The Four Most Common Myths
about PBC Request List Management

And how you can turn them from challenges that hold your firm back

into a streamlined process that sets you apart from the competition

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MYTH VS. REALITY

"Myths which are believed in tend to **become** true."

- **George Orwell**

Every culture or group has its own set of myths. Accounting and audits are no different.

Some myths are good; they help bring people together and distill complex concepts into relatable terms. And some myths aren't as good; they reinforce ideas that keep us from progressing. This second group of myths are what we'll be diving into in this ebook.

We'll discuss the three most common myths firms and accountants believe about PBC request list management, and more importantly, how you can turn them from challenges that get brushed under the rug into a streamlined process that sets you apart from the competition.

1

MYTH

We understand how much time document management takes; it doesn't cost that much.

REALITY

Firms often lose track of the true costs of document management and most firms are losing money on it or creating a poor experience for clients.

2

MYTH

We're using a secure portal, so I know my clients' information is safe.

REALITY

Your team says they're using a secure spreadsheet or portal. They're actually using email.

3

MYTH

We're pretty good at communication, and if we do miscommunicate, it's not a big deal.

REALITY

Most parties involved in an audit don't just manage miscommunication—they expect it.

4

MYTH

PBC request lists are hard to manage and time-consuming and that's just the world we live in.

REALITY

Managing PBC requests lists doesn't have to be hard. You just need the right tools for the job.

MYTH #1

We understand how much time document management takes; it doesn't cost that much.

We've all heard some version of this myth: "We don't need to budget for document management time; it won't take long." Usually, a firm will allot 1–2 hours for "management" and call it a day. Another associated myth is, "Even if document management takes longer than expected (additional samples, explanations, etc.), I'll remember why when it comes time for billing."

REALITY #1

Firms often lose track of the true costs of document management and most firms are losing money on it or creating **a poor experience for clients.**

The truth is, no firm in the world budgets time for document management while completing an audit. Managing spreadsheets, emails, documents, changes, notes, updates, and everything else that's required to manage audit documentation takes on average 15-20 hours per engagement. So where is that time coming from? It's not a line item in your bill to the client, which means your firm is eating those costs.

Let's look at another example. Six months ago, an accountant—let's call him Tim—worked on an engagement and had to ask for additional explanations and samples. It took Tim longer than he expected and he ended up being way over budget. Now it's present day. That was three clients ago and Tim is currently working on seven more. His manager asks him why he was over budget. All his documentation on the engagement is in random emails buried in his inbox or gone. Tim's firm isn't happy because they can't bill accurately for his work and the client isn't happy because they don't understand what they're getting billed for. It's a no-win situation. Poor Tim.

> On average, a firm spends **15–20 hours per engagement just managing documents.**

MYTH #2

We're using a secure portal, so I know my clients' information is safe.

Our second myth might be the most dangerous in today's (rightfully) focused security environment. You set up the right processes, spreadsheets, and even customized a portal or document-sharing program to facilitate secure sharing. You think your team is using everything you've provided to protect your client's sensitive information. Turns out, they aren't.

REALITY #2

Your team says they're using a secure spreadsheet or portal. They're actually using email.

The hard reality around this myth is that those systems are cumbersome and difficult to use, so your accountants fall back on the tried and true "easy" solution: email. Not only is email one of the least secure forms of communication—easily hackable, unencrypted, and susceptible to phishing—it's almost virtually impossible to control. Documents that should be deleted, aren't. Documents get lost. And it's easy to avoid accountability because individual email accounts aren't transparent to everyone involved in the process.

"There used to be a lot of back and forth between us and the clients because everything was done by email. It got frustrating with the volume of documents that came through. We would sometimes either lose documents or clients would give us documents we didn't need. At the end of the day, it was a frustrating process. The Excel spreadsheet never really worked because the clients wouldn't update it on their side, and we were just guessing on our side."

- Brandon Keyes, Senior Auditor, WSRP

MYTH #3

We're pretty good at communication, and if we do miscommunicate, it's not a big deal.

First, let's define miscommunication. In this case, we're using it as an umbrella term for poor, non-existent, or late communication. Now that that's out of the way, let's do a quick quiz around our third myth. Mark all that apply:

A) ___ The amount of miscommunication that happens during an audit is relatively low

B) ___ If miscommunication does happen, it's not a big deal

C) ___ Miscommunication is just part of the process you have to deal with

D) ___ All of the above.

If you chose option D, congratulations! You're right! Options A through C are all sub-myths of our larger miscommunication myth. There's a certain amount of either head-in-the-sand denialism or I-can't-do-anything-about-it fatalism amongst accountants around miscommunication. They view it either as an aberration that doesn't have much of an impact, or as simply part of the process.

REALITY #3

Most parties involved in an audit don't just manage miscommunication—they expect it.

There are both positives and negatives in the reality about our third myth. Let's start with the bad news: miscommunication happens all the time. Here are just a few examples:

Duplicate or missed requests.

Let's say you get the file you need at the beginning of the engagement, but you don't need it for two months. You forget and have to ask again. Or the client gave it to someone else in the organization. These types of miscommunications don't look great for your firm or make life very easy for the client.

Status updates.

The client wants an update? Good luck! First, you, as an individual contributor, have to understand the list, gather all the items you've received for your sections, find all the new requests, and get them over to whoever is compiling the update. Then every. single. contributor has to do the same thing, reconcile everything to make sure it's accurate, and finally send it on its way. And then, when someone adds a new request or document 15 minutes later, all your hard work is now out of date and virtually worthless.

Accountability and transparency.

Miscommunication doesn't just happen between the firm and clients. It also happens within the firm. As a partner, do you know what's happening in your engagements? Do you know if they're on track? Behind or ahead of schedule? Do you want your accountants and staff spending their time giving you detailed updates? You're deeply invested in your business, but don't have a good way to get updates on a huge part of your revenue.

That's the bad news. Every miscommunication means you and your brand lose a little credibility with your client or you lose a little more time or money.

MYTH #4

PBC request lists are hard to manage and time-consuming and that's just the world we live in.

Our fourth myth is the culmination of our other three: **PBC request list management is simply a difficult process and there's nothing we can do about it.**

REALITY #2

Managing PBC requests lists doesn't have to be hard. **You just need the right tools for the job.**

The hard reality around this myth is that those systems are cumbersome and difficult to use, so your accountants fall back on the tried and true "easy" solution: email. Not only is email one of the least secure forms of communication—easily hackable, unencrypted, and susceptible to phishing—it's almost virtually impossible to control. Documents that should be deleted, aren't. Documents get lost. And it's easy to avoid accountability because individual email accounts aren't transparent to everyone involved in the process.

A PBC REQUEST LIST SOLUTION HELPS YOU:

1. Create dynamic request lists

Import tried and true spreadsheets, create new lists from easy-to-use templates, and roll forward existing engagements

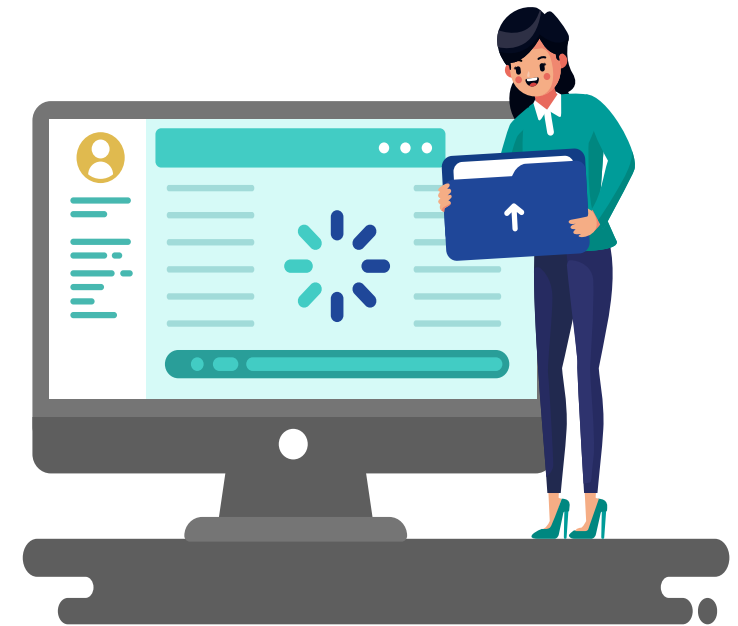## 2. Send and receive documents securely

Drag and drop files directly onto your list and link them directly to the corresponding request

3. Track request and team engagement

Track the progress of individual requests in real-time and monitor how your team is interacting with each document and list

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
IN A DYNAMIC PBC REQUEST LIST SOLUTION

List Management

- Create categories and subcategories
- Add, edit, and remove requests
- Provide descriptions, instructions, and view the request history
- Drag and drop firm provided files to requests
- Accept or return the info provided for each request

Customization

- Enable firm co-branding
- Choose a custom sub-domain
- Add personalized firm email domain
- Customize end-user license agreement

Team Management

- Add new departments, users, and assignments
- Search and sort team members

Security

- Assign requests to specific users and lock them for security
- Clone requests from one engagement to another
- Enforce multi-factor authentication
- Adjust inactivity time-out
- Enable third-party guest access via encrypted channels
- Restrict access by role or engagement

Alerts and Notifications

- Send customized emails based on system events

Import and Export Data

- Export client list
- Export engagement
- Export individual or selected requests
- Import existing Excel spreadsheets or other file types

SURALINK
THE LEADER IN PBC REQUEST LIST MANAGEMENT

At Suralink, we serve hundreds of the top accounting firms in the US—making it easier and faster to manage the documents, processes, and teams associated with an audit. Our goal for every audit is:

Security
Protect clients' sensitive data

Simplicity
Streamline the process and make it easier for everyone involved

Transparency
Keep everyone involved in-the-know at all times

Accountability
Ensure accountability throughout the process for both the firm and the client

Profitability
Create efficiencies to support profitability

"Just receiving the documents on a large audit engagement could take 40+ hours to maintain. When we demoed Suralink, it was an instant decision to onboard it. If I were to estimate on a larger audit, it's probably saving 30–50 hours. Having everything real-time, not having to maintain separate request lists, and having everything all in one place is pretty impactful."

- Destiny Flood,

Audit Senior Manager, PP&CO

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ABOUT SURALINK

Suralink is the leader in PBC request list management, helping accounting firms simplify the audit process while improving the client experience. The company's cloud-based application—built by accountants for accountants—integrates a dynamic PBC request list and assignment workflow solution with a secure file hosting platform to serve as a single location for client interaction. Suralink's technology, combined with its industry expertise, helps more than 275 of the leading firms in North America and the UK ensure security, simplicity, transparency, and accountability throughout the audit process.

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