

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY CASE STUDY

When Lo Wei Min FCPA and her father started their accounting firm, Lo Hock Ling & Co, in the early 1980s, floppy disks were considered high tech. This Singapore-based firm was quick to adopt technology and it's a strategy that has helped fuel its success. "We started out with very primitive computers," says Lo. "But, from day one, we believed in technology and how it could enhance our processes and our services."

Fast forward almost 40 years and Lo Hock Ling & Co is now ranked among Singapore's top 20 public accounting firms. It has grown to a team of more than 90 professionals, including seven partners and a tax director. Its services include tax, audit, accounting, business advisory and technology consultancy. And, in addition to regularly reviewing its own technology needs, the firm's IT team also provides IT out-sourcing services for clients.

"When GST was first implemented in Singapore about 27 years ago, we realised that clients would benefit from these services," says Lo. "We're a business partner of Sage and we install the software for our clients' ERP systems. On top of that, we do training, systems customisation and install a range of applications, such as electronic funds transfers and power business intelligence solutions."

Ready for robotics

Technology has been part of the firm's DNA from the very start. Around 80 per cent of audit and tax work is now paperless and the firm is exploring Robotic Process Automation. "The intention is that processes like invoicing and bank account confirmations can be done in just a few keystrokes," says Lo.

The firm uses the CCH suite of audit applications, which includes document management and basic AI functions, such as the extraction and evaluation of data. "We also use VPNs [Virtual Private Networks] so that when staff go to clients' offices, they still have access to all the applications and the storage of data," says Lo. "Although we weren't using applications like Zoom on a regular basis two years ago, everyone is comfortable with technology now due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so the transition was quite simple. We recently did a stocktake in California via Zoom."

One step at a time

Lo says that while the firm has been testing cloud-based technologies, many clients are hesitant due to security concerns. "We still work very much with in-house servers," says Lo. "Some clients are interested in migrating to the cloud and our technology team is helping them with this. But many of our clients are SMEs and, in Singapore, they are still quite conservative and protective of their data, especially financial data. So, we have to take it one step at a time. Cloud applications will inevitably be adopted, but it just may take a while."

Lo says this progressive approach should also apply to accountants seeking to leverage technology in their own practice.

"It's important to have an overall strategy, but do it one step at a time," she says. "I also recommend choosing compatible solutions that can go across platforms, so that data is interchangeable, whatever the software you implement. Sets of data must be able to talk to each other and this is one of the most important criteria when you're talking to a software vendor."

Lo also recommends building tech capabilities within your own team. "In small-medium practices, partners or business owners wear many hats, but you can't do everything. That's why I think it's important to empower younger members of the team to really drive technology forward," she says.

"It could just be one or two people who look at how to apply technology, but then you also need a team to champion the implementation," adds Lo.

"That's our approach when we embark on new technology projects. We always have a group of younger staff who form the champion team. They run the whole project, including identifying any inefficiencies or issues that need to be solved, because it's rarely smooth sailing. Build a team who can highlight the technology obstacles for your firm to overcome."

**"IT'S IMPORTANT TO EMPOWER
YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE
TEAM TO REALLY DRIVE
TECHNOLOGY FORWARD"**

Lo Wei Min FCPA