preparation of financial forecasts for management, and external auditing.
- Certified General Accountant (CGA) -- specializes in financial accounting, external auditing, as well as small business taxation and consulting.
- Certified Management Accountant (CMA) -- specializes in the development of internal information on the company's product or service cost which assists management in their decision making.

For additional information:

Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountant

www.cica.ca

Certified General Accountants Association of Canada

www.cga-canada.org

Certified Management Accountants Canada

www.cma-canada.org/index.cfm/ci_id/1194/la_id/1.htm

For information on selecting a bookkeeper:

Canadian Bookkeepers Association

www.c-b-a.ca/

Selecting a Lawyer

Lawyers are highly trained professionals who deal with a full range of personal and business legal matters. Lawyers tend to specialize in one or more areas of practice.

If your legal concerns are restricted to one specific area, it may be best for you to deal with a lawyer who specializes in that area. Many business transactions have legal implications, so you should try to find a lawyer who you can treat as a trusted business advisor.

Some advice that lawyers can provide involve:

- help in choosing the correct legal form that is right for your business venture;
- help in drawing up the documentation for the business;
- help in understanding and observing zoning laws and local legal requirements;

- aid in conforming with government regulation and record keeping;
- help in developing contracts with landlords, suppliers, customers, etc.;
- help in understanding and arranging leases.

Hourly fees or charges vary widely from lawyer to lawyer, depending on the complexity of the issues, the services required, and the degree of experience of the lawyer.

For more information:

Canadian Bar Association

www.cba.org/cba/

Selecting a Banker

Your commercial banking relationship is a matter that requires careful selection and the foundation for a long term commitment. Changing banks is far more difficult and expensive with a business account than with a personal account because commercial services are more customized and time consuming to negotiate. Many of the reasons why individuals select a bank for personal needs are just as valid for business needs. You must consider price, quality, attitude, reputation, service, convenience, safety, and reliability.

These are a few critical factors that a business manager should bear in mind when selecting a banker:

- Attitude toward your business -- Are they interested in your problems? Are they active in the community? Are they interested in creating a relationship?
- Credit services -- Does the branch provide operating loans, term loans, letters of credit, guarantees, franchise financing, leasing, and government guaranteed loans?
- Size and management policies of the bank -- Will your maximum requirements fall within their limit? How concerned is the banker with the growth and prosperity of your community?
- Cash management service -- How does the bank's portfolio of services meet your needs? Services to consider: automated payrolls, payment distribution, transfer of funds, lock boxes, and 24-hour depository services.

A preliminary meeting with potential lenders is a good idea. You can outline your general plans and learn the needs of the lending institution and its services. To establish a good rapport with the lender, it is important to create confidence in your ability. Plan your project in advance and give the lender time to consider your business plan.

Banks generally will not lend you 100% of your start-up financing. Your bank is a lender, not an owner or shareholder of your business. The bank will request that you invest some of your own money as a symbol of your commitment.

For more information:

Canadian Bankers Association

www.cba.ca/

Selecting an Insurance Agent

Insurance is an essential part of financial planning. Unless you are willing to pay personally for business catastrophes and lawsuits, you will need to consult an insurance agent and purchase insurance.

You may not be aware of the types of business catastrophes that could conceivably occur in your business. It is the job of your insurance agent to tailor a policy that best fits your needs.

Here are some examples of insurance coverage that would protect you against a claim.

- Personal liability -- protects against claims made by those who suffer bodily injury on your premises.
- Product liability -- protects against lawsuits by customers who are injured while using your product.
- Fire -- will enable you to rebuild or repair the business location as well as replace equipment and inventory in the event of fire damage.
- Automobile -- protects your vehicle during business use.
- Disability -- will provide income during a period when you cannot work.
- Business interruption -- compensates for lost earnings during a temporary halt in business caused by a major disaster such as fire, tornado, flood, etc.
- Life -- provides protection against financial loss caused by your death or serious injury.
- Workers' Compensation -- covers treatment of injuries and loss of pay related to employee accidents or illness on the job.
- Crime/theft -- reimburses for losses due to robbery, burglary, employee dishonesty.
- Bonding -- ensures protection for faithful representation.

For more information:

Insurance Brokers Association of Canada

www.ibac.ca/Pages/English/Home/Default.aspx

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