

It's Amazing What CPAs Can Do

Using Technology to Spread a Passion for Learning

Jack Fingerhut, CPA

I grew up in New Jersey as a typical kid who played sports, followed the local teams, and watched comedy on TV at night while doing my homework. The thought of one day becoming a CPA never entered my mind until much later in life.

After graduating from high school, I attended the University of Maryland at College Park, majoring in history. I realized, however, that it would be very difficult to secure a job after graduating with a history major, so I decided that studying accounting instead would lead to a much better and more secure future. I then applied and was admitted to the Rutgers MBA program, where I studied accounting.

While attending Rutgers, I interned at KPMG in New Jersey. On one of my first days there, I was told to go to a client's warehouse to look for the audit senior and help in an inventory observation assignment, among other things. Though I was nervous, I found that the people I worked with were kind and knowledgeable, and my first hands-on experience was a definite success.

Upon graduating from Rutgers, I went to work full-time at KPMG in New Jersey and worked on the Hoffman-La Roche pharmaceutical company account. I stayed at KPMG for three years, rising to senior auditor, and earned my CPA license.

After leaving KPMG, I went to work as an internal auditor at the RCA Corporation, where I eventually became RCA's international auditor, and then assistant controller. After about three years at RCA, I started to miss my days in public accounting and went to work at BDO in New York. It was there that I discovered my true love and calling, continuing professional education. Working as a manager in the CPE department and as a line auditor, I was just in time to catch the advent of the home video market. Not only did this new technology seem to be the perfect tool for training, but it could also be used to help accountants meet yearly CPE requirements.

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So in 1981, I left BDO to pioneer the use of video in the accounting profession and cofounded the firm that is today known as SmartPros. (Our first video was on inventory observation, just like my first assignment as an intern at KPMG.) In the late '80s, we introduced our flagship product—the Financial Management Network (FMN), which provides monthly news (and CPE) to accountants on hot topics in the profession and is still used today. While technology has changed greatly over the years—moving from VHS/Beta tape to DVD to streaming video—the constant has been my passion for learning and education and finding new ways to enhance a student's learning experience.

When it comes to learning, Benjamin Franklin said it well: “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” For the last 35 years, I've kept that maxim close to my heart, using it to drive everything we do at SmartPros. Education wasn't the career I imagined for myself when I was 18, but then, neither was becoming a CPA.

Jack Fingerhut, CPA is the executive director of SmartPros (A Kaplan Company).

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