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Words to Set a Course for the Future

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”
— Eleanor Roosevelt

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Pathfinder Profile

Carolyn Sechler: New Definition of CPA



**Carolyn Sechler—
She was one of the
first CPAs with a
Web site, and that
was just the
beginning.**

Most people who first drop into Carolyn Sechler's Web site, www.azcpa.com, probably find themselves asking, "Wow! This is a CPA?"

It's a surprising site, from the first greeting of "Welcome to Carolyn's World!" to the array of topics--punctuated by lively icons--including Make Me Laugh, Weekly News, Travel and Pleasure, Legal, Nonprofit, Friends, Business and more. Via links on the Calculator page, you'll even meet Blue Dog, who barks out answers to equations. Through frames, you're still tied to her site even if you venture out on one of the many links.

Taking on a New Role

As her Web site indicates, the accounting world has changed. Clients are able to access more efficient bookkeeping, accounting and research tools. But that doesn't mean they know what to do with all the information. "Our role is to be both guide and coach," she says. "Sechler CPA, P.C. does exactly that."

Per-diem CFO...fiscal psychiatrist (as a co-worker in a former firm dubbed her evolution). Call it what you will. In Carolyn's eyes, the CPA background uniquely qualifies practitioners to participate in their clients' leadership, evaluating day-to-day operations and business plans within a company, area and industry.

She fosters that partner relationship in almost everything she does. "I coach technology, live in e-mail and on the Web, price differently than competitors, and run a virtual office. But I'm also visible to my clients."

The technology consulting began as a bundled half-hour of phone coaching and unlimited e-mail for a month. She was engaged first by accountants who wanted to develop a technology vision. Since then, other firms have tapped her guidance in entering an electronic environment, including developing staff telecommuting plans.

Her contracts emphasize access, too. She signs clients for an annual fee, which keeps her administrative costs down and helps the customer shed that "meter's-running" mindset. In negotiating a contract, Carolyn works

with the client to form a specific job description and yearly plan, which helps emphasize the importance of communication in a successful relationship. “This puts responsibility on both me and the client. It also redefines the acronym, ‘CPA.’ In fact, I’ve become a CPA again because I like the new definition. I’ve got my passion back.”

This type of relationship has changed her client volume. Overall, she’s dropping to a substantial few, finding it important to microniche. She specializes in nonprofit trade associations--principally engineers and doctors--a business segment she incubated years back by providing brown-bag sessions on tax planning and contract review to hospital residents. With her associations, Carolyn provides leadership workshops, participates in long-range planning meetings and budgeting sessions. “I differentiate by being visible, teaching, talking, listening and learning.”

All the Ducks Are in a Row

This isn’t a one-person operation, though. Sechler employs three people full-time, along with an alliance of independent contractors. In servicing clients, she runs a high-caliber, entrepreneurial, virtual team connected almost entirely through e-mail.

“I’ve got the beauty of a big firm, without the overhead. But it is a true team, not a vendor relationship,” she says. “Don’t overlook the diamonds, especially administrative employees with regular client contact. “Motivate them to generate revenue. Everyone innovating is what it’s going to take to stay ahead in the business world.”

She should know. *Accounting Today* recently selected her as one of the “Top 100 Most Influential People in the Profession.” That follows her selection in the magazine’s 1996 list of “Trailblazers in Technology.”

Carolyn feels the accounting profession is waking up to the changing role of the CPA. The stereotypical image of the green eye shade/bean counter is long gone. Carolyn muses about what exactly will take its place. “We’re evolving as a profession. Wouldn’t it be fun to come up with a new stereotype?”

For more insight into a new way of doing business, explore Carolyn’s Web site, or contact her at carolyn@azcpa.com.

This is another story about innovative techniques CPAs are using, either in their practice, or in business and industry. We are interested in receiving tips on future Pathfinder Profiles. E-mail suggested comments to pathfinder@cpavision.org.

[Horizon Cover](#)



Vision Web Site Provides Virtual Trip to the Future

Visit the CPA Vision Web site and you'll find a gold mine of resources, information, interactive exchanges ...and even a few surprises.

As an integral part of the CPA Vision Project, this Web site is designed first and foremost to promote dialogue about the future of the profession. In the site, one click on the [door icon](#) offers a fun and unexpected entrée into a world of information on the profession, and the challenges and opportunities it faces. Fast modems help as an automatic software download enables the viewer to seamlessly connect to the next level.

All of us want information—and we want to offer our opinion as well. Begin with “Talk to Us” and participate in [Web Views](#), an interactive forum where CPAs and others can post questions and provide answers to pressing issues about the future. Another area features an [online poll](#) where you can comment on and rank CPA core values, services and competencies. Updated [results](#) are available, too, at any time.

The monthly, online version of [Horizon Perspectives](#) and archived copies of [past issues](#) are on the site for reference. You can also opt for a monthly [e-mail version](#) that links directly to the Web site. A new area within the newsletter is “Question of the Month.” Responses to thought-provoking questions are published on the site under Web Views.

Readers of *Horizon Perspectives* have told us that the monthly Pathfinder Profile is perhaps the most popular article because each snapshot of an innovative and visionary CPA ties the concept of visioning to real people working in the CPA profession. Followers of printed profiles will want to click on “Pathfinders” from the home page to read additional stories that will be published exclusively online.

Click on “[Resources](#)” and a world of data, facts and news is revealed. For example, users can use information from the site to understand why the Vision Project is vital to the future of the profession. [Text](#)

[files](#), as well as copies of [PowerPoint presentations](#) on the visioning process, are available for [downloading](#). “Resources to Visioning” provides topical executive summaries and full text versions of several white papers, including a study of how values and competencies influence the CPA profession and how multi-national companies have used visioning to improve the bottom line.

“[Future Focused Links](#)” is a collection of useful and trend setting paths to organizations involved in the Vision Project, and includes materials to help CPAs supplement their own understanding of the future. Similarly, the Online Bookstore identifies and offers book titles under “[Highly Recommended Reading](#)” and “[Suggested Reading](#),” with direct links enabling users to purchase books at Amazon.com.

One of the greatest features of the Internet is the ability to instantly see what has changed on your favorite sites. Contributors are constantly adding new material, links and updated information not only to enhance the Vision Project, but also to provide CPAs with reasons to take a serious look into the future.

Send an e-mail note to horizon@cpavision.org with your own comments and suggestions related to the Web site and the process.

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Websites Worth Visiting Your Virtual Assistant for the Future

Saving time *and* money are two good reasons to keep an e-mail address, but can the same be said about the Internet? Check out these sites for a grab bag of free, low-cost and time-saving sites.

Everything's Up-to-date

No one has time to keep up with all the software updates, patches and add-ons to run every computer application. Even if you just downloaded or bought the most recent upgrade, [WOPR \(Woody's Office Power Pack\) Essential Software Updates](#) has a complete list of links to all major applications, many of which are free downloads.

Take Me Home

Many CPAs use accounting-related products, and have a need to visit the Web site of their favorite software or technology vendor for FAQs, problem-solving and

information retrieval. Find an A-Z list through the [Web Wanderers List of Computer-Related Company Home Pages](#) and access links to specific companies across the globe.

More Updates

Surf the Net smarter by knowing when your favorite pages have changed, have new information or moved to another address. A free service from [Netmind](#) automatically sends you an e-mail when updates occur, and can even deliver the page as an attachment.

Got a great Website? Do you know of visionary Internet sites? E-mail suggestions to horizon@cpavision.org.

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Questions of the Month

The *Horizon Perspectives* “Question of the Month” is now incorporated into [Web Views](#)’ Forum “Question of the Week”.

When you enter [Web Views](#), if you do not see the Forum “Question of the Week” in your list of Forums, click on the **Options** button at the top of that page. On the left side of the Options Page, you may select which Forums to display. You may also change the font and size of the font used to display these discussions.

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**BITS AND
BYTES**

**TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS
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- At least 11 million Americans telecommute, a 30-percent increase in the last two years, and nearly 75 percent report feeling more satisfied with their personal and family life than before starting to work at home (source: AT&T;).

- The latest buzzword in Internet marketing and electronic commerce is the “Extranet,” in which external customers have access to a company’s Intranet. With Extranets and other sources, the worldwide e-commerce market is poised to more than quadruple to \$3.2 billion by the year 2001, an increase from \$1 billion in 1995 (source: InfoWorld Electric).
- One survey estimates that 30 percent of adult respondents 18 years of age and over have purchased a product from infomercials and similar forms of advertising—at least one in the past—up from 19 percent last year. The majority of buyers’ household income ranges from \$25,000 to \$50,000 annually (source: National Infomercial Marketing Association).

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Noteworthy Printings

Spotlighting Publications Dealing With the Future

Net Gain: Expanding Markets Through Virtual Communities

by John Hagel and Arthur Armstrong, Harvard Business School Press, March 1997,
(available under “Recommended Readings” at the CPA Vision Website’s [online book store](#))

Where is the next level of value on the Internet? Authors Hagel and Armstrong lay out the first economic model quantifying the revenue potential and the investment required to build a successful virtual community.

Virtual communities are groups of people with common interests and needs who come together online. Although many are drawn by the opportunity to share a sense of community with like-minded strangers—regardless of where they live—virtual communities are more than just a social phenomena. What starts off being a group drawn together by common interests ends up being a group with a critical mass of purchasing power—based in part on the fact that communities and members can exchange information with each other on many levels, such as a product's price and quality.

From Hagel and Armstrong: “In our experience, the number one thing that keeps senior management of large companies from launching a virtual community is discomfort with the technology choices required to be successful. Yet, success in the virtual community business hinges not on technology-drive differentiation, but on strategies designed to accelerate member acquisition and to create deep understanding of the needs of those members.”

Editor’s Note: we invite readers to submit reviews of their favorite future-focused books to horizon@cpavision.org.

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