

Case Study: Rachael Johnson, Old College Nurseries & Accommodation, Norwich

Andrew and Rachael Johnson are more than a married couple. They are business partners. Together they jointly run Old College Accommodation their short-term holiday lettings and bed and breakfast business in the Norfolk Broads. Rachael also helps with the running of Andrews' wholesale horticultural nursery.

For the past four years they have used ACCA member Sara Harvey, director of Hines Harvey Woods Ltd, a local chartered certified accountancy company, as their accountant. Rachael explains: "My sister had first used Sara and had been very impressed. The recommendation was very useful and I certainly found it to be valid.

"I do not understand tax and have no real knowledge of financial issues and so I entrust everything to Sara. She gives excellent advice and I know I can always contact her about any financial queries I may have. It is very handy to have someone like Sara to hand as she can give advice on a range of accountancy issues such as the Taper Relief, which saved me money in the long-term. I have total trust in her and the relationship is very fruitful."

Interestingly, an area that the Johnsons' have not used their accountant for is that of late payment. Rachael says: "Many small businesses grapple with late payment but this only occasionally effects us. My husband has a good one-to-one relationship with many of our customers and so will phone or see if them if a problem arises. I can send reminders, but this personal relationship is more useful."

And, judging by Rachael's enthusiasm for Sara, if a problem with late payment arose she could, of course, contact her because "at the end of the day Sara is only at the end of a phone" she says.

What the accountant says....

ACCA member Sara Harvey and director of Hines Harvey Woods Ltd says: "Trust in the relationship between an accountant and their client is absolutely vital. To best advise the client, the accountant must be in full possession of the facts. The client must also be sure that you are working in their best interest.

"Small businesses wishing to employ an accountant should listen to recommendations rather than flashy adverts. Meet with the accountant – all decent accountants will have a first free meeting with you – to make sure you have a rapport and feel able to communicate effectively. It is not helpful if the accountant is talking in jargon you don't understand.

"I enjoy working with Rachael and Andy because they are hard-working, and determined to succeed. If Rachael asks a question she listens to the answer and acts on it. If she promises to find out something she will. And she has a great sense of humour – a great personality.

“The only challenges in the relationship are the normal challenges of dealing with a business in a tough market, and working to tight deadlines.”