

# NAPEO TRUSTED ADVISORS IDI STUDY

Key Findings from Nationwide In-Depth Interviews with Business Decision  
Makers' Trusted Advisors

DECEMBER 2022

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# About this Study

NAPEO commissioned Povaddo to conduct a qualitative research study consisting of 24 in-depth interviews with trusted advisors to understand attitudes toward PEOs, assess reactions to information and messages about PEOs, and explore decisions regarding recommending PEOs to business decision makers (BDMs) among trusted advisors across four segments.

## Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to understand general attitudes toward PEOs among trusted advisors, assess reactions to information and messages about PEOs, and explore the facilitators and barriers when it comes to recommending a PEO to their BDM clients.

### Key objectives for this project:

- To determine participants' awareness and familiarity of PEOs as well as their general attitudes toward them
- To assess whether participants (1) who are familiar with PEOs currently discuss them with their small business owner clients or (2) who are unfamiliar with PEOs would be open to discussing PEOs with their small business owner clients in the future
- To assess reactions to information and messages about PEOs
- To explore what qualities/aspects of a PEO stand out to participants as helpful or potentially helpful to their small business owner clients and to themselves as attorneys, Bankers, CPAs, and Business Consultants
- To uncover what information is still needed or most pertinent for participants in these segments to build openness to discuss PEO use with their small business owner clients
- To uncover the most important pieces of information that participants would need in order to make a recommendation

## Methodology

The key findings outlined in this report are drawn from 24 in-depth interviews conducted with trusted advisors: Attorneys, Bankers, Accountants (CPAs), and Business Consultants nationwide. The study was conducted November 3rd – December 2nd, 2022. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes in length.

### Participants

Participants, n=24 (13 males; 11 females), who specialize in working mostly (50% or more) with small to mid-size business decision makers (10-150 employees) with the following breakdown by industry:

| Industry                  | Age (Range)                       | Race   | Gender        | Location               |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---------------|------------------------|
| Attorney (n=6)            | 25-39 (2), 40-54 (2)<br>55-70 (2) | Asian: 1, Native American: 1, White: 4                     | M: 4,<br>F: 2 | CA, CT, GA, IL (2), MO |
| Banker (n=6)              | 25-39 (2), 40-54 (3)<br>55-70 (1) | Asian: 1, Black/African American: 2,<br>White: 3           | M: 3,<br>F: 3 | AZ, IL, MA, NC, TX, WA |
| Accountant (n=6)          | 25-39 (2), 40-54 (2)<br>55-70 (2) | Hispanic/Latinx: 2, White: 4                               | M: 2,<br>F: 4 | IL (2), MO, NY, OH, PA |
| Business Consultant (n=6) | 25-39 (1), 40-55 (3)<br>55-70 (2) | Black/African American: 1, Native<br>American: 1, White: 4 | M: 4,<br>F: 2 | CA, FL, IL, ME, TX, VA |

## About this Study (continued)

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### **Materials and Testing**

*- Each interview followed this format:*

- Participants were oriented to the discussion of professional service firms and specifically Professional Employer Organizations, at which point participants' overall knowledge of PEOs and general attitudes towards PEOs were explored.
- Then the PEO Industry Statement and five (5) top-rated messages from recent qualitative research were presented one by one and discussed.
- Following presentation of the statement and materials, a discussion of the facilitators and barriers to discussing and/or recommending a PEO to BDM clients, including exploring if further information was needed, took place.
- Finally, participants were asked what qualities or offerings of PEOs stood out as most helpful to their clients and to themselves in their work, followed by a discussion of their attitudes toward and/or perceptions of PEOs after reviewing the statement and messages.

*Note: In-depth interview findings are qualitative in nature and not generalizable to the broader population; statistical significance does not apply to this type of research.*

# Executive Summary

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- 1. Knowledge of PEOs is closely tied to positive perceptions, with most participants who are familiar with PEOs holding positive attitudes toward them and those with little or no knowledge of them remaining neutral.** Business Consultants are most familiar with and hold the most positive attitudes toward PEOs, followed by Bankers, then Accountants, and finally Lawyers. Two Business Consultants and one Banker who are “very familiar” with PEOs do currently recommend them to their clients.
- 2. Aligning closely with PEOs’ offerings, accounting, legal, and human resource services emerge as the presumed most beneficial professional services to outsource for BDMs.** Further, trusted advisors reveal - *before discussing PEOs specifically* - that the professional services they most typically recommend to their clients are accounting, legal, and HR consulting.
- 3. The PEO Industry Statement garners positive reactions from nearly all trusted advisors, and all say this statement would make them research or further investigate PEOs on behalf of their clients.** The benefits the PEO Industry Statement features generate favorable reactions due to their presumed relevancy in addressing pain points of trusted advisors’ BDM clients.
- 4. The five messages receive mostly positive reactions among trusted advisors with Messages 1 and 5 garnering the most positive feedback and Messages 3 and 4 receiving the most neutral to negative feedback.** Overall, participants praise the messages for their relevancy, composition, and information; meanwhile, suggestions for improvement include adding more details or examples, focusing on the positive, and including citations to statistics. Furthermore, to make the messages more inclusive, changing the terms “small business owners” to “small to midsize businesses/business owners” emerges as a suggestion.
- 5. The notion of retaining and taking care of employees, highlighted in the Industry Statement and Message 2, garners favorable reactions from trusted advisors.** The importance of retaining employees, providing good benefit packages, and taking care of employees are considered very relevant to trusted advisors’ BDM clients, some of whom are struggling to find and retain top talent in the current job market.
- 6. Two key factors surface as facilitators to trusted advisors’ willingness to recommend PEOs to their clients: (1) learning about the benefits of PEOs for their clients and (2) the potential positive effect of good and valuable referrals on the trusted advisor/client relationships.** Learning more information about PEOs’ offerings and how they address common pain points of BDMs leads trusted advisors to believe that PEOs would be helpful for their clients, and the positive effect of good referrals on the business relationships of trusted advisors and their clients emerges as a secondary facilitator to recommending PEOs. Helping their clients solve problems so their clients can focus on the growth of their business is beneficial to trusted advisors, who often also benefit from that growth.
- 7. Two primary barriers emerge when it comes to trusted advisors recommending PEOs to their clients: (1) a lack of knowledge about the industry, including specific details about PEOs and their offerings and (2) a need for trusted relationships with individuals at PEOs.** Some trusted advisors feel comfortable discussing PEOs with their clients with cursory information; however, in order to truly recommend a PEO, most say they would need more information (e.g., general price breakdowns, cost savings functions, and a better understanding of PEOs overall and how they function), and all say they would need to have a personal relationship with a point of contact at a PEO.

## Executive Summary (continued)

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- 8. All trusted advisors are open to the idea of discussing the services of a PEO with their clients, assuming the services offered are a good fit for their clients' needs.** While all participants say they would discuss the benefits of PEOs in conversations with their clients, a few offer the caveat that they would do so only if their clients expressed a specific need that would be addressed by a PEO, and a few also say their discussion might depend on the size of their client's business and cost of a PEO, as they would not want to recommend something that was irrelevant to their client.
- 9. Forming a referral partnership with a PEO piques almost all trusted advisors' interest, but a high level of importance is placed upon building a trusted relationship first.** Most participants say emphatically, "Yes" they would be interested in forming a referral partnership with a PEO, and a few already have such partnerships in place; however, trusted advisors across industries say they do not make recommendations lightly, and if they were to recommend a PEO to a client, there would need to be a great deal of trust in that PEO relationship.
- 10. Networking is a clear winner when it comes to building relationships with trusted advisors; in fact, current knowledge of PEOs has been built mostly through networking according to participants already familiar with PEOs.** Networking, LinkedIn, and hosting educational events relevant to their industry are the most suggested ways to approach and build relationships with trusted advisors. Specifically, participants consider being involved in networking events is the ideal way for PEOs to introduce themselves to and build relationships with trusted advisors.
- 11. The materials and discussion of PEOs move the needle when it comes to trusted advisors' perceptions of PEOs, as all participants' opinions of PEOs either remain positive or become more positive at the conclusion of the interviews.** Overall, trusted advisors' reactions to PEOs at the end of the discussion are overwhelmingly positive, including participants who were unaware of or who had little knowledge of PEOs at the beginning of the discussion, which is due largely in part to learning more about PEOs through the materials.

# Strategic Considerations

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- 1. Pursue building relationships with trusted advisors, most of whom say they are open to building referral partnerships with PEOs.** Across segments, almost all participants say they are interested in having a referral partnership with a PEO, while a few say they already have a partnership in place. Thus, Business Consultants, Bankers, Accountants, and Lawyers who work mostly with small businesses are valuable advisors to build referral partnerships with for PEOs.
- 2. To build referral partnerships with trusted advisors, focus on building relationships and providing information around the benefits of PEOs to BDMs as well as to trusted advisors.** Take time to build relationships with trusted advisors based on trust and information, especially highlighting the benefits of PEOs to BDMs as well as the secondary benefits to trusted advisors themselves.
- 3. Prioritize informing and building relationships with trusted advisors through networking events, LinkedIn, and continuing education events.** trusted advisors who are actively recommending PEOs to their clients formed their initial PEO referral relationship through business networking. Consider using LinkedIn and continuing education events to make initial introductions of PEOs to trusted advisors and focus on building relationships during and after events.
- 4. To clarify PEOs' clientele and improve inclusivity, add the adjective "medium-size" or "midsize" (e.g., "small to mid-size businesses") when describing businesses or business owners in the messages.** Previous research among SBMDs shows that the term "small business" is relative with some medium to larger small business owners believing the term does not accurately describe how they view their businesses' sizes; mirroring that finding, a few trusted advisors in this study believe the term is too exclusive and recommend adding "medium-size" or "midsize" to improve its inclusivity in order to reach a broader audience in messaging.
- 5. In messages targeting trusted advisors, focus on the benefits of PEOs, remain positive, and include citations and examples.** While trusted advisors respond positively to the messages overall, this educated audience would require more detailed information and concrete sources (e.g., citations or footnotes to support statistics) before they would consider recommending PEOs to their clients.

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## Participant Knowledge of Professional Service Firms and PEOs

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- ▶ **All participants see themselves as trusted advisors or in a consulting role when it comes to their BDM clients and agree that professional services are beneficial to their clients and sometimes to themselves.**
  - **“Advisor” is a role all participants agree they fulfill when it comes to their BDM clients.**
    - Business Consultants, Bankers, Accountants, and Lawyers agree they operate in a consulting or advising capacity with their clients and often advise BDM clients on issues outside of their specialties.
  - **Accounting, legal, and HR outsourcing are perceived by participants across segments to be the most beneficial to their BDM clients’ success.**
    - Accountants (including CPAs, payroll services, and tax consultants), attorneys, and HR consulting (including hiring and recruiting help, HR experts, insurance experts, and risk management experts) are top of mind across the industry when it comes to professional services that participants currently recommend or think would benefit their BDM clients.
      - › IT consultants, banking referrals (specifically made by accountants), and financial advisors are other services participants recommend to their clients, although less often.
        - » One Business Consultant says examples of professional service offerings that are beneficial to their clients include “everything that is a non-core business activity.”
    - Most participants say their clients’ success and thriving businesses are what brings them the most benefit when it comes to recommending professional service firms.
      - › While most agree they do not directly benefit from their clients’ use of professional service firms, outsourcing of payroll and accounting are perceived to hold the most benefit for participants in their roles advising BDMs, followed by financial advisors and tax and risk management experts.
        - » Interestingly, several Accountants share that they “hate” payroll and do not want to do it themselves. One says that if her clients ask for this service, she often outsources it.
        - » One Banker prioritizes accurate accounts, sometimes with the help of an accountant, saying when it comes to his job it is “garbage in, garbage out.”
        - » Additionally, a Lawyer who is unfamiliar with PEOs suggests that it would be helpful if her clients used professional service firms who understood their businesses’ legal needs.

## Participant Knowledge of Professional Service Firms and PEOs (continued)

### ***In their words...***

*"Well, it is definitely helpful if other professionals understand what is important for lawyers and work within that framework. That's definitely helpful." – Lawyer*

*"IT, tech, accounting, I mean someone that could keep their books in order, that kind of thing. Those are the main ones. Maybe sometimes someone that's an expert in something specific that they need, like HR." – Lawyer*

*"Mostly to other lawyers or real estate agents or accountants that I know." – Lawyer*

*"Accountants, a tax person, a payroll service, we definitely recommend those." – Accountant*

*"I do source out the payroll because it's very tedious and time consuming, so I prefer not to do it. I do source that out to QuickBooks payroll because they have amazing systems." – Accountant*

*"We do refer people out to legal firms, sometimes there's financial advising, so we will send people out to financial advisors to get more expertise. One other would be payroll. And we, of course, don't handle any kind of insurance or anything, but we do get questions about life insurance and investments, and we'll refer those out." – Accountant*

*"I cannot provide them with actual accounting advice, so in that case I would actually recommend that you consult with an accountant for that or with an attorney if they ask about how long should I keep my documents, for example." – Business Consultant*

*"Well, I look at everything that's a non-core activity of their business, like is the HR in house or do you outsource those activities and your IT?" – Business Consultant*

*"I think it's more - it'll make my clients' lives easier. Not 100% mine, but that's what is important." – Business Consultant*

*"If I'm looking at a business, it's very much sort of looking at where are the complementary skills that I can bring in on a project. I can pull in amazing experts." – Business Consultant*

*"I have suggested outsourcing payroll operations, accountants, and the hiring so they'll hire a company, professional service, to try to help them recruit and fill positions." – Banker*

*"When they hire outside accountants to prepare their financial statements, I mean that's probably the biggest and most helpful thing to the bank because we all have this phrase 'garbage in, garbage out.' So, the better quality of financial information they can provide to the bank is more helpful for our analysis, but ultimately just gives them a better insight into their business and operations and knowing what's actually going on." – Banker*

## Participant Knowledge of Professional Service Firms and PEOs (continued)

- ▶ **Knowledge of PEOs goes hand-in-hand with positive perceptions, as most participants who are familiar with PEOs hold positive attitudes toward them, and those with little or no knowledge of them remain neutral.**

| Knowledge of PEOs    |               |                   |                     |              |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|
|                      | Very Familiar | Somewhat Familiar | Only Knows the Name | Not Familiar |
| Business Consultants | 2             | 3                 | 1                   | 0            |
| Lawyers              | 0             | 3                 | 0                   | 3            |
| Accountants          | 1             | 1                 | 2                   | 2            |
| Bankers              | 1             | 1                 | 3                   | 1            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>4</b>      | <b>8</b>          | <b>6</b>            | <b>6</b>     |

Half say they are very to somewhat familiar while half only know the name or are not familiar with PEOs.

Trusted advisors learn about PEOs through networking.

| Attitudes About PEOs |                 |           |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
|                      | Mostly Positive | Neutral   | Mostly Negative |
| Business Consultants | 6               | 0         | 0               |
| Lawyers              | 2               | 4         | 0               |
| Accountants          | 2               | 4         | 0               |
| Bankers              | 4               | 2         | 0               |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>14</b>       | <b>10</b> | <b>0</b>        |

Familiarity of PEOs correlates to favorable attitudes of them, while unfamiliarity does not lead to negative attitudes of them.

- **Business Consultants are most familiar with and hold the most positive attitudes toward PEOs, followed by Bankers, then Accountants and Lawyers.**

- Business Consultants

- › Business Consultants interviewed are all familiar with PEOs to varying degrees, with one-half being somewhat familiar, one-third being very familiar, and one-in-six reporting they only know the name.
  - » This awareness correlates with positive attitudes toward PEOs as all say their attitudes are mostly favorable.
    - ◇ One says it is “a net positive, if it is the right fit,” for their client’s company, and some describe PEOs as an “excellent resource” for BDMS.

- Bankers

- › One-third of Bankers are somewhat to very familiar with PEOs while half say they only know the name and one-in-six say they are not familiar at all.
  - » Despite reporting lesser overall knowledge of PEOs, two-thirds of Bankers say they have positive attitudes toward PEOs while the remaining one-third hold neutral attitudes.
    - ◇ One Banker says she thinks of PEOs positively because they function in parallel to banking and therefore don’t threaten her job.
  - » Bankers describe PEOs as “specialized,” a “value-add,” “beneficial,” and an “asset.”

## Participant Knowledge of Professional Service Firms and PEOs (continued)

- Accountants
  - › Two-thirds of Accountants hold some familiarity of PEOs while one-third are not familiar with the industry.
    - » One-third of Accountants report positive attitudes toward PEOs while two-thirds say their attitudes about PEOs are neutral.
- Lawyers
  - › When it comes to knowledge of PEOs, Lawyers are split with half saying they are somewhat familiar and half saying they are not familiar with PEOs.
    - » Of those who say they are somewhat familiar, two-thirds have positive attitudes about PEOs while one is neutral.
- **Those who have knowledge of PEOs say it was mostly built through networking.**
  - Networking events with entrepreneurs or business professionals, often those that feature guest speakers from similar industries, are where most Business Consultants and Bankers who are familiar with PEOs first learned about the industry.
    - › Business Consultants, who are most familiar with PEOs, report learning about PEOs through discussions with other entrepreneurs and in entrepreneurial and general business networking groups.
      - » One Banker who is very familiar with PEOs and currently recommends them to his clients says he learned about PEOs from contacts in different networking groups and events, after which someone reached out to him and they formed a mutually beneficial referral partnership.
  - Additionally, a few participants say their knowledge of PEOs was gained from their own clients who use or are considering using a PEO.
  - One Banker says she first heard of PEOs in a job training while a Lawyer says she learned about PEOs in a CLE (Continuing Legal Education) seminar.

### ***In their words...***

*"Absolutely, I know PEOs. I'm playing golf today with somebody from a PEO. Yeah, so I might be playing nine holes with him. He reached out to me - that's a guy, one guy I try to refer in and he tries to refer me to people so that's great."* - Banker

*"Yeah, it was pretty positive; the ones I've known are pretty sharp and the people that go to them tend to like it and they are at least open minded to talk to them and think about how they might save money and provide benefit. Yeah, it's positive."* - Banker

*"I've just heard of them through word of mouth, but I would say positive. Any kind of company that specialized in what they do can just be a value-add and be a helpful asset to a small business."* - Banker

*"If I'm thinking about them in the right context in terms of basically an organization that provides outsourced expertise to supplement an organization's existing team and skill set, I'm very favorably inclined to that because I see a lot of that happening in a different context within the organizations that I represent."* - Business Consultant

*"I'm very familiar. I've in fact helped a client get set up with a PEO, and I've done that on several occasions. There are times when I look at a business and I'm like, you should get this off your plate - that is the right answer."*  
- Business Consultant

## Participant Knowledge of Professional Service Firms and PEOs (continued)

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*"I'm positive and I think they are very positive for the right fit. There are businesses where I think they're the exact right fit and when I see that I certainly recommend it."* – Business Consultant

*"I mean, they, if they're good, they serve their purpose. I mean, the cost to provide, on a legal side, just to provide that buffer for a small business is worth its weight in gold. It takes a lot of necessary worry off of the business owner and into the hands of the PEO. So yeah, I think they're very useful in certain situations."* – Accountant

*"I'm pretty positive. I don't know why I wouldn't be, maybe their fee, but to me it was worth it."* – Accountant

*"I'm not familiar, it's actually something I was curious about when I saw this study."* – Lawyer

*"I haven't personally had an experience with one, I just know what they are. So, neutral. I don't really think there's anything bad about them, if anything they're probably helpful."* – Lawyer

# Participant Reactions to PEO Industry Statement

## PEO Description

Professional employer organizations (PEOs) provide human resource services to small and mid-size businesses—paying wages and taxes under the PEO’s EIN, offering workers’ comp and risk management services, and providing **compliance assistance** with employment-related rules and regulations.

In addition, many PEOs provide HR technology systems and access to 401(k) plans, health, dental, and life insurance, dependent care, and other benefits. In doing so, PEOs help businesses take care of employees by enabling them to offer **Fortune 500-level benefits** at an affordable cost and providing access to experienced HR professionals.

PEOs also help business owners and executives save time by taking **administrative and HR-related tasks off their plates**, allowing them to focus on the success of their businesses.

Employee satisfaction, retention, and recruitment surface as important benefits. >

Business Consultants and Lawyers especially value this benefit.

Trusted advisors deem this benefit the most valuable of all.

### ▶ The PEO Industry Statement receives overwhelmingly positive reactions among trusted advisors.

- Almost all trusted advisors report having positive reactions to the PEO Industry Statement, and all participants say this statement would make them research or further investigate PEOs on behalf of their clients.
  - Nearly all participants respond positively, and all participants say the offerings detailed in the statement are relevant to them in their work with BDMs, as these are often pain points of their clients.
    - › Participants say the statement is “well-written,” “really good,” “concise,” and “encompassing.”
      - » Retaining employees is emphasized as important to BDMs and, therefore, to their trusted advisors across segments.
        - ◇ Some participants highlight the importance of good benefits packages, among other offerings of PEOs, in retaining skilled employees.
      - » Several say PEOs seem to be a good fit when it comes to aligning with their clients’ goals, as a PEO could maximize BDMs’ time and contribute to companies’ growth.

| Attitudes About PEOs by Segment |                 |          |                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
|                                 | Mostly Positive | Neutral  | Mostly Negative |
| Business Consultant             | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| Lawyer                          | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| CPA                             | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| Banker                          | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>22</b>       | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b>        |

Nearly unanimous < favorable reactions surface.

### – Positive Responses

- › Aspects of the description that stand out to trusted advisors include the final sentence, specifically the focus on helping BDMs save time, Fortune 500-level benefits, HR services, and compliance assistance.
  - » Participants praise the final sentence of the statement, saying that saving BDMs time and taking tasks off their plates so they can focus on the success of their businesses are truly the most important benefits of a PEO.

## Participant Reactions to PEO Industry Statement (continued)

- ◇ One Business Consultant who is very familiar with PEOs and already recommends them to his clients suggests moving this sentence to the top of the statement in order to feature these benefits early in the statement.
- » The phrase “Fortune 500-level benefits” draws attention as trusted advisors highlight the importance of providing good benefits when it comes to employee satisfaction, retention, and recruitment.
- » Access to HR professionals and technology systems as well as compliance assistance with rules and regulations are top of mind for some participants across segments, but especially for Business Consultants and Lawyers who mention these points often.
- » Other phrases that stand out to participants, although somewhat less often, include access to 401k benefits, payroll, and PEOs paying wages.

### – Suggestions for Improvement

- › While no participants dislike the statement, suggestions for improvement underscore two opposing trajectories for the statement – 1. to prioritize a more concise delivery, and 2. to include more details to support certain points and clarify others.
  - » The most requested edit across segments is to add bullet points to streamline PEOs’ offerings and benefits, especially in the middle paragraph, which some say is bulky or congested.
  - » On the other hand, some participants request more details or examples when it comes to specific offerings including HR services, Fortune 500-level benefits (especially as Fortune 500-level companies are not always associated positively with taking care of employees), and how wages and taxes under the PEO’s EIN work.
    - ◇ And for a few, more information needs to be included in general, including how communication/customer service operates, a la carte/customizable plan options, how PEOs manage employees and take on liabilities, longevity of the PEO industry, and testimonials from clients.
    - ◇ Confusion emerges regarding company sizes that would benefit most from using a PEO for a few participants who are unfamiliar with PEOs.
  - » Requested edits include:
    - Utilize bullet points to streamline offerings and benefits
    - Include examples of HR services offered
    - Explain “Fortune 500-level benefits” and what this includes
    - Add information about communication and customer service
    - Clarify if a la carte options/customizable plans are available
    - Add in knowledge of/expertise in different states (regarding taxes, compliance, etc.)
    - Clarify how PEOs take over EIN of employees and how this affects small businesses’ taxes
    - Add language regarding how PEOs’ manage employees, provide employee handbooks, and take on liabilities
    - Add a quote from a client willing to go “on the record”
    - Include longevity of industry to demonstrate expertise

## Participant Reactions to PEO Industry Statement (continued)

| Breakdown  |   |
|--|---|
| Positive Response  | Neutral/Negative Response   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Final sentence of statement</li> <li>▪ Fortune 500-level benefits</li> <li>▪ HR services and technology systems</li> <li>▪ Compliance assistance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Congested” wording</li> <li>▪ Considered “too vague”</li> <li>▪ Fortune 500-level benefits</li> </ul> |

### In their words...

*“My first question would be, you know, like what is the cost or fees or whatever that’s associated with this type of service? Also, they provide services to small and midsize businesses - what is the smallest company that they would service and what’s the cutoff for the mid-size businesses? I would have those questions.” – Banker*

*“Very comprehensive. It looks like it’s worded very positively for a potential prospect that might want to use it. Maybe instead of all the verbiage, maybe put in some bullet points. The second paragraph, a couple key points, make it a little bit less congested.” – Banker*

*“I think the last paragraph really connected with me from what my clients have told me they need. You know, it takes a lot of the HR-related tasks off their plate so they can focus on the success of their business.” – Banker*

*“I think that’s plenty, it’s packing a powerful punch.” – Business Consultant*

*“Small businesses are fighting for employees, and what do you see? People are like, okay, what do you, what do you have to offer me benefits-wise? So, I think all these things are relevant and retaining those skilled employees, it’s really important for these small businesses.” – Business Consultant*

*“I feel like it’s rather lengthy. I can digest it easily after having a substantial amount of caffeine. But I think having some bullet points or shorter sentences would be good.” – Business Consultant*

*“I think it would be relevant. I’d say it’s a little more relevant for people who are 50-plus employees possibly. I think anything less would be a little too small for that.” – Accountant*

*“I think it’s pretty precise and the idea that you’re offering Fortune 500 benefits, I mean, everybody wants to be able to offer that. And also, indicating you know you’re saving time; I mean, it’s saving your time as a business owner. So, I think, I think those are all good points.” – Accountant*

*“Maybe streamline it a little bit, make it, block it out, make it easier to read and kind of pay attention to specifics.” – Lawyer*

*“If I had a small business that would need all these things, I would look into this for sure. The biggest thing that really would make me want to explore this is that these employees could access Fortune 500-level benefits at an affordable cost. I think that’s huge.” – Lawyer*

*“It sounds very positive. It sounds like it’s kind of like a one-stop shop for everything.” – Lawyer*

# Overview

► **The five messages receive mostly positive reactions among trusted advisors overall with Messages 1 and 5 performing the best.**

- **Most trusted advisors have positive reactions to the five messages with Messages 1 and 5 garnering the most positive feedback overall and Messages 3 and 4 receiving the most neutral to negative feedback.**
  - Regardless of how participants perceive the messages the messages, almost all participants say the offerings detailed are relevant to them in their work with BDMs as these topics are important to their clients.
    - › Overall, trusted advisors praise the messages – which they believe are well-written and information – for being relevant to their clients and therefore to trusted advisors themselves.
    - › Suggestions for improvement often revolve around adding in more details or examples, focusing on the positive, and adding citations to statistics.
    - › The term “small business” confuses some participants throughout, specifically Business Consultants, Accountants, and Bankers and even rubs a few the wrong way.
      - » Adding “small to midsize” would alleviate most participants’ concerns and would make the messages more inclusive in their eyes.

| Total Message Ratings - Attitudes Toward Messages Across Segments |                 |           |                 |
|---|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
|   | Mostly Positive | Neutral   | Mostly Negative |
| Message 1   | 22              | 2         | 0               |
| Message 2   | 20              | 4         | 0               |
| Message 3   | 18              | 5         | 1               |
| Message 4   | 18              | 3         | 3               |
| Message 5   | 22              | 2         | 0               |
| <b>Total (All Messages)</b>                                       | <b>100</b>      | <b>16</b> | <b>4</b>        |

< Messages 1 and 5 perform the best.

– **Positive Responses**

- › Presumed positive messages garner favorable responses from trusted advisors.
  - » Messages 1 and 5 gain the most positive reactions, with participants praising the messages for being concise, well-written, and generally positive.
  - » Message 2 garners the second-most positive reactions overall, as participants laude the substance and agree with the importance of providing good benefits to and taking care of employees.
    - ◇ However, the term “Fortune 500-level benefits” confuses some participants who say this phrase needs more explanation, underscoring their neutral responses to the message.

– **Neutral to Negative Responses**

- › Although three-in-four participants respond positively to Messages 3 and 4, Message 3 has the most neutral responses overall and Message 4 has the most negative responses overall.
  - » The presumed negative spin on Message 3 garners the most neutral responses, although many participants praise other aspects of this message and most say the offerings detailed are very relevant to them and their work with BDMs.
    - ◇ The assumption that the message ends on a negative note rubs several participants the wrong way while others say it is too lengthy. A few participants praise the beginning but dislike the second half of this message, saying it is fear-based.

## Overview (continued)

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- › Due to its presumed lack of credibility, Message 4 receives mixed reactions and garners the most negative responses, despite otherwise receiving mostly positive responses.
- » The specificity of the percentage, 27.2%, as well as how high this number is perceived to be in terms of overall cost savings immediately causes several participants to respond skeptically with a few saying they “don’t believe it.”

| Breakdown   |  |
|---|--|
| Positive Response (Overall)   | Neutral/Negative Response (Overall)  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Concise writing</li> <li>▪ Positive</li> <li>▪ Relevant</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Negative wording</li> <li>▪ Somewhat “vague” wording</li> <li>▪ Skepticism of claims/statistic</li> </ul> |

# Message 1

Message is relevant and persuasive.

Consider replacing "small" with "small to midsize."

## Message 1

A PEO saves **small** business owners time by taking **administrative tasks** off their plate, allowing them to focus on their core business.

< Add description to "administrative tasks."

► **Message 1 is a winner with almost all trusted advisors reporting positive overall reactions.**

- Tying with Message 5 for the most positive responses across segments, Message 1 garners favorable responses from 22 of the 24 participants.
  - This message is praised as "straightforward," "a good message," "concise," "positive," "attention-getting," and "well-written."
  - Across segments, nearly all participants say these offerings are relevant to them in their work and the point of the message rings true as some say they already advocate to their clients the importance of spending more time on their core business.

| Attitudes Toward Message 1  |                 |          |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
|                             | Mostly Positive | Neutral  | Mostly Negative |
| Business Consultants        | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| Bankers                     | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| Accountants                 | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| Lawyers                     | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| <b>Total (All Messages)</b> | <b>22</b>       | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b>        |

- **Positive Responses**

- › All aspects of Message 1 are regarded positively by most participants across segments.
  - » Specific phrases that stand out to trusted advisors include allowing BDMs to "focus on their core business," "saves small business owners time," and "taking administrative tasks off their plate."

- **Suggestions for Improvement**

- › Suggestions for improvement among participants focus on providing examples of administrative tasks and adding the phrase small "to midsize" business owners to the message.
  - » While no participants dislike the statement, suggestions for improvement among participants highlight both the need for more details to explain what is meant by "administrative tasks" as well as adding "midsize" to expand the reach of the statement to businesses some trusted advisors don't consider "small."
  - ◇ Interestingly, despite the vast majority of participants responding positively to the phrase, several trusted advisors (two Business Consultants and one Banker) dislike the phrase "off their plate." They say that this language is too familiar and should be more elevated if it is targeting them in their trusted advisor role.

## Message 1 (continued)

» Suggested edits include:

- Include examples of administrative tasks the PEO handles
- Add “small to midsize business owners” to replace “small”

| Breakdown  |   |
|--|---|
| Positive Response  | Neutral Response  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on core business</li> <li>▪ Administrative tasks (taking them off BDMs’ plates)</li> <li>▪ Save time</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vague phrases (e.g., administrative tasks)</li> <li>▪ Small</li> </ul> |

### In their words...

*“I would also add in the midsize business; you know, it just, it just says small business owners, but I would add in small to midsize.”* – Banker

*“Taking the administrative tasks off of their plate, yeah, that’s number one for small businesses. I would say the complaint from a lot of them is not really having enough time to do just the basic stuff.”* – Banker

*“It’s positive. I think administrative tasks is such a big bucket. It would be helpful to have a little more on that. Some examples.”* – Business Consultant

*“You want the quick, easy elevator pitch, and this is it. This is great.”* – Business Consultant

*“I think it’s positive. I think it’s great that it helps save time on the administrative tasks and it makes sense. I always advocate to my clients, that’s one of the reasons why they hire a CPA, to take time off other stuff and they don’t need to do all that. So, if they’re willing to hire a CPA for something like that I think they would be willing to take HR off the plate as well.”* – Accountant

*“I think certainly the first part of the statement is very positive. I think business owners should be focused on business, and these are big items that can really take a lot of time and research. So, I think if it would take things off the plate of business owners that’s good. And yeah, these are the things that can overwhelm a business owner. So, just to know the comfort of, I know it’s been taken care of, is a big positive.”* – Accountant

*“For me, knowing that business owners are spending less time dealing with this with the help of a PEO, that leaves them more time for me to ask them questions to help issues that we have, the legal issues that we have.”* – Lawyer

*“This is positive and very relevant. I mean, business owners, they’re very passionate about what they do. So, this sentence is talking about focusing on their core business, which is mostly what they want to do. You know, if I was starting my own business, I would not want to deal with the administrative. So, especially with my contractor business clients - this would be great for them. They would love to see this type of thing.”* – Lawyer

## Message 2

Explain "Fortune 500-level benefits."

### Message 2

A PEO helps small business owners take care of their employees by enabling them to offer Fortune 500-level benefits at an affordable cost and providing access to experienced HR professionals.

This message's overall substance and focus on employees resonate.

► **Message 2 garners the second-most positive reactions overall, highlighting the importance of employees to BDMs and their trusted advisors.**

- **The substance of the message hits home for participants who agree it is important to provide good benefits to and take care of employees; however, some call for more information when it comes to the "Fortune 500-level benefits" offered.**
  - Across segments, most trusted advisors respond positively, with some describing this message as "good" and "having more substance" than the previous message; however, some say they would like more details when it comes to the benefits mentioned.
  - All say these offerings are relevant to them in their work, noting the importance of helping BDMs take care of their employees and providing good and affordable benefits.

| Attitudes Toward Message 2  |                 |          |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
|                             | Mostly Positive | Neutral  | Mostly Negative |
| Business Consultants        | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| Bankers                     | 4               | 2        | 0               |
| Accountants                 | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| Lawyers                     | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| <b>Total (All Messages)</b> | <b>20</b>       | <b>4</b> | <b>0</b>        |

- **Positive Responses**

- › Most aspects of Message 2 are regarded positively by participants across segments, although the phrase "Fortune 500-level benefits," which stands out positively to many, receives mixed reactions from others.
  - » Specific phrases that stand out to trusted advisors include "Fortune 500-level benefits," "affordable cost," "access to experienced HR professionals," and "take care of their employees."

- **Suggestions for Improvement**

- › Suggestions for improvement prioritize clarifying what Fortune 500-level benefits includes or means, including examples of benefits offered, and updating the phrase small to include "to midsize" in the message.
  - » The majority of participants respond positively to the statement, and often highlight the phrase "Fortune 500-level benefits" as standing out to them; however, a few trusted advisors across segments dislike the phrase and point to the need for more details.
    - ◇ One Business Consultant says he doesn't think of big businesses as being known for taking care of their employees, citing recent unrest following mass layoffs in the technology industry, and suggests replacing the phrase with "competitive benefits" or something similar.

## Message 2 (continued)

- » Several participants, specifically a few Accountants and one Banker, also reiterate the importance of adding “midsize” when describing business size in the message to be more inclusive.
- » Suggested edits include:
  - ◇ Clarify, replace, or include examples of “Fortune 500-level benefits”
  - ◇ Add “small to midsize business owners” to replace “small”

| Breakdown   |   |
|---|---|
| Positive Response   | Neutral Response  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fortune 500-level benefits</li> <li>▪ Affordable cost</li> <li>▪ Access to experienced HR professionals</li> <li>▪ Take care of employees</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fortune 500-level benefits</li> <li>▪ Small</li> </ul> |

### ***In their words...***

*“They give a small business owner a connection to a top benefits provider of Fortune 500 companies that are using this at an affordable cost. So that’s a good statement. These are all very good messages so far.” – Banker*

*“I would say it’s more neutral. Also, to where it says, ‘enabling them to offer Fortune 500-level benefits at an affordable cost,’ I would want to see some examples of those Fortune 500-level benefits. And then also I would want to know how experienced the HR professionals are. You know they could say ‘with five years or experience.’ That would be helpful.” – Banker*

*“I dig it. I guess my initial reaction to Fortune 500 is that I don’t think big-time corporate America is necessarily well-known for taking care of the little guy, so when I see Fortune 500-level benefits, I know what you’re trying to say, which is benefits that a small business probably couldn’t afford. But the immediate reaction I had is oh cool, so, we can kind of screw our employees a little bit. I would probably say maybe ‘competitive’ benefits.” – Business Consultant*

*“I like this because it adds a little bit of, just enough meat to the bone of like ‘wow.’ Now this one might spark questions, which is a good thing, like ‘well tell me more about that.’” – Business Consultant*

*“Being to be able to have Fortune 500 benefits at a good cost is great. And I really like the last term of experienced HR professionals, just having access to that, similar to having access to an experienced CPA or something like that. It’s a similar meaning there.” – Accountant*

*“Enabling them to offer Fortune 500-level benefits, that kind of jumps out at me at first, I’m like oh you know that’s great - but it’s kind of vague because my question is okay what are Fortune 500-level benefits? What does that mean? Is that different than benefits we’re all familiar with? So that would be one thing I would ask. The other thing that jumps out at me is just having access to HR professionals because a lot of questions do come up.” – Accountant*

*“I like the affordable cost, that jumps out at me especially; you know, small businesses love to cut costs where they can in a way that’s not going to, you know, harm them in any way, and access to experienced HR professionals, I think that’s good.” – Lawyer*

*“I think this is generally positive. Taking care of employees and access to professionals, I like these. But I don’t know what Fortune 500-level benefits means.” – Lawyer*

## Message 3

Although deemed relevant by most, this message's presumed negative tone generates several neutral reactions.

### Message 3

Partnering with a PEO provides the **peace of mind** of having a team of experienced HR and employment experts to help small business owners comply with government regulations that can be **confusing** and financially risky if they get it wrong.

Stands out < as a positive.

< Strong agreement to this notion.

► **Message 3 receives mostly positive responses and is regarded as highly relevant to trusted advisors; however, the perceived negativity of the message as well as its length and complexity lead to a few neutral reactions.**

- Although three-in-four participants respond positively to Message 3 and praise aspects of the message as important and relevant, the perceived negative spin of the end of the statement (e.g., financially risky if they get it wrong) as well as the sentence length garner the most neutral responses of all messages.
  - All say these offerings are relevant to them in their work with BDMs as the message highlights areas that are major concerns of their clients, many of whom lack knowledge of specific regulations and how to maintain compliance in an ever-changing regulatory world.
  - › Accountants and Lawyers respond most passionately to this message across segments, giving examples of regulations, taxes, and compliance issues they have faced with their clients and noting how difficult it is to “stay on top of” everything with often changing regulations.
  - Participants say the statement is “really good,” “very relevant,” and “important.”

| Attitudes Toward Message 3  |                 |          |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
|                             | Mostly Positive | Neutral  | Mostly Negative |
| Business Consultants        | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| Bankers                     | 3               | 2        | 1               |
| Accountants                 | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| Lawyers                     | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| <b>Total (All Messages)</b> | <b>18</b>       | <b>5</b> | <b>1</b>        |

#### – Positive Responses

- › Most positive reactions to this message are attributed to several phrases highlighting both the importance of providing BDMs with peace of mind as well as the confusion of maintaining compliance with regulations.
  - » “Peace of mind” stands out most to participants as it is brought up across segments, followed by “confusing and financially risky” (“if they get it wrong” stands out, but to a somewhat lesser extent), “comply with government regulations,” and “team of experienced HR and employment experts.”

#### – Suggestions for Improvement

- › Suggestions for improvement focus on re-writing the statement for conciseness and to end more positively, adding in midsize, as well as clarifying some details of the message.
  - » Across segments, some trusted advisors suggest re-writing the message to be more succinct and to end on or focus on the positive, while others suggest breaking it up into two shorter sentences.

## Message 3 (continued)

- ◇ Re-working the statement to highlight the positives of PEOs and their benefits is suggested by several Business Consultants and Bankers.
- ◇ The phrase “financially risky if they get it wrong” leads to mixed reviews, while some respond positively to the phrase, the perceived negative spin of the statement underscores a few participants’ neutral responses, with one calling it “fear-based.”
  - One Business Consultant suggests removing “if they get it wrong” altogether, although others praise the importance of the statement.
- » A few additions to the message are requested by participants for clarification.
  - ◇ As with other messages, several participants suggest adding in “midsize” to reach a wider audience.
  - ◇ “Experienced HR and employment experts” is too vague for a few participants, specifically a few Accountants and Lawyers, who say they would like examples or clarification regarding what is meant by this phrase.
  - ◇ A few Lawyers are adamant that “laws” should be added to the message in addition to regulations.
- » Suggested edits include:
  - Re-work message to focus on the positive/end more positively
  - Break message into two sentences
  - Add “midsize”
  - Clarify or give examples of “experienced HR and employment experts”
  - Add “laws” in addition to regulations (Lawyers)

| Breakdown  |  |
|--|--|
| Positive Response  | Neutral/Negative Response  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peace of mind</li> <li>▪ Confusing and financially risky (if they get it wrong)</li> <li>▪ Comply with government regulations</li> <li>▪ Team of experienced HR and employment experts</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Long/run-on sentence</li> <li>▪ Negative ending of message (“financially risky if they get it wrong”)</li> <li>▪ Small</li> </ul> |

### In their words...

*“I would say it’s relevant because government regulations are always changing, and for some, they’re not that, you know, savvy to try to keep up with different things.” – Banker*

*“I think it sends a message. I think it’s too long of a sentence and is a run-on. I think they should break it into two sentences. And ‘financially risky if they get it wrong,’ the beginning of this is positive, but I’m not big on the latter part of that. It’s just too confusing and negative.” – Banker*

*“I think the idea behind the message is right on, which is HR compliance is definitely confusing. Those are really important things to hit. Just in terms of the message, it’s like that sentence seems to be going on for a while, right? So, I think trying to tighten that up a bit and then it would pack a punch.” – Business Consultant*

*“Yeah, this is really good. This introduces that little bit of fear and the stuff that business owners, quietly, when they go home at night, one of the things they stare at the ceiling thinking about, ‘Oh my god, the taxes and the government regulations.’ Yeah, this is good.” – Business Consultant*

## Message 3 (continued)

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*"It's positive, I think it's great to provide a peace of mind. So, I think it's a good thing to say. And just being able to comply with all the regulations, I think it's just a good and relevant message overall." – Accountant*

*"It starts off good, giving peace of mind, you know, having a team of HR professionals. Yeah, but aside from that, it just seems kind of long and drawn out." – Accountant*

*"It's maybe the most relevant of the three to me. But it starts off kind of lengthy. I'm not really sure of the point they're trying to get at, at least after the first six or seven words. Also, 'financially risky if they get it wrong' kind of comes off as something to be afraid of." – Lawyer*

*"I'm all on board with this because I'm an attorney who likes to help my clients so that they don't need me anymore. I do not like to have my clients have bad things happen to them where I am just bailing them out. I do agree that government regulations and laws, those are technically two different things, government regulations and laws can be confusing and can be devastating in terms of finances if you get it wrong. As a lawyer, I am all in favor of warning people. So that's why I say it's positive. I say pointing out that compliance can be confusing and financially risky, I think that's very good. I don't think people understand that all the time or if they do, they just know it's a thing and they get confused. It is very relevant, incredibly relevant. Is there anything I see that's negative about it? Actually, no." – Lawyer*

# Message 4

Persuasive and well-received by most.

## Message 4

The annual return on investment, or overall cost savings, from using aPEO is conservatively estimated at 27.2%.

Adding a citation would improve credibility and believability.

► **While most trusted advisors respond positively to the idea of cost savings, one-in-four distrust the claim of savings and the percentage provided, 27.2%, without attribution or explanation.**

- Three-quarters of trusted advisors respond positively to Message 4, highlighting the importance of cost savings; however, negative responses underscore some participants’ skepticism of the estimated 27.2% cost savings claimed.
  - Almost all say these offerings are relevant to them in their work, highlighting the importance of cost savings to BDMs and therefore to their trusted advisors.
  - Participants praise the statement for being “concise” and say saving money is a “good thing.” A few respond excitedly, as one exclaims, “Wow!” and another notes this is the “best” of the statements they’ve seen.

| Attitudes Toward Message 4  |                 |          |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
|                             | Mostly Positive | Neutral  | Mostly Negative |
| Business Consultants        | 3               | 0        | 3               |
| Bankers                     | 5               | 1        | 0               |
| Accountants                 | 4               | 2        | 0               |
| Lawyers                     | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| <b>Total (All Messages)</b> | <b>18</b>       | <b>3</b> | <b>3</b>        |

– **Positive Responses**

- › Cost savings for small businesses drive the mostly positive reactions to Message 4 across all segments.
  - » “Cost savings” stands out most to participants, followed closely by “ROI,” and finally the percentage “27.2%.”

– **27.2%**

- › The estimated cost savings statistic of 27.2% is divisive without proper attribution or a citation.
  - » While the statistic is mentioned across segments as standing out to participants, neutral and negative responses stem from participants questioning the legitimacy of the statistic, a distrust which then extends to the message itself.
    - ◇ The specificity of the percentage, 27.2%, as well as how high this number is perceived to be in relation to cost savings immediately causes several participants to respond skeptically, leading to neutral and negative reactions.
      - A few Business Consultants who respond negatively outright say they don’t believe the statistic is legitimate and write off the message completely.

## Message 4 (continued)

### - Suggestions for Improvement

- › Suggestions for improvement prioritize adding a citation or footnote to the statistic, including more information about or examples of cost savings and how this is achieved, and potentially using average cost savings instead of conservatively estimated.
  - » The most requested edit across segments is to include a citation or footnote.
    - ◇ Once the legitimacy of the overall message is questioned, participants say it is difficult to win them back; however, the inclusion of a citation or footnote to explain the statistic would help.
    - ◇ One Lawyer points out that this could be a “risky” statement to make in the current unpredictable business climate, especially without a citation.
  - » Some find the idea of cost savings in this context confusing without more information and suggest adding examples of cost savings and being specific about how PEOs contribute to cost savings.
  - » The phrase “conservatively estimated” rubs some participants the wrong way, and a few participants across segments suggest replacing this with “average” cost savings instead.
  - » Requested edits include:
    - Add citation or footnote to 27.2% statistic
    - Include examples of or explanation of cost savings (how is this achieved?)
    - Replace “conservatively estimated cost savings” with “average cost savings”

| Breakdown  |   |
|--|---|
| Positive Response  | Neutral/Negative  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cost savings</li> <li>▪ ROI</li> <li>▪ 27.2%</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 27.2%</li> <li>▪ Conservatively estimated</li> </ul> |

### In their words...

*“When our clients can save money, that’s a hot topic with rates going up on everything. Yeah, if they can save a little money, that’s great. But I would personally need a citation. Because I like research.”* – Banker

*“27%, I don’t know how they got that necessarily. But it’s a relevant message that people would save money if you use the PEO. Relevant to small businesses. That’s positive. It’s cost savings.”* – Banker

*“I think that’s good. I mean, it can’t just stand on its own. But I mean it’s definitely part of, if I were writing an email to a client saying ‘I really want you to explore a PEO,’ this would be one of the short bullet points. For sure.”*  
– Business Consultant

*“Well, you know, I mean people are going to hold you to this. Like the oil and gas driller says, ‘Okay I’m gonna use a PEO, and if I don’t see 27% of cost savings, I’m going to sue this organization.’ So, you put numbers out there, you better be able to back them up and you better have footnotes.”* – Business Consultant

*“27.2% cost savings; If I want that in combination with other things, that’s awesome. That’s a great fact to call out. But, I don’t want to go on too much of a tangent here, but from somebody who’s fairly scientifically minded and thinking about that and stats. I’m like, where is that really coming from?”* – Business Consultant

## Message 4 (continued)

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*"It's positive but I feel like it doesn't really give enough information. How does it give a return on investment? I guess the cost savings, just because they might not be hiring somebody else so they can save time or something like that. But I think there might need to be a little more to explain that in this sentence. Or, you could say the average return on investment is so and so, maybe it could even be higher or something like that."* – Accountant

*"So initially any kind of savings is very positive. But going through, just as a statement, I would want to know how that comes about. You know, I want more information about this. Because usually when you're outsourcing, you know, obviously there's a cost to that. So how is there a savings bounced back to the company?"* – Accountant

*"I mean, just right out the gate, before actually I got past the comma, you may have noticed that I smiled. I don't even know what you're going to say after the comma, but I just felt like something positive was going to happen. Which is interesting because I really didn't care what number was in front of that percentage. I was smiling just talking about savings."* – Lawyer

*"I like this because it's numbers, I like details like numbers, but I want to know more about how the estimate works. I want to know the numbers. I want to know what 'conservatively' means. I do think this is relevant because every small business I know has to, at the end of the day, ask 'how much is this gonna cost?'"* – Lawyer

## Message 5

Powerful message!  
Makes trusted  
advisors feel  
confident in telling  
clients about PEOs.

### Message 5

98% of business owners who are PEO clients would recommend a PEO to a small business colleague.

► **The importance of positive recommendations propels Message 5 to the top as almost all trusted advisors report positive reactions.**

- **Message 5 garners positive responses from almost all (22 of 24) participants, tying with Message 1 as the most positively rated message across segments.**
  - This message is praised as being “powerful,” “killer,” “very positive,” “short and sweet,” and “confident.”
    - › Several trusted advisors say this message makes them confident in telling their clients about PEOs.
  - Almost all say these offerings are relevant to them in their work as they place a high value on referrals, as do their clients.
    - › A few share that this is not directly relevant to their work, but one Lawyer acknowledges it would trickle down to them by streamlining the processes of their clients.

| Attitudes Toward Message 5  |                 |          |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
|                             | Mostly Positive | Neutral  | Mostly Negative |
| Business Consultants        | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| Bankers                     | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| Accountants                 | 4               | 2        | 0               |
| Lawyers                     | 6               | 0        | 0               |
| <b>Total (All Messages)</b> | <b>22</b>       | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b>        |

– **Positive Responses**

- › Message 5 garners positive responses from trusted advisors due to its focus on recommendations from other business colleagues regarding PEOs.
  - » “98%” and “recommend” stand out the most to participants across segments, summing up the essence of the statement and the importance trusted advisors place on recommendations.

– **98%**

- › While almost all participants respond positively to the statistic 98%, saying it is eye-catching and positive, it elicits skepticism for a few without a citation or footnote to back it up.
  - » One Accountant shares that without a source for the statistic, this statement doesn’t hold any weight, and a Lawyer says he is “really skeptical” of such a high number.

– **Suggestions for Improvement**

- › While responses to the message are overwhelmingly positive, suggestions for improvement among trusted advisors prioritize providing a citation or footnote, adding “small to midsize” business owners, and a few participants request more information or “proof.”

## Message 5 (continued)

- » The most requested addition is a footnote or citation to the statistic, 98%, as well as adding where this number originates (e.g., is it all PEOs nationwide, specific businesses/business owners, what is the sample size, etc.).
- » As with other messages, several trusted advisors suggest adding “small to midsize” business owners to this message.
- » A testimonial, an example of a recommendation, or including reasons for recommending PEOs are requested by a few participants who say this proof would strengthen the message.
- » Suggested edits include:
  - Include a citation or footnote for 98%
  - Add “small to midsize”
  - Include a testimonial, recommendation example, or reasoning as proof

| Breakdown  |  |
|--|--|
| Positive Response  | Neutral Response   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 98%</li> <li>▪ Recommend</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 98%</li> <li>▪ Small</li> </ul> |

### In their words...

*“I would say positive. I mean, there’s 98% of business owners who are PEO clients who would recommend. That’s awesome.”* – Banker

*“Oh yeah, that’s very positive. Once again, who’s giving the number? Is that coming from a pool of companies? I mean, if they could state what the sample size was or the region or types of businesses, that would be good. It’s very relevant. You want to say they’re the best and recommend using it. But if there’s any facts to substantiate it, that would be better.”* – Banker

*“That’s killer. In my experience one of the most powerful currencies that professionals have is their word, you know, like so when you, when you are willing to spend that kind of currency to recommend something that goes a long way.”* – Business Consultant

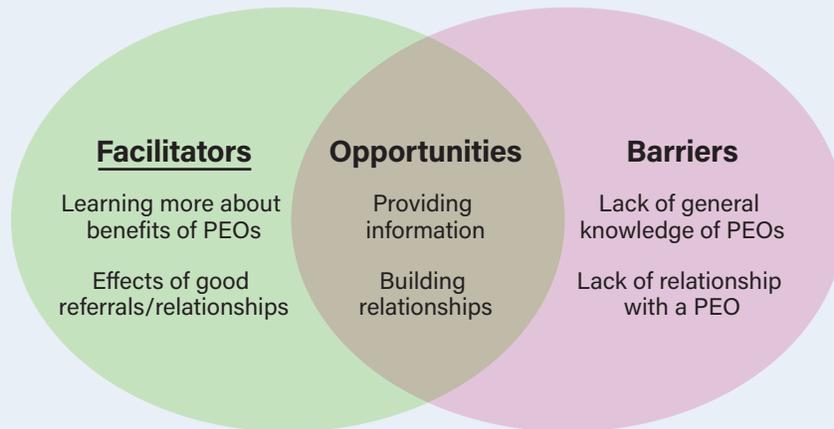
*“That’s a powerful message. I’d definitely be more interested in where they got it from because depending on the answer to that, it could make it all the more powerful. So, this is a specific PEO that has 100 clients and 98%, 98 of the 100 like it - okay that’s powerful. But it’s like, statistics can do lots of things, and I would like to just know 98% of what? Like what business owners? Is this a nationwide thing, where do we come up with 98%?”* – Business Consultant

*“I think it just implies it all - the customers, the PEO clients, are pretty much satisfied. Yeah, I think it’s good overall.”* – Accountant

*“Wow. That’s pretty powerful. Yeah. And, even maybe adding a recognized owner that would be willing to go, you know on the record. I guess the naysayers, someone would be like there’s no way 98% of business owners, I mean that’s a pretty, that’s a pretty high percentage, so a footnote would help.”* – Accountant

*“98% suggests almost all business owners, and one of the most persuasive things is word of mouth and referrals, and this looks like a referral saying, ‘hey, people just like you are saying this works’ and that’s precise. But it’s so high, it sounds almost too good to be true and that’s not to say that it isn’t, it just comes across a little suspicious.”* – Lawyer

## Facilitators



► **The benefits of PEOs as well as the positive effect of good referrals on their business relationships with BDMs emerge as facilitators when it comes to trusted advisors recommending PEOs.**

- **Learning more about the offerings of PEOs and how they address common pain points of BDMs leads trusted advisors to the belief that PEOs would be helpful for their BDM clients.**
  - Specific offerings of a PEO do not exist in a vacuum, as most trusted advisors focus on the overall benefits of PEOs to small businesses and list two to three interrelated benefits that are top of mind when asked what stands out to them as helpful to their clients.
    - › For example, one Business Consultant who already recommends PEOs on a business-to-business basis, depending on the business's size and operational challenges, says the benefits of a PEO include being a one-stop shop, helping his clients save money and increase employee satisfaction.

*Benefits of PEOs that stand out to trusted advisors as helpful to their clients include:*

- » providing HR expertise,
- » enabling companies to provide sophisticated benefits and 401k packages,
- » taking over administrative tasks (including payroll),
- » saving businesses money while promoting growth,
- » reducing BDMs' stress, and
- » saving BDMs time.
- Breakdown of benefits of PEOs
  - › Accessibility to HR experts, including adhering to government regulations, maintaining compliance, and helping manage employees, emerges as an important offering of PEOs across segments.
    - » Many participants say these are pain points their clients face, echoing the sentiment that government regulations are ever-changing and maintaining compliance is difficult for their clients who are not experts in these affairs.
    - » These benefits are especially top of mind for Business Consultants, who mention them most often.
  - › Providing better or more sophisticated benefits and 401k packages to employees is a winning offer to trusted advisors, who say this could increase employee satisfaction and help their clients retain and recruit good employees.
    - » Employee satisfaction and retention are high-priority issues for most BDMs.

## Facilitators (continued)

- › Taking over administrative tasks, especially payroll, stands out across segments as a helpful offering of a PEO for small businesses.
- › Cost savings, including ROI, and promoting growth are important benefits of PEOs, as trusted advisors say their clients are focused on these topics.
  - » Bankers and Lawyers especially highlight cost savings and promoting growth for their clients, and one Banker points out that his clients' growth benefits him, as when businesses grow they are more likely to stay with their bank.
- › Reducing the stress of BDMs and saving them time surface as important benefits of PEOs across all segments, indicating how phrases like "peace of mind" and "taking tasks off their plate" stick out in participants' minds after reviewing the materials.
- When asked if it would make their work any easier if their clients used a PEO, some participants agree, saying a PEO would help them in their work with their clients in a myriad of ways.
 

*Benefits of PEOs that stand out to trusted advisors as helpful to them (if their clients used a PEO) include:*

  - » help with risk and compliance issues (help with liability, workman's comp, fiduciary responsibility, etc.),
  - » help with organization (record keeping, payroll, paperwork kept in order),
  - » clients having an HR team to help with staffing (recruiting and retaining top talent),
  - » being a one-stop shop (streamlining of their referral process),
  - » clients having the help of experts in different areas of business,
  - » allowing clients to focus on their business and growth, and
  - » potentially the ability to access their clients' portals for accounting/tax purposes (Accountants only).
- **The positive effect good referrals have on the business relationships of trusted advisors and their clients emerges as a secondary facilitator of trusted advisors recommending PEOs.**
  - Giving their clients good recommendations strengthens their business relationships by building trust, which generates positive feelings toward them as trusted advisors.
  - Across segments, trusted advisors discuss the importance of helping their clients or solving their clients' problems when asked if their clients' use of a PEO would benefit them.
    - › According to one Business Consultant, making his clients' lives easier would make his life easier.
    - › Helping their clients solve problems so they can focus on the growth of their business is beneficial to trusted advisors, who often benefit secondarily from that growth.
      - » As one Banker notes, as his clients grow they are more likely to continue doing business with him and his bank.

## Facilitators (continued)

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### ***In their words...***

*"The ability to retain their employees by offering a better or more sophisticated benefit package, that's definitely going to be attractive to my clients. The cost savings, because expenses come down to everything, so that would definitely be a key selling point. So, probably the cost savings, the additional benefits, more sophisticated benefits stand out the most." – Banker*

*"I can think of four out of 10 businesses that I have in my book that would benefit from this. And if I can help them with their business then more business falls back our way. The more these business owners save their money, the more they're able to focus on their business, the more they're able to operate and function better. So, I always look for ways to help them grow." – Banker*

*"I think PEOs make it more efficient. One of the things that stands out is taking that job away from their current team and freeing up some labor expense where people have been doing it and making their job more efficient. That's probably the biggest message. And taking care of all their payroll and benefits, too." – Banker*

*"Whenever I put a client in connection with a service offering or with an expert that does good work for them it just makes our relationship stickier. Like relationships where we've recommended an accountant and the accountant has done great work for them. It just makes the bond a little bit stronger between me and my client." – Business Consultant*

*"The things that stand out for me are having that level of expertise available to a small business who otherwise couldn't afford it in terms of compliance and increasing employee satisfaction. It being a one-stop shop for sure. And the ability to save the business money. Those, to me, they're tremendous value-adds in addition to my starting point with my clients, which is always like - you gotta get this off your plate. Why are you running payroll as CEO? These are the kinds of things we look for to make a business more efficient." – Business Consultant*

*"The benefits part was, for me, the best part about it. But yeah, I mean being able to relieve a business as well of, you know, some liability and the peace of mind knowing that this is all going to be properly taken care of, and then you don't have to directly have someone on payroll doing it." – Accountant*

*"I think just being able to take off the extra stress of a business owner and just be able to essentially outsource the HR section." – Accountant*

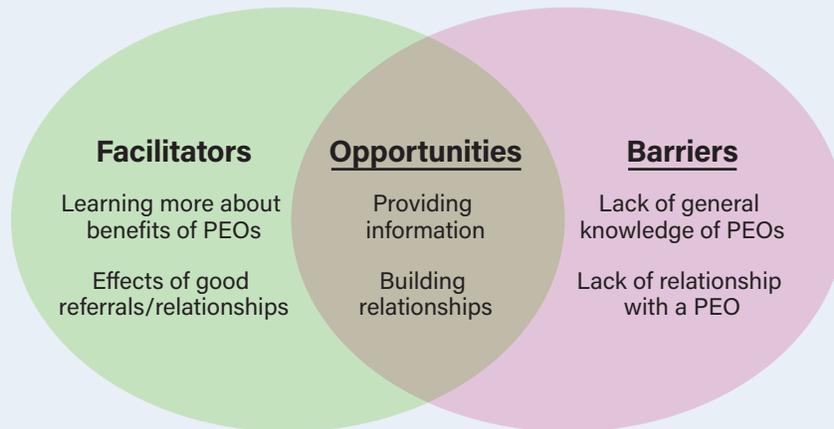
*"The things that jump out are the things that I've come to deal with and those are the 401ks and the health insurance benefits. I've had many clients get to that point where I need to start doing this, and so having a path of being able to give them the idea of exactly how to go down and get that set up, that, that's I think what is most relevant." – Accountant*

*"It [a PEO] will save our clients time and headache in the long run. It appears it would save them money. And I think it would also give them access to better benefits." – Lawyer*

*"I mean, the general concept is savings. It's kind of a twofold thing. Number one, savings, and number two, I think it facilitates growth. And that's a message that was implicit but I don't think it would hurt to point out the fact that this takes out of the way one of the stumbling blocks to growth." – Lawyer*

*"I think just that it's like a one-stop shop, they have everything. So, you know, if I have a client that's like 'oh my gosh, the business part of this' or 'oh, the admin stuff' or 'I'm having trouble running everything' or 'maybe I should hire a tech guy and an accounting guy.' It's kind of like, maybe you should contact a PEO or check one out." – Lawyer*

## Barriers and Opportunities



### ► Barriers to recommending PEOs are surmountable with more information and relationship building among trusted advisors.

- While many trusted advisors say there are no “real” barriers to recommending a PEO, general lack of knowledge and the need to have a trusted point of contact at a PEO emerge as the main barriers.

#### Discussing PEOs and recommending PEOs are viewed as distinct actions.

- Trusted advisors say they would discuss PEOs with their clients; however, they consider this different from recommending a PEO.
- Some trusted advisors feel comfortable *discussing* a PEO with their clients with cursory information but say this comfortability comes from knowing they would not be recommending a specific company and would expect their clients to look into specifics on their own.
  - › A few say they would have conversations with their clients with just the information they have been provided during this study. However, they stress that they would suggest their clients look further into PEOs on their own and they would not necessarily consider this a recommendation.
- Recommending a specific PEO is a different story, as almost all participants say they would need to have a personal relationship with a point of contact at a PEO and would need more information about the industry or specific PEOs before they'd consider *recommending* one.
  - › The biggest barrier is participants' lack of a relationship with a partner at a PEO.
    - » Relationships are important to trusted advisors, most of whom say they would not recommend a specific PEO without having a trusted relationship with a person at that PEO.
      - ◇ When making referrals, most feel they are putting their own reputation on the line because if their clients have a negative or poor experience, they are unlikely to ask for their advice again.
- Participants across industries say they would need to know more general information about the PEO industry and specifics about a certain PEO before they would be comfortable recommending it.
  - › When asked what they still need to know, the following information emerges:
    - » How PEOs function overall
    - » **Cost and general price breakdowns**
    - » How exactly PEOs save businesses money

For some,  
this is critical  
information.

## Barriers and Opportunities (continued)

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- » Size of businesses PEOs work best for
- » Specifics about individual PEOs
- » A la carte options
- » Communication (including customer service/response rate)
- » Benefits (more information about plans and how this works)
- » Whether they are versed in all state and local regulatory/compliance issues
- » How the transfer to a PEO would work
- » Case studies
- › Of note, price breakdowns by tier are important to participants across segments, who say they would need to know at least general information regarding cost before they would consider making recommendations to specific clients.
  - » Several point out that they would need this information to determine if PEOs were a good fit for specific clients, as they would not want to waste their clients' or their own time recommending a PEO to a client who could not afford the service.
- Hypothetical barriers focus on potential experiences or issues which would cause trusted advisors to cease their recommendations.
  - › A few Accountants and Lawyers say that if they had a bad experience with a PEO or a client had a bad experience this would be a barrier. And, one Lawyer says if the PEO were indicted by the DOJ or had lawsuits against them, this would be a barrier.
  - › A few Bankers share they would need to know more about the legal and/or compliance issues associated with their recommendations, as these might be barriers which they are currently unaware.
    - » Conversely, one commercial Banker shares openly that he faces no barriers when it comes to recommendations and describes commercial banking as having "loose" regulations when it comes to kickbacks and referrals.
  - › Presumed barriers that might exist within their clients' companies including costs, an owner not wanting to give up control to an outside provider, or an established company in which leaders are resistant to change.
- Of note, one Business Consultant says a barrier is her inability to recommend unauthorized partners at her company.

## Barriers and Opportunities (continued)

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### ***In their words...***

*"No barriers in my line of business. Within banking and financial institutions, commercial banking is very loosely based. I mean, of course the compensation part you have to report quite a bit. But yeah, nothing that would get in the way seriously."* – Banker

*"The only barrier would be the lack of knowledge, not having the facts to back up those claims or having the resources to find the information. There's nothing else that's holding me back because I do believe the one-stop shop is the best way to go."* – Banker

*"I mean the only thing that it would come down to would be the capability and competency of the PEO, right? I'd need to have a conversation with the PEO for sure."* – Business Consultant

*"I'm willing to say to a client 'I am generally aware of the services, and we should probably spend some time taking a look at a few PEOs.' But if I was going to recommend one specifically and have a referral relationship it's helpful to know someone there."* – Business Consultant

*"I think knowing more specifics of what the PEO would actually offer. We saw that there were HR services offered. What does that entail? Does that entail personal services, staffing, payroll? Provide more specifics and bullet points that are very clear. And then having a trusted relationship with them, having good experiences with them."* – Business Consultant

*"Before I recommended, I would need to know the cost. I want to know the tier breakdown, and that there's somehow some savings in there. I want to know those details before I actually recommend. But I certainly think it's a potentially good thing to have."* – Accountant

*"Negative reviews, I would want to try it myself before, see how easy it is to contact them. See how easy it is to get information, I would need to know the response rate. I would need to know how they are in government, state, and local rules and regulations, and costs."* – Accountant

*"Before I actually gave them a name of anybody, I would want to know more about the company, the services, how happy the clients are. I would do a search to make sure there's no complaints about them, they're not involved in any lawsuits, especially if they're offering regulatory and legal compliance with human resource laws. I would be very careful about making sure that I'm okay with saying these are people I think you can trust."* – Lawyer

*"Rules of professional responsibility and legal ethics, protection and privacy offered by the PEO, and how many employees the client has. Because that could determine if the PEOs have a lot of the tools that will be involved or if this is going to be relevant to the client."* – Lawyer

## Building Relationships with Trusted Advisors

- ▶ **Trusted advisors are open to discussing PEOs with their BDM clients, and many are interested in forming a referral partnership with a PEO built on a trusted relationship.**
  - **PEOs align with recommendations to and conversations with clients as all trusted advisors say they would consider discussing the benefits of PEOs with their BDM clients.**
    - All trusted advisors say they would (or already do) discuss the benefits of PEOs with their clients after reviewing the materials.
      - › The caveat, that a few participants mention, is that they would discuss PEOs only if their clients expressed a specific need that would be addressed by a PEO, and a few also say their discussions might hinge on the size of their client's business and/or the cost of the service.
        - » This sentiment is echoed by a Business Consultant who currently recommends PEOs and shares that he does so on a situational basis, depending on the business's size and operational challenges.
  - **Forming a referral partnership with a PEO is interesting to trusted advisors; most say they are open to establishing such a partnership while several already have a partnership in place.**
    - Almost all participants say emphatically, *yes*, they would be interested in forming a referral partnership with a PEO; however, most say they would need to build a trusted relationship with a contact at a PEO first.
      - › Referrals and recommendations are important to trusted advisors who say their referral relationships must be built on trust if they are putting their reputation on the line with their clients.
        - » A few participants explain that a negative experience for a client could negatively affect their own relationship with that client, something they do not take lightly.
      - › Several participants already have referral relationships with someone at a specific PEO and say they have close relationships with their contacts.
        - » One Banker, in reference to his relationship with a partner at a PEO, says he is golfing with them after he finishes this interview.
      - › A few participants, while still interested in such a partnership, express slight hesitancy regarding how this relationship might work, raising concerns about the legality and ethics involved.
        - » Several Bankers express interest in building a referral partnership but are unsure of any potential legal and compliance issues of their recommendations, and one says she would also need clearance from her company to enter such a partnership.
        - » Half of the Lawyers interviewed say they would need to be assured of the legality and ethics of such an arrangement.

## Building Relationships with Trusted Advisors (continued)

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### ***In their words...***

*"If there's any professional service offering that makes it easier for my clients to run their businesses profitably, successfully, then absolutely, I would recommend it. I think we're often getting into conversations with clients about professional services and the network of professional services providers that they might use. And to be able to say 'actually, here's a PEO that you should be taking a look at' would be great." – Business Consultant*

*"I'm not going to engage in a referral relationship unless it is clear to me that they offer a benefit, right? And I don't want to put my professional reputation on the line by recommending somebody that's not good at what they do." – Business Consultant*

*"I think if my role is to be the small business's trusted advisor, it wouldn't be helpful to just supply a PEO name. You know, it would be more helpful if I knew that I was starting to develop a relationship with the contact at the PEO firm and then went from there." – Banker*

*"Oh yes, I definitely could imagine a referral relationship. I mean, I don't know how you would quantify that referral relationship other than just, you know, someone you were in contact with and cross-referencing, but yes." – Banker*

*"I need to prove a good relationship because obviously if I recommend something that does not work then they point the finger at me and I'm going to lose them as a client as well. So, I'm always a little leery. We can say, here's something that might help you. But if I had a client that personally worked with them that would be a great place to start networking." – Accountant*

*"I'm all in - if you do a good job, I'll recommend you. But it's all or nothing. I mean, you got one bad step then I can't consciously recommend you because I'm going to lose the valid validation with my client." – Accountant*

*"So, your client sees you as like the go-to person and sometimes finding the right person is really hard. The minute you give a reference you're on the hook. If they're good, you're good. If they're bad, you're bad." – Lawyer*

*"I'm going to sound like a broken record, but it really comes down to, if you want me or someone like me to refer a client to this, I need to know more, a personal connection is good. Meeting someone is good, sitting down with them and meeting the people that work with them, that's all better." – Lawyer*

## Networking, LinkedIn, and Educating

► **Networking is the most suggested way to approach and build relationships with trusted advisors, followed by LinkedIn and hosting educational events relevant to their industries.**



- **Networking is a clear winner across segments, emerging as of the utmost importance when it comes to building lasting business relationships, whether this is through specific networking groups or other venues.**
  - Current knowledge of PEOs has been mostly built through networking according to participants who are familiar with PEOs, a few of whom recommend them to their clients already.
    - › Networking events with entrepreneurs or business professionals, often those that feature guest speakers from similar industries, are how a few Business Consultants and Bankers first learned about PEOs.
  - Entrepreneurial networking events, financial networking events, and business networking events emerge as good ways to reach Business Consultants, while other industry-specific networking groups are suggested to reach Lawyers, Accountants, and Bankers.
    - › Often these events bring in speakers and host seminars and are therefore a prime place for trusted advisors to learn more about the PEO industry.
      - » Participants say offering quality speakers and providing substantive content at these events would pique their interest and make them want to dig in more, and providing lunches is always a plus (e.g., one Business Consultant says, “Give it away before you sell it.”)
    - › Two specific opportunities participants mention as great ways to build relationships with trusted advisors are PEOs getting involved with local and female-led events.
      - » Cementing a relationship is a requirement for trusted advisors before they would be comfortable referring their clients to a specific PEO, and several suggest reaching out to, joining, or hosting local business-related groups or events to begin building those relationships (e.g., one Banker suggests joining a local chamber of commerce to build such relationships).
      - » Further, one female Accountant suggests networking groups and events targeting women in these fields might be good ways to reach someone like her, as she is in several such groups and prefers networking with other women.
- **Across segments, participants say LinkedIn would be an appropriate place for ads and other introductory-level information regarding PEOs.**
  - Several Business Consultants suggest publishing information and content that is relevant to small businesses and entrepreneurs, as this might catch their eye.
    - › Suggestions for this content include examples of situations that PEOs address and help solve, walk-throughs of how PEOs merge with companies, and examples and walk-throughs of how PEOs manage specific issues.
      - » One Business Consultant suggests having a spokesperson associated with PEOs share their messages on LinkedIn to give the industry a “personality.”

## Networking, LinkedIn, and Educating (continued)

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- **Continuing education events that are specific to participants' industries are a promising way to initially reach and inform trusted advisors, who are typically required to complete a certain number of these events per year.**
  - Accountants and Lawyers often mention speaking at or hosting industry-specific continuing education workshops (CLEs, or Continuing Legal Education events for Lawyers, and CPEs, or Continuing Professional Education workshops for Accountants) as ways PEOs can reach trusted advisors like them.
    - › These can be conducted in-person or virtually, and Accountants and Lawyers say they are required to attend a certain number of continuing education events per year.
      - » However, these events might be best used as an initial introduction, relying on further communication to build a relationship, as a few say they learned about PEOs through events like these, but still don't consider themselves familiar with PEOs' offerings and have not thought of suggesting their services to clients.
        - ◇ One Lawyer found out about PEOs at a CLE event; however, she does not consider herself very familiar with them and did not look further into PEOs after the event.
- **A few other opportunities to connect with trusted advisors emerge, especially when it comes to initial introductions to PEOs.**
  - Avenues to approach trusted advisors with the purpose of introducing them to the idea of PEOs include hosting tables or events at conferences, sponsoring trade events, putting ads in trade publications (print and online), and a few participants suggest emails and phone calls (although most say they do not typically respond to these "cold" introductions).
  - When seeking information about PEOs on their own, trusted advisors most often reference "Googling" the industry/specific PEOs as well as reaching out to their networks (especially to their colleagues and clients who use PEOs already) to find out more information.

## Networking, LinkedIn, and Educating (continued)

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### ***In their words...***

*"Maybe like in a networking group, you know, getting in touch with a networking group and then asking to put on a presentation or maybe like an alumni association for a college of business."* – Banker

*"I think it would be good to publish content on LinkedIn that walks through some of the issues that are faced by organizations, right? Where the PEO would solve that problem and show how. Give it away before you start selling it."* – Business Consultant

*"I feel as if having a personality associated with the PEO would be game changing. LinkedIn is a constant barrage of people trying to say how smart they are, right? And I see lots of names that pop up day in and day out where I'm like 'I have no idea who these people are!' So, if they could establish not just a content presence but a personality presence, I think that that would be eye-opening and refreshing."* – Business Consultant

*"When you're at trade shows or networking events, you also need to be a sponsor for networking events, you have to have your booth, pamphlets, business cards, and word of mouth."* – Business Consultant

*"I think the conference is a good idea. And also, if you're able to maybe like offer a free CPE class where you can give a presentation for an hour and tell them about your services essentially."* – Accountant

*"We have networking events with law firms, there are payroll companies that we've partnered with, they come in and give us food and say who they are. So, in business it's personal relationships. If I just get a general email and someone says 'here's what I offer,' I'm probably not going to refer them. I would try to attend networking events with PEOs."* – Accountant

*"I really hate to say, but I think a reliable source, word of mouth, and that's not easy. I think you need to know somebody that's used it and would say, oh, you're a reliable source that would tell me to use this. It's not, I hate to say this, but you're not just another salesperson trying to sell something I don't need."* – Accountant

*"I would say LinkedIn, just because it is more professionally-oriented so you're not going to get as much background noise. An industry event, it's not uncommon for people who are trying to connect with lawyers to underwrite the local bar associations' happy hour or to be the one that provides lunch for a CLE presentation. That's definitely a way to get in front of attorneys and to at least get them to think about you somewhat positively."* – Lawyer

*"I know a lot of the vendors that have approached us, whether it's for my firm or for clients, they'll just host a free CLE because we have to get I think 15 or 16 hours now and a lot of attorneys hate the idea of, you know, going for three days to sit around. So, it's nice to do a lunchtime, you get an invitation that says 'we've got a service that we think your clients may benefit from.' So, you know one-hour online lunchtime."* – Lawyer

## Participant Takeaways

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- ▶ **Overall reactions to the materials and discussion are overwhelmingly positive according to trusted advisors offering their final thoughts.**
  - **The statement and messages positively affect *all* participants' perceptions of and attitudes toward PEOs.**
    - Participants who already held positive perceptions of PEOs say their perceptions either stayed the same or slightly improved following the discussion and review of the materials.
      - › One Accountant who was familiar with PEOs at the beginning of the discussion says reviewing the materials is “just a reminder of how great they [PEOs] are.”
    - Additionally, those who started the discussion with neutral attitudes say at the conclusion of their interviews their perceptions of PEOs have improved and are now positive and more informed.
      - › One Lawyer says his thinking went from “Not having any perceptions to thinking it’s a pretty good idea,” while another says, “They’re a great idea!”
  - **Learning more information about PEOs, their benefits, and the services they offer piques the interest of many trusted advisors, some of whom say they are now going to do more research into PEOs.**
    - Although differing levels of awareness of and perceptions toward PEOs existed among trusted advisors at the beginning of their interviews, by the end most say their perceptions are very positive. This change is attributed to feeling more informed about PEOs and their offerings.
      - › Participants directly correlate having more information to their positive perceptions of PEOs. Ultimately, learning more about the offerings and benefits of PEOs for their BDM clients positively influences many trusted advisors' perceptions of the industry.
    - Across segments, some participants say they want to know more, and several say they are going to research or “Google” PEOs following their interviews.

## Participant Takeaways (continued)

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### ***In their words...***

*"I was already positive, but this has helped to provide me with selling points if you will. Previously I knew about PEOs a little bit, but now, due to our conversation and just a little more information, it's like okay well now these are just a few things as selling points that could push me to discuss it more."* – Business Consultant

*"I was positive about the idea of PEOs but didn't really have a solid sense of the idea. I feel like I gained some knowledge during [the interview]. I feel like I know more about them now and I'm favorably inclined."*  
– Business Consultant

*"They [perceptions of PEOs] went from nothing to something. So now I know that they exist. I mean, I obviously knew that they existed to a certain extent but now I'm more aware of them. I think it's good overall. I think it's a great option to have for small to midsized businesses."* – Accountant

*"I would say my attitude towards PEOs is more positive than before."* – Accountant

*"My perception hasn't changed; it just reminds me how much I think they're good - and I'm not just saying that. Honest to goodness, I think they're ideal."* – Accountant

*"My perception has changed positively, although I started somewhat positive already."* – Lawyer

*"Well, actually, my first perception was today when you told me about them, and they've just been positive since we talked about them. So, I don't think, I really can't think of anything negative. I think they're great."* – Lawyer

*"I went from not having any perceptions to thinking it's a pretty good idea. I didn't know what it was before this. I honestly thought that a PEO was one of those referral groups where everybody goes and exchanges cards and then I'm supposed to send my real estate work to Ted and my accounting work to Carol, you know that type of thing."* – Lawyer

*"Definitely positive now, definitely makes me want to do a little bit more research. You know, like I said, I do have some points of interest that this would definitely benefit. So definitely positive. And definitely going to Google those."* – Banker

*"I would say positive. Like now I'm intrigued, I want to know more."* – Banker

*"I feel like you've provided some more details. So, to me it's clearer in my mind the suite of offerings that a PEO could provide."* – Banker



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