Make your payroll bureau service stand out with online client platforms

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The Importance of Standing Out

In a world where customers have infinite choices, it's important to stand out from the crowd. One of the main challenges many business owners face is that they are so caught up in the day-to-day tasks of running and maintaining a business that they simply do not have the time to consider creative ways to stand out from their competitors.

This is no different for accountants and payroll bureaus. In fact, it's probably even more important than many other sectors. For potential clients, it's difficult to differentiate between one accountant and another. Put yourself in a potential client's shoes. You look at three different accountants - they look the same, say the same things, so who do you go with? Unless one is drastically cheaper than the others most of us choose the lowest priced option. If you can't differentiate yourself from all the other firms, you leave it to clients and the only criteria they'll find is price: **lowest fee usually wins.**

Downward pressure on accountancy fees is increasing. It's not going away. If you provide a compliance only service, it's very difficult not to compete on price. **That's why it's so important to look, feel and sound incomparable.**

If you want any hope of succeeding and really creating success as a payroll bureau, it's important to stand out from the competition. Standing out in a crowd of other payroll bureau providers is no easy task, and it's getting more difficult all the time. Difficult, but not impossible. As a payroll bureau, you need to find unique ways to differentiate your practice from all the others.

Think about what the client actually wants, and not just for you to do their payroll, for example, but there are other factors that are very important to businesses who are looking to outsource their payroll, such as:

- **Security**
- **Compliance**
- **Reliability**
- **Cost-effective**

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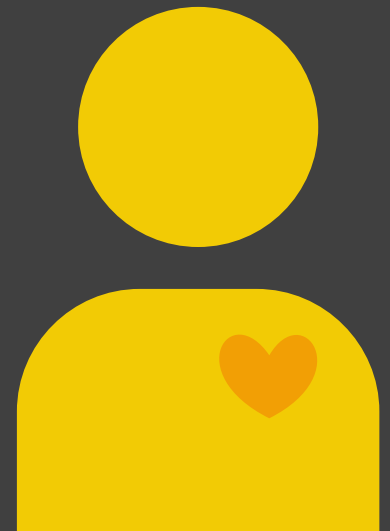
How can you WOW your clients?

But, there's one other thing that is very important in terms of differentiating your services - you shouldn't just meet your customer's expectations, but you should exceed them. Your customers need to feel like they're getting value from what makes you different from the rest of your industry.

Consider the knock-on benefits that your services can bring to your clients - not just what they expect, but surprise them with other factors that they might not have considered.

So what's the magic solution? How can you WOW your clients? This is where cloud innovation and online client portals come in. By embracing innovative cloud features, payroll bureaus can expand their service offering. You can offer your clients a better value-added service, but at the same time, reducing the amount of time that you spend on payroll tasks.

In this guide, we examine the impact that client cloud platforms have on the essential factors that the client needs - security, compliance, reliability and cost-effectiveness.

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GDPR & Data Protection

Backtracking a bit to 2018, I think we all remember the overwhelming days of May 2018 and the lead-up to the GDPR D-Day. Employers everywhere, everyone, was consumed by mass panic, as the new legislation was fast approaching. But then, the day came and passed and, although the GDPR is in full effect, the hectic GDPR-mania disappeared very quickly, as no massive fines or crackdowns actually happened.

That was until just recently when the ICO announced its intention to fine British Airways £184 million for a breach of the GDPR in relation to a serious data hack. The data breach took place when users of British Airways' website were diverted to a fraudulent site, through which the details of approximately half a million customers were compromised, including customers' names, email addresses, travel itineraries and credit card details.

British Airways are currently appealing against the level of this fine, and although the £184 million seems massive, it's still less than 2% of British Airways' annual turnover. The maximum could have been up to £489 million.

Up until the British Airways announcement, the highest fine had been given to Facebook for the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and that was a measly £500k.

But the GDPR's very existence indicates a deeper point: **Data security is extremely important in today's world.** The introduction of the GDPR not only introduced employer duties, but it also made everyone much more aware of the importance of data protection.

Client's expect it, especially when we store, process and send confidential information such as payslips, employee hours and payroll reports.

For accountants and payroll bureaus, using the right payroll software that is designed with data security as a priority, will make GDPR compliance a much simpler effort.

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Automated Backups

Your data accuracy and compliance improve even further when you add in the ability to automatically backup payroll data in the cloud. **If you only keep your clients' payroll data on your desktop, you are at risk of losing the information.**

It's important to ask yourself *'how prepared am I for a disaster recovery situation?'*. Have you thought about what would happen if your computer broke down or was hacked? Or if there was a fire or a flood, for example? How would you get your clients' payroll data back quickly? Would employees still get paid if the information was lost?

The security-conscious client not only wants but needs their data stored in a secure place. Without cloud backup, the consequences would be dire. But now, these problems can be solved quickly, and that's because of cloud innovation.

Cloud integration introduces the ability to automatically and securely backup the payroll data to the cloud. BrightPay Connect is our optional add-on that works alongside BrightPay payroll software. BrightPay Connect maintains a chronological history of all your backups, and these backups can be restored at any time if required. **It's simply an added layer of data protection to safeguard your clients' data.** And if the worst happens, you know you can salvage the situation.

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1 Security

Secure Communications

As well as having backups of the payroll data, it's also important to protect this information in transit. There is nothing in the GDPR that states it is no longer permissible to email sensitive data. However, the thing to keep in mind is to ensure that all appropriate security measures are in place.

Fortunately, there is a better way to manage client communications instead of the client sending you sensitive information through emails. With BrightPay Connect, the client can send their employees' hours, payments, additions and deductions for the pay period to the bureau through their secure online portal. Routine tasks such as adding a new employee to the payroll can also be done seamlessly through the online dashboard.

Client Responsibility

Once the details have been entered by the client, and checked by the bureau, the information can be synced back to the payroll software on the bureau's PC, protecting your client's payroll data every step of the way, and adding that additional security measure when the data is being sent from one party to the other.

By getting the client to enter the employee payments and approve the payroll run before being finalised, bureaus can take less responsibility for errors and mistakes that occur, with the primary responsibility on the client for accuracy of data. Ultimately, your client becomes jointly accountable for ensuring the payroll information is 100% correct before the payroll is finalised, thereby protecting you as a bureau and protecting your clients.

"Bureaus can take less responsibility for errors and mistakes that occur, with the primary responsibility on the client for accuracy of data."

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2 Compliance

Remote Access for Employees

The GDPR legislation includes a best practice recommendation, whereby organisations should provide individuals with remote access to a secure system, which would give them direct access to their personal information.

This is where an employee self-service option comes in, and this is made possible because of new cloud technologies. An online employee portal, such as BrightPay Connect, will store employee's information online, giving the employee access to personal data that the bureau and the client have on file for them. The employee can update their contact information easily, with changes instantly and seamlessly updated in the payroll software.
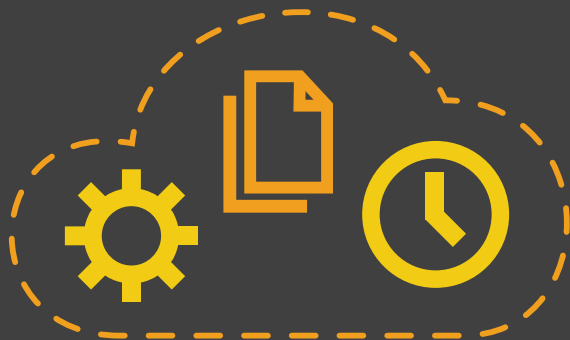
Record-keeping Requirements

The cloud can help both you and your clients with record-keeping. By law, employers must retain certain documentation relating to their employees for specific minimum periods.

Not only is BrightPay Connect useful for keeping a record of payroll information, but the client can also use it to hold various employment and leave records. Sometimes record-keeping can be something that we let slip or are perhaps not as diligent as we might be with say, payroll files, where we tend to be very diligent.

If your clients happen to have an inspection, the inspector will want to see all of the employee records, whether it's pay records, annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, and they'll expect the records to be readily accessible. With BrightPay Connect, clients can access the calendar and reporting features to see at a glance who has taken leave, and when, so should an inspector arrive, clients can simply log into Connect to access the records, rather than getting into a panic about what is saved where.

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Employment Legislation

For employers, there's also compliance with employment legislation. This will be even more important over the coming months, as three new pieces of employment legislation come into force on 6th April 2020.

One of the changes being introduced is **a day-one right to receive a written statement of terms and conditions** (more commonly known as a contract of employment). At the moment, this needs to be given to new employees, no later than two months after the beginning of their employment, so this new day-one timeframe requirement from next April of providing an employee with their contract on their first day of employment will be a big change for many employers.

If a client is on leave or not based at the same location as the new employee, meeting that day-one deadline could be challenging, and that's where the online client and employee portals can help. Being able to upload employment contracts and other employee documentation onto the cloud from any location, and share it with the employee, could be a lifesaver.

With BrightPay Connect, the documents and resources feature also offers an activity log, which gives the date and time stamps in relation to when an employee accessed the document.

Employment Legislation

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Position yourself as an expert

Employers outsource their payroll processes to you because you have the expertise. They trust you as a payroll professional to make sure they are fully compliant with the law. But regardless of the time and money it saves them, if a client doesn't find you credible as an expert and authority figure, they're likely to go elsewhere.

Meeting Deadlines

Meeting deadlines is a critical factor in determining your reliability. Employers outsource to you because they have the confidence in your expertise and ability to make sure they are fully compliant with the law. If you are not meeting deadlines, it ruins your reputation as a trustworthy professional.

BrightPay Connect has a number of different ways that can save you time. Through automation, through integration, through delegating tasks to the client, bureaus can free up time that's wasted on day-to-day administrative tasks. That's time to focus on meeting deadlines, as opposed to being swamped with work and struggling to meet those key dates.

Bureau Branding

One way of reinforcing this image of experience and expertise is through the use of branding. Trust is built on a well-designed logo, and brand loyalty is quick to follow. Brand loyalty is huge and something every business needs to foster.

Some payroll bureaus might not have a logo - it might not seem like a top priority. But it should be. It's a vital part of building a successful business and brand. If you don't have a logo, then you are missing an opportunity to make your business stick in the minds of your clients.

Some bureaus are customising their online client dashboards with their company logo. As you build brand awareness with more exposure to your logo, this familiarity creates the perception that you're trustworthy and accessible. Your logo is an integral part of making your brand a successful one.

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4 Cost

For the bureau, migrating to the cloud should be cost-effective. It shouldn't be an expensive luxury reserved for big corporations. You want a product that can grow as you grow, so that you don't find yourself outgrowing your product. You want a product that can accommodate a temporary slowdown in business so you're not paying for something you don't need.

Take into consideration multiple users - you want to be able to add as many users as you wish so that you can delegate tasks, not only to clients but also to colleagues.

Think of other ways that there might be hidden costs. Is there a charge for additional users? Will there be costs associated with training and support? Simplicity is key to ensuring that you get up and running quickly, with no disruption to your day-to-day business.

BrightPay Connect is affordable and designed with small businesses in mind. There's a simple monthly subscription based on usage, depending on the number of employees, so it is scalable as the company grows.

> "Not only do we love BrightPay Connect, but our clients' and their employees love it too! I've just had a little play with your new 'Requests' feature. I am so excited about using it, I can't wait!"
>
> Annamarie Angell, Deadline Accounting Ltd

> "The connect self-service platform is fantastic for delivering reports and payslips by secure means. I would highly recommend it."
>
> Michael Wilson, Meiring Chartered Accountants

> "I've got to say BrightPay Connect is one of the best payroll portals I have used! I really like the new documents feature and I have been using it quite a bit recently."
>
> Kevin Waller, Strutt and Parker LLP

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Knock-On Benefits

That's our four essential factors that clients look for, but as mentioned previously, to differentiate yourself from other payroll bureaus you can't simply meet your client's expectations, you need to exceed them. Surprise your clients with other benefits that they didn't realise that they were looking for.

On the surface, an online client portal might seem designed simply to relieve a bit of pressure on the bureau. But the benefits go much deeper than that. **There are so many benefits that can satisfy clients, while cutting down on your workload.** It also gives you justification to increase your prices if you wish to do so.

Move with the times

Clients are no longer interested in printed or paper forms, or hard copy material. With BrightPay Connect, clients have instant access to their own employer dashboard from any device. Here clients can run payroll reports, access employee payslips and view amounts due to HMRC. For bureaus, this eliminates the need for you to manually send payslips and payroll reports to clients each pay period.

Environmentally friendly

With online payroll portals, payslips are automatically available to both employees and clients through their self-service portal. In a world that's becoming more and more eco-conscious and eco-aware, by replacing paper documents with online portals, you are also reducing your impact on the environment.

Reduce administration

With BrightPay Connect, clients have the ability to add a new employee to the bureau's payroll software. Within the client dashboard, the client can add all basic details required for processing the payroll, such as the new employee's National Insurance number, date of birth, tax code etc. Once accepted by the bureau, the new employee is automatically added to the payroll software, eliminating the need for the bureau to gather this information from the client and manually set up the employee in the payroll software.

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Delegate tasks

Empower your clients to do all the manual work - not just enter the payroll and add new employees, but also to run their own payroll reports and view amounts due to HMRC. Clients also have the option to delegate tasks. Clients can add HR or department managers where users can be set up to approve holidays for specific employees, and restrict access from the payroll information.

Online annual leave tool

Managing annual leave could be considered a full-time job in itself with the amount of paperwork and administration required. With BrightPay Connect, clients have access to an online annual leave facility, where employees can request annual leave electronically, and once approved by the client, leave will automatically be added to the employee and employer calendars, and it will also synchronise back to the payroll software on your PC, streamlining the entire annual leave process.

Simplify annual leave requests

In recent years, employees are using holiday time in a different way compared to previous generations. Shorter, more frequent bursts of annual leave tend to be requested last minute rather than planned in advance. This alone creates new challenges for payroll and HR managers. It is important for employers and to be able to quickly review and approve leave requests. With BrightPay Connect, the employer calendar has instant notifications and visibility of all employees leave, and so leave requests can be processed by the client at the click of a button.

Eliminate employee requests

An online client portal also means that you can eliminate employee requests for past or lost payslips and for leave balance enquiries. The employee can access their information directly by logging onto their portal, where they can view a payslip library, download historic payslips, and they can also view their leave entitlement for the year, and their balance remaining. For you and the client, it eliminates those time-consuming, day-to-day HR tasks - the interruptions that distract you from getting your work done.

Reduce sick days

Some businesses have noticed a reduction in sick days since implementing employee self-service systems. With BrightPay Connect, there's a real-time annual leave calendar. As sick days are much more visible on-screen to both employees and their managers, this likely acts as an incentive to keep sick days to a minimum. For bureaus, a reduced number of sick days means less last-minute changes to the payroll.

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Keep staff up-to-date

An employee self-service system can allow clients to notify employees of policy changes or company-wide announcements. Employees can simply log in to their self-service employee app, wherever they are, to stay abreast of any company-wide changes that may affect them. The employer can then track whether or not an employee has viewed the notice, resource or document.

One central online location

Store everything in one central location. The client can upload documents, such as employment contracts, staff handbooks, privacy policies, etc., but they can also upload documents that are not visible to employees, for example, a performance review, where the document is only visible to the employer, yet still attached to the employee's record. Ultimately, there's a central location for everything pertaining to each individual employee, and similar to the online annual leave management tool, this is a nice value-added feature, that you can pass on to your clients.

Ensure Data Accuracy

Giving employees the ability to edit and update their own personal contact information can also help with reducing errors and ensuring data accuracy. Mistakes can be avoided as changes made by the employee automatically sync back to both the payroll software and the client portal, as opposed to manually updating the information.

Attract & retain new staff

Becoming an employer of choice has never been more important, especially as we are at nearly full employment. The challenge for employers is to attract and retain the best candidates. Offering smartphone access to their annual leave calendar, their payslips, their HR documents, their personal details, is the smartest, most cost-effective way to show your employees you are in the same digital space that they are. The option to view and manage their data online provides a source of independence, power and control.

Client Responsibility

For bureaus, mistakes can easily happen with the manual data entry needed when processing payroll. By requesting the client to enter the employee payments and approve the payroll run, bureaus can take less responsibility for errors and mistakes that occur, with the ultimate responsibility on the client for accuracy of data, thereby protecting you as a bureau.

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SAVE TIME

⬇

IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

⬇

INCREASE PROFITS

In summary, all of the benefits can be summed up into three key benefits for bureaus.

- Bureaus are no longer wasting time on manual, administrative tasks, and instead, automating tasks through the software and delegating tasks to their clients. As advanced, cloud technologies are introduced, clients become more efficient themselves and are easier to serve where everybody benefits.

- Overall, bureaus can increase the efficiency of their practice. With less time spent on mundane administrative tasks such as entering employee hours and making corrections to the payroll, you will be guaranteed to be running your practice much more efficiently and profitably.

- By automating time-consuming tasks, BrightPay Connect helps accountants and payroll bureaus use their time more effectively, allowing them to extend their reach to a wider network of clients. You'll have more time to be able to cater for an increased number of clients, and you will also be able to cater for more complex payroll clients, as the responsibility for entering the payments for irregular employees can be placed on the client themselves. You may even decide to put this time towards improving your work-life balance.

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The key takeaway today is that cloud innovation introduces simple ways to impress your clients and make your payroll service stand-out, while your software hums along quietly in the background, automating and simplifying the repetitive aspects of the job and keeping you compliant.

There are more ways that BrightPay can help bureaus introduce automation and integration into payroll processes:

- BrightPay includes payroll journal API integration with a number of accounting packages, including Sage One, Xero, and Quickbooks Online, with more coming soon. This allows users to send the payroll journal directly to the accounts software from within BrightPay.

- With the batch payroll processing, bureaus have the ability to process the payroll for multiple employers at the same time. You can finalise payslips, check for coding notices and send outstanding RTI & CIS submissions for multiple employers at the same time.

Discover more ways that BrightPay can help you save time, improve efficiency and increase profits. Book a demo today to see BrightPay Connect in action.

Book a Demo

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Payroll Software of the Year 2018 & 2019

★★★★★
5 Star Rating on Software Advice

99%
99% Customer Satisfaction Rate

250,000 Businesses in the UK & Irleand