

SUCCESS STORY

Watson and Colhoun transform business in the cloud with Sage

Pandemic gives accountancy practice the catalyst to move to Sage Accounting and reap the rewards across its business



Based in Omagh, Co. Tyrone, Watson and Colhoun Chartered Accountants serves the local community and beyond with services ranging from accounting and bookkeeping to tax and financial planning. With just eight employees handling many clients, the practice is constantly looking for ways to conduct business more efficiently. Clients range from local start-ups through to agricultural businesses, construction and retail organisations.

Key outcomes:

- 50% reduction in manual invoice input time with Sage Accounting
- Automated processes, such as statements and VAT, means less time spent on manual data input
- Sage Accounting has provided clients with greater insight into their finances thanks to direct bank feeds, forecasting cash flow and tracking debtors
- More timely information ensures year-end accounts are finalised within a month—rather than six months—after close
- AutoEntry ease of use has helped to boost client uptake of Sage software



Company

Watson and Colhoun

Location

United Kingdom

Industry

Accountancy

Sage Solution

Sage Accounting, AutoEntry

For more info, visit

sage.com/accountants



Watson and Colhoun worked with Sage to understand how they could help them migrate to the cloud.

“With so many of our processes automated, the team don’t have to spend hours inputting invoice or VAT data—they’re free to do more client-facing work.”

Nial Colhoun, Principal Chartered Accountant, Watson & Colhoun

Moving to the cloud

A long-term Sage partner, Watson and Colhoun were keen to develop a more efficient practice and automate processes for clients. With HMRC’s phased introduction of Making Tax Digital and the mandating of clients to file online, the practice wanted to move to the cloud, so they started looking at the benefits Sage Accounting delivers.

But finding the right time to begin a deployment was challenging until the pandemic occurred, changing the firm’s perspective, according to Nial Colhoun, principal at the chartered accountants.

“A move to the cloud hadn’t been our primary focus, it seemed easier just to carry on. Lockdown focused our minds—we knew we had to adapt like every business and having not been able to do any accounting for almost a month, something had to give,” he says.

Saving time and doing more

During lockdown, Watson and Colhoun worked with its Sage Practice Success Manager to plan a smooth migration to the cloud and once lockdown eased slightly, they began to migrate their clients to Sage Accounting.

It opened the team’s eyes to see how they could have worked during the first month of the pandemic, giving them the motivation to drive as many benefits from the product as possible, Nial says. One such benefit has been the time saved on manually entering accounting data.

“We’re not totally cloud-based yet. We’re just at the start of our cloud journey, but we can already see how much time we’re saving,” he says. “With so many of our processes automated, the team don’t have to spend hours inputting invoice or VAT data—they’re free to do more client-facing work.” Nial estimates that the time it takes to manually enter invoice information has been reduced by at least 50%.



The Watson and Colhoun team have used Sage Accounting to get more timely information to clients.

“Now with the information reconciled every quarter, clients can run monthly statements and communicate this to their customers, which is improving their cash flow.”

Kathryn Mitchell, Trainee Chartered Accountant, Watson & Colhoun

Strong support

The team have welcomed the move, and the firm has even appointed a Sage champion internally, Kathryn Mitchell, Trainee Chartered Accountant, to continue its progression. Using the free Sage support and enablement team, Kathryn has been integral to the adoption of the technology, helping ensure integration has been smooth and being on hand to assist the team with any user questions.

“Having someone at the end of the phone was such a great resource,” Kathryn says. “Other vendors just have an email helpdesk, and then can take a considerable time to come back to you on any issues. With Sage support, I could use the online help advice or give someone a call if it was more complex.”

More effective business management

With less time spent on admin and manual data entry, the Watson and Colhoun team have used Sage Accounting to get more timely information to clients. As a cloud platform, Sage Accounting delivers real-time data for both accountants and clients. For example, now the team says the accountancy practice has client accounts finalised and ready within a month of year-end, whereas previously, this may not have happened for at least six months.

“With more timely and more regular information from Sage, our clients don’t have to guess their business performance, which they would have done previously. Now they know. This allows them to make decisions based on their performance, which helps their businesses run more effectively,” Nial says.

This level of expedited insight has been boosted further by the direct banking feed that’s available through Sage Accounting, according to Kathryn. With the Open Banking (PSD2) regulations that came into force in Northern Ireland in March 2020, accessing banking information has been accelerated through increased automation and efficiency, and with Sage, this process has become seamless. “The Sage Accounting direct banking feeds makes transactions instantly available, so we can quickly and easily see exactly what’s going on in our clients’ accounts. This not only makes bank reconciliations much quicker, but it means our clients can make better business decisions based on real-time information on their accounts,” she says.



AutoEntry allows users to simply upload a photograph of their receipts directly to the platform.

“There’s no more manual data entry of receipts and bills. Clients upload to AutoEntry, which is automatically linked to Sage Accounting so I can post directly into their accounts.”

Kathryn Mitchell, Trainee Chartered Accountant, Watson & Colhoun

Achieving client buy-in

It's these benefits that have driven a solid uptake in client adoption of the Sage technology too. The accountancy practice has clients that range from those who arrive at year-end with a bag of receipts, to those who use Excel and those who also use some elements of Sage Accounting within their own organisation.

Moving some of the more traditional clients over to the cloud might take time, Nial admitted, but he has been surprised by the number who have already made the transition. Communicating with them directly about how the technology works and what it can help them achieve has been crucial, he adds.

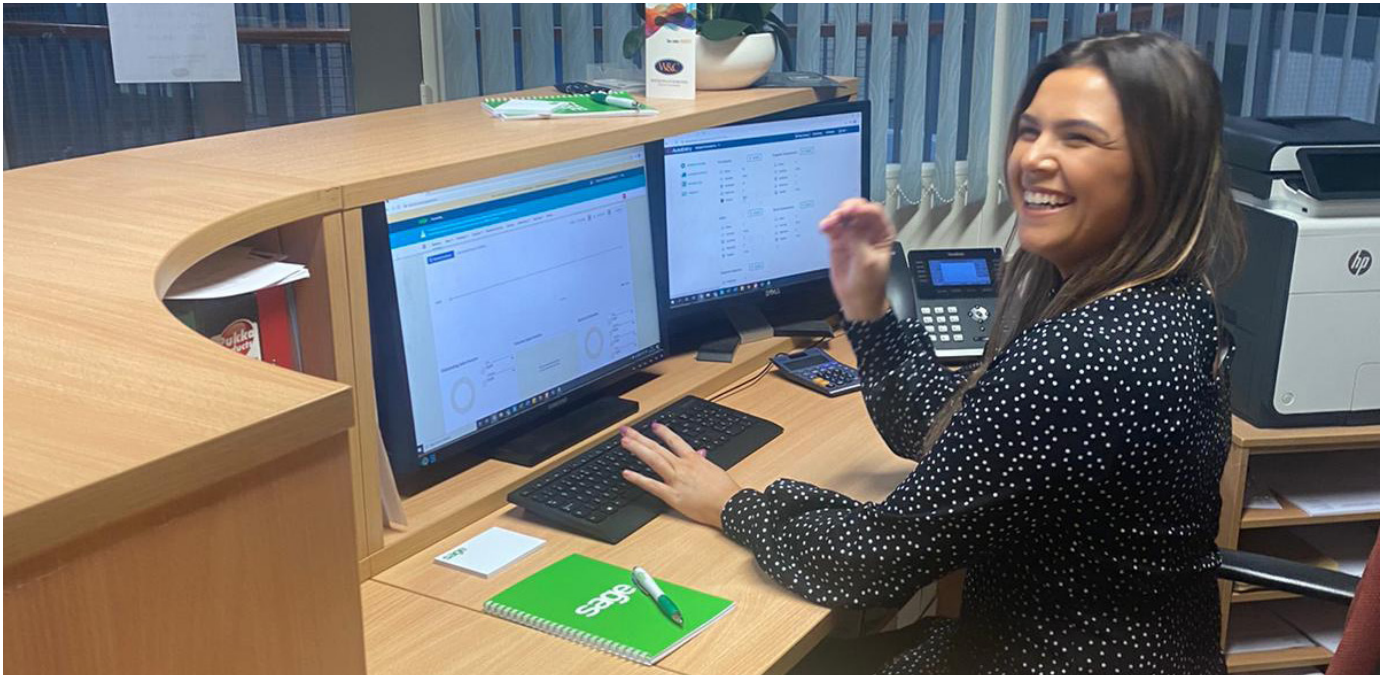
“Once they understand the benefits, such as managing their businesses better because they can see what’s happening with their cashflow or their statements, they are moving to the cloud with us,” he says.

Fast, efficient, effortless

A big factor in client satisfaction has been AutoEntry. The automated data entry software allows users to simply download the mobile app, take a photograph of their receipts and upload them directly to the accounting platform.

“This has made my job much easier,” Kathryn says. “There’s no more manual data entry of things like receipts and bills. Clients upload to AutoEntry, which is automatically linked to Sage Accounting so I can post directly into their accounts. It means I can spend more time focused on more value-add tasks for the practice,” she adds.

It's also given a new level of convenience and simplicity to clients. Instead of having to trek to the post office or bring their receipts into the office—something that’s not been possible during the pandemic—they can now just upload everything with a photograph and the app. Watson and Colhoun is all about adding value to the clients, and having software such as AutoEntry helps to demonstrate that, Nial adds.



Sage Accounting will help Watson and Colhoun retain their staffing level while increasing their client base.

“The accounting world is evolving, and we have to keep up. That means cloud software with a vendor we trust - Sage.”

Nial Colhoun, Principal Chartered Accountant,
Watson & Colhoun

Transforming business

Watson and Colhoun is determined to continue on its cloud journey now it's realising so many benefits, although knows it will take time and is a big change for some of its more traditional clients.

Nial says, “the accounting world is evolving, and we have to keep up. That means cloud software with a vendor we trust - Sage.”

He adds that the trust is passed onto customers, many of whom have found Making Tax Digital challenging. “They are confident that we get everything done correctly, and in a timely fashion—even during the pandemic—which is a big weight off their shoulders.”

Looking to the future, Nial says the technology will help Watson and Colhoun to grow even further.

About Sage Accounting

From sales and purchases to cashflow, VAT and reporting. Sage Accounting supports every step in your business process. Elevate your productivity and efficiency with software that frees you to perform at your best.