**Professional Workflow Practices for BAS Deadlines**

It’s not always easy to juggle the ATO deadlines with regular client tasks, meetings, internal administration and professional development. Not to mention the genuine calls for help that clients may need assistance with from time to time that may need to interrupt your schedule.

So how to do you manage your workload, particularly if you have a lot of quarterly clients that cause extra workload in BAS time?

We hear of many bookkeepers, particularly those newer to the profession, who get caught up by clients not providing documents promptly to allow them to complete the BAS on time or being derailed by unexpected client demands.

**Managing Client Expectations**

Different clients will inevitably have different expectations of you as a BAS agent. Have you established what their expectations of you are? Have you let them know what your expectations of them are?

Business owners have legal obligations to meet compliance deadlines. You are engaged to assist them in meeting those deadlines, but you are dependent on them providing you with information when needed. If they have not given you what you need to complete a compliance deadline, the responsibility still lies with them – not you.

Your engagement letter is an essential document that covers all aspects of your engagement, including responsibilities and obligations for both parties.

Communication is the key to managing client expectations. What are you selling? What does the client want? Are you checking in with the client? Are you making an effort to foster good relationships?

If the client respects the job you do for them, they will make an effort to get you the information you need by your required deadline.

**Remind the Client of Your Expectations**

Communications around ATO deadlines, client obligations and your commitments as a BAS agent need to be reinforced regularly. Some clients may be with you for years and still need reminders about everything you need from them!

Your deadlines should be in your engagement letter and an email specific to each BAS period. Give clients concrete dates that you need all documents returned and software files ready for you to guarantee lodgement by the due date. Then if the client misses that date, you have written communiques to refer to.

If the clients don't meet your deadline, you can always say something like, "I will do my best, but I can no longer guarantee lodgement by the due date. I will schedule your BAS in the next available time slot". This lets them know you have expectations, boundaries and an organised schedule.

It's up to you if you want to work outside your regular hours to get BASs done on time – but why would you add stress to your workload because a client has not taken your requests seriously? Of course, there are always exceptions – if a client has had a genuine emergency, you may want to help them out. But in the majority of cases where clients don't get information to you on time, it's because they have forgotten, or they don't take it seriously and think they won't get a late lodgement fee because you’ll bend over backwards to get their BAS done on time.

**Are You Creating a Bottleneck in Your Practice?**

Whether you are a solo operator or a small team practice, or a multi-team business, bottlenecks are a problem that can happen to anyone.

Bottlenecks may be based on people or processes. If you’ve got good workflow processes in place, you’re less likely to encounter bottlenecks.

People bottlenecks happen when someone is doing too much, trying to control everything, hasn't documented their processes, so the system is reliant on them, or they are doing a job they are not suited to.

Process bottlenecks happen when procedures are not documented or are inefficient. The system is not easily repeatable, technology solutions are unsuitable or old, or job management systems are simply not meeting your current internal administration and client management needs.

An inability to discern whether a job is important and/or urgent (or not!) compounds the problem. And if you don’t have good workflow practices established, it only takes a few days of clients messing with your planned schedule to throw your workload out for weeks.

However, YOU are in charge of your workload and workflow, not your clients. Clients who are late with their information do not have to ruin your scheduling. Nor do you need to take on stress on their behalf. This is where getting everything in writing is essential. If a client does get a late lodgement penalty and blames you for it, you can respectfully show them the email history that documents your requests for information and your deadlines.

**Managing Deadlines and Stress**

* Are you taking on the responsibilities of the client? Can you create some perspective between the client's legal responsibilities and your professional services engagement?
* Have you communicated with the client what your expectations and timings are?
* Are the client expectations and your obligations clearly listed in your engagement letter? This could vary significantly with each client so review each engagement letter to ensure it is relevant to that client.
* Send an email soon after the BAS quarter end date with specific dates you need documents by to guarantee lodgement by the due date.
* Flag clients who do their own bookkeeping and may need help to get everything ready by your date. A quick phone call may be all that is required to remind them to stay on top of their bookkeeping!
* How are you tracking your tasks and workload? There are many free online project management tools that are excellent for solo operators or small teams. Once you have a few clients, it is worth investing in a professional system designed to manage your workflow, processes, procedures, checklists, client communications and job status.

**Technology Solutions**

If you’re not already using practice management software, check out [GovReports](https://www.govreports.com.au/), [Karbon](https://karbonhq.com/) and [Ignition](https://www.ignitionapp.com/).

Check your software partner plans as there may be tools to assist workflow that are included with your software such as [Xero Practice Manager](https://www.xero.com/au/xero-practice-manager/). Other options for simpler workflow management could be [Wrike](https://www.wrike.com/), [Monday.com](https://monday.com/), [Todoist](https://todoist.com/), [Evernote](https://evernote.com/) or [Asana](https://asana.com/).

Some of these tools overlap with communications and task management. You’ll need to research the options to see what works for you. Ultimately you will probably need several apps to organise tasks, clients, communications and practice workflow, but it may take some experimenting to find the bundle that suits you.

Remember – you are a professional service provider and it’s your responsibility to manage your workload and client expectations competently. This gets easier over time! But establishing good workflow practices will certainly reduce the stress of meeting deadlines.