

Accounting: The perfect career choice

By Jill Brown

Whenever I tell people that I'm an accounting major, they usually reply, "So all you do is sit around in a cubicle and crunch numbers, right?" Wrong! Accounting is a great career field with a lot of variety and exciting opportunities.

Many accountants work for individual companies. Every business needs someone to handle the company's finances, whether it's your favorite restaurant down the street or a mega-corporation with locations all over the world. These accountants help keep track of everything their company does, and then analyze the results to improve the company's strategy. Other corporate accountants, called "internal auditors" help their companies run better. A mentor of mine who worked as an internal auditor travelled to every continent (except Antarctica) to visit her company's locations and help them run more efficiently.

If working for just one company isn't your style, public accounting may be the right fit for you. In this career field, you'll spend your time working with many different people from various different businesses and industries. Auditors visit their clients to ensure that the client's accountants are fairly reporting their company's financial information. Tax accountants work with their clients to plan their tax strategies, save them money, and help them with tax compliance. Accounting consultants become their clients' trusted business advisors, and use critical thinking and analytical skills to come up with solutions to their clients' problems and challenges. Many public accountants also pursue a career in forensic accounting. These accountants investigate financial fraud and stop employees from stealing money from their companies. And don't forget about opening your own business—many public accountants go on to start their own successful accounting firms.

Finally, many accountants work for the government. They help the government in a lot of the same ways that corporate accountants help their companies, and they're also in charge of collecting and administering our taxes. If you're interested in something a little more fast-paced, you'll be happy to hear that accountants are recruited by the FBI and similar government agencies. In fact, to work as an FBI special agent, you must have one of five backgrounds, and accounting is one of them! A friend of mine just graduated with an accounting degree, and he now works as an armed law enforcement officer for the national Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Do these career opportunities sound fun? I think so! They're also great in terms of pay, job security and growth potential.

Accountants make good salaries. Entry-level accountants can expect to earn between \$45,000 and \$50,000 straight out of college. After that, the sky is really the limit. CFO's, which are the top accountants in their companies, average salaries that are *well* into six figures. Directors at public accounting firms also earn six figures (\$104,500 – \$160,750 before bonuses, which can be substantial). Partners of public accounting firms make even more.

Accounting is also a great career when it comes to job security. A lot of my friends have been having trouble finding jobs in this economy, but all of my friends who graduated in accounting have jobs. Several of us even received job offers from our summer internships. It certainly made our senior years

less stressful to know we had great paying jobs waiting for us after graduation. And because everyone needs accountants, it's often called a "recession-proof" job—accountants don't have to worry too much about losing their jobs or being unemployed for long.

Finally, you'll have plenty of opportunities to grow as a CPA—it's far from being a dead-end job. In 2009, the first four spots on *BusinessWeek's* "Best Places to Launch a Career" list were earned by accounting firms. An accounting firm also nabbed the top spot on *Training Magazine's* list of companies that provide the best training. Starting your career in accounting is a great way to build the skills and relationships you'll need to succeed in the business world. Many CEOs have accounting-related backgrounds.

Accounting is an awesome career choice. There are many different areas to choose from, so you can find something that fits your unique personality and work style. And regardless of the area you pick, you'll be rewarded with great pay, job security, and the opportunity to grow. At a time when a lot of my friends are struggling to start their careers, my accounting friends and I are all really looking forward to what the future holds. Our accounting degrees are opening a lot of doors, and we're entering the workforce with confidence and excitement.

Jill Brown is an accounting student at Marquette University in Milwaukee. She plans to graduate in May 2010 with a bachelor of science in business administration with an emphasis in accounting and will receive a master of science in accounting in May 2011.