

2011 is a special year for CTN Polska. You have just blown out the first ten candles and are celebrating the 10th anniversary of your presence on the Polish market. During those ten years you have become one of the biggest independent accounting practices, providing services to small and medium-sized francophone enterprises. What does it look like today?

Currently we can boast a stable and closely-knit team of 30 employees, three offices in the biggest Polish cities and a sizeable portfolio of, I hope, smiling and happy clients.

Our practice offers a full range of accounting and payroll services, i.e. bookkeeping, preparation of tax returns and financial statements, payroll calculation. We also prepare reports required by our clients for consolidation and management purposes in Polish, French and English.

Indeed, this is quite a considerable structure. How did it all start?

The beginnings were, I would say, typical – one person, a small office. However, small or medium-sized firms have the enormous advantage of flexibility which, when appropriately coupled with awareness of the market and its needs, enables you to set new trends and use competitive advantage.

Since we set business we have followed and reacted to changing market needs. In the period immediately after 1989 the major investors in Poland were giant French companies. In time, smaller, primarily trading companies also started to move in. Initially French companies invested mostly in Warsaw. Tax regulations were unclear at that time and the approach of tax inspectors far less friendly than today. We did our utmost to be of assistance to the newly establishing companies in those key areas at that time.

Later, new attractive options emerged to locate investments outside Warsaw. Special Economic Zones, where foreign investors can operate on preferential terms, came into being. The creation of SEZ resulted in the inflow of a new type of client, namely production companies. It led CTN Polska to master new competencies as clients' expectations became even higher and the practice evolved towards assistance and advisory in obtaining investment grants as well as SEZ-related tax exemptions. The decentralisation of client headquarters posed a challenge to CTN Polska. We responded to it by deciding to open two offices outside Warsaw – three years ago in Cracow and then in Poznań.

What is your take on how accounting has developed in Poland over the last 10 years?

During the ten years of our presence on the market the accounting tools and methods of work have changed. Computers are used for absolutely everything nowadays. It may sound unbelievable today, but 10 years ago bookkeeping was done on paper and with the use of a calculator.

Taking advantage of the available technology and adjusting to client needs, in Cracow we have created a department which deals in making data entries from scanned documents. The data are then transferred to various computer programs (bank, inventory, fixed assets).

Yes, it almost sounds like outsourcing in India. But what happened to the accountants? Their role must have evolved somewhat. What is an accountant nowadays?

New IT solutions have revolutionised the quality of accounting services. On the one hand they have cut the time needed to enter data. On the other, they have significantly reduced the risk of error. As a consequence, the cost of a basic accounting service is becoming relatively low. The accountant's role is evolving towards advisory services and continuous support.

Looking at the growth of CTN Polska, those ten years can definitely be called a success. What is your recipe for success in the accounting sector?

I do not know what the overall recipe is. Without doubt the greatest asset CTN Polska has is its excellent team of professionals with their knowledge of Polish regulations and western European accounting standards. The ability to speak French and English enables free-flowing communication with clients and allows us to better meet their needs and expectations. We have experience in reporting financial data for Polish companies in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards. In the case of companies with foreign capital, we prepare reports according to local accounting standards. As a consequence, our clients can downsize their structure and still comply with the stringent requirements imposed by their group or foreign financial markets.

For an accounting practice to function efficiently and service demanding clients, a key success factor is a cohesive, well-qualified and stable team. Our employees are competent, have the necessary qualifications and certificates and a long experience of working with French and Belgian companies. Our clients appreciate being able to work long-term with the same employees of our accounting practice. Ensuring the continuity of services is vital for good and satisfactory cooperation.

Can you really guarantee a client long-term cooperation with a specific employee?

I realise that for a client the person servicing them is extremely important and any change disrupts harmonious cooperation and causes a certain turbulence.

I think the atmosphere in the company is crucial. The majority of accountants are women. We strive for a friendly and positive atmosphere at work. Our employees particularly appreciate the flexible working arrangements and the option to adjust their working hours to home duties and unexpected family requirements. We attach a great deal of importance to the sense of well-being of our employees both in day-

to-day operations and in the long-term perspective. Currently, 20% of our employees are either expecting a child or on maternity leave. We hope they know we are waiting for them and that they can return to their positions whenever they want. However, I must admit that employee turnover related with maternity leave is a challenge for us, because it often causes certain organisational problems.

But a good atmosphere at work is not the only guarantee of success, is it?

One key factor is obviously good relations with clients. We strive to build them on solid foundations. Clients need to rely on the experience and professionalism of their accountant. We have to above all make them trust in us.

Successful and long-term cooperation can only be built on honesty and transparency in a relationship. In these difficult times only the best possible quality of services and tailoring the services rendered to the specific needs of the client allows to look to the future with hope. The development of our clients is obviously our goal.

You mentioned difficult times. Has the world crisis changed the way the accountant's role is viewed?

The world crisis necessitated swift transformation of clients and their advisors. Difficult times require a fresh approach from companies and in some way even more so from accounting practices. Managing in difficult and unpredictable times poses an incredible challenge. It requires skilful cost reduction, an ability to quickly adjust business models and grasp new development opportunities. Nowadays, financial markets are exerting increasing pressure on accuracy and transparency in financial management. The role of an accountant as the party delivering accurate data is crucial. The amount of data delivered is on the increase while pressure on prices necessitates cuts in the costs of accounting services. These are then both challenging times and highly dynamic times. Potentially, times of development.

It is said that accountant's job consists of counting other people's money. Is there any space in this profession for supporting charitable activities?

Obviously, it would be difficult for us to build wells in Sudan. We try however to support such activities indirectly. We support men and women of action and goodwill who often feel lost in complicated accounting and tax regulations. We help foundations and other non-profit organisations organise themselves in the best possible way. We also strive to promote Corporate and Social responsibility among our clients.

How?



We continuously advise companies and in some way influence their behaviour. I feel that it is our responsibility to promote CSR initiatives and constantly strive to increase the awareness of our clients as far as CSR is concerned.

Yes, it sounds beautiful.