Wealth management, investments, mergers and acquisitions, and intellectual property are just a few of the areas becoming part of the day-to-day strategies of contemporary companies. Financial services companies capable of providing oversight in these areas have become a thriving industry sector with both local and global organizations expanding their scope of services.

The San Diego Business Journal posed a series of questions to a sampling of the area’s leading financial experts on some of the issues facing business today and how the accounting industry is responding to those needs. Their insights into the business of accounting today also provides a view to how these companies are reinventing themselves to retain top talent and stay relevant for the future.
The battle for talent is apparent as local business schools tout examples of 2016 accounting grads landing jobs with great pay and benefits. Yet many young people want to be their own boss and say they do not want to be tied to the same company for many years. What is your firm doing that is a best practice for attracting and retaining young talent? What advice do you have for your clients on this front?

**MCMAHON:** We often hear recruits or interns at Moss Adams speaking about how nice everyone is here and the variety of industry groups in which people can specialize. Our appeal as a firm stems from giving employees the freedom and support to navigate their careers early on with flexibility where and how they need it. We foster good people and they end up staying. In fact, the staff retention rate in our San Diego office is high — about 95 percent. My advice is simple: always strive to develop and retain your human capital. Growth can’t be achieved without the right people.

Succession planning is a significant issue for many firms. What is your firm doing to develop Gen X and Gen Y leadership as baby boomers transition out?

**ADAMS:** Recruitment and talent development are top priorities for most accounting firms. We actively engage young CPAs and take a hands-on approach to teaching them new skills, include them in our corporate culture and mentor them throughout their careers.

Many economists are predicting a slowdown in the near future. What do you advise for businesses that express short-term concerns about economic conditions?

**MCMAHON:** During a slowdown it’s important to be strategic in terms of taking on debt. The idea is to take on debt for expansion or acquisitions, but not for operational purposes, particularly if it’s a losing operation. Work on streamlining your operations to make sure each process is as lean as possible, which will continue to benefit your bottom line when the economy picks up. The economy fluctuates by nature — keep this in mind before making any sudden plan changes that might affect your long-term goals.

Looking around one or two corners, what do you see for the future of accounting in San Diego County?

**MCMAHON:** While there’s always a demand for accountants doing tax returns and financial statement audits, the real growth area is in value-added services. This is particularly true in San Diego where there’s a large, diverse industry base that includes a growing presence in technology, real estate, construction, and life sciences. These value-added services could range from private client services to international consulting, transaction services, or cybersecurity assessments. This is where accounting firms will find the competitive edge necessary to thrive in the ever growing and evolving San Diego environment.
As an accounting firm, we love numbers.
Here are a few of our favorites.

103 Years in business
102 Countries served*
33 Industries served

52 Years in San Diego
5.2:1 Staff-to-partner ratio
1 Goal: to help you succeed

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Has your group created or added practice groups for certain segments or industries?

ADAMS: San Diego has an enviable multi-industry economy; innovation fueled by an entrepreneurial culture and a robust academic R&D ecosystem. In addition to more traditional practice areas such as manufacturing, defense and aerospace, life sciences and real estate, we also have developed expertise in emerging areas such as clean energy, crowdfunding, and craft beverage brewing. Another segment for Haskell & White has been supporting the private equity and financial sectors in due diligence procedures.

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With the San Diego economy continuing to evolve, how has your firm addressed the changing demands of the market?

MCMAHON: Our goal is to provide insight that clients can rely on to make a difference in their day-to-day business. This goes beyond being just a compliance shop. What sets us apart is truly being industry based. Our advisors have experience in the industries that are most important to San Diego, which gives us a unique perspective. Clients want to know what the trends are in their industry, what we see in the marketplace, and whether or not business is down across the region and broader. We’re able to provide that information because we’re immersed in more than 30 industries.
How have the accounting priorities changed for the industry in the past five years?

ADAMS: The accounting profession is a reflection of the business environment it serves. As companies adapt and change, accountants must also learn new skills and understand the evolving business landscape. For our firm, such changes include how our services are prioritized within each industry and for each client. We are emphasizing early industry training for our engagement teams so that they thoroughly understand the industries they serve, and at an earlier time in their careers than we have done in the past. Also, in the past five years, we have seen an evolution in capital raises as businesses are no longer restricted to seeking small business loans from a bank or taking their enterprise public. Through the proliferation of private equity, crowdfunding and a host of new financial technology portals, there are many methods to raise money, and each method has its unique accounting considerations. We also are helping our non-attest clients implement new accounting guidance, such as the new revenue recognition and lease accounting standards.

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Helen Adams
San Diego Area Managing Partner
Haskell & White LLP

The perfect fit for your growing business.

The pieces of your company’s financial puzzle become more complex as you grow your business. Haskell & White provides the experience and leadership to fit those pieces together and help you achieve your goals.