

The AVN

Navigator

Steering you in the right direction

THE 2025 AVN AWARDS





Celebrating Our 2025 AVN Awards Winners!

This is the issue of The AVN Navigator that I really look forward to.

Why?

Because it celebrates what AVN is all about – making a difference.

The accountants you'll read about in these pages are the winners in the 2025 AVN Most Inspiring Accountant Awards and they have made a phenomenal difference. To their clients, their team, their business and, perhaps most importantly, to themselves.

They've listened to their clients' challenges – and **taken action**.

They've recognised the friction points in their own business – and **taken action**.

They've seen how much more their teams can contribute – and **taken action**.

They've identified where automation can improve their business – and **taken action**.

They've understood why their firm needs be seen and heard – and **taken action**.

They've created a vision for their firm that goes beyond the numbers – and **taken action**.

See the common thread?

And as a result of taking action, clients' businesses have been revitalised, team members have thrived and, obviously, awards have been won!

I hope this issue inspires you to do the same. Remember, your Practice Growth Expert is there to keep you on track so you achieve what you want to achieve.



Shane



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WHAT HAPPENED AT THE AVN AWARDS?

Trophies!



Sparkly mic!



The aftermath!



Fizz!



More trophies!

We had a ball!

We loved having the award winners here with us in person, though sadly Amrat and Charlotte couldn't make it and joined us online instead. It was a fantastic opportunity to share experiences and discover that many challenges are shared by other accountants too.

Will you be joining us as an award winner next year?

AVN MOST INSPIRING ACCOUNTANT 2025



Rachael Chadwick-Harrison, Chadwick

Dynamic, determined and driven to succeed, that's why Rachael won both the High Profile Practice and Changing Lives categories, and has now been named AVN Most Inspiring Accountant 2025.



And it's not the only award she and her team have won as this year alone Rachael has picked up the Women in Change Award for Change Programme of the Year. Chadwick's also won Best New Business (launched in the last five years) in the Stratford Herald Business Awards where Marketing and Communications Manager, Beth Davis, was also a finalist for Employee of the Year.

So what makes this such an award-winning firm?

Clarity of purpose is a key element.

"Our mission is simple yet powerful," says Rachael. "To empower businesses and nurture growth by delivering exceptional, people-centred accountancy services. We are committed to helping clients succeed, while creating a supportive and fun workplace where our team can thrive."

"Our vision is to be the leading accountancy firm known not just for numbers, but for helping businesses flourish, our people thrive, and our community benefit. Integrity, sustainability, and empathy run through everything we do: including our journey towards net zero and our active role as a force for good."

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"We don't just provide compliance services; we transform lives through financial clarity and proactive advice. By putting people first, we help clients unlock opportunities, reduce stress, and secure their financial futures."

Rachael and her team are actively fulfilling this mission.

Here's just one example:

"One business came to us after suffering from poor bookkeeping and a lack of tax efficiency. We uncovered miscategorised transactions, unclaimed VAT and allowable expenses wrongly posted as director loans. By restating accounts and personal tax returns, we secured a £40,000 saving. This meant cash back into the business and into the directors' pockets: a transformative result that gave them the confidence and resources to grow again."

Rachael has also worked hard to raise the profile of her firm.

"Like many practice owners, you go into practice and you sometimes you get really lucky and you get that amazing flagship client straight off. And you think, God, this is amazing. And then the other part of you goes, panic stations! They're 60% to 80% of our revenue, what happens if they drop off?"

"This client was scaling and we were doing amazing projects with them. However, you know there's a point where they're going to go internal with most of this, and you're going to assist them to go internal. And so in my mind, every year, I was thinking, that's going to happen: how am I going to tackle that?"

"And I started thinking, Okay, I need to build revenue, I need to get leads coming in. I need to make sure that we can cope when this client drops off. I was starting to look at the prospect journey. What do they see? How do they click on





Accountants & Bookkeepers

the website? What do they see when they walk in the office? Then the AVN book (Putting Excellence Into Practice) landed on my lap at that point, and I couldn't put it down. I read half of it and I thought, this is how I'm going to do this."

"I think everybody who is in accountancy thinks they're a great accountant. That's why you're there. But we all need to recognise, like our clients use us because they're not great at accountancy, that we need support as well. That's why we came to AVN. That's why I hired a PR consultant."

Taking a different approach

Rachael knew that she needed to make herself more visible and began attending and speaking at local events. This has really paid off as she's been invited to be the keynote speaker at this year's Women in Business Conference, been quoted in both the Financial Times and the Stratford Herald on business and economic matters, and met with her local MP to represent the voice of small businesses. Entering – and winning! – awards has also helped to make sure the firm is well known.

The firm launched its podcast, For Finance Sake (cheekily known as FFS for short) at the beginning of 2025 to deliver free, practical financial advice to businesses. This is going from strength to strength with over 2,000 downloads, becoming a trusted resource for owners wanting hands-on insight.

The ONE THING That Made A Difference For Rachael

"If I had to pick one thing that's made the biggest difference in my journey, it's resilience.

Bouncing back after every "no" from a prospect, navigating tough staffing challenges, and learning to keep getting back on the horse – again and again.

I've also made a conscious effort to surround myself with people who lift me up, cheer me on, and help me refocus when things feel tough. That combination has kept me moving forward, even when the road has been far from easy."



Emma Slack, PGE, comments:

Rachael has worked hard to transform her business within a very short amount of time. She understands the benefits of bringing in specialists to help drive the change and this has meant she has had a clear strategy for increasing the profile of her business so that more clients are constantly approaching Chadwick. She keeps a firm eye on what works and what doesn't so that she invests her time and energy into the things her clients and prospects value the most.



Rachael is constantly looking for ways to help her clients develop their businesses too. Her background in Management accounting means she has the skill to use the numbers to identify key areas of a business that, if changed, can transform that business's efficiency and profits.

The best thing is that Rachael is always encouraging her team to do the same.

I love working with Rachael and the team because they truly have a 'can do' attitude.





Harish Sharma, Grip Business Advisory

Harish's vision isn't just about running a successful accountancy firm - it's about crafting a business that works for him, not the other way around. His clarity of purpose has allowed him to regain control over his schedule, empower his team and deliver more value to clients.

But it wasn't always that way.

"My phone rang every 10 minutes, that was my major problem," Harish says. "Since I've got around 600 to 700 clients, I didn't know how to manage my calls. I lost control over the operation of the business and I didn't really know what system I needed to put in place. I was juggling way too many tasks and some of them I shouldn't have been doing. Plus I had clients taken on from 2012-13 and the fees had never been reviewed!"

After recognising the toll of being constantly on call, Harish introduced some small but powerful changes.

"With my coach, Andrew, we walked through the problems and the very first thing we did was look at the calls. Now, if my phone rings more than 10 seconds, it gets diverted to a third party and a link is sent to book a 15 minute call with me. That actually solved the problem."

Harish has found that clients either resolve their own issues before the meeting or arrive well-prepared, making each 15-minute call highly effective.

He also tackled the issue of juggling too many tasks.

"I didn't delegate much of the work; it was all done by me. So I put systems and processes in place where I can effectively delegate every single admin task so that it's taken care of by my team members, rather than me. Process wise, we didn't have a dashboard to know the status of accounts, VAT returns, client fees etc. So we put a system in place where we can see the up to date information on a dashboard. So we've massively improved our processes."

And what about those outdated fees?

"We started grading our clients. This helped me to put up the prices by 25% to 50%. I even did 300% for certain clients, given that they take up substantial amounts of time. I was nervous that we might lose those clients, but they never left us. Actually, they're happy with us."



Harish with his PGE Andrew and his wife, Shobika.

Rather than reducing his hours, Harish has focused on changing what he does with them. His schedule now includes focused windows for different types of work, including dedicated time for client calls, team queries, and strategic thinking. Early mornings are used for liaising with his Sri Lankan team, and the rest of the day follows a carefully time-blocked structure to minimise distraction and maximise impact.

These steps have reduced interruptions and saved him up to two hours daily as well as increasing revenue by £10k annually, despite working fewer reactive hours.

The ONE THING that made a difference for Harish:

"Time-blocking my day and getting distractions under control — particularly by outsourcing all phone calls and ensuring clients book appointments rather than calling directly — has helped me stay focused on high-value work and contributed massively to our success."





Amrat Parshotam, ATP Accountants

From taking on any old client to developing a laser-targeted programme for his ideal clients, Amrat has come a long way since he started.

"I decided I'd had enough of working for other people," Amrat says. "I'll set up my own practice (which I had been running on a part time basis). The problem was that, after having a steady income, you suddenly find yourself chasing money because you have bills to pay, you've got children to feed. So essentially, that's how I started, taking any and every client that walked through the door."

But he soon found that this just led to lots of frustrations.

"There were times, as my website says, I had 'same shit, different day' syndrome, when you really did not want to wake up on a Monday morning. So I was in a very dark place and it meant that my family life started to suffer. My kids and my wife saw me as a grumpy old git sitting in the corner, not having any interaction with them."

"But at that point, I found AVN, and with AVN, I found two people. Andrew (Amrat's PGE) who, as I've told him, has the right to kick my backside if I don't keep to the programme. And I met Patrick of Perfect Client, who helped me build my website and develop the programme as well."

The programme that Amrat created is a great example of how to differentiate your firm in a way that appeals to your ideal clients. Aimed at clients in construction, it directly appeals to what they want most.



"Most of my clients are in the construction and related trade businesses, and the one thing I hear from them is they want to 'get off the tools.' I constantly hear, 'I can't do this anymore, I'm getting tired, my back is aching.' With that in mind, together with Patrick, we built our website."

Get off the tools!



Amrat's website focuses on the pain points of construction clients, showing them how well he understands their issues. His 12 month 'Get Off The Tools' Programme is designed to help trades business owners break free from the day-to-day and build something truly sustainable. It's business advisory at its most practical and most transformational.

Apart from helping Amrat to win both the Practice Differentiation and Business Advisory Awards, this has had huge benefits.

"I no longer chase money. When I first joined AVN and used the Time's Up process, I virtually doubled my fees and my clients were happy to pay me. So I'm in a happier place. My kids now actually talk to me as a father, and my wife talks to me as a husband. So, you know, we've come to where we are in the right places."

The ONE THING that made a difference for Amrat:

"There hasn't been a single factor behind the awards; it's learning how to look at everything I do through the eyes of my ideal client. I've spent a lot of time listening to them to understand their struggles, their language and what works and what doesn't."

I would like to thank my coaches, Andrew Miller of AVN and Patrick McLoughlin of Perfect Client, for helping me put the Get Off The Tools program together.

I judge success by the number of lives I can positively impact by helping them get off the tools. The more people I can help, the better I feel, and the better they feel."



Charlotte Zacharia, The Z² Group

With the right team on board, your firm can achieve so much more. And that's exactly what Charlotte and her team at The Z² Group have found.

Strong personal relationships are at the heart of the firm. "Every client is seen as an individual," says Charlotte. "And that personal connection is reflected in the way the team mark life's important moments — sending cards for birthdays, births and bereavements, and sharing warm messages at Christmas. We know when their children are starting school. We know when they're getting married. We know when something dramatic happens. Clients know they are valued as people, not just businesses."

This focus on relationships doesn't mean the firm isn't embracing technology.

They are moving with the times in their tech stack, but that's all behind the scenes. Their outward focus is on their clients.

"Over the last five years, we've seen dramatic change in what business owners require. They're far more intuitive in what they want to see in terms of their financial insights. And obviously with AI coming into the equation, the evolution of the accountancy world is just crazy. It blows my mind. But I wanted to be able to take that challenge and make sure that I was running a practice with my team that was still very personal."

"I still wanted to keep the traditional speaking, talking, physical communication with our clients. So every year we have a team annual day, where we review our values. Also, when we're going through our business values as well as our personal values, we look at what our clients need. How have they changed, year on year, and the world as a whole, how has it changed? How are people communicating?"

"We make sure that whatever these changes are, that we've put them in practice. It can then aid us to be able to keep those relationships with our clients."

For Charlotte the biggest honour is that clients are regularly referring new business to her, proof that she and her team are delivering truly remarkable service.

The ONE THING that made a difference for Charlotte:

"Working with AVN has helped me identify the right kind of clients that we as a team want to work with, to make a difference in their business and personal lives. We recognise that all business owners are individual characters with individual goals and desires. They start their own business to be able to better themselves personally. We as their accountants need to work with clients we personally know so we are able to advise to each bespokely."

"We pride ourselves on giving that personal service to them and winning the Client Committed Team Award not only acknowledges, but confirms to us and to our community just how dedicated we are to them, their businesses and the success they achieve."





Kathryn Webb, Torbay Accounting

This award is all about putting systems and technology in place to help your firm run like clockwork. Or rather, run like a 21st century business that constantly adapts to changing times.

Kathryn started her business while she had young children and was happy to work part-time for several years. When her husband suffered an injury and was unable to work, she knew she had to put more into it.

"I've always really enjoyed working with business and helping other people," she says. "I'm an absolute nerd when it comes to business development, accounting and all that kind of stuff. It just really lights me up. I realised that I probably ought to look for premises and think about scaling up."

"So that necessitated me being a little bit more grown up in that business journey, rather than seeing it as a part time job. And so really, that's where Torbay accounting properly started. I then started looking at building the team and moving forward from there."

Exciting though it was develop her business, Kathryn found that as it grew, she was becoming overwhelmed.

"My biggest challenge was the fact that it had grown organically. So all of our systems were basically constructed in my head, and they were really quite effective when I only had a few clients. Then as the business scaled, it became really quite apparent that these weren't fit for purpose."

Four key areas worried her:

Quality "Were we doing the right things for the right people at the right time? Were we going to miss deadlines? Were we going to drop the ball on something?"

Cashflow "We didn't have great systems for charging the right fees to the right clients. We didn't have anything in place for scope creep, and we weren't collecting on time either. So I was constantly worrying about paying bills and cash flow, rather than being able to deliver good quality work."

Capacity "Capacity was an issue. We weren't doing things right so our capacity wasn't being well utilised."

Profitability "We were spending too much time on low value tasks that probably weren't important because we just didn't have those core systems in place."



She decided that they needed to dismantle all of their existing systems and go back to the beginning.

How did she approach this mammoth task?

"We really looked at every single thing that we did. First of all, did it need to be done? If it did, did it need to be done by us? Was there a system that could do it? Was there somebody else that could do it? Could we outsource and were we following best practice on everything?"

"We overhauled lots of our tech pack, so we started using things like Go Cardless. We started using better workflow management software, better proposal software, really leaning into AI and just revolutionised how we did everything so that we could have a really streamlined solution that I felt confident in scaling up."

The ONE THING that made a difference for Kathryn:

"The real difference came from three key shifts. First, truly recognising the value in what we do and how we serve our clients. That gave me a clearer sense of purpose and renewed motivation.

Second, learning to let go of control. I realised I was the bottleneck, and trusting my team has allowed both them and the business to grow.

And finally, taking regular time to work on improving our systems. Regular consistent efforts over time have made a big impact on how smoothly everything runs and how confidently we can support our clients."

CONSISTENTLY HIGH STANDARDS





Lee Fallon, PLF Accounting

The Rising Star Award is for an AVN member who has made remarkable progress, swiftly making transformative changes in their business. Nominated by their PGE, this is for firms that have recently joined us but are already showing huge potential for the future.

Emma Slack, Lee's PGE, explains why she nominated him for this award.

Lee only set up his practice 5 years ago in Donegal, having worked in industry for 20 years.

When he joined AVN 4 months ago his main goal was to allow his wife to give up her job and come and work for him before the end of the year.

Why did I nominate him?

Lee is passionate about helping customers with more than their compliance work. He is open and honest and, amazingly, even allowed one of our speakers (Miranda Birch) to question him live (without any knowledge of the questions beforehand) on one of our Thursday webinars in order to show the audience 'How to create great marketing videos'.

During that interview, he said...

"There is no stupid question. Clients recommend their friends and say, "Well, speak to Lee, because he'll make you feel at ease. And if you've got any questions, he'll answer them and help you.""

I think that's the greatest compliment you can probably get. A thanks is nice, but if they refer you to other people on top of that, based on the experience that they've had, that's probably the nicest part of it.

As a sole trader he has worked on taking control of his time AND giving his clients the best service he can. Clients can book time with him through an online booking system when it is convenient for them and he outsources any bookkeeping to a local bookkeeper (who by the way, sends him lots of great referrals too).

Lee has really learnt to value himself and has started increasing fees by 10-20%. He is giving quotes and rather than backing down on price, negotiating a reduction in the package... for a reduced price. He is aware that not every prospect will be a great client and is feeling confident enough to turn down work, preferring clients where he can add strategic value.

I said at the beginning when Lee joined AVN 4 months ago his main goal was to allow his wife to give up her job and come and work for him before the end of the year. I am proud to say that he was confident enough in the future of his business to encourage his wife to hand in her notice and leave her job last month!

The ONE THING that made a difference for Lee:

"Joining AVN and working with Emma has helped massively.

Emma has been a coach and a sounding board to help me navigate all the problems and issues I'm currently facing. Emma has helped to prioritise and schedule items for me and start us on the AVN journey and pick off some the easy tasks and start to build my practice to look like one I want to work in going forward.

There is still a lot to work through but receiving the award shows we are going in the right direction."



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2025 AWARD ENTRIES

Entries for the AVN Awards are always full of innovation, determination and inspiration! Here are just a few extracts from this year's crop. These may not have won a trophy but they're still fantastic ideas.

“In the past, this client's last-minute drop-offs might have derailed the week...

They instead established proper boundaries: had a respectful, upfront conversation about timelines, a fast turnaround agreed and payment secured in advance. The result? Happier client, clearer expectations, smoother delivery. That kind of shift shows a mature business vision being lived out in the day-to-day.”

Barry Shaw, Shaw Mitchell

“Every limited company client gets two advisory sessions per year: one before and one after year-end.

These aren't generic reviews; they're tailored deep dives into profitability, margins, tax planning, and financial forecasting. Clients regularly express shock at how much clarity they get, especially compared to prior experiences elsewhere. It's a consistent game-changer.”

Richard Parker, Blend Accounting

“A client once deemed her too expensive and left.

But after trying to manage things themselves, they returned chastened and struggling. Barbara didn't just take them back; she held firm, explained the value her team brings, and gave them the updated (higher) pricing. They accepted it without hesitation.

This wasn't just a win for her bank balance it was a moment of validation that the strategy is working.”

Barbara Perry, Perry Legal and Accountancy

“Usman created a clever solution to tackle bottlenecks.

Instead of files piling up in a queue, team members now book a review slot directly into his calendar, forcing timely action and faster turnaround. Team accountability is further reinforced through daily check-ins and check-outs, giving visibility on progress and preventing random disruptions.”

Usman Sial, Sial Accountants & Tax Advisers

“Efficiency has also been boosted through the Pomodoro technique...

... small time blocks that have helped tackle neglected projects like personalised System Builder docs and pricing matrix updates. Time management isn't just a theory here; it's part of the operating rhythm.”

Ifan Lloyd, IDH Accountancy Services



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