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# ICB Software Guide

An essential guide for bookkeepers

Written and compiled  
by Richard Sergeant for ICB.



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## Foreward

by Lara Manton MICB

The skills we develop as a bookkeeper allows us to form a much better understanding and become deeper users of the software that is available.

The technical knowledge we need means we can often be more demanding, and can find the limitations in the software that we use more quickly than other users. Which is why we are in a great position as a profession, and as a community, to share our experiences and opinions on the tools that we rely on.

I also think that more of the software world is listening to what we want, and is developing technology that can help us create better firms for ourselves, and deliver better services, more efficiently for our clients. We also need them to continue to recognise the unique circumstances and characteristics of bookkeepers and what works well for us commercially. What will work for us, will work much better for them in the long run.

This software guide demonstrates the impact that bookkeepers can have on the software world, as much as software has had on the world of bookkeepers.

How it impacts your world specifically depends on what you want your practice to be like, how you wish to serve clients, and ultimately where technology will help the most. Being aware of your bottlenecks and challenges is a great place to start, and if you are new to the profession then perhaps consider focussing on a single piece of software (like a preferred bookkeeping software) and becoming an expert there before moving on.

Wherever you are on your journey, this guide will prove useful as a tool to understand the choices you have, and inspiration to what might come next.

**Lara Manton MICB**

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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	03/06/2024	Beep broadband				65.31	0.00
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	03/06/2024	Beep broadband				65.31	0.00
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	03/06/2024	Beep broadband				65.31	0.00
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	03/06/2024	Beep broadband				65.31	0.00
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	03/06/2024	Beep broadband				65.31	0.00
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- 346 | Computer and IT costs

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# Welcome to the ICB Software Guide

The world of business and the essential role that bookkeepers play, has continued to be supported by digital tools that aim to streamline processes, improve productivity and increase capacity.

This guide, created by ICB for bookkeeping professionals, has been designed to help those new to the profession through the crowded world of software, and provide a resource for established bookkeepers to explore new innovations.

## How to use this guide

The guide consists of an introduction to some of the key technology themes and challenges bookkeepers face, a breakdown of the key software categories, and a useful directory of suppliers.

Listing in the directory is not an endorsement, however official ICB accredited partners will be indicated.

## The software categories

- AML
- Banking
- Bookkeeping
- Data capture - Accounts payable
- Data quality
- Ecommerce
- Expense Management
- Marketing/Client communications
- Payroll
- Payments
- Practice management
- Proposals and onboarding
- Reporting
- Security
- Tax



# The key technology challenges

## Integrations

Cloud computing has enabled more software programs to connect with each other. This is mainly achieved through Application Programming Interfaces (API), which allow for the transfer of data between different tools that you may use on a daily basis.

These connections benefit users by allowing workflows to be created, and can help to drastically reduce the amount of manual input that can be required.

However, it's important to understand what data is being transferred - and the subsequent impact. Bookkeeping software providers often have integration strategies, offering a wide choice of compatible software but potentially working better with specific vendors.

Also, bookkeepers are increasingly looking at integrations when choosing and selecting new software. Specifically how a new tool may fit in with what they are already using.

## Ease of use

The focus on getting the job done can sometimes be at the expense of the experience of using a specific software. Software vendors are increasingly focussed on User Experience (UX), which covers everything from how the software actually works, the position of buttons, to design.

Bookkeepers are particularly aware of software UX, especially if the client will be using it too. Minimising the amount of time required to become familiar with a product is often the sign of good UX, as is the how much time is spent acting as support to clients who may experience difficulties.

Evaluating ease of use is often a matter of opinion, however your view is entirely valid, especially as it is a skill that can ultimately help create better engagement and save time in the future.

## Cost/Package/Ability to sell on costs

The cost of servicing clients has increased over time as software has come to play an important role in delivering services, and staying compliant.

Cost has perhaps therefore become a real focus for bookkeepers, especially as some vendors often don't take into consideration the size of firm they are often dealing with, and the extent to which their product may be of use to their clients.

Bookkeepers can often find themselves in a position of having to pay for unwanted licences or features which are not of use if they want to deploy a specific piece of software.

Being aware of the business terms and packages costs, especially with an eye to the future where costs are likely to only increase, must be seen as part of due diligence before adopting.

Although some vendors are very tuned to the needs of bookkeepers it should not be assumed that all are, and the ability and confidence to negotiate is important if costs are to be managed.

Software costs should also be passed on to clients either as a calculation of overhead or for specific licence costs as required.

## Support

Given the deadline driven nature of many of the services bookkeepers perform, the ability of software vendors to provide speedy and effective support when required is under real scrutiny.

Their reputation in providing help, and the effectiveness of this help in solving issues is something that often comes up in conversation between bookkeepers and is another important factor in due diligence.

Testing their support function can be a useful exercise while utilising a free trial period. And while support is often focussed on when you need help in the moment, a more general view can be had by looking at what training is offered, educational webinars, online communities and account management.

## Security

Cyber crime is something that no business can ignore, and while bookkeepers are vigilant and intelligent in their approach, the sophistication of criminal activity requires a robust technological and human solution.

Fraud, denial of access to essential systems and data, identity theft, or facilitating money laundering all pose significant threats to bookkeepers given the sensitive nature of their work.

Considering software that can support prevention should be a high priority such as two factor authentication (2FA), password managers, and anti-virus tools. But so is general vigilance, not clicking on suspicious emails, spotting unusual email addresses, and calling clients on a reliable and verified telephone number.

Talk to your software vendors about their security and back up procedures, and what they are doing to help you safeguard your and your clients data.

## Advent of AI

As with many leaps in technology the hype usually exists before the practical use cases become very apparent. Artificial intelligence (AI) may seem to be in a similar position, however there is a clear commitment from vendors to augment their products with this new technology in the new future.

Generally bookkeepers' concern will be around how AI has been usefully integrated by their software vendors, and will not have to specifically think about deployment across their firm by themselves. The burden should be the vendor to demonstrate its usefulness and value.

However, some are already utilising tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot in Microsoft products, and Gemini in Google Workplace to experiment and assist in various ways.

Caution should be exercised around data privacy, and sensitive client information is best kept out of tools that may be exposed to the public realm. However, these types of tools are likely to be a reliable mainstay of the next generation of products, and it is worth becoming familiar with some of their capabilities.

## Overview

Designed to be the heart of a bookkeeping firm's day to day, Practice Management is the central repository of client data, and the system in which work can be managed and controlled. By integrating with other essential tools like email, it can provide a way of storing and sending client communications, and even include other processes such as AML compliance.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Staying on top of client work and codifying your processes ensures the efficient delivery of your services. Doing this across several separate systems or programmes (calendars, Excel, to-do lists etc) can be both inefficient and difficult to scale if you choose to grow your client base over time.

As many of the services bookkeepers offer are timely and deadline driven, the risk of non-delivery is always there if tasks are not easily monitored, regardless of how diligent the team are.

## The Problems it Solves

Practice management tools are specifically designed to solve common challenges such as maintaining visibility of client work, having a central place for all client information and communication, as well as creating and monitoring tasks and projects.

## How it Works

A central database for core client data is at the heart of all practice management systems. This allows workflows to be created for service delivery, and may include features like a secure client portal, customisable templates, time and billing functionality and integrations with other major software suppliers to create a connected system.

**Lara says** "Get it in place before you think you need it. The set-up time can take a while, and it can be fiddly, but it's definitely worth it. My key recommendation is to find one that you can customise to your practice and the way you want to work."



## The Future

There are likely to be more developments in the world of practice management as compliance and technology continue to evolve. While it is unlikely to feature dramatically in the short term, AI may have an impact on resource planning, profitability analysis, client reporting and even surfacing clients that may need to be repriced.

## Pros

- **One place for client information:** For easier client management
- **Manage workflow:** Create customised templates that can be used across clients
- **Integrations:** Most come with useful integrations with bookkeeping tools, proposal and onboarding software and AML providers.
- **A range of providers:** Some are independent, and some have been acquired or developed by major providers. This may provide a particular route to explore that suits you best.
- **BrightManager:** [www.brightsg.com/en-gb/accountancy-manager](http://www.brightsg.com/en-gb/accountancy-manager)
- **Client Engager:** [www.engager.app](http://www.engager.app)
- **Karbon:** [www.karbonhq.com](http://www.karbonhq.com)
- **Uku:** [www.getuku.com](http://www.getuku.com)
- **Capium:** [www.capium.com/products/practice-management](http://www.capium.com/products/practice-management)
- **IRIS Elements:** [www.iris.co.uk/products/iris-elements/practice-management](http://www.iris.co.uk/products/iris-elements/practice-management)

## Cons

- **Setup time:** This can be significant, especially if you have complex clients
- **Cost and features:** Check to ensure the features and cost match your overall requirements
- **Customisation:** Some systems are regarded as easier to configure than others

## Directory

**BrightManager**  
ICB accredited

**Capium**

**Client Engager**

**FreeAgent Practice Dashboard**

**IRIS Elements**  
ICB accredited

**Karbon**

**Quickbooks**

**Sage for Accountants  
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For further information about  Bright please visit [brightsg.com](https://brightsg.com)

## Overview

A well-structured proposal helps you clearly outline your services, pricing, and expectations, while a smooth onboarding process ensures a great start to your relationship with new clients. These steps are not just about formalities; they are essential to building trust and setting the stage for a successful partnership.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Like many professionals, bookkeepers can sometimes face the challenge of articulating their value to potential clients. Without a clear proposal, clients may not fully understand the scope of services, leading to misunderstandings or undervaluing work done.

Scope creep can also develop over time, and over servicing clients an easy trap to fall into.

## The Problems it Solves

- **Clarity:** It clearly defines the services you will provide and at what cost.
- **Professionalism:** A structured proposal presents you as organised and detail-oriented, and can make you feel more confident in charging what you're worth.
- **Expectations:** It sets clear expectations for both parties, reducing the risk of disputes.
- **Efficiency:** A streamlined onboarding process reduces the time and effort required to start working with a new client.

## How it Works

By codifying your charging structure into the software, proposals can be created quickly, easily and with a very professional presentation. This usually works by selecting services and a variable (such as numbers of monthly transactions), and builds up a clear and concise menu of services and their costs.

The software usually produces either a PDF document or a link that is sent to the client for them to review and approve. Some systems will also create an appropriate letter of engagement and even incorporate the capture and setting up of payment details with a third-party provider.

Onboarding can then be made easier through integrations with practice management software (which sets up the client and the initial workflows), and AML providers.

## Pros

- **A structured approach:** create consistent pricing and presentation easily
- **Reduces misunderstandings:** Clarity on what is to be provided, when and for how much
- **Professional first impression:** Smooth experience for new clients.
- **Tailored to each client:** A solution and proposal for each set of circumstances

## Cons

- **Pricing:** check to see if the pricing works for the number of new clients and existing clients you may wish to review pricing with
- **Integrations:** Ensure that it integrates with service providers you are happy to work with if these workflows are important to you.

**Lara says** “It really helps to be more analytical and structured in your approach to pricing. It helps balance what your clients need and what their budgets are, with what you are delivering and making sure you are not undercharging.”



## The Future

As technology advances, bookkeepers may be able to use proposal software to automate reviews and renewals of clients based on previous activity. For example, to automatically spot over-servicing, or to instigate bulk price increases based on annual inflation or changes to software pricing that is charged back. However, the personal touch will remain important; understanding your client's specific needs and tailoring your approach will continue to be key in building lasting relationships.

## Directory

**Bright Propose**

**Cone**

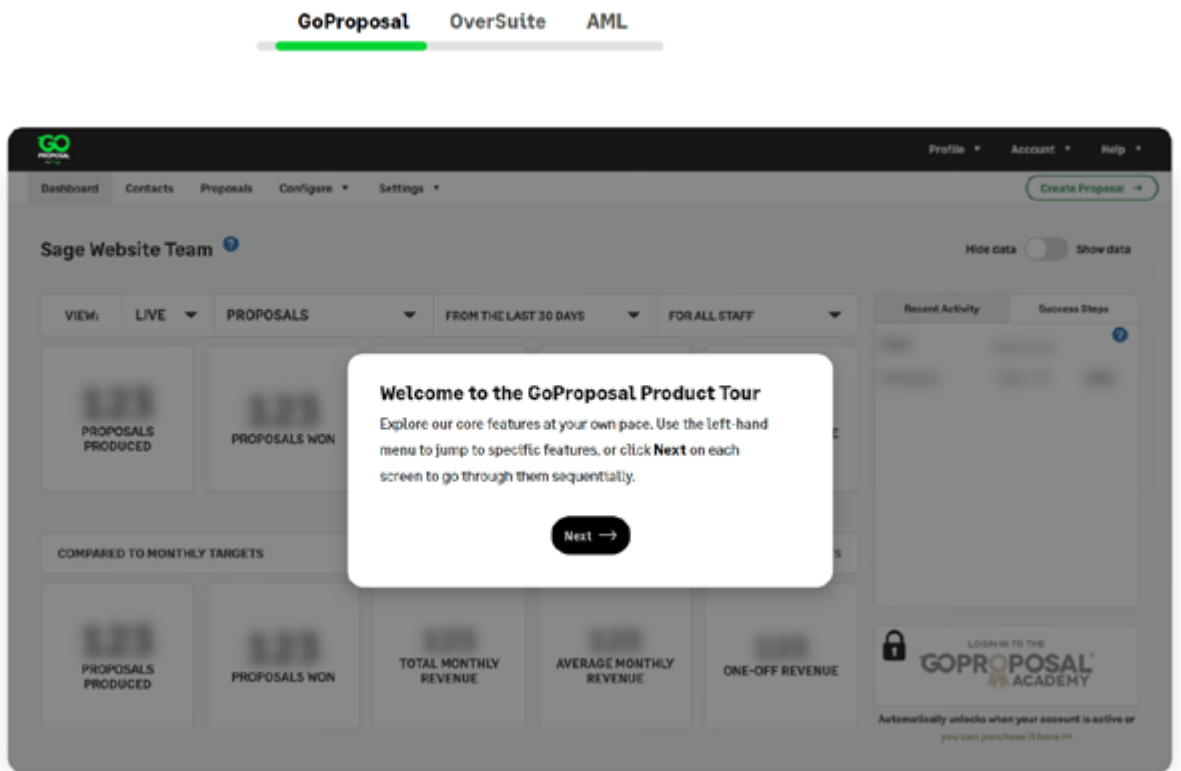
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## Overview

Reporting tools can effectively produce and automate financial insights based on good quality client data. By using these tools to transform raw financial information into meaningful reports, it enables bookkeepers to provide insights that are highly useful and easy to produce. While some reporting capabilities may be included in bookkeeping software, dedicated reporting tools provide more sophisticated features and customisation options.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Without the right tools, Bookkeepers face the challenge of translating complex financial data into clear and concise reports that clients can easily understand. This can often be time consuming and also rely on the ability to present information in a way that is relevant to the client's specific needs and goals in a timely fashion.

## The Problems it Solves

- **Time to create:** Saves time and reduces the risk of manual errors.
- **Customisation:** Tailor reports to the specific needs of each client.
- **Formatting:** Presenting financial data in a visually appealing and easy-to-understand format, such as charts and graphs.
- **Always relevant:** Create live connections with bookkeeping software and update regularly

## How it Works

Providing there is a regularly updated stream of data from bookkeeping software, and the books themselves are up to date, reports can be produced very quickly and easily.

Selecting from a variety of report templates including balance sheets, income statements, cash flow projections and others means that often the hard work of creating your own charts and formats is done for you.

These reports are often highly customisable, allowing you to add or remove data points, applying filters, and changing the layout and design.

## Pros

- **Easy to produce:** Utilising your professional and client knowledge to create and present insights
- **Customisable:** Ensuring that clients have what they need, and you can adjust to create different scenarios as required
- **Collaboration with clients:** creating meaningful dialogue with clients who need the insights

## Cons

- **Not relevant to all clients:** Some clients may not necessarily have a need or demand for much additional reporting
- **Too feature rich:** Be sure to select tools that match client requirements, as some may have features you will not need..
- **Reliant on quality of the data:** This can create issues if it also requires data from sources outside of your control.

**Lara says** “Reporting tools mean being able to provide the next level of information to clients in formats they will find easier to understand and make real use of. Graphs and charts can have an added impact when preparing management accounts or providing regular updates.”




## The Future

This is one area where there is expected to be much more talk and feature development around AI. Data analysis and presentation, as well as creating alerts and triggers may become standard in some of these reporting tools over the next few years.

## Directory

Fathom

Futrl  
ICB accredited 

Joiin

Pulse  
ICB accredited 

Spotlight

Syft



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## Overview

Banking remains an essential service for all businesses and is an increasingly non-negotiable aspect of remaining compliant and to be able to service clients effectively.

While many of the high street banks remain the primary destination for banking services, they have not been exclusive holders of this position for many years.

An increase in the number of so-called 'challenger banks' which come with the full protection of bank licences has provided welcome competition, offering digital-first solutions that appeal to many new and mobile-adept business owners.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

The key aspect of banking for bookkeepers is ensuring that transaction reconciliation is as painless, straight forward and comprehensive as possible within bookkeeping software.

However, bookkeepers also play a key role in informing and even making recommendations around what banking services a client may choose to use. Unincorporated clients may need encouragement to separate out their business and personal banking affairs, while others could benefit from your insight into things such as whether the fees charged represent good value for money.

Other considerations may be around their handling of foreign currency exchange and the ease and speed of transactions, customer service and access to additional benefits.

## The Problems it Solves

Helping clients by recommending banking solutions can provide both practical and financial support. On the practical side matching banking requirements with the scale and complexity of the business, especially if it requires complex foreign transactions is essential. Also, some of the new banks can provide operational accounts within 48 hours of application.

Clients may also need additional services such as access to cash banking which may not be as readily available to non-high street providers. Your involvement in the application process can often ensure that accounts and other banking products such as loans can be processed more quickly, and with greater confidence than if a client were to do so by themselves.

## The Future

As technology continues to evolve, these tools are expected to become even more sophisticated and integrated. Machine learning will likely play a significant role in automating fraud detection, identifying financial trends, and offering predictive insights. This could further enhance the value that bookkeepers can provide to their clients and assist in general cyber security.

## How it Works

- **Online and mobile banking:** Some newer banks may have no physical branches
- **Direct Bank Transfers:** Facilitating seamless movement of funds between different bank accounts.
- **Integration with Accounting Software:** Synchronising banking data with accounting systems to automate reconciliation and reporting.
- **Payment Scheduling:** Automating recurring payments to vendors and suppliers.
- **Access to loans:** And other relevant financial service products

## Pros

- **Forming relationships to assist clients:** Although the bank manager may not exist these days, most banks and banking apps will have relationship managers who work directly with bookkeepers.
- **Ability to encourage:** Or place clients that don't already have a business bank account
- **Enhanced Security:** Robust security measures protect sensitive financial information.

## Cons

- **Cost:** Some banking options may involve subscription fees or transaction charges.
- **Integration Challenges:** Compatibility issues with existing accounting software can arise, particularly with older banks. It is good to check with your bookkeeping software provider if in doubt.

## Directory

Metro

Mettle  
ICB accredited 

Monzo

Starling

Tide

Zempler  
(formerly Cashplus)

# Lara's journey: Using tech to help more clients make it

With over 15 years of experience as a bookkeeper, Lara Manton has seen her share of OCR (Optical Character Recognition) technology. She's been using the tech since 2016. Initially, OCR platforms transformed her workflow by automating document processing, but over time, challenges arose.



As the platforms Lara used became more popular, prices started to rise without a corresponding increase in value. "I've always charged a fee for the OCR platform I was using, but with the continuous price hikes, it became increasingly difficult to justify the cost to my clients," Lara says.

This left Lara with two options: Absorb the rising costs herself, or seek a better solution.

## The switch to Apron Capture

Lara first encountered Apron Capture while searching for a more efficient and cost-effective OCR solution for her clients.

Having segmented her clients based on their needs—whether they needed comprehensive services or just purchase and expense processing—she was keen to find a platform that could cater to these varied demands without breaking the bank.

The transition to Apron Capture was straightforward. As Lara recalls,

"Switching to Apron was an easy sell because it's not only quicker and just as accurate as what I was using before, but it also comes at a fraction of the cost."

## £5/month per client

Capture became Lara's go-to platform. One significant advantage was the integration with WhatsApp, which allowed clients to upload documents for processing on the go, without taking time out of their busy days.

This feature alone, in Lara's experience, makes Capture incredibly user-friendly. "I know my clients like using WhatsApp, and Apron supports that, which makes the whole process so much easier." Lara's clients can also upload documents via the Capture app, or email them directly. There's an Offline mode, too, so clients can get ahead of tasks even while they're on a flight.

Capture's price was a game changer, too. At £5/month per client, it offered significant savings compared to Lara's previous OCR platform, where her clients were paying up to £15 more per month.

## Saving hours every week

Since switching to Capture, Lara has noticed an improvement in her daily workflow. She has saved time, particularly with the automated processing of documents and the ease of time, particularly with the automated processing of documents and the ease of client onboarding.

"The accuracy and speed of Apron is unmatched. It has cut down the time I spend chasing clients for documents and handling manual inputs, allowing me to focus on other critical aspects of my business."

Then there's security. Sensitive client information is well-protected, reducing Lara's concerns about data breaches or mishandling.

## Efficiency leads to growth

Capture hasn't just made Lara's current operations more efficient—it has also positioned her business for growth. By offering a cost-effective and reliable solution, Lara has been able to attract more clients who were previously hesitant about the high costs associated with OCR technology.

"Capture is like the gateway to more advanced services. Once clients see how effective it is, it's easier to introduce them to other services like payments using the same platform. It's a win-win."

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Apron is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority.

## Overview

While not all bookkeepers are directly involved in the actual initiation and completion of payments, there are plenty of tools which can be used and integrated to both help clients be paid on time, and to make the process of managing payments more streamlined.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

The sending and receiving of cash has become an area of huge complexity and choice when it comes to software. Understanding the client requirements, and their processes well is at the heart of being able to advise and support them.

International payments can add an additional layer of complexity, as can dealing with clients who use multiple platforms which can increase the amount of knowledge required.

## The Problems it Solves

Payment tools ultimately facilitate the movement of cash in and out of the business. The use of electronic payments has become incredibly diverse to match the ways in which businesses operate. Understanding your clients' specific requirements therefore is essential.

Common problems solved include being able to service a wide variety of consumer or business payment preferences (such as paying with your phone or smart watch), dealing with large numbers of individual transactions simply and quickly, and cost-effective international supplier payments.

## How it Works

Payments are often facilitated directly between bank accounts either through bank-to-bank transfers or Open Banking technology. These payments are often easy to administer and cost effective but may not be suitable for large volumes of transactions.

Otherwise, a third-party provider is used to help act as a processor and collator of payment. These may be run by well-known household names and will be heavily regulated.

In terms of receiving payments, retail businesses may need Electronic Point of Sale devices (EPOS), while others may benefit from 'Pay now' functionality on emailed invoices, however the list is diversifying.

Increasingly common are cost effective batch payment tools, where supplier runs can be imported from bookkeeping software. Clients can then fill a virtual wallet, and the payment initiated through the Faster Payment System. This can be a considerable time saving and allows for a more organised approach to outgoing payments.

## Pros

- **Increased payment choices:** Offer the most appropriate way to suit the consumer
- **Bringing rigour to processes:** For example through creating an auditable trail
- **Helps manage cash flow:** Can speed up the receipt of cash, and control spend
- **Saves time by facilitating bulk payments in a controlled and traceable way.**

## Cons

- **Can be expensive:** Understanding the cost structures is essential.
- **Integrations:** Some payment systems integrate with bookkeeping software better than others.
- **Fit for purpose:** It is essential that the client workflow is properly understood to avoid costly and time-consuming mistakes

**Lara says** "Starting with the question around how we can improve a client's cashflow can open up all kinds of conversations around speeding up cash coming in, and managing payments going out. Making things easier is always a benefit for clients, but also at times it's just as useful for their customers too."




## The Future

It is highly likely that payment tools will become even more automated, taking advantage of an increased use of artificial intelligence to detect fraud and working better with other financial software. We are already starting to see bookkeeping software develop the ability to take and initiate payments, and this is a trend that is likely to continue.

## Directory

Airwallex

Apron  
ICB accredited 

Crezco

Modulr

Stripe

Telleroo

## Overview

Anti-Money Laundering (AML) refers to the set of regulations and procedures designed to prevent criminals from disguising illegally obtained funds as legitimate income.

AML is seen as crucial in combating financial crime, including terrorist financing and proliferation financing. For bookkeepers in practice, carrying out AML is a legal requirement, and bookkeepers play a key role in identifying and reporting suspicious activities.

AML software is generally designed to facilitate some of the key facets of compliance (such as identity checks), and to help in the required administration and ongoing monitoring of clients.

**Note:** ICB has a proprietary AML software that is provided at no extra cost to its members.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Practising bookkeepers are legally required to comply with AML regulations alongside other key professional service providers such as accountants and solicitors. Given the constraints of time and resource, this often non-chargeable expense can create a noticeable overhead.

With limited resources the task of complying with AML regulations can feel challenging and failing to adhere to these laws can result in severe penalties, both legally and professionally.

However, bookkeepers are perfectly positioned and trained to spot things like irregular transactions that might be linked to suspicious activity. Effective client due diligence and ongoing monitoring can be integrated seamlessly into the bookkeeper's everyday work, and by really knowing the client, bookkeepers provide reassurance and security to both the client and themselves.

## The Problems it Solves

AML software helps bookkeepers by providing a framework to identify and report suspicious financial activities, as well as provide access to the core checks required at the start of an engagement and at regular intervals throughout.

## How it Works

While different providers have different approaches, generally you should look for those that offer:

1. Customer Due Diligence (CDD): This means verifying the identity of clients, beneficial owners and understanding their financial activities such as who they trade with.
2. Politically Exposed Persons and sanction screening
3. A single hub to compile, keep and update your client and firm risk assessments and checks
4. Managing policy and procedures: An essential part of being able to demonstrate your practices's understanding and approach to conforming to and executing the requirements of the regulations.

## Pros

- Working with a dedicated piece of software provides a standardised approach
- Often the changing structure can be flexible to take into account the frequency of new clients being onboarded
- It helps demonstrate compliance, by having everything in one place.

## Cons

- Software providers often have solutions which are very different from each other, so it is important to find one that covers exactly what you need.
- Special attention should be paid to any ongoing monitoring charges

**Lara says** "Getting this done quickly and easily for both you and your clients is essential. Also, don't forget that you need to log your risk assessments with ICB if you are a member and there's no requirement from them to have any additional software."



## The Future

AML for bookkeepers is increasingly digital. With advancements in technology, there are more tools available to automate the identification of suspicious activities. However, as criminals become more sophisticated, bookkeepers will need to stay close to the accounting data and source documents. Ongoing education, knowing your client (KYC) and utilising technology will be key to staying compliant and effective.

## Directory

Firmcheck

Smartsearch

Thirdfort

Veriphy

Xama



## Overview

Dealing with the tax reporting for clients is of increasing interest to many bookkeepers. With no further delays to MTD for Income Tax (MTD IT) anticipated, there is a significant opportunity to help the self-employed both stay on top of their obligations under quarterly reporting, as well as effectively tidying up for the year-end tax position. This is on top of helping the majority of small businesses with their needs.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Bookkeepers have tended to see tax as a service too far, preferring to hand this work over to accountants even though most small businesses affairs are fairly straightforward. To deal with effectively further training and qualifications are required which while could be a barrier does provide a significant area of service potential.

## The Problems it Solves

- **Automation:** Automating accurate tax calculations, form filling, and filing processes.
- **Better experience for clients:** Allows more of their work to be done by their trusted bookkeeper, and reduces the need to introduce another relationship
- **Client Communication:** Providing clear and concise tax reports and insights to clients.

## The Future

There is a substantial opportunity being generated for bookkeepers to become more involved with the tax reporting for their clients through MTD IT, and perhaps in the future with corporation tax. For clients with reasonably simple tax affairs, continuing the relationship with their bookkeeper rather than handing over to an accountant is likely to be of interest in a bid to control costs and the number of advisors they have to deal with.

## How it Works

Tax calculations are based on income, expenses, deductions, and credits pulled from core data from the bookkeeping system. These templates within the system can be used to apply your technology knowledge to formulate the clients tax position.

After presenting and reporting to the client, they can usually electronically sign and the system can file directly with HMRC on your approval.

## Pros

- **Time-saving automation:** Minimising the need for manual calculations, or interactions
- **Improved compliance:** Software remains up to date with current legislation
- **Enhanced client service:** Offer clients more, and remove the need to introduce another professional into the relationship
- **Generally inexpensive:** Most tax software is general seen as keenly priced

## Cons

- **Training and qualification:** In order to be able to confidently handle tax matters
- **Needs of clients:** Ensure that the needs of your clients match the level of service you are able or wish to provide. This can also impact the type of tax software you may need.

## Directory

### BTC

**FreeAgent Final Accounts**  
ICB accredited

**IRIS Elements Tax**  
ICB accredited

**Sage Final Accounts**  
ICB accredited

**TaxCalc**  
ICB accredited

**Xero Tax**  
ICB accredited



## Overview

Payroll software is an essential tool for bookkeepers who manage their clients' payroll processes. It automates the calculation and reporting of employee wages, taxes, and deductions, ensuring accuracy and compliance with regulations. Payroll software varies significantly, and your choice should ultimately reflect the complexity and volume of payrolls you run, as well as your preferred way of managing them.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Managing payroll can be complex. It involves keeping track of new and leaving employees, employee hours, calculating wages, PAYE & National Insurance, pension contributions and relevant employee benefits and allowances. Plus, sick leave, maternity/paternity pay and variations in individual contracts on their allowances and benefits. As with all elements of bookkeeping, good communication with the client is at the cornerstone of success.

## The Problems it Solves

- **Automation:** Automating repetitive tasks like calculating wages, taxes, and deductions.
- **Accuracy:** Minimising human error in calculations.
- **Compliance:** Staying updated with the latest tax laws and regulations to ensure compliance.
- **Reporting:** Generating detailed payroll reports for clients, employees, HMRC and others

## The Future

Payroll is likely to become increasingly cloud based as the well-established suppliers transition their technology. This should help reduce some of the risk and inconvenience of having software on specific machines and increase the ability to develop useful integrations. It is likely that separate backups would still be advised and contingency for non-availability of software (through lack of internet as an example).

## How it Works

- **Employee Information:** Storing standing data such as employee details, salaries, tax codes
- **Time Tracking:** Recording employee work hours, including regular hours, overtime, and time off.
- **Payroll Calculation:** Automatically calculating gross pay, taxes, deductions, and net pay.
- **RTI Filing:** Preparing and filing Real Time Information (RTI) submissions to HMRC.
- **Reporting:** Generating various payroll reports, such as payroll summaries, tax costs, and employee payslip


## Pros

- **Mature product set:** Payroll has been digitised and most specialist suppliers are seen as being 'feature complete'.
- **Cost effective:** Generally payroll software is seen as offering value for money and can be bought in a scalable way.

## Cons

- **Few pure cloud options:** Although many will provide cloud enabled functionality (such as integrated client portals)
- **Non-specialist suppliers need to be reviewed:** Check to see that the software is proportionate and sophisticated enough for the payroll clients you have and intend to have in the future
- **Support:** Given the time-critical nature of payroll, ensure that the supplier has an appropriately good service level agreement, support structure and reputation.

## Directory

**BrightPay**   
ICB accredited

**Buddy**   
ICB accredited

**FreeAgent Payroll**

**FreshPay**

**Intuit Quickbooks Payroll**

**Moneysoft**

**Sage Payroll**

**Staffology**

**Xero Payroll**



## Overview

Expense management software automates and streamlines the tracking, organising, and managing of business expenses. It enables bookkeepers to efficiently record, categorise, and analyse expenditure, ensuring accurate financial records and simplifying reimbursements.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Keeping on top of out of hand expenses can rely on a number of systems from paper sheets and Excel documents to emails and a bag of receipts. This can create challenges around timeliness and completeness, as well as more manual tasks.

## The Problems it Solves

- **Control for clients:** Providing an easier way of staying on top of what is owed to employees and remaining in control of business expenditure in general
- **Less manual data entry:** Reducing the time spent each month on collation
- **More engaged employees:** Greater chance of timely and more complete submissions

## The Future

For some self-employed clients expense management tools could be a useful introduction into what they may need to consider around MTD ITSA. For other clients, helping them to streamline employee expenses could have a positive impact on staff, especially where virtual or physical cards can be issued and there is none of their own cash to be reimbursed.

## How it Works

- **Receipt Capture and Storage:** Easily captures and stores receipts digitally, reducing paper and risk of loss.
- **Data Entry Automation:** Automatically imports and categorises expenses from linked accounts.
- **Expense Categorisation:** Intelligently categorises expenses based on predefined rules.
- **Approval Workflows:** Streamlines expense approval with customisable workflows.
- **Reporting and Analytics:** Generates detailed expense reports and provides insights into spending patterns.
- **Virtual/Physical payment cards:** Some may include cards for employee use that draw from a separate 'account' or pre-charged wallet.

## Pros

- **Reduced end of month admin:** Time-saving automation and good integrations with bookkeeping software
- **Streamlined reporting and reimbursement:** For payroll or entry into accounts
- **Enhanced visibility into spending:** Helping clients to understand their expenditure

## Cons

- **Teaching clients how to use effectively:** Still relies on human users to use the tools effectively.
- **Unwanted functionality:** Ensure the product fits the intended use.

## Directory

- Expend
- Expensify
- Pleo
- Soldo

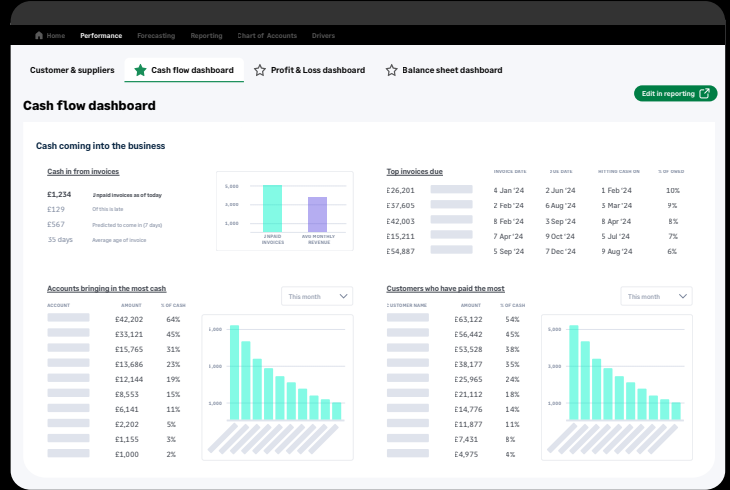


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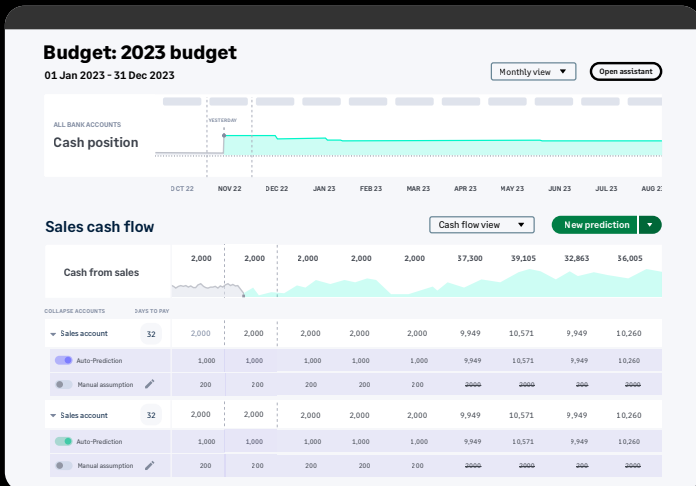
Make use of instant cash flow forecasts.

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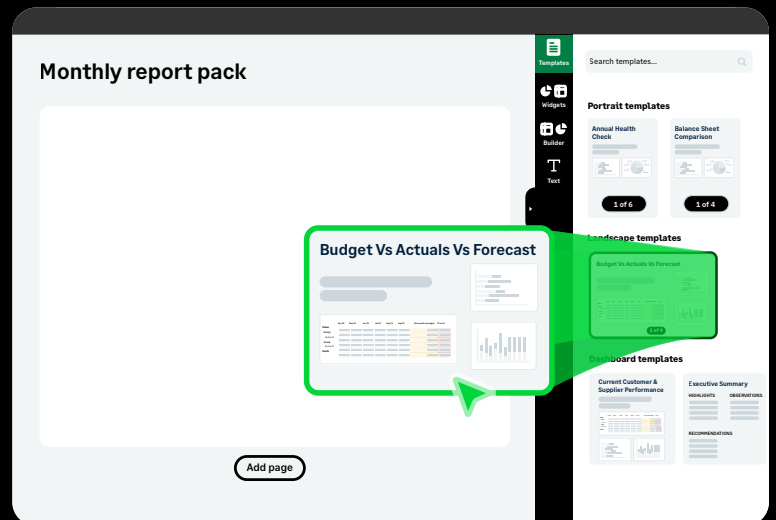
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Make budgets in 3 ways; either manually, duplicated from last year, or predicted based on your forecasts.



# Templated and Scheduled Reporting

Accelerate the creation and delivery of your reports with automated reporting and a choice of over 60 templates.



## Overview

Bookkeeping software is the staple of the profession, and at the cornerstone of the movement away from paper-based bookkeeping or Excel.

Given the maturity of some products that have been in the market for a considerable time, clients have come to rely on them or have created their own integrations which embed them into their business operations. "Users have the option of choosing bookkeeping software that covers the majority of their needs in one, or to build out functionality through integrations."

Cloud technology has proved that working through a browser on any device connected to the internet can provide significant advantages around working flexibly, benefit from continuous development, integrations with other software, and subscription pricing rather than one off purchase or licence.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Finding the right bookkeeping software is as much around personal preference as it is functionality. In reality, most of this category of software works in much the same way, however differences are important to note. For example, the type of reporting possible, what other software integrates with it, and who they perceive their target user to be.

The challenge also exists around getting clients to use it (properly) or move to your preferred provider. Some will willingly do as their bookkeeper commands and others may be more reluctant to change. This may mean becoming proficient in a number of different bookkeeping solutions.

## The Problems it Solves

As the heart of what a bookkeeper does, and as a repository of the core data that most accounting and tax processes rely on, the primary problem solved is how to collate, organise, categorise and report on the transactions in and out of the business.

However, different solutions may need to be considered depending on the nature and activity of the client. Charities, groups, franchises, very small sole traders, or complex manufacturing clients are all examples where careful consideration may be required. Each provider has strengths and weaknesses that may need to be understood in order to provide the best outcome for you and your clients.

**Lara says** "The best system is one that meets your and your clients' needs. Offering to work with many systems can be a drain on you personally as it requires staying on top of all the updates and latest developments."



## The Future

While this is a very mature area when it comes to software, it is also an area where innovation continues at pace. AI has been heralded by a number of large providers as being core to their strategy over the next few years, while tighter integration with payments and payroll is also likely to be a priority.

## How it Works

As standard most will include:

- **Sales invoicing:** Ability to create and send invoices
- **Business expenditure:** managing incoming invoices from suppliers
- **Bank feeds:** Accept feeds from major banks to facilitate reconciliation
- **Reporting:** Generate standard reports e.g. Profit and loss statements
- **VAT reporting and filing:** Calculations and submissions under MTD VAT.
- **Integrations:** Facilitating the passing of data to or from other useful software such as Data Capture and Reporting Tools.

## Pros


- **Choice exists:** A range of software exists and choice can be important to enable the right fit for you and your clients.
- **Maturity of products:** Even cloud options have existed for over 15 years, so the processes and functionality are well understood and developed.
- **Willingness to foster integrations:** All major providers have an integration strategy.

## Cons

- **Cost:** Annual cost increases are now normal. Getting a good deal in place is essential.
- **Integration Challenges:** Some providers may choose to have a tighter integration plan than others. It is wise to check if you need a specific integration to be in place.

## Directory


AccountsIQ

FreeAgent  
ICB accredited 

Intuit QuickBooks

Iplicit

Sage  
ICB accredited 

Xero  
ICB accredited 

Xledger

## Overview

Data capture is the process of collecting and recording financial information from various sources, such as receipts, invoices, and bank statements. For bookkeepers, accurate data capture is crucial to maintaining up-to-date records and reducing the amount of manual data entry most welcome.

Many tools have been developed to help in this process, often relying on Optical Character Recognition (OCR) backed up by manual checks. Being able to scan paper, or receive emails and attachments directly from suppliers has enhanced the overall efficiency of this essential process of capturing, extracting, categorising and publishing data.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Bookkeepers often face the challenge of dealing with large amounts of paperwork and digital records which need to be accurately captured and recorded in accounting systems. While bookkeepers are trained and highly skilled to do this, the actual physical process of manual data entry adds no specific value in itself. Data capture tools can provide a more automatic way of speeding up the process and provide a 'safe' way for clients to still participate and play a role in the collation of data.

## The Problems it Solves

1. **Error Prevention:** By implementing effective data capture methods, bookkeepers can reduce the chances of mistakes.
2. **Time Management:** Automated data capture tools can save time by streamlining the process, allowing bookkeepers to focus on reviewing and analysing the data itself.
3. **Creating capacity:** spending less time on manual data entry can increase the capacity to either take more on, or increase the value of existing work.

## How it Works

Data capture can be performed in several ways, depending on the tools and systems in place:

- **Scanning and OCR:** Documents are scanned, and OCR technology extracts the relevant data for publication into a bookkeeping system.
- **Mobile Apps:** Mobile apps can capture data on the go by taking photos of receipts or invoices, which are then automatically processed and categorised.
- **Integration with bookkeeper software:** Verify and processing the data in data capture tools then allows for easier publishing and reconciliation within the ledger.

## Pros

- **Increased Efficiency:** Automating data capture reduces manual entry, saving time.
- **Rules and automation:** Ability to create rules that recognise and treat invoices automatically helps to minimise repetitive tasks.
- **Speed up the process:** By removing the total reliance on clients to send in paperwork.

## Cons

- **Costs:** Ensure the cost structure suits your requirements and that you are not overpaying for features or volumes that are not required.
- **Accuracy:** Using data capture tools can increase accuracy but safeguards should be in place to ensure that what is being published is correct as per the scanned document and that the transactions themselves are valid.

**Lara says** “You want a system that works at the speed that you do, and you don’t want to be keying in information if you don’t need to. These tools take away most of the data entry and you can focus on the checking things like VAT, tracking codes or departments.”




## The Future

The future of data capture is likely to involve greater use of artificial intelligence and machine learning, further reducing errors and improving the speed of financial data processing. OCR is already starting to be replaced by more sophisticated AI algorithms. It is hoped that this will in turn also help to reduce costs.

## Directory

**Apron**   
ICB accredited

**Autoentry**  
**Datamolino**

**Dext**   
ICB accredited

**Hubdoc**  
**Lightyear**



## Overview

Data quality tools help to ensure the accuracy, completeness, reliability, and relevance of data that bookkeepers and their clients rely on. Using software to check through and monitor records in the most common bookkeeping software helps reduce the time in spotting anomalies and boost confidence in the figures reported. Several of the softwares allocate points of accuracy – offering the additional benefit of measuring your own progress and benchmarking your team.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Bookkeepers often face the challenge of managing large volumes of financial data from various sources and clients. This data can be inconsistent, incomplete, or contain errors, especially if clients are also submitting their own data, or there are issues with what the supplier has submitted. These issues can lead to inaccurate records, be time consuming to resolve, and at worst pass unnoticed.

## The Problems it Solves

1. **Error Reduction:** Ensuring data quality minimises the risk of errors and reduces the time spent on corrections.
2. **Completeness:** High-quality data supports compliance, and means better reporting.
3. **Efficiency:** Consistent and accurate data makes bookkeeping tasks smoother and faster

## The Future

As bookkeeping increasingly becomes digital, the importance of data quality will only grow. Automated systems will handle more data, but the need for accurate, reliable information will remain critical. Just because something is digital it doesn't automatically mean it is more correct. Data quality tools can help create both a safety net, and a way of having the confidence to take on more work.

## How it Works

- **Works with your cloud tools:** Scanning client records from all the major bookkeeping software providers
- **Data Validation:** Checking data for accuracy and completeness
- **Regular Audits:** Reviewing data to identify inconsistencies or errors.

## Pros


- **Increased Accuracy:** Reduces the likelihood of time-consuming checks and reviews
- **Time Savings:** Focus time on the exceptions and queries only.
- **Increased confidence:** A check and balance that can underline the overall quality of the client record.


## Cons


- **Initial Time Investment:** Setting up systems to ensure data quality can be time-consuming.
- **Potential Costs:** It is worth ensuring that the charging structure fits your needs and/or can be bought as a standalone tool if this is what you require.

## Directory

**Armalytix**  
ICB accredited 

**Xbert**  
ICB accredited 

**Dext Precision**  
ICB accredited 

**Xenon Connect**  
ICB accredited 



## Overview

Ecommerce tools for bookkeepers are designed to simplify the complexities of managing financial data for clients who operate online stores or sell through online marketplaces. These tools may automate various aspects of bookkeeping, including sales tracking, inventory management, and financial reporting, specifically for ecommerce businesses.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Bookkeepers with ecommerce clients face unique challenges due to the high volume of transactions, the complex nature of working with multiple sales channels, and the need to reconcile data from each one. Manually managing this data can be time-consuming and complex.

## The Problems it Solves

- **Automation:** Automating data entry and reconciliation from various ecommerce platforms and payment gateways.
- **Integration:** Seamlessly integrating with popular ecommerce platforms (Shopify, WooCommerce, etc.) and accounting software.
- **Accuracy:** Reducing errors through automated data synchronisation and calculations.
- **Efficiency:** Streamlining sales tracking, inventory valuation, and financial reporting.
- **Compliance:** Monitoring and assisting with VAT reporting.

## The Future

As ecommerce continues to grow, these tools are likely to become even more sophisticated. We can expect to see advancements in AI-powered data analysis, fraud detection, and predictive insights, further enhancing the efficiency and value of ecommerce bookkeeping tools.

## How it Works

- **Sales Tracking:** Recording sales data from multiple channels (online stores, marketplaces, etc.).
- **Inventory Management:** Tracking stock levels, cost of goods sold (COGS), and inventory valuation.
- **Financial Reporting:** Generating ecommerce-specific reports (sales reports, profit margins, etc.).
- **Tax Calculation:** Data for VAT calculations
- **Integration:** Connecting with ecommerce platforms, payment gateways, and syncing with accounting software.

## Pros

- Time-saving automation
- Reducing the complexity of getting hold of data from different sources
- Streamlined ecommerce bookkeeping processes
- Better insights into client's ecommerce performance

## Cons

- Potential integration complexities
- Can be complicated to use
- Set-up time and robust testing must be factored in

## Directory

A2X

Dext Commerce

Link My Books

Synder

## Overview

Security in bookkeeping is essential to both you and your clients in order to protect sensitive financial data from unauthorised access, fraud, and cyber threats. Bookkeepers handle confidential information like financial transactions, payroll, and client details, making them gatekeepers of some of the most important information in a business, but also a target for criminals.

## Challenge for Bookkeepers

Bookkeepers face increasing threats from criminals, particularly cybercriminals who target financial data for theft or fraud. The challenge lies in safeguarding this data while maintaining accurate and efficient bookkeeping processes. With the rise in the use of digital systems, the need for heightened security measures and software has never been more critical.

## The Problems it Solves

- **Data Breaches:** Protects against unauthorised access to sensitive financial data.
- **Fraud Prevention:** Helps detect and prevent fraudulent activities.
- **Compliance:** Ensures adherence to legal regulations, such as GDPR in the UK.
- **Client Trust:** Builds confidence with clients by securing their financial information.

## How it Works

Security tools are not often sold as a complete and comprehensive solution, and you may need to consider a variety of different tools in order to cover all your needs. This might include tools such **Password controllers** which help to limit the access to client and internal software, and **Two (TFA) or Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)** Adds an extra layer of security by requiring multiple forms of verification.

But it might also include the ability to make **Regular Backups**, which can help prevent data loss due to system failures or attacks.

## Pros

- **Increased Client Trust:** Secure systems enhance reputation and client confidence.
- **Reduced Risk:** Lower risk of data breaches, fraud, and financial losses.
- **Compliance:** Ensures legal and regulatory compliance, avoiding fines and penalties.
- **Minimise data loss:** Making very regular or automating backups can mean you getting back up and running quickly in the event of disaster or malicious attack

## Cons

- **Cost:** Implementing and maintaining security is an overhead that you hope never to need, but can be viewed as an essential for all businesses.
- **Complexity:** Can add a layer of complexity to everyday processes such as logging in to software.
- **Ongoing checks:** Requires regular updates, training and vigilance to stay effective.

**Lara says** “From a business continuity perspective having a secure place for all your passwords that can be accessed in an emergency, is an added advantage to the security offered by password managers.”



## The Future

As criminal and cyber threats evolve, the future of security for bookkeeping will likely involve more advanced technologies such as AI-driven threat detection. Continuous education and adaptation will be crucial for bookkeepers to stay ahead of potential risks. Investing in security tools and training will not only protect the firm today but also prepares bookkeepers for the challenges of tomorrow.

## Directory

**1Password**

**LastPass**


**Malwarebytes**

# Software Directory





## AML

Firmcheck  
Smartsearch  
Thirdfort  
Veriphy  
Xama



## Banking

Metro  
**Mettle**  
ICB accredited   
Monzo  
Starling  
Tide  
Zempler  
(formerly Cashplus)

## Bookkeeping

AccountslQ  
**FreeAgent**  
ICB accredited   
**Intuit**  
ICB accredited   
IplcIt  
**Sage**  
ICB accredited   
**Xero**  
ICB accredited   
Xledger

## Data Capture

**Apron**  
ICB accredited   
Autoentry  
Datamolino  
**Dext**  
ICB accredited   
Hubdoc  
Lightyear

## Data Quality

**Armalytix**  
ICB accredited   
**Approval Max**  
ICB accredited   
**Dext Precision**  
ICB accredited   
**Xbert**  
ICB accredited   
**Xenon Connect**  
ICB accredited 

## Ecommerce

A2X  
Dext Commerce  
Link My Books  
Synder



## Expense Management

Expend  
Expensify  
Pleo  
Soldo


## Marketing & Communications

Client Window  
Mailchimp



## Payroll

**Buddy**  
ICB accredited   
**BrightPay**  
ICB accredited   
FreeAgent Payroll  
FreshPay  
Intuit Quickbooks Payroll  
Moneysoft  
Sage Payroll  
Staffology  
Xero Payroll

## Payments

Airwallex  
**Apron**  
ICB accredited   
Crezco  
Modulr  
Stripe  
Telleroo



## Practice Management

**BrightManager**  
ICB accredited   
Capium  
Client Engager  
Intuit QuickBooks Practice Manager  
**IRIS Elements**  
ICB accredited   
Karbon  
Sage for Accountants Client Management  
Uku  
Xero XPM

## Proposals and Onboarding

Bright Propose  
Cone  
GoProposal  
Ignition





## Reporting Tools

Fathom  
**Futrli**  
ICB accredited   
Jooin  
**Pulse**  
ICB accredited   
Spotlight  
Syft

## Security

1Password  
LastPass  
Malwarebytes

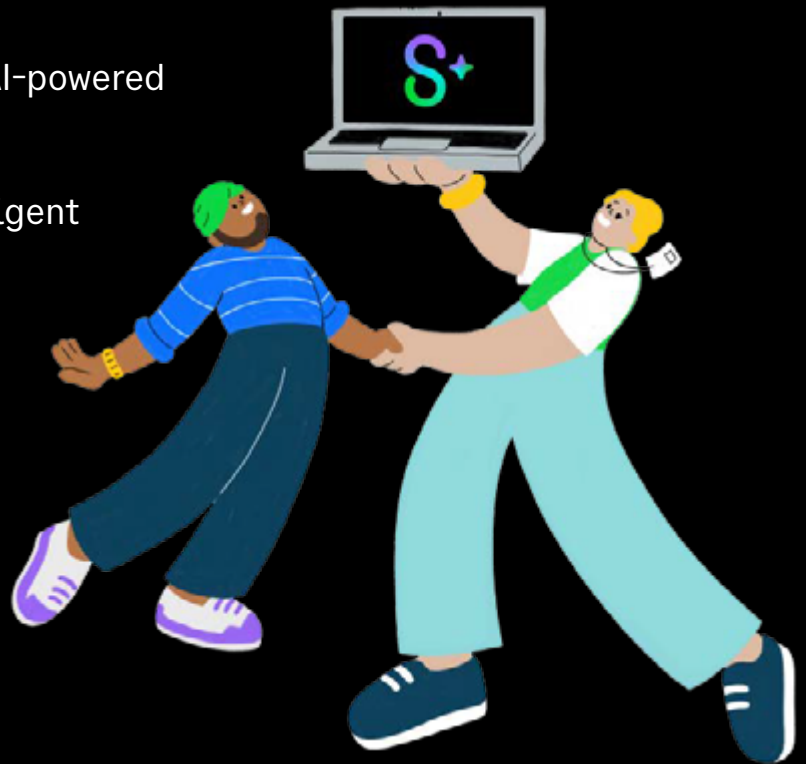
## Tax & Accounts Filing

BTC  
FreeAgent Final Accounts  
**IRIS Elements tax**  
ICB accredited   
**Sage Final Accounts**  
ICB accredited   
**TaxCalc**  
ICB accredited   
**Xero Tax**  
ICB accredited 

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## About ICB

ICB is the only UK professional body that is dedicated to bookkeepers and the bookkeeping community. We are here to certify, supervise, support and connect bookkeepers and provide a trusted benchmark for the profession.

Membership comprises over 15,000 active members, students and apprentices as well as more than 3500 practices. ICB members are renowned for their high professional standards, social influence and supportive network. They're passionate, outspoken and have a voracious appetite for new technology.

Find out more [www.bookkeepers.org.uk](http://www.bookkeepers.org.uk)