



Professional Services

**The Next Chapter for Audit,
Tax & Advisory Firms**
Bold Moves for a Disrupted
Future

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Transforming businesses for growth



Introduction

Over the past few years, the accounting industry and profession has undergone seismic shifts. Clients' expectations and demands have increased, with demands for faster insights, broader capabilities, and deeper strategic value. Technology is reshaping not just how services are delivered but enabling the development of new services and offerings that are relevant. And private equity has stormed in, injecting capital and urgency into a traditionally conservative sector. Early movers leaned hard into acquisition strategies; each executing 25 to 30 deals to scale rapidly and satisfy investor expectations. By 2024, the majority of the top 25 accounting firms beyond the Big Four—Deloitte, KPMG, EY, and PwC—had PE backing or alternative funding. But now, with capital flooding the market, quality targets dwindling, and deal multiples soaring from 5–8x to 12–15x EBITDA, the once-clear path to growth through acquisitions is becoming increasingly crowded, more challenging, and far less predictable.

The Next Chapter of Professional Services

As the next wave of disruption crashes into the Audit, Tax, and Advisory landscape, the shake-up will be seismic.

1. **Mega Mergers That Reshape the Rankings** - Expect headline-grabbing combinations, like Baker Tilly with Moss Adams, or CBIZ with Marcum, that vault firms up the leaderboard overnight. These moves will trigger a cascade of competitive responses, forcing others to pursue similarly ambitious deals, backed by deep-pocketed investors hungry for market dominance. All eyes will be on Eisner Amper as it goes to market, sparking speculation about buyer intentions, existing portfolio synergies, and the potential for major integrations. Once deals close, many investors will return to their traditional playbook: consolidate operations, cut costs, streamline teams, and chase margin. But hitting top-line growth targets will take more than efficiency. It will demand reinvention.



Mega-mergers present a fundamental challenge: whether firm leadership and client-facing professionals possess the skills and capabilities to operate and scale a multi-billion-dollar enterprise while maintaining high-quality client service. Beyond leadership, post-merger integration and more critically, the underlying infrastructure required to function as a unified, high-performing organization is often underdeveloped. Key enterprise elements such as talent, processes, technology, and internal risk management are frequently strained, jeopardizing both near-term stability and the long-term value creation promised in the original merger thesis.

2. **Platform Fatigue and Strategic Stalls** - As acquisition-led growth loses momentum, cracks are starting to show. Platform firms that rapidly rolled up smaller players now face a tougher reality—mid-office, back-office consolidation and offshoring gains have plateaued, and revenue from small clients often fails to scale. Many firms will not meet investor expectations, with some facing growth and operational stagnation or outright failure.
3. **IPOs on the Horizon** – As the IPO market regains momentum, we are likely to move into the era of publicly traded accounting firms. The race to go public will continue heating up. Firms like Andersen Tax, Alvarez & Marsal, and AlixPartners are actively exploring IPO valuations, signaling a shift toward greater transparency, capital access, and market influence. While EY’s previous attempt to spin off and IPO its advisory arm fell short, the thesis still applies, and appetite has not faded. Expect renewed efforts, and successful executions, as firms seek to unlock shareholder value and redefine their competitive positioning.
4. **Big Four in Reinvention Mode** - With next-tier firms closing the gap, the Big Four are under pressure to evolve. They will continue consolidating member firms into larger regional powerhouses, streamlining service lines around tech-enabled transformation, and aggressively firing underperforming and non-revenue generating talent while upskilling those remaining. Additionally, you

will see a continuing trend of less promotions of new partners and principals into the partnerships while personal scorecard metrics will continue to rise. This is not just adaptation, it is strategic reinvention and recalibration to maintain relevance and dominance in a rapidly shifting landscape.



Key to Success – A Well Executed Go-to-Market Strategy driven by a strong leader

We have all heard of the classic saying, “what got you here, will not get you there.” As traditional growth levers like M&A become less viable due to inflated valuations and limited targets, accounting firms must embrace a sharper, more intentional Go-To-Market (GTM) approach (see next page for a proprietary GTM framework). This framework is not just about selling services, it is about aligning strategy, talent, and execution to drive sustainable, organic growth.

The three main elements of the Go-To-Market plan include:

- **Who:** Identify and prioritize high-potential market segments—whether by region, industry, or service need. Understand the segment’s pain points, competitive dynamics, and unmet demand. Then assess whether the firm’s potential market share within that segment aligns with its revenue and growth goals.

GO-TO-MARKET (GTM) FRAMEWORK

Who	What	How					
Identify & Segment Market	Customer Business Needs	GTM Strategy	GTM Org Structure	GTM Process	Messaging for GTM Team	Sales & Marketing Support	Business Operations
Addressable Market	Current Product / Service needs	Revenue Model	GTM Leadership - CRO	Prospecting	Value Proposition	Sales Training & Coaching	Sales & Marketing Tech & Tools
Competitive Landscape	Potential Additional Product/Services	Budget Strategy	Client Facing (PPMD, D/SM) Org	Lead Management	Buyer Positioning	Sales Approaches and Playbooks	Sales & Marketing Ops
Ideal Client Profile	Industry Specialization	Pricing Strategy	BDM Org & Design	Legal & Risk Review	Positioning vs. Competitors	Prospect Marketing & Content	Forecasting & Pipeline
Buyer Personas	New Product/ Service Acquire or Develop	Brand Strategy	Marketing Organization	Account Based Marketing	Brand Messaging & Execution	Strategic Alliances	Quotas and Compensation
Willingness to Buy		Campaign Strategy	Client Targeting Design	Opportunity Management	Campaign Messaging & Execution	Social Media Content & Posting	KPIs, Dashboard, Reporting
Buying Process & Journey Maps		Digital Strategy	Channel Strategy	Proposal Development	Digital Messaging & Execution		
				Client and Project Setup	Customer Feedback & Input		

Responsibility: ■ Firm & GTM leadership ■ Sales only ■ Marketing only ■ Support Team

Source: Idea Innovate Consulting, Accelerated Revenue Growth: The Game Changing “Mantra” for Professional Services (Audit, Tax & Advisory) Firms, January 2025

- **What:** Define the right mix of offerings for each target segment. Evaluate current capabilities and determine whether to build, buy, or partner to expand. In today’s market, firms that target the lower end of the market, are increasingly shifting toward recurring revenue service offerings, such as outsourced accounting, managed IT and security services, fractional C-suite talent, and data analytics—to deepen client relationships and stabilize growth.
- **How:** Execute with precision across strategy, structure, and operations. This includes:
 - **Strategy:** Define revenue models, pricing, branding, and digital campaigns. Use value-based or hybrid pricing to enhance perceived value.
 - **Structure:** Align sales, partner-led sales team, Business Development team, and marketing teams with clear roles and incentives. Train professionals to sell and cross-sell effectively.
 - **Process:** Standardize prospecting, lead management, onboarding, and delivery workflows. Establish feedback loops for continuous improvement.
 - **Messaging:** Craft compelling, segment-specific value propositions. Use targeted content to highlight how offerings solve real problems.
 - **Support:** Equip teams with sales enablement tools, marketing assets, and training. Ensure tight coordination between client-facing and support roles.
- **Operations:** Leverage technology to track KPIs like Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC), Lifetime Value (LTV), and Return on Investment (ROI). Continuously optimize sales and marketing performance.

Talent will be the Primary Driver of Growth

In the evolving landscape, talent will be the ultimate catalyst and differentiator for success. The roles, skills, and strategies for success are rapidly evolving. To thrive in this changing landscape, Audit, Tax, and Advisory firms must reimagine how professionals deliver value, build client relationships, drive business growth and identify the right talent to lead and propel the change. Historically, many firms sought cost savings by replacing seasoned, high-cost professionals with less experienced, junior talent. But in the next phase of the industry, that model collapses. As automation takes over routine, junior-level work, the true value will shift to senior professionals who bring deep business and industry expertise and can drive tangible results for clients and their future needs. These individuals can synthesize asynchronous data from audit, tax, and advisory outputs into actionable insights and strategic guidance, becoming

indispensable advisors to clients. This shift will upend the traditional pyramid talent structure, forcing firms to rethink their talent strategy, compensation models, career progression, and what success truly looks like in a tech-enabled, insight-driven future.

The key roles, and skills and capabilities that will be critical for success are:

- **C-Suite Leadership** - C-suite leadership will be the driving force behind the next wave of transformation in accounting firms. The most effective executives will be strategic innovators and not only champion change with bold vision and relentless execution, but they will also architect the future. Success will require strategic foresight, cross-functional influence, and the ability to align the firm’s direction with market realities. These leaders must attract and activate the “right” talent, foster a high-performance culture, and guide teams to embrace new service models with confidence. They will need deep financial and operational acumen to steer investment decisions, fluency in emerging technologies to embed innovation into the firm’s DNA, and a client-centric mindset to position the firm and themselves as a valued advisor. Ultimately, they will drive cultural and organizational alignment, enabling agility, resilience, and relevance in a rapidly evolving market. Cross-

service line collaboration will be key to driving the enterprise forward.

- **Chief Growth & Innovation Officer (CGIO)** - To succeed in this next phase, Accounting firms will require hiring a Chief Growth and Innovation Officer (CGIO), a role that primarily does not exist in the industry. The skills and capabilities required for this role need to be extensive (see image below).
- **Go-To-Market Talent** – To continue to grow revenues firms will need to have talent which is focused on selling and acting as valued advisors to their clients. The sales teams needed are:
 - **Strategic Advisors for Growth & Excellence (SAGE) Partners** – This is a new team that would need to be created of senior firm partners who would act as relationship leads to large clients or targets, and for Private Equity and their portfolio companies, and provide “sage” advice and insights on the work done by the firm for the client. These partners will be the value creation team for the accounting firm and its clients. These advisors are not just sellers, they are strategic partners who shape transformation, deliver impact, and elevate the firm’s relevance in the market. This type of talent is going to be difficult to find

SKILLS & CAPABILITIES FOR THE CHIEF GROWTH & INNOVATION OFFICER (CGIO)



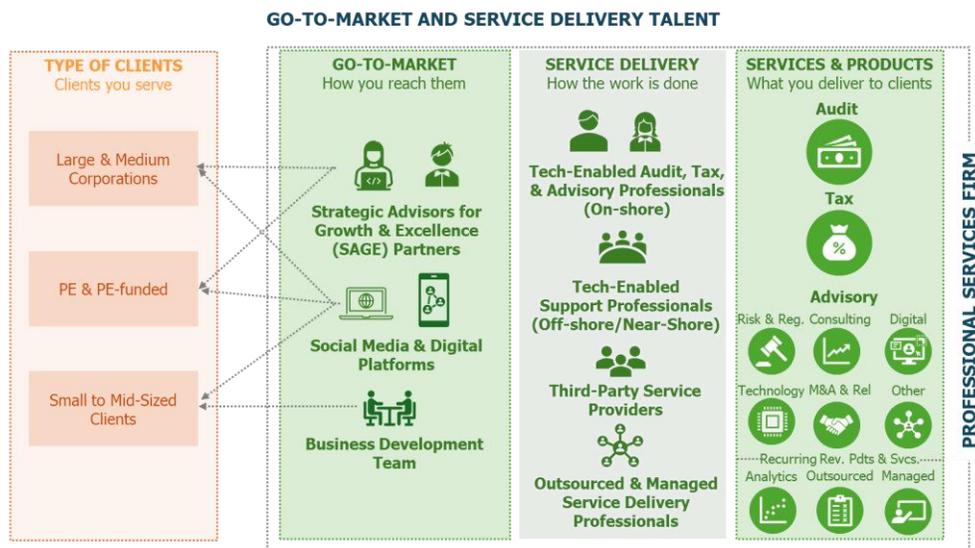
Source: Idea Innovate Consulting

within an Accounting firm but it will be critical for success. The skills and capabilities they will need are:

- Bring a unique blend of strategic insight, cross-functional fluency, selling skills, and executive presence.
- Have industry and service line expertise in multiple areas.
- Deeply understand client business models, industry dynamics, and competitive pressures to tailor solutions that align with strategic priorities, not to particular service lines.
- Act as trusted advisors to the client C-suite.
- Build credibility through empathy, insight, and consistent delivery of value, navigating complex stakeholder environments to drive alignment and action.
- Collaborate internally across audit, tax, advisory, and emerging service lines, orchestrating the right mix of capabilities to meet evolving client needs. This requires fluency in the firm's offerings and the ability to identify cross-selling opportunities that expand relationships and unlock growth.
- Communicate with clarity and confidence, distilling complex ideas into compelling

narratives and leading high-stakes conversations with consultative skills.

- Commercial acumen to understand how to drive top-line growth, discuss ROI and pricing models with client finance leaders, and track performance metrics such as pipeline velocity, conversion rates, and client satisfaction.
- **Business Development Team** - Firms should have a Business Development team be the primary contact, for the small to mid-sized clients, and could be relationship and engagement-led by Managing Directors, Directors and Senior Managers. This client base is highly receptive to, and arguably a greater beneficiary of managed services, like Information Technology (IT), Security & Privacy, Marketing HR, fractional talent, supply chain, etc., and outsourced offerings, i.e. bookkeeping, Accounts Receivable/Accounts Payable, financial reporting, tax preparation, financial analysis, and analytics. Staffing teams with need professionals who have strong selling skills and can build long-term relationships with these clients with a focus on recurring revenues, with a high level of stickiness.



Source: Idea Innovate Consulting

- **Service Delivery Talent** – Delivery of services in this evolving landscape is likely to be performed leveraging a combination of:
 - **Tech-Enabled Onshore Professionals** - These professionals will serve as program managers and delivery “quarterbacks,” overseeing work across teams and ensuring quality, accuracy, and completeness. They will play a critical role in reviewing and refining GenAI-generated insights, applying their deep understanding of the client and industry context. Acting as orchestrators, they will manage service delivery end-to-end, engaging with clients to gather input, track progress, and equipping the Strategic Advisors with the intelligence needed to deliver final insights and recommendations.
 - **Tech-Enabled Offshore/Nearshore Professionals** - To improve margins and scale delivery, many firms have built offshore operations staffed with tech-enabled professionals. These teams will execute work efficiently and cost-effectively, integrating closely with onshore leads to ensure seamless collaboration and high-quality outcomes. Some firms are considering setting up near-shore operations for better access to delivery providers.
 - **Third-Party Service Providers** - Increasingly, firms are leveraging external providers specializing in audit, tax, and accounting services, often based in talent-rich regions like India, South Africa, and the Philippines. These partnerships offer access to specialized skills and scalable talent pools, enabling firms to expand capabilities and improve margins without building internal offshore teams.
 - **Outsourced & Managed Service Delivery Professionals** - For outsourced and managed services, firms will rely on a different type of talent, often less specialized but optimized for operational efficiency. In

areas like fractional C-suite offerings, firms may need to curate pools of senior part-time professionals who are engaged and compensated only when assigned to active projects.

Conclusion

As accounting firms and professional services enter a new phase of transformation, one truth is clear: the old playbook no longer applies. With acquisition-led growth constrained by inflated valuations, firms must pivot toward bold, organic strategies. Success will depend on visionary leadership, a Chief Growth & Innovation Officer who can drive change, a tightly orchestrated go-to-market strategy, and empowered Strategic Advisors for Growth & Excellence (SAGE) and Business Development professionals. Equipped with the right behaviors and incentives, these teams must foster cross-functional collaboration, deepen client relationships, and become trusted advisors—expanding the breadth of services delivered to both existing and new clients. In this landscape, talent is not just an asset, it is the ultimate differentiator. The firms that attract, align, and activate the right people will be the ones that lead the market, while others risk falling behind.

While each firm’s transformation journey will be distinct, the path forward favors those who act with urgency and precision. The winners will not be those who react to disruption, they will be the ones who architect it. In this new era, competitive advantage will be driven by firms that move fast, innovate relentlessly, and execute with purpose. The future of professional services won’t be inherited; it will be built.



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Nita Sanger, CEO of Idea Innovate Consulting, is a CxO, Operating Partner and Advisor executive with over 25 years of experience driving transformational growth, revenue optimization, and operational excellence for large, complex, global professional, legal, business, and financial services organizations. A proven strategist and innovator, she excels in turning around underperforming businesses, accelerating market expansion, and maximizing shareholder value. Nita's extensive experience spans leading business strategy and digital transformation at a mid-sized, Audit, Tax, and Advisory firm, heading global innovation for the Legal & Regulatory division of a legal information services provider, and driving global strategy and innovation for two of the largest service lines at a Big Four firm. Her leadership extends to C-suite roles in multiple PE-backed startups. Additionally, Nita advises private equity firms and their portfolio companies on scaling revenue, streamlining operations, and positioning for long-term success. Nita is renowned for her ability to unlock untapped potential, drive sustainable profitability, and deliver above-plan performance. She can be reached at nsanger@ideainnovate.com.



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