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SECTOR BENCHMARK REPORT · ACCOUNTANCY FIRMS · 2026

How ten accountancy firms present themselves, and what it is costing them.

We read the websites of ten UK accountancy firms, from national and mid-tier networks to online fixed-fee practices and local firms, and scored each against the same two frameworks. The average was 24.6 out of 60. Large firms sold scale, online firms sold price and local firms sold their postcode. None sold a problem solved. Accountants keep clients for longer than almost any other adviser, yet only one firm in ten shows a client where the relationship leads.

Produced by
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Framework
The Proposition Architect

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three markets. One mistake.

10
UK accountancy firms assessed

24.6 / 60
Average combined score

1.5 / 5
The Visible Path, the weakest layer

0 / 10
Firms showing a client outcome measured in pounds

This report benchmarks the proposition of 10 UK accountancy firms against two frameworks: the 5S Proposition Score, which measures what a firm says (out of 25), and the Commercial Architecture Score, which measures how it sells (out of 35). The combined maximum is 60.

The sample covers the three markets a UK business owner meets when looking for an accountant: national and mid-tier firms with sector teams and regional offices, online practices selling fixed monthly packages, and local practices serving their town. Each market sells something different. National firms sell scale. Online firms sell price. Local firms sell place. None of them leads with the problem the client wants solved.

Four failure patterns drive almost all of the underperformance. The Mirror Trap appears in every firm studied and the Trophy Cabinet in nine. The Wrong Invite appears in eight and the Comparison Trap in seven. The weakest of the seven commercial layers is The Visible Path, at an average of 1.5 out of 5, the lowest layer average recorded in this series so far. The weakest of the five proposition dimensions is Signature, at 1.7 out of 5.

Every firm in the profession wants the same thing commercially: to move clients from annual compliance work into higher-value advice. Their websites show both, side by side, as separate menus. Almost none shows the route between them. One firm has a named growth programme for owner-managed businesses. One online firm shows its onboarding steps. The rest list services and wait.

The implication is simple. The firm that shows a business owner where the relationship goes, from year-end accounts to a stronger, more valuable business, will win the clients worth having and keep them on better terms.

HOW TO READ THE SCORES

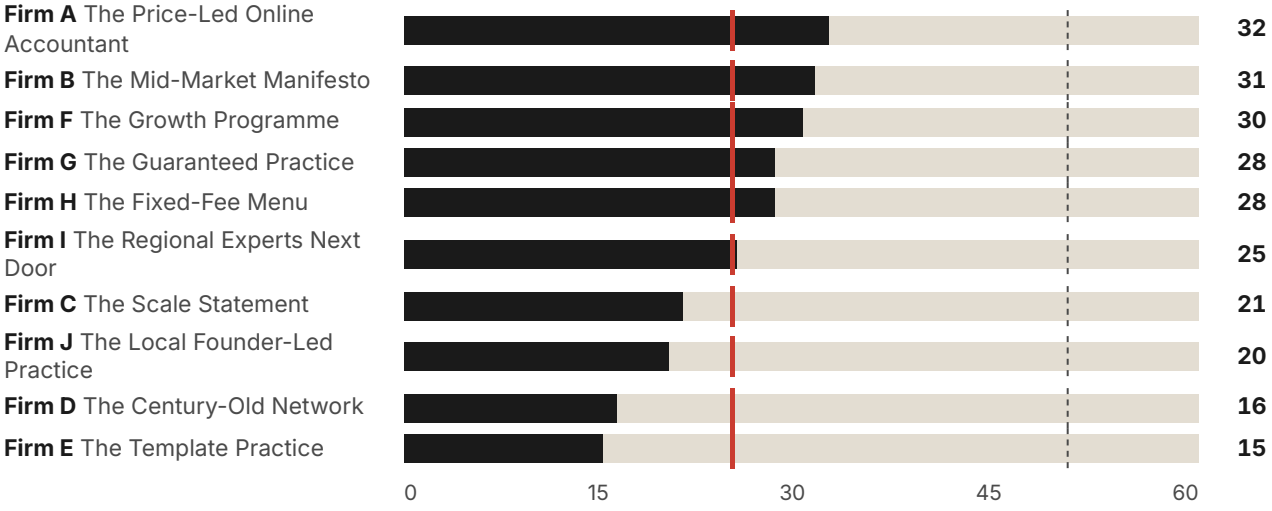
Scores are based on publicly available website content, read as a cold prospect would experience it: the homepage and the main service, pricing, programme or about page for each firm. Pages were rendered in a browser where the site allowed it and read as text, and checked against screenshots, where it did not. Firms are anonymised and referred to by letter and archetype. Scores describe the proposition, not the quality of each firm's accountancy.

01 · SCORE SUMMARY

Three firms function. Four are fragile.

Each firm is scored on what it says (the 5S Proposition Score, out of 25) and how it sells it (the Commercial Architecture Score, out of 35). Scores are based on publicly available website content, assessed as a cold prospect would experience it.

Combined score out of 60, highest first



Firm	Archetype	5S / 25	CA / 35	Total / 60	Verdict
A	The Price-Led Online Accountant	12	20	**32**	Functioning
B	The Mid-Market Manifesto	14	17	**31**	Functioning
C	The Scale Statement	9	12	**21**	Fragile
D	The Century-Old Network	7	9	**16**	Fragile
E	The Template Practice	6	9	**15**	Fragile
F	The Growth Programme	14	16	**30**	Functioning
G	The Guaranteed Practice	11	17	**28**	Developing
H	The Fixed-Fee Menu	9	19	**28**	Developing
I	The Regional Experts Next Door	10	15	**25**	Developing
J	The Local Founder-Led Practice	8	12	**20**	Fragile
Market average		**10.0**	**14.6**	**24.6**	

Verdict bands for the combined score match the earlier editions: 21 and below Fragile, 22 to 29 Developing, 30 and above Functioning.

01 · SCORE SUMMARY, CONTINUED

Three markets, and little gained from depth.

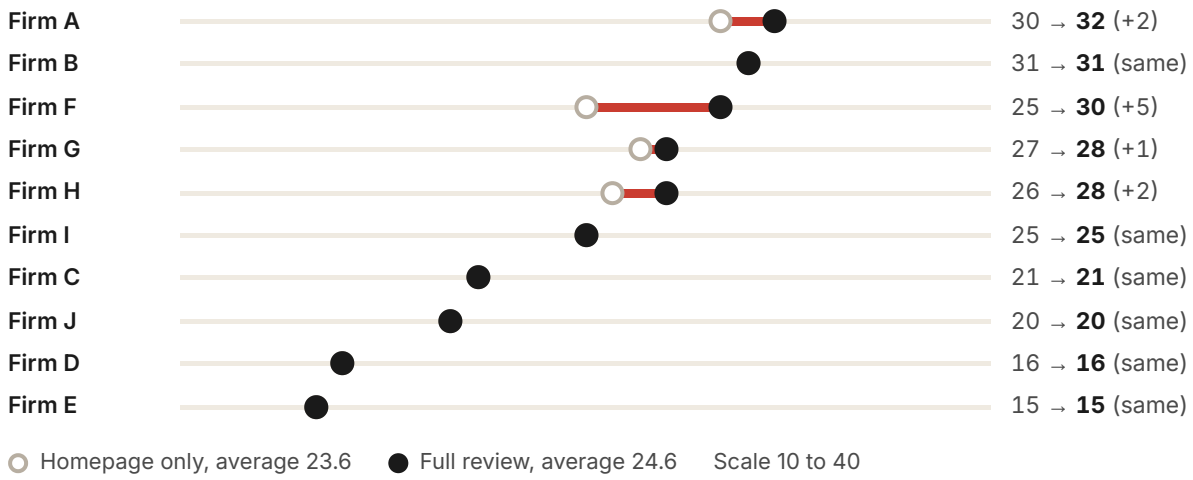
Each firm's score on its homepage alone, and after its second page was read. The average rises only from 23.6 to 24.6. Seven firms gained nothing. The largest gain came from the one firm whose second page introduces a named growth programme with client stories. For everyone else, the service page is the same list at greater length.

Score by market

National and mid-tier
Firms B, C, D, F, I
24.6 / 60
Strongest: **The Public Proof**
Weakest: **The Visible Path**

Online fixed-fee
Firms A, G, H
29.3 / 60
Strongest: **The Open Door**
Weakest: **The Public Proof**

Local practice
Firms E, J
17.5 / 60
Strongest: **The Easy Yes**
Weakest: **The Visible Path**



What firms say: the five dimensions, market average out of 5

01	**Specific**	Firms name sectors and sizes. Almost none name a moment.	**2.2**
02	**Standout**	Scale, price or place. Three positions, each shared with dozens of competitors.	**2.2**
03	**Substance**	Headcounts, offices, years and review totals. No outcome measured in pounds.	**1.8**
04	**Signature**	One named growth method. One named guarantee. Packages, not methods.	**1.7**
05	**Shareable**	Two firms publish original research. Five publish the same Budget commentary.	**2.1**

02 · MARKET-WIDE FINDINGS

Every firm opens with itself.

Four named failure patterns explain most proposition underperformance in consulting markets. This is how often each appears across the 10 firms.

Failure pattern	Firms	Share	What it does
The Mirror Trap	10 of 10	100%	Clients cannot recognise themselves, so size, price and distance become the filter.
The Trophy Cabinet	9 of 10	90%	Proof counts the firm, not the client. Headcounts, offices, years and badges without outcomes.
The Wrong Invite	8 of 10	80%	Start-ups to listed groups, every sector, every size. No client feels chosen.
The Comparison Trap	7 of 10	70%	Interchangeable compliance services force a comparison on monthly fee.

01 The Mirror Trap 10 of 10 firms · 100%

Clients cannot recognise themselves, so size, price and distance become the filter.

Every firm opened its homepage with what it is. National firms opened with a confident slogan, a manifesto or a budget briefing. Online firms opened with the simplicity of their service and its monthly price. Local firms opened with their name or their town. Two firms in different parts of the market open with almost the same promise that accounting can be simple. None opens with the moment a business owner is in: a first year of trading, a company that has fallen behind on its filings, a founder thinking about selling, a family business passing to the next generation, a cash squeeze after a large contract. A client who already knows they need an accountant can compare services. A client who only knows that something is not working cannot.

02 The Trophy Cabinet 9 of 10 firms · 90%

Proof counts the firm, not the client. Headcounts, offices, years and badges without outcomes.

This market measures itself in size. Client counts run into the tens of thousands. Headcounts run into the thousands. Office counts run to dozens and then hundreds. Three firms lead on more than a century of history. Rankings, network memberships and software partner badges fill the space where client stories should be. The online firms swap headcount for review volume and software accreditations. One firm reports a client retention rate, the only outcome metric in the study, and lists it among its credentials without a word of explanation. One firm, on its third page, tells the story of a client whose business sold for more than they thought possible. Not one firm shows a client outcome in pounds: tax saved, cash released, penalties avoided, a valuation raised.

02 · MARKET-WIDE FINDINGS, CONTINUED

Why the patterns persist, and what they cost.

03 The Wrong Invite 8 of 10 firms · 80%

Start-ups to listed groups, every sector, every size. No client feels chosen.

Eight firms invited everyone. The national firms list sixteen or seventeen sectors and serve start-ups through to listed groups. One lists more than two dozen services across five practice areas. The online firms list sectors from dentists and opticians to e-commerce sellers and landlords. The local firms serve businesses of all sizes. A sole trader filing a first tax return and a family-owned manufacturer planning a sale need entirely different things. A page written for both serves neither.

04 The Comparison Trap 7 of 10 firms · 70%

Interchangeable compliance services force a comparison on monthly fee.

Year-end accounts, a VAT return and a corporation tax filing look the same from one firm to the next. The online firms have accepted this and compete on monthly fee, which makes them easy to compare and hard to prefer. Most traditional firms publish no fee at all, so the comparison happens on a quote, after the client has already decided the firms are interchangeable.

The firm that shows where the relationship goes does not need to be bigger or cheaper to win.

02 · MARKET-WIDE FINDINGS, CONTINUED

A profession built on precision publishes in generalities.

THE BUDGET IS NOT A PROPOSITION

In the week we reviewed these sites, five of the ten firms featured the Autumn Budget at or near the top of their homepage: a hero banner, a briefing, a webinar, a news feed, a knowledge hub article. Every one said broadly the same thing about the same announcements. Budget commentary is useful and clients expect it. It is also the one piece of content every competitor publishes in the same week. When five firms lead with the same event, the homepage stops telling a client why this firm.

SCALE, PRICE OR PLACE

The three markets each lead with a different credential. National firms lead with scale: offices, people, clients, years, networks. Online firms lead with price: a monthly figure, a fixed fee, a package. Local firms lead with place: a town, a region, a founder who lives nearby. Each is a real advantage. None is a proposition, because none tells the client what will be different about their business. And each is shared with dozens of firms in the same market.

THE ACCURACY TEST

Accountants sell accuracy. Across twenty pages, every one of the ten firms fails that test somewhere. One firm states two different client counts and two different years of experience on the same site, and its quote form asks for turnover bands in euros. One promises clients can cancel at any time and asks for a month's notice in the same line. One repeats a single bullet point about nine times on its price list, and calls its fees fixed while saying they are adjusted for each client. One describes its international network as covering two different numbers of countries on two pages. One describes the same client base in two numbers that do not quite match. One carries an internal label from two years ago in its page metadata. One ends the invitation on its services page with a double full stop. One uses the same placeholder image on every service card. One has a spelling error in its homepage introduction. None of this says anything about the quality of the accounts. All of it says something to a cold prospect about how carefully the firm checks its own numbers.

WRITING FOR THE MACHINES

Half the firms in this study publish a file written specifically for AI assistants, telling them what the firm does and which pages to trust. It matters, because more business owners now ask an AI assistant to shortlist an accountant before they visit a website. But the files say what the homepages say: a list of services, a list of sectors, a statement of scale. Being readable to the machines only helps if there is something specific for them to repeat. Three firms' sites, one of them among those five, put our browser through a security check before showing any content, which some AI tools will not pass.

03 · COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

The longest relationships in professional services, with no visible path.

The Commercial Architecture Score assesses seven layers. Under the Solid Foundation Rule, the lowest layer limits everything built above it. In this market the lowest layer is The Visible Path. Accountants keep clients for years, sometimes decades. Their websites show a menu of services, not a route through them.

Market average by layer, out of 5

01	**The Foundation**		**1.7**
	No firm leads with a client problem. One firm has a named growth method. Most headlines describe the firm, its price or its town.		
02	**The Fit Test**		**2.4**
	National firms segment by sector and by situation, such as family businesses, private equity-backed firms and overseas-owned subsidiaries. Online firms segment by business type.		
03	**The Visible Path**		**1.5**
	The lowest layer. Two firms show any sequence: a named growth programme and a short onboarding process. Eight show compliance and advisory as separate menus.		
04	**The Right Tools**		**2.1**
	Online firms package services into tiers. National firms list dozens of services with no sense of which a client needs first.		
05	**The Easy Yes**		**2.2**
	Free consultations, free trials, switching incentives and instant quotes at the online and local firms. A contact form at most national firms.		
06	**The Public Proof**		**2.5**
	The strongest layer. Two national firms publish original trackers, surveys and sector reports. Most others publish Budget commentary.		
07	**The Open Door**		**2.2**
	Two firms publish their prices. One offers a money-back guarantee. Eight require a quote.		

THE SOLID FOUNDATION RULE

Your lowest layer is your only priority, whatever your total. In this market, the binding constraint is The Visible Path. Every firm wants to move clients from compliance into advice. Until they show the client the route, from tidy accounts to better decisions to a stronger, more valuable business, advice remains something clients do not know to ask for.

FROM COMPLIANCE TO ADVICE

Every firm in this study offers both compliance work and advisory work. Every firm lists them in separate menus. The online firms bolt on part-time finance directors and cash flow forecasting as extras. The national firms put corporate finance, succession and growth advisory in a different section from accounts and tax. Only one firm describes a programme that starts from where an owner-managed business is today and sets out what profit, control, value and growth should look like at the end. It is the clearest commercial path in the study, and it sits behind a Budget banner.

04 · WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOUR BUYER

What it looks like from the client's chair.

Consider the founder of a £4 million owner-managed engineering business. Her accountant files her accounts and her tax return on time and she hears from them twice a year. Now she wants more. She wants monthly numbers she can run the business on. She wants to understand what the business is worth. In three to five years she would like the option to sell, or to hand it to her management team. She types "accountant for growing business" into Google, then asks an AI assistant for a shortlist.

She opens ten websites. Every one opens with the firm, not with her. The national firms tell her how many people, offices and clients they have, and what the Budget means. The online firms tell her what a sole trader pays per month. The local firms tell her which town they are in. She finds pieces of what she needs scattered across the market. Two online firms offer a part-time finance director as an add-on. One national firm has published a report on who will own the next generation of manufacturing businesses. One firm describes a growth programme for owner-managed businesses that ends in a stronger, more valuable company, with a client who sold for more than they expected. It is the most useful thing she reads all morning, and it is three clicks behind a Budget banner. None of the ten shows her the route from where she is to where she wants to be.

Every firm told her how big it was or how little it cost. None showed her how a business like hers got from year-end accounts to a sale.

The firm that named her situation, showed a three-year path from monthly management accounts to a business ready for sale, and offered a defined first step with a clear output, a valuation baseline or a readiness review, would have won her before the first meeting. Between them, the ten firms in this study already have every piece of that offer. None has put the pieces together, or put them first.

The commercial opportunity for a well-positioned firm is significant precisely because the competition is so weak at the path and the proof. A firm with a clear, specific, client-led proposition would stand out without needing to be larger, cheaper or fundamentally different in how it works.

THE TEST FOR YOUR OWN HOMEPAGE

Would this founder recognise her situation in your first screen? Could she see what the next three years would look like, and what her business would be worth at the end?

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS

Ten firms, ten untaken positions.

FIRM A

The Price-Led Online Accountant

32 / 60
5S 12 / 25 · CA 20 / 35
Functioning

The clearest price in the study, under a headline its nearest competitor also uses.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This online firm leads the study on the strength of its open door. Its headline combines a promise of simplicity with a low monthly starting price. It publishes fixed packages for sole traders and limited companies, offers support into the evening when most accountants have closed, includes bookkeeping software, and carries accreditations including one specific to contractors. It has a large volume of customer reviews, a client portal, tax calculators and a knowledge hub. But its headline promise is almost identical to another firm's in this study, its proof is review volume and unsourced statistics rather than client stories, and its price page leaves the cost after the first year unclear.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline describes the service and its price, not the client's situation.
- **The Comparison Trap.** Leading with a low monthly fee invites the cheapest competitor to win.
- **Layer 7 strong.** Packages and prices published, with FAQs. The clearest open door in the study.
- **Accuracy.** Cancel at any time and a month's notice, in the same line.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Contractor accounting, answered after you finish work." The firm already holds a contractor-specific accreditation, publishes contractor tax guidance and answers the phone into the evening. Contractors working on client sites all day need exactly that. Lead with them, and the late support hours become the reason to choose, not a footnote.

FIRM B

The Mid-Market Manifesto

31 / 60
5S 14 / 25 · CA 17 / 35
Functioning

The strongest point of view and the best research in the study, with no way in except a contact form.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This national firm opens with a published manifesto for the UK mid-market, which is the closest thing to a point of view on any homepage in the study. It backs it with the strongest public proof we have seen in this series: recurring trackers, risk surveys, sector reports and data guides, refreshed every month. Several of its sector descriptions name a real client worry. It even publishes a file telling AI assistants which of its pages to trust. But a mid-market business owner who is persuaded by all of this has nowhere to go except a general contact page, and the proof is about the economy, not about clients.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline is the firm's manifesto, not the client's situation.
- **The Wrong Invite.** Start-ups to listed companies, across more than a dozen sectors.
- **Layer 6 strong.** Original, recurring research. Best public proof in the study.
- **Layer 5 critical.** No diagnostic, review or defined entry offer.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"See how your business compares with the mid-market." The firm already tracks the mid-market better than anyone. Turn the research into a benchmark a business owner can run on their own numbers, and the manifesto becomes a first meeting.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM C

The Scale Statement

21 / 60

5S 9 / 25 · CA 12 / 35

Fragile

Big numbers, no client.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This national firm opens with a generic promise of confidence, then sets out its scale: thousands of people, dozens of offices, tens of thousands of clients, an international footprint and a long record of acquisitions. It publishes a regular survey of business leaders across several countries and a timely Budget briefing. Its services page lists eleven service lines for clients from start-ups to complex corporates. Several homepage sections are headings with nothing beneath them. There is no client, no situation, no story and no entry point beyond contact us.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** A slogan any firm could use, followed by the firm's own statistics.
- **The Wrong Invite.** Clients of all shapes and sizes, by the firm's own description.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** Scale everywhere. No client outcomes.
- **Layer 6 partial.** An original business survey, presented as a download rather than an insight.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Benchmark your business against the barometer." The firm already runs a regular survey of business leaders across several countries. Turn it into a barometer an owner can compare their own business against, send every respondent their position, and the survey becomes a reason to call rather than a download. Scale finally means something to the client.

FIRM D

The Century-Old Network

16 / 60

5S 7 / 25 · CA 9 / 35

Fragile

The only outcome metric in the study, buried in a list of credentials.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This national network leads with a warm, short promise to be alongside its clients, then describes itself as a leading firm, rooted locally and connected nationally. It has more than a century of history, hundreds of professionals, dozens of offices and a published client retention rate, the only client outcome metric in this study. It names family businesses among its sectors in a single sentence. Its service lists on the homepage are headings without content, and its office pages repeat the same general copy with a different town.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline is a sentiment, followed by the firm's own description.
- **The Wrong Invite.** Businesses, organisations, individuals and families of every size.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** A ranking, an award without a name and a history. The retention rate is not explained.
- **Layer 3 critical.** No route from compliance to advice, despite clients who stay for years.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Family businesses, across generations." A firm with more than a century of history and a high retention rate has watched family businesses pass from one generation to the next. Lead with succession for family-owned firms, explain the retention rate, and tell three stories of handovers that worked.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM E

The Template Practice

15 / 60

5S 6 / 25 · CA 9 / 35

Fragile

A focused client list on a page that could belong to any practice.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This local practice opens with a welcome and its name, then says something genuinely specific: it focuses on owner-managed businesses, professional partnerships and high net worth individuals. Everything after that is generic. Services are described as accounts, tax and business advisory. The promise is first-class personal service. The resources are standard factsheets. The only proof is an audit registration number.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline is a welcome and the firm's name.
- **The Comparison Trap.** Standard services with nothing to separate the firm from its local competitors.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** An empty cabinet. No testimonials, case studies or client names.
- **Specific partial.** Three clearly named client types. The best audience definition among the local firms.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Accounts and tax for professional partnerships." Partnerships of solicitors, doctors, architects and surveyors have their own tax, profit-sharing and succession questions, and few local firms speak to them directly. This firm already names them. Lead with them.

FIRM F

The Growth Programme

30 / 60

5S 14 / 25 · CA 16 / 35

Functioning

The only named growth method in the study, three clicks behind the Budget.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This large firm's homepage leads with Budget commentary and a list of recent mergers. Below that, it asks visitors what is on their mind and offers three themes: growth, efficiency and succession. It is one of the few moments in the study where a homepage speaks to a client's concerns. Behind it sits the most commercially valuable thing in the study: a named growth programme for owner-managed businesses, with a named method, four outcome areas covering profit, performance, control and growth, and named client testimonials including one about an exit achieved at a value the owner had not expected. None of this is on the homepage, the programme's steps are not described and there is no price or qualifying criteria.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The homepage hero is Budget commentary and merger news.
- **The Wrong Invite.** Around seventeen sectors and more than two dozen services.
- **Signature strong.** A named programme with a named method and stated outcomes. The only one in the study.
- **Layer 2 strong.** The client concerns section names real owner worries.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"From owner-dependent to sale-ready." Put the growth programme on the homepage, show its steps and the outcomes at each stage, and finish the exit story with numbers. Owner-managed businesses thinking about the next five years would buy the route, not the accounts.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM G

The Guaranteed Practice

28 / 60

5S 11 / 25 · CA 17 / 35

Developing

The only guarantee in the study, under two different client counts.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This online firm opens with a statement that it is an expert business accountant in its city. It offers something no other firm does: a money-back guarantee that it will never miss a filing deadline. It shows a short process from signing up to software setup, and a clear year-end process with timings. It offers multilingual accountants, a part-time finance director, legal and insurance services, instant quotes and consultations. Its accounts page speaks directly to first-time filers and companies that have fallen behind. But it publishes no prices despite promising fixed fees, its proof contradicts itself on client numbers and years of experience, and its quote form uses euros.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline describes the firm and its city.
- **The Wrong Invite.** Startups to established companies, across many sectors and services.
- **Signature partial.** A named guarantee and a visible process. Rare in this market.
- **Accuracy.** Two client counts, two years of experience and euro turnover bands.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Fallen behind on your filings? We will catch you up and never miss a deadline again." The firm already speaks to late filers and already guarantees its deadlines. Companies facing penalties are urgent, motivated buyers. Lead with the rescue, then the guarantee, and publish the price.

FIRM H

The Fixed-Fee Menu

28 / 60

5S 9 / 25 · CA 19 / 35

Developing

A full price list and a long sector list, under a headline another firm also uses.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This online firm opens with almost the same promise of simplicity as Firm A, followed by fixed monthly fees for small and medium-sized businesses. It is one of two firms in the study to publish a full price list, with tiers for contractors, businesses and sole traders. It offers a cash incentive to switch, segment pages for a long list of business types, partner badges from the main accounting software platforms and a regular blog. Its reviews section has a heading and nothing visible beneath it. Its price page repeats one bullet point about nine times and calls its fees fixed while saying they are a guide.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline describes the service, not the client.
- **The Comparison Trap.** A price list and a shared headline make the firm easy to compare and hard to prefer.
- **Layer 7 strong.** Tiered prices published with FAQs and a quote validity period.
- **Accuracy.** Duplicated bullets and a fixed fee that is also a guide.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Accountants for online sellers." The firm already claims hundreds of e-commerce clients and has pages for the main selling platforms. Online sellers have specific VAT, stock and marketplace payout problems that general small business accountants handle badly. Lead with them, and the price list becomes a specialist's price list.

05 · INDIVIDUAL FIRM DIAGNOSTICS, CONTINUED

FIRM I

The Regional Experts Next Door

25 / 60
5S 10 / 25 · CA 15 / 35
Developing

A sharp report on business succession, and nothing to buy after reading it.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This regional firm opens with a report asking who will own the next generation of manufacturing businesses, and what tax policy means for family-owned firms in the sector. It is one of the most specific, issue-led pieces of content in the study. The firm also runs a Budget webinar and a hub on a major accounting standard change. Its market pages segment by situation, including family businesses, private equity-backed firms and the UK subsidiaries of overseas companies. But the first heading below the carousel describes the firm, the proof is a century of experience and an unnamed award, and a manufacturer worried about succession has no defined next step after reading the report.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The first heading describes the firm's expertise, not the client's situation.
- **The Wrong Invite.** SMEs to listed companies, public sector and private clients, across seventeen sectors.
- **Layer 2 strong.** Markets defined by client situation, not just industry.
- **Layer 6 strong.** An original sector report on succession. A real point of view.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Succession for family-owned manufacturers." The firm has already written the report. Attach a named succession review with a fixed output, and every manufacturer who reads the report has a reason to call.

FIRM J

The Local Founder-Led Practice

20 / 60
5S 8 / 25 · CA 12 / 35
Fragile

A warm local practice, introduced by its town.

THE CORE COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

This local practice opens by naming its city. It is founder-led, proud of its region and has been trading for more than a decade. It offers a free initial consultation, fifteen services, a callback form, an FAQ and a blog. Its homepage carries six named testimonials from real local businesses, more than most firms in the study. But every service card uses the same placeholder image, the testimonials describe a pleasant relationship rather than a result, and the services page offers no packages, prices or process.

WHAT WE FOUND

- **The Mirror Trap.** The headline is the firm's location.
- **The Comparison Trap.** Fifteen standard services and a local address, shared with every practice in the city.
- **The Trophy Cabinet.** Named testimonials without outcomes.
- **Layer 5 partial.** A free initial consultation, with no stated output.

THE UNTAKEN POSITION

"Your first year in business, handled." Most of this firm's clients are owner-operated start-ups. A named first-year package, from company formation to the first set of accounts, at a published price, with the founder on the end of the phone, would give local start-ups a reason to choose this firm over the one round the corner.

06 · THE UNTAKEN POSITION

What good looks like in accountancy firms.

No single firm in this study occupies the full commercial architecture the market is leaving open. The untaken position has four characteristics that none of these firms shows in combination. Every one of them exists somewhere in the study. They are simply never in the same place.

01

A situation, not a size, a price or a postcode

Not "businesses of all shapes and sizes", but a client at a specific moment: a first year of trading, a company behind on its filings, a founder three years from a sale, a family business passing to the next generation. Several firms segment by situation on their market pages. None leads with it.

02

A path from compliance to advice

Not two menus, but one route: tidy accounts, then monthly numbers, then better decisions, then a stronger, more valuable business. One firm in the study has a named programme that does this for owner-managed businesses. It is the most commercially valuable structure in the market, and it is three clicks from the homepage.

03

Proof in pounds, not in headcount

Before and after: what the client's position was, what changed, and what it was worth. Tax saved, cash released, penalties avoided, a valuation raised, a sale completed. Accountants measure everything for their clients. They measure nothing for themselves in public.

04

A first step with a result

Free consultations are common. What is missing is a first step that leaves the client with something: a valuation baseline, a readiness score, a health check of their numbers, a catch-up plan for late filings. One firm's deadline guarantee shows what it looks like to remove the risk of saying yes. The best first step would do the same for advice.

A firm does not need to be bigger, cheaper or closer to claim the open position. It needs to show where the relationship goes. In a profession that keeps clients for decades, the proposition should show what those decades are for.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Two ways to use this report.

This benchmark is read by two kinds of people: the firms in markets like this one, and the businesses choosing between them. There is a next step for each.

IF YOU RUN AN ACCOUNTANCY FIRM

Find out where your own proposition sits.

Start with the free score: the same two frameworks, twelve questions, an instant result with a named failure pattern and a priority fix sequence.

If you want an outside read, the Reviewed Diagnostic is Tom reading your website the way these firms were read, then writing up the score, the pattern, a proposition blueprint and the fix sequence, with a 45-minute call. £495 + VAT, delivered in three working days.

Get your free score · thepropositionarchitect.com/reviewed-diagnostic

IF YOU ARE CHOOSING AN ACCOUNTANT

Run a selection that finds the substance behind the shop window.

Tom was CEO of a compliance and training consultancy for eight years. With his team, he helped sell it and then merged it with its biggest competitor. He can help you agree what you need, write a brief firms can answer, run a fair selection and check the engagement terms. This report shows how much of a firm sits beyond its homepage. Provider selection is built to find it.

01
Review
What you actually need, what you have now and what has to change.

02
Brief
A written brief or RFP and scoring criteria, agreed before anyone pitches.

03
Shortlist and panel
A researched shortlist, structured interviews and a scoring panel.

04
Select and contract
A recommendation you can defend, with the engagement terms checked before you sign.

thepropositionarchitect.com/provider-selection

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Method, citation and the frameworks behind the scores.

Method

Ten UK accountancy firms were assessed in November 2026. The sample covers three markets: five national and mid-tier firms, three online fixed-fee practices and two local practices. For each firm we read the homepage and the main service, pricing, programme or about page: around twenty pages in total. Pages were rendered in a browser where the site allowed it and read as text, and checked against screenshots, where it did not. Every site was also checked for a file written for AI assistants. Each firm was then scored against the 5S Proposition Score (25 points) and the Commercial Architecture Score (35 points, seven layers of 5). Homepage-only scores were also recorded to show how much of each proposition sits beyond the first screen. Downloadable documents were not opened or scored. Firms are anonymised and referenced by letter only. Scores reflect public-facing material, not the quality of the firms' accountancy, and this is not a definitive audit of any firm's commercial capability.

The frameworks

The 5S Proposition Score tests whether a proposition is Specific, Standout, Substantive, Signature and Shareable. The Commercial Architecture Score tests seven layers in sequence, from the Foundation to the Open Door. Both are proprietary diagnostic frameworks developed by Addoli to assess and improve the commercial performance of founder-led and growth-stage consulting businesses.

Cite this report

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Read it online

The full report, including an interactive version of every chart, is free to read at thepropositionarchitect.com/accountancy-firm-benchmark/. No email needed.

About Addoli

Addoli works with founder-led B2B businesses that have reached the point where growth slows, not because the founder lacks capability, but because the business lacks the commercial systems it needs to scale. Tom Wood is a Fractional Commercial Director. For eight years he was CEO of a compliance and training consultancy and, with his team, helped sell it and then merged it with its biggest competitor, before founding Addoli.

FIND OUT WHERE YOUR PROPOSITION SITS

How does your firm compare with these ten?

Take the free Proposition Architect score. Twelve questions, five minutes, an instant result with a named failure pattern and a priority fix sequence.

Get your free score at diagnostics.addoli.com

addoli.

addoli.com · thepropositionarchitect.com · tom@addoli.com

Addoli (Welsh): to worship, to revere. Your business should be adored.

Assessments are based on publicly visible website content only: the homepage and main service, pricing, programme or about page per firm, evaluated as a cold prospect would experience them. Firms have been anonymised. This report is not a definitive audit of any firm's commercial capability.

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