

The most current information on how financial professionals can increase cash flow & control costs.

February 14, 2020

KEY FINANCE FIGURES

	Curr*	Lst Mo	Lst Yr
■ Leading Rates %			
Prime Rate	4.75	4.75	5.50
Fed Funds Rate	1.75	1.75	2.50
■ Money Market Rates %			
<i>London Interbank (LIBOR)</i>			
1 month	1.66	1.78	2.52
3 months	1.81	1.93	2.78
6 months	1.83	1.92	2.85
■ Stock & Bond Indexes			
DJIA	28,536	28,645	24,528
S&P 500	3,244	3,240	2,644
NASDAQ	9,139	9,007	7,086
5-Yr T-Bill	1.44	1.68	2.58
10-Yr T-Bill	1.61	1.88	2.75
■ NACM Credit Managers' Index			
Sales	58.8	61.6	59.0
New credit apps	59.4	61.2	57.5
Dollar collections	57.9	59.2	59.3

*As of 1/27/20

The Cumulative Effect of CFO & Controller Alert

With the pace of change accelerating and the competition tougher, what's the best chance to keep up performance and get two steps ahead of the competition? A reliable source of continuous information.

It's the **cumulative effect** that helps, not any one reading. Our unique function is to deliver solid, focused information in your area of responsibility in a fast-read format twice a month to help performance.

70% of firms have made biz decisions on bad data

■ *Majority of CFOs not confident data is error-free*

“Without trust, you have nothing.” That’s something you expect to hear when it comes to love, relationships ... and financial reports?

There are definitely some trust issues afoot in finance departments.

More than half (55%) of companies aren’t completely confident they can ID financial errors before they report their results.

Even worse: 70% of finance execs and biz leaders believe their firm has made a significant business decision based on inaccurate financial data.

Those eye-openers come from a recent study by BlackLine.

And they can lead to some very serious – and costly – missteps.

Of course this has a ripple effect. You can bet the same phenomenon’s likely happening with your key customers and suppliers, impacting you.

Here’s where things are going wrong for your peers and what they’re doing to increase the accuracy of their reporting so you don’t make the same mistakes.

The No. 1 culprit is ...

You probably won’t be shocked to hear that manual data entry and

(Please see Bad data ... on Page 2)

Dept. of Labor finalizes joint-employer rule

■ *Your liability has been limited, thanks to this change*

Good news for employers everywhere: You’re now less likely to end up on the hook for another business’s compliance missteps.

The Department of Labor (DOL) just released the final version of the joint-employer rule. And it’s effective March 16, 2020.

Here’s what you need to know.

Enter a new test

When determining whether there’s a joint-employer relationship, it doesn’t all come down to economic dependence. Instead the DOL has

created a new gauge.

The “four-factor balancing test” takes into account who:

1. hires or fires the employee
2. supervises and controls the employee’s work schedule or conditions of employment to a substantial degree
3. determines the employee’s rate and method of payment, and
4. maintains the employee’s employment records.

Info: For the final rule, go to [dol.gov/agencies/wbd/flsa/2020-joint-employment](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wbd/flsa/2020-joint-employment)

Bad data ...

(continued from Page 1)

human error top the list of reasons it's so tough to trust the numbers. A full 41% of BlackLine survey respondents offered that as the problem.

But what else is standing in the way of more accurate reporting?

- Companies lack sufficient automated controls and checks for the volume of data they must handle (28%), and
- The procedures to collect and process the data is just too complex (28%).

Righting the ship

So what are your peers doing about it?

Here are the top three avenues they've pursued to have more confidence in their own numbers:

1. *41% have implemented technology to minimize the risk of inaccuracies.* Automating is a good way to reduce human error, whether you tap Optical Character Recognition Software or Artificial Intelligence.

Just be careful – you'll want to make sure the data coming in is clean, otherwise automating won't give you the results you're hoping for.

2. *38% have reviewed both their internal and external audit processes.* That's always a welcome move, but

FORMAT MATTERS TOO

One of your peers hit upon a way to make financial data more meaningful, thanks to a change in format.

They created a one-page report, divided into four quadrants.

In the top left, they put the income statement – actual results versus budget and prior year. In the top right, they listed the next month's forecast.

In the bottom left, they had a balance sheet comparing actuals with last year. And in the bottom right, they made note of significant variances in the prior month to explain the results.

The left side of the paper serves as a rear view mirror and the right side a windshield.

it's still a reactive solution to the problem at hand. You want to do this in coordination with other fixes.

3. *28% have changed their organization's reporting process.* If you're thinking about going that route, be sure to enlist feedback from many different sources, from accounting staffers on the front lines to the high-level execs who receive and act based on reports.

Info: Survey results are detailed in the whitepaper "Mistrust in the Numbers: BlackLine Study into the Potential Global Scale of Financial Data Inaccuracies," at blackline.com

Sharpen your JUDGMENT

This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

■ Salaried worker gets paid commissions: Still exempt?

"Hey, Kerry," said CFO Bill Keeper, as payroll manager Kerry Peterson stepped into his office. "Were you able to pull up John Reynolds' paystubs for me?"

"Yes, here you go," Kerry said, handing them to Bill.

"Thanks. John filed a complaint against the company," said Bill. "He's saying we didn't pay him overtime."

"But he's exempt," Kerry pointed out. "So he shouldn't get overtime."

'Unlawful deductions'

"Yes, but he's claiming we took unlawful deductions from his pay, so that meant he wasn't exempt. That's why I wanted to take a look at his paystubs.

"He works on commission, so I see his paycheck could be lower one week than the next, depending on whether or not he met his commission bank threshold," said Bill.

"You can also see his commission earnings are completely separate from his salary. Any deductions made from John's paycheck were just from his commission payout," said Kerry.

"Yes, I see his base salary was consistent each pay period. It's just that his check as a whole would be different, depending if he met his commission threshold. Well, we've got a case to make then," said Bill.

Did Bill's company win the case?

- Make your decision, then please turn to Page 6 for the court's ruling.

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Audit fees on the rise ... for some: Who's paying more and who isn't

■ *Size matters when it comes to how much more you'll pay*

Quick – how much did you pay in audit fees last year compared to the one before it?

If you say more, you're not the only one. But maybe you shouldn't be.

Audit fees are increasing overall, says a new report out of Financial Executives International (FEI). But that trend isn't being felt across all organizations evenly.

To make sure you're not paying more than you should be, compare your numbers against what FEI found.

The bigger you are, the more you should expect that number to rise. When FEI broke audit fee increases down by revenue classification, the numbers told a different story.

Your fees should be down if you're in these buckets:

- less than \$25M
- \$25M-\$100M, or
- \$1B-\$5B.

However, you're probably paying more if your revenue is:

- \$100M-\$500M
- \$500M-\$1B, or
- \$5B or more.

Bucking this trend? You may want to talk to your audit firm.

Info: To get the full audit fee report, go to financialexecutives.org/Research/Publications/2020/10th-Annual-Audit-Fee-Survey-Report.aspx

FOR MORE ...

To see how this compares to a few years back, go to cfoandcontrolleralert.com/new-benchmarks-how-do-your-audit-fees-compare

Hourly rate up \$67

The average year-over-year jump to tap an external auditor? 4.25%. And in the past decade, the average per-hour rate went from \$216 to \$283.

Finally! Proof weight loss programs pay off

■ *The key is offering ongoing access, says a study of 11,825 employees*

Don't shut down those wellness efforts yet. Firms can help staffers lose weight and keep healthcare costs down with an ongoing program, says a new report.

One-and-done wellness programs don't work, says the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force. It tracked the weight loss and health improvements of 11,825 employees who participated in Naturally Slim weight loss, a popular online program.

The 52-week program consists of 10 weekly video lessons, followed by bi-weekly and monthly maintenance videos. Employees also have access to an online community of coaches.

The findings showed employees lost

weight the first time they completed the program, then gained some back.

However, those who participated *again* lost more weight, averaging 4.5% of their initial body weight, due to learning repeatable lessons to lose weight and move more.

More cost-effective

A web-based weight loss program such as this one which is more cost-effective for employers and produces the same results as a more costly clinical program, say researchers.

Adapted from "Employee weight loss programs effective over the long term, new study suggests," by Scott Wooldridge, at benefitspro.com

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

■ Reality check on Coronavirus and the global economy

You can't look at the news without hearing about escalating concerns about the Coronavirus, with several confirmed cases hitting the U.S.

But considering the size of the global economic presence of the source – China – many can't help but wonder what this will do to the world economy.

Stocks tumbled as news of the virus' spread hit.

Which means that other execs in your company may be starting to get nervous.

And you can give some context to offer a reality check.

Do not panic (yet)

First the good news:

- The Coronavirus is not as deadly as SARS, which claimed 800 lives.
- Authorities took steps earlier to contain the spread.

Now the less-good news: The timing is terrible.

Shutdowns of everything from airports to movie theaters to parts of the Great Wall hit just as the Lunar New Year arrived – one of the biggest spending times of the year in China.

That's expected to have a significant negative impact on their economy.

Will that spread to hurt the global economy? Too soon to tell, say economists. Stay tuned.

(Adapted in part from "How China's Virus Outbreak Could Threaten the Global Economy," by Alexandra Stevenson, at nytimes.com/2020/01/23/world/asia/wuhan-coronavirus-china-economy.html)

The No. 1 tech vulnerability that's living on every staffer's desktop

■ Folders are a minefield of sensitive info

If an employee has a computer, your company has a potentially expensive risk on it.

And it's living in those little manila icons on the screen.

Desktop folders are leaving companies', their employees' and even their customers' sensitive information at risk.

That's the finding of the recent 2019 Varonis Global Data Risk Report.

Here's where the exposures lie and how you can shore them up.

Exposed on 2 fronts

These two vulnerabilities make desktop folders a liability for every firm:

1. They're not locked down. Nearly a quarter (22%) of folders are open to everyone. For 15% of your peers that equals more than one million folders that anyone could access.

2. They're full of stale data.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of desktop folders house stale data, which is sensitive info a company no longer needs to do business.

Turning the tide

What do you do about it?

Going forward, all folders should be restricted only to those who need them. You're also going to want IT to lock folders down and restrict access.

But you might encounter some pushback from IT when you raise the issue. The techies estimate it takes about six to eight hours *per folder* to locate and manually remove global access groups, then figure out who needs access and create new groups.

Considering how much a data breach could cost, it's worth the effort.

Info: For the full report, go to varonis.com/2019-data-risk-report

Data key to managing healthcare investment

■ Self-funding insurance helps, but be sure you get access to the numbers

As healthcare costs continue to rise every year, CFOs worry they aren't getting what they pay for.

Self-funding healthcare insurance is one way to chip away at costs. But not all self-funded plans are equal.

That's because the real key to maximizing the ROI on your healthcare expenses is getting access to employee health data.

By analyzing that data, you can find more savings while improving benefits and employee health.

Leveraging data analysis

Check out a couple of real-world examples of how your peers have

leveraged data to achieve truly impressive savings.

When a Delaware-based employer saw many of its minimum wage workers routinely going to the ER, it eliminated urgent care and office co-pays. It saved \$140,000 Year 1, and reduced costs 50% over three years.

An Ohio company used anonymized employee health data to create targeted wellness programs, including on-site clinics. Result? It lowered cost-per-insured for workers with chronic conditions by an average of 16% over three years while protecting employees' private health information.

Info: selffundingsuccess.com

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

■ Flight risk algorithm? Yes, a way you can stop turnover

What if there was an algorithm to help you retain your best and brightest?

IBM's in the process of patenting such a formula that can supposedly predict an employees' flight risk with 95% accuracy. Stay tuned.

3 mistakes leaders make

For now, to boost your own retention rates, here's an expert who can help: Insights and Outcomes co-founder Jon Christiansen.

He's run countless predictive models on retention and ID'd the leadership mistakes that make people quit:

- **Having too many process constraints:** When a lack of information, resources, etc., stops an employee from moving forward on a project, find out how much control they have over the situation first. Most likely, you'll need to step in and have that uncomfortable conversation with the other department involved.
- **Setting contradictory goals:** What if staffers have to constantly juggle multiple finance tasks at once? Work with them on a list of priorities from most to least important.
- **Wasting resources:** When you're assigning staffers extra tasks or inviting them to meetings without stopping to think if they really have the time for it, that's "resource waste," says Christiansen. It's best to give them the space to do their most important work. Otherwise, it'll burn them out and impact the quality of their deliverables.

(Adapted from "8 things leaders do that make employees quit," by Jon Christiansen, at hbr.org)

Our subscribers come from a broad range of companies, both large and small. In this regular feature, three of them share success stories you can adapt to your unique situation.

1 **Telehealth usage up 400% – here's why**

We are in a very competitive labor market, so we wanted to make sure we have an excellent benefits program to attract the best and the brightest.

We began offering telehealth two years ago not only because it can be a great tool, but we have a lot of single parents who work in our industry, and it can be a real lifesaver for them.

We wanted to ensure they don't have to spend additional money or traipse across town to their doctor.

The opportunity for someone to spend 10 minutes on their mobile phone on a video chat with a doctor who can prescribe meds or help with a non-serious ailment lets them receive care and helps us with productivity.

Added appealing incentives

In 2019, we decided there'd be no telehealth deductible or co-pay. As a result, we've seen a 400% jump in use.

Making this type of care so easily available and affordable has also saved us in benefits costs, placing the

right care in the best setting. It's led to an improved sense of satisfaction among employees and bottom line.

For us, things like telemedicine are innovative and are also specifically aligned with a large portion of our workforce. Everybody loves it. I used it for my daughter when she'd been bitten by a spider. Five minutes on my mobile phone with a telehealth advisor, and she got the care needed.

It's a true win-win.

*(Jeremy Falke, SVP,
HR, Capital Senior Living,
Dallas)*

**REAL
PROBLEMS
REAL
SOLUTIONS**

2 **The strategy that gives us compliance confidence**

If a tax notice from the IRS or state fell through the cracks, we could be liable for thousands of dollars.

We knew our original method of tracking and resolving these notices didn't cut it. Paperwork relating to the notice was typically stored in one place, while notes about any calls or emails we sent inquiring about the notice would be saved in another.

That made it easy for info to get misplaced or misfiled, which put us in danger of missing key deadlines for

responding to the notice or sending necessary supporting documents.

Central info storage

To help us stay organized, we started using a software program specifically designed to track tax notices.

All we needed to do was scan the notice into the software, and it would create a file that allowed us to store all notes and records in one place.

We could create reminders to follow up with agencies or

submit vital forms.

The software also allowed us to keep notes on how we resolved the

issue and how we could prevent future problems.

It paid for itself quickly – not only did it help us avoid a big fine from IRS, it's saved us countless hours of work.

(Adapted from "Taming the Tax Notice Compliance Tiger," presented at the 2019 American Payroll Association Congress, Long Beach, CA)

3 **Annual review uncovers ongoing savings in A/P**

We heard it all the time: A/P's a cost center, not a profit center. And we were determined to change that.

Our team started brainstorming a strategic way we could better track, assess and ultimately reduce costs in A/P.

Had them drive the train

That led us to the idea of conducting an annual review of our cost structure.

We went with once a year because it wouldn't be too time-consuming and would let us see how things change year-over-year.

We look at everything from invoicing to p-cards to payments, and it helps us pinpoint places where we may be able to bring costs down.

After identifying the best opportunities for savings, we empowered A/P to take action.

For example, an early review showed just how much money we wasted printing paper checks.

So A/P began reaching out to any

vendor that received more than five checks from us per year to convert them to ACH.

An essential first step for sure. But after, we moved on to focus on reducing related expenses, like how much it costs to get invoices into our system.

With a review we can identify new ways to turn A/P into less of a cost center every single year.

(Michael Clark, A/P Manager, Southwest Airlines, as presented at the A/P P2P Conference & Expo, Las Vegas)

Your top time-trackers aren't putting mechanisms in place to measure their own performance

■ Vast majority of companies missing even the most basic key performance indicators for Payroll

Payroll may be considered a cost center, but it probably doesn't need to cost your company as much as it does.

Establishing and tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) can be one of the best ways to contain that.

But besides the traditional use, you can also use KPIs as a personal development tool.

Get personal

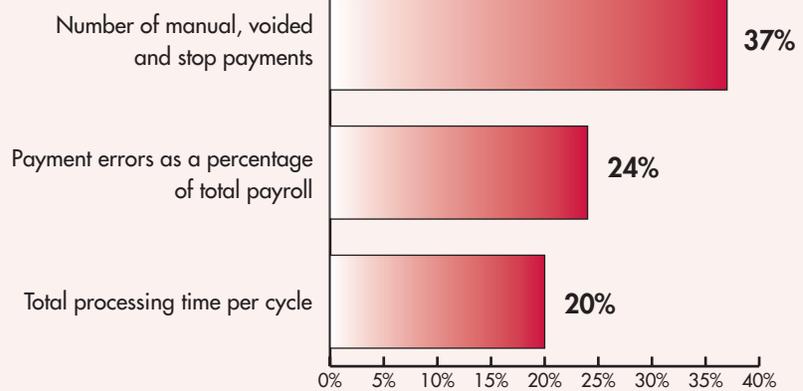
Consider having each member of your payroll team create a personal KPI for him or herself – a metric that staffer feels is important for success in his or her position.

Staffers will appreciate having a hand in how they're evaluated, so you should get a morale boost.

And you'll have additional ways to know this mission-critical team is on track.

LIGHT ON YARDSTICKS

Payroll Key Performance Indicators Tracked



Source: The American Payroll Association's Annual State of Payroll Survey

Tough to know where you need to go when you don't know where you are now! It's still early enough in the year to get some metrics in place for 2020 that you'll be able to track quarter over quarter.

Sharpen your judgment...

THE DECISION

(please see case on Page 2)

Yes, the company won the case.

The company satisfied all of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements for classifying a worker as an exempt employee who's paid a fixed salary, said the court.

The employee argued that his salary was reduced whenever he didn't make enough in commission, which he claimed violated his status as a salaried employee.

But the judge, referring to the employee's paystubs, confirmed that only his commission payouts were changing every payroll period – regardless of his performance, his biweekly base salary was the same and “not subject to

reduction,” as per FLSA guidelines.

The only portion of his pay that was reduced was his commission pay. If he missed his commission goal each pay period, he would have to make that up in future commissions before taking home any extra pay.

Analysis: Keep salary and commissions separate

Employers cannot make deductions from exempt employees' base salary due to performance. However, if exempt workers receive separate payments that are subject to deductions, like commissions, make sure that's clear on employee paystubs.

Also, have employees sign a commission agreement, which acknowledges they understand the terms of payment.

Cite: *Billings v. Ryze Claim Solutions, LLC*, No. 1:18-cv-01767-JMS-MJD, U.S. D.C., S.D. Indiana, 6/18/19. Note: Dramatized for effect.

Experts give their solutions to difficult workplace problems

Finance professionals like you face new questions every day on how to deal with everything from accounting and tax regulations to management and employment law issues. In this section, experts answer those real-life questions.

The DOJ and third-party risk management

Q: Does the new DOJ Evaluation of Corporate Compliance Programs document increase our compliance responsibilities for third-party risk management?

A: The Guidance sets very high expectations when it comes to third-party management, says Kristy Grant-Hart (kgranthart@sparkcompliance.com), CEO of Spark Compliance Consulting.

The DOJ issued its guidance to help prosecutors when they examine a corporate compliance program in two contexts – first, before an issue is found, and second, after an issue was discovered.

So companies should make sure contracts with third parties include specific safeguards and a clear description of any work to be provided by third parties, but they should also follow up to be sure that the work is actually being performed as specified.

As an example, for high-risk relationships, the guidance tells prosecutors to evaluate whether contracts give your company audit rights to analyze the books and accounts of third-parties, then evaluate whether you exercised those rights.

DOJ prosecutors will also evaluate whether your third-party compliance program is properly resourced.

Organizations found liable for any violations by third parties will only get more lenient sentencing if the compliance program's design,

implementation and effectiveness meet the guidelines.

Child support orders from another state

Q: We received a child support order for one of our employees that was issued by another state. Do we have to contact our state child support agency before we start withholding?

A: You don't have to contact your local child support agency when you get an out-of-state support order.

In most cases, says HHS, child support orders are issued by the state where the custodial parent resides, regardless of where the noncustodial parent lives or works.

This state has "continuing, exclusive jurisdiction" (CEJ) over the child support order. This means it can modify and enforce the order on its own. As long as a parent or child lives in the state with CEJ, the state keeps this authority.

The state with CEJ can ask for enforcement assistance from the state where the noncustodial parent lives by sending a request to the other state's child support agency. This agency can then take on the responsibility of collecting child support from the employee.

If you have a question you'd like our experts to answer, email it to Jennifer Azara at jazara@pbp.com

COMMUNICATION KEYS

■ Break the 'how are you' chit-chat loop for good

"How are you?"

"Good. You?"

"Good."

Enter the awkward silence. It's the No. 1 killer of small talk.

But you can quickly re-steer the conversation with a small shift you've prepped in advance. Instead of leaving it at "good," elaborate:

"I'm good. I've been listening to this podcast ____; do you know it?"

Info: tinyurl.com/howareyouloop

■ Motivation to solve that customer complaint fast

A customer calls about a problem with an invoice? Don't let your A/R team back-burner it. It could cost you.

Customers who have a complaint handled in less than five minutes spend more on future purchases. Make sure everyone understands complaints can be very profitable.

Info: superoffice.com/blog/customer-complaints-good-for-business

■ The time you're most likely to speak too quickly

When you're giving a speech or presentation, you're likely careful to watch your pacing to make sure you don't speak too fast.

But there's one instance where even the most metered speakers hit the gas too hard: when they recite lists, especially ones they have memorized.

To keep from rushing through, add an extra pause before each item on your list.

Info: ragan.com/5-ways-to-slow-down-your-speech-2

Recent developments that can help your business stay ahead

IRS issues new guidance on lock-in-letters

These are some tricky times when it comes to withholding, thanks to the new tables and new W-4.

Which is likely why IRS issued new guidance on how your team should handle “lock-in-letters.” The letters spell out the withholding arrangement IRS selected to correct an underwithholding issue for a specific employee.

The Q&A-style guidance walks you through everything from how to handle it with your software to substitute W-4s.

Info: irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/withholding-compliance-questions-and-answers

SECURE Act holds 401(k) changes for small biz

Heads up, small businesses! The SECURE Act (part of the new fed spending bill) has some provisions specifically for you when it comes to retirement plans.

And they just may incentivize you to bolster your plan:

- a bigger tax credit for plan start-up costs; in some cases you'll get up to \$5,000 instead of \$500.
- an additional tax credit for adding automatic enrollment. If you're a small business and include this feature you'll get an additional \$400 tax credit for three years.
- easier administration, from extra time to adopt new plans to simplified notice requirements.

End-to-end travel mgt: a progress check

So ideally your company would be integrated from booking to expense reporting and all the steps in between. But most of your peers aren't quite

there just yet. There are in-roads being made, says American Express Global Business Travel.

So where are they integrating? Online booking tools is the top area (92%), followed by corporate cards (74%) and expense management platforms (60%).

Info: amexglobalbusinessstravel.com

Employee confusion here can cause compliance woes

You'll want to run a refresher with all hiring managers on what makes a worker an independent contractor and what makes them an employee.

Seems there's lots of confusion out there that could jeopardize your company's compliance.

More than a third (35%) of salaried employees don't know the difference between being a W-2 employee and a 1099 independent contractor. That jumps to 57% of hourly workers, according to research by Bluecrew.

Info: For guidance straight from IRS, go to irs.gov/newsroom/understanding-employee-vs-contractor-designation

Lighter side: Fraud fighter not for lactose intolerant

Having a problem with items “sprouting legs” and walking off at your company?

Try checking employees' lunches for clues.

Police in Texas recently found that a slice of Kraft Singles American cheese perfectly preserves a fingerprint and can be used as evidence. (They used it to figure out who was covering local cars in Kraft Singles.)

So the next time you want to know who's taking what's not theirs, make your first stop the company fridge!

MEASURE UP

Fee-asco!

“We don't know if our corporate card has ...”

... late fees or interest charges

23%

... a fee for issuing a card or replacing a card

21%

... fees for card renewals

25%

Source: A survey by the Global Business Travel Association

This “little” confusion can end up costing your company a lot. And quickly. If any of these questions can't be answered in your own organization, you'll want to find out fast, then see what fees you can negotiate away.

FROM OUR SUBSCRIBERS

Over 90% of our readers say that CFO & Controller Alert, with its quick-read format, is more valuable than any other publication they read.

“CFO & Controller Alert's quick-read format is more valuable – I don't have time for extended reading.”

Mark Dunning
CFO

Design Materials, Inc.

“Easy to read with relevant and pertinent information.”

Gilbert Kouame
CFO

Prism Health North Texas

The Purpose of CFO & Controller Alert

CFO & Controller Alert is a fast-read resource to help busy financial executives boost cash flow, control expenses, manage their resources effectively and stay in compliance with ever-changing regulations.

Each issue presents real-world examples of what worked and what didn't for CFOs and Controllers in a wide variety of industries – all in a concise format that saves you time.

Depend on this publication for the winning ideas you can put to work today to help your company manage growth.