



**Wisconsin Institute of  
Certified Public Accountants**

## **Consider an exciting career in forensic accounting**

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When you think of accounting, do you think of pocket protectors, calculators, spreadsheets, and a focus only on the bottom line? Instead, think of exhumed graves, recovered DNA samples, microscopic fibers, and forgotten security cameras. For accounting situations, that's figurative language. But there are very close parallels between cold cases shown on television and the forensic accountant plying his or her profession.

Our most recent economic downturn has increased the potential for malfeasance. More people have found themselves overextended financially and in need of a quick fix. Employees spared their jobs have begun to feel overworked and underappreciated. Corporate cutbacks decrease internal controls such as supervisory review or segregation of duties. Opportunity, rationale, and financial need can possibly lead to fraud. Therefore, a forensic accountant can be called on to investigate any fraud schemes that may surface.

Ideally, the forensic accountant would be hired by companies as a consultant prior to a fraud occurring. Forensic accountants can help companies proactively save both time and reputation. They can teach fraud prevention and detection techniques to employees, perform employee background checks and help to set up hotlines for employees to anonymously report suspected fraud.

The forensic accountant must prepare an accounting case that contains the legal elements that show whether or not a fraud has occurred. Only the most skilled and dogged investigators will turn up evidence that will lead to a resolution. To do this, the forensic accountant uses an impressive array of computer programs and analytical skills to trace funds and indentify assets, including those that may have been hidden from a business partner, a spouse, or the government.

The forensic accountant is a team player and depends on a diverse team of experts. He or she is paired with attorneys while performing the accounting discovery work. During a court case, the forensic accountant often provides expert testimony and knows what questions should be asked, thereby assisting with cross examination including evaluating the opponent's expert witness. Other partners can be police, insurance investigators, government bodies, banks, information technology experts, and the business community. Frequently, small businesses are in need of this type of investigative accounting, but many don't have this in-house capability. In this case, hiring a forensic accountant on an ad hoc basis makes sense.

Forensic accounting is an important and exciting field that should not be overlooked when considering a career in accounting. If you have a dogged determination and love for following the smallest clue, consider forensic accounting as a career option.