

What will 2022 look like for professional services firms?



The busy professional services firm's guide to 2022

Small and medium firms in professional services face a unique set of challenges—client and supplier relations, talent management, scope creep, and so on—which demand constant, day-to-day attention.

The problem is, these challenges often take up so much attention that there's no time to get an outside perspective on what's happening and how to act.

It's why we've teamed up with research agency CensusWide to survey professional services firm

owners and leaders and bring you the insight you need to thrive in 2022. Insights like:

- 41% of professional services firms consider “increasing productivity” their primary motivation for new technology investments in 2022.
- There's a 50/50 split between firms that expect to be mainly remote or hybrid, and those that expect the majority of their workforce to be in the office or field in 2022.
- The top sales goal for 37% of professional services firms in 2022 is overcoming previous losses.

Dive into the key data and trends that are set to influence professional services firms in 2022.

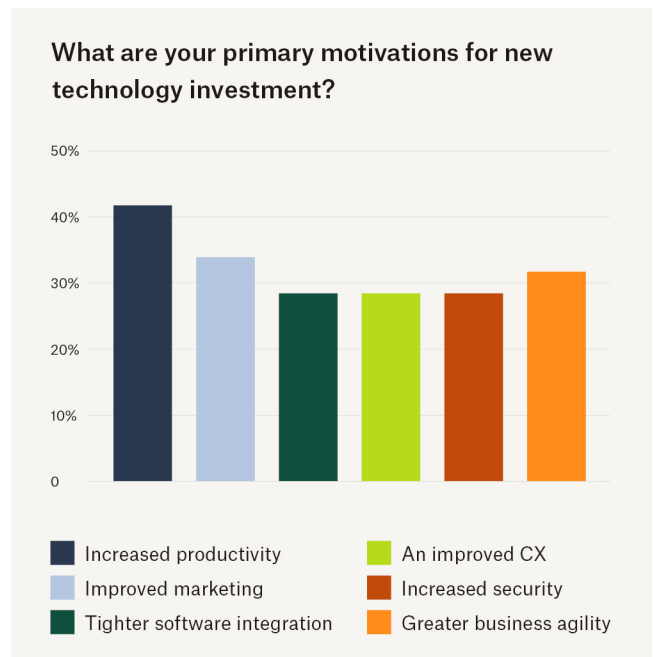
Tech investments are targeting operational productivity

In professional services, time is money—so getting the most out of each team member means a more successful business. It’s no surprise, then, that 41% of professional services firms consider “increasing productivity” as their primary motivation for new technology investments in 2022.

To find this productivity, small businesses in professional services are betting on technology investments that can improve the procurement process, with 34% saying procurement is the top business function that would benefit most from automation.

What’s behind firms selecting more operational technologies? Digital transformation expert, Greg Verdino, explains that increased investment in operational technology is part of a wider push to embrace a new digital culture:

“I’m seeing a commitment to applying technology across the organization, to create the kind of operational efficiency that lays the foundation for a broader and more substantial transformation of the experience that the SMB provides to its customers. Operational technologies help to evolve the culture of an organization, shift the mindsets of the people in the organization to think more digitally, and explore new business models and new ways of working.”



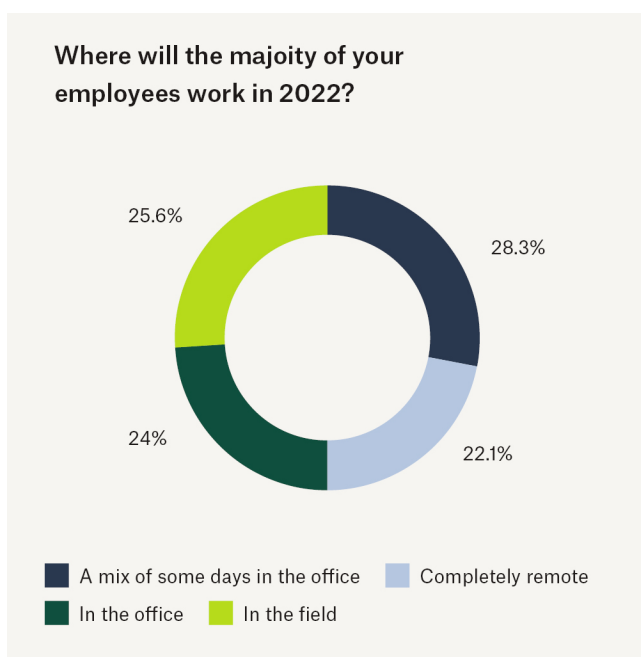
Professional services firms are still conflicted about remote work

Giving employees flexibility and freedom in how they work are key ways that professional services firms can attract and retain talent in 2022. “The reality is that the ability for an organization to give its workforce the maximum degree of flexibility over when, where, and how they get work done and to trust [employees] to act, behave, and perform responsibly in getting that work done, is what we’re looking at here. Organizations need to be thinking about the employee experience, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. For some organizations, it means going back to the office. For others, it means being remote, for many, it will mean something in between,” explains Greg Verdino.

Uncertainty about where employees will work in 2022 is clear from the office plans professional services firms are making in 2022. There’s a near 50/50 split between firms that expect to be entirely remote or hybrid and those that expect to be in the office or field in 2022.

Flexible working arrangements will be key for firms going forward, with 22.5% listing it as their main concern. Specifically, professional services businesses think that the location of their business is the leading barrier to attracting talent in 2022.

To address these concerns, professional services firms’ main strategy for attracting talent in 2022 is pursuing flexible working arrangements.



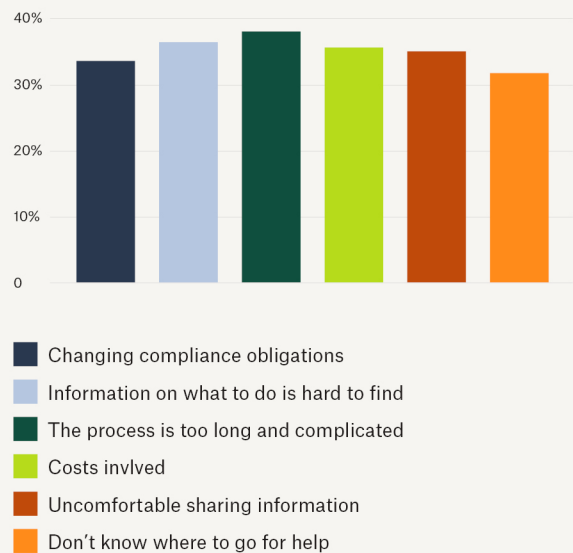
Professional services firms are grappling with shifting regulations

The top compliance challenge for professional services businesses is changing compliance obligations. But several other compliance issues are also causing headaches, with confusion about where to find information and unease with sharing information both featuring prominently.

Small business expert, Ramon Ray, explains why these issues are such an irritation for professional services firms but thinks there's an advantage for those firms that can leverage automation to get compliance right:

"Getting a proposal done right, walking the proposal through the process, once the contract is rewarded, dealing with all the many compliance issues in the industry, it's so much paperwork. The better SMBs can automate and leverage technology to be compliant, the easier they can rest . . . Everyone wants to be better with compliance and legal issues because everyone wants to know how they can find an edge in their industry."

Primary motivations for new technology investment



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— Ramon Ray, Small Business Expert

Security

Security isn't top of mind

While small and medium businesses in all other industries surveyed list security as the reason for switching software vendors, those in professional services are less concerned with security, instead citing support as the top reason to switch vendors.

Security also ranked as the lowest motivation for new technology investment amongst professional services firms—only 28%.

Tom Rossiter, CEO of real estate platform RESAAS, explains why:

“2020 and 2021 were heavy in security focus and security spend—tightening policies, security measures, remote working handbooks. That has largely been accomplished in the remote working era we're in. Now it's not really an ongoing focus. The rules have been established, so SMBs are returning to the things they should be focused on, and that's not security.”

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Recovery through retention is the priority

In 2022, professional services firms' top sales goal is to overcome previous losses. This is a departure from 2021, where "increasing profitability" and "stabilizing the business" were the top sales goals.

To bounce back in 2022, 38% of professional services firms are targeting repeat business as the primary area for growth.

What can professional services businesses do to retain customers? "It's the quality of service delivery, it's doing the things that you're committed to doing . . . I think that the other piece of it is customer experience. How do you provide customers with a sort of simple, seamless way to engage? How do you strip the friction out of the experience of doing business with your company? And how do you prove you can do it in this disrupted environment? . . . You deliver quality no matter how the work is getting done," Greg Verdino explains.



Get more value from your essential workflows

From hiring to compliance to sales, professional services firms have a unique set of challenges ahead in 2022. The answer to many of these challenges lies in deploying technology that can automate and speed up slow manual processes that stall progress—because the less time your people spend on administrative tasks like proposals, SOWs, or hiring, the more they can focus on delivering for clients.

eSignature solutions can automate and speed up processes across your business, including offer letters, sales proposals, and audit trails, not to mention keep your agreement documents secure and support compliance.

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Methodology

The survey was conducted online by Censuswide on behalf of Dropbox Sign between November 06, 2021 and December 22, 2021. It polled founders, CEOs, and senior leaders at businesses with between 1 and 500 employees. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct which is based on the ESOMAR principles.