

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

April 12, 2021

KEY FINANCE FIGURES

	Curr*	Lst Mo	Lst Yr
■ Leading Rates %			
Prime Rate	3.25	3.25	3.25
Fed Funds Rate	0.25	0.25	0.25
■ Money Market Rates %			
<i>London Interbank (LIBOR)</i>			
1 month	0.11	0.11	0.99
3 months	0.20	0.18	1.45
6 months	0.21	0.21	1.17
■ Stock & Bond Indexes			
DJIA	33,171	33,172	22,327
S&P 500	3,971	3,972	2,627
NASDAQ	13,060	13,589	7,774
5-Yr T-Bill	0.89	0.71	0.39
10-Yr T-Bill	1.73	1.45	0.70
■ Employment Stats			
Unemployment rate (%)	6.2	6.3	3.5
Payroll employment (thousands)	379	166	289
Average hourly earnings (\$)	0.07	0.03	0.08

*As of 3/30/21

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.

Sales tax in 2021: Where your biggest exposures lie

■ Rate changes, newly taxable services make states \$

No crystal ball needed here! When it comes to a key compliance issue impacting both your Accounts Receivable and Accounts Payable departments, plan on staying busy this year.

Sales and use tax will continue to be a critical and constantly-changing challenge for companies all over the U.S.

Last year hit state and local governments hard, just like it did private industries.

So many will tap one of their favorite sources to secure much-needed revenue: sales tax.

But where are the biggest exposures in 2021? You'll want to take an extra close look at these three areas to make sure you're not hit with any costly surprises:

Exposure 1: District sales taxes

The first round of changes impacts you no matter what your company buys or sells: sales tax rate changes.

The good news? There wasn't a single state rate change in 2020.

But there were plenty of other ones – near-record-levels, in fact. And those can be a lot trickier

(Please see Exposures ... on Page 2)

Feds report: Your 401(k) is a cyberexposure

■ DOL to hand employers new requirements to protect participants' data

Get ready: Your company may soon have to take some new steps to minimize the cyber risk in your 401(k) plan.

Turns out retirement plans are a massive vulnerability.

That's the finding of a new report on defined contribution plans by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Here's what may soon be in store.

So many chances to expose data

It makes sense: Think of all the sensitive info needed for a 401(k).

And it travels between the employee, your company, the plan itself and often a third party.

That's where you come in. The GAO has charged the Department of Labor with two tasks:

- Clarify that cybersecurity is a fiduciary responsibility of private employers under ERISA, and
 - Develop and issue guidance identifying minimum expectations to mitigate cybersecurity risks.
- Stay tuned.

Info: You can read the GAO's findings at [gao.gov/products/gao-21-25](https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-25)

Exposures ...

(continued from Page 1)

to track. 2020 was the year of district sales taxes. In fact, 70% of the sales tax rate changes came on the district level.

And it isn't just those .25% changes to existing rates you and your team have to keep track of. There were 177 new district taxes to contend with last year. That's one of the highest numbers in a decade.

Keep an eye, too, on city-level sales taxes: 69 new ones were added, along with a slew of rate changes.

On the A/R side, missing one of these smaller rate changes can result in more than compliance headaches – they can create cash flow issues.

If a customer's A/P department catches a mistake on the sales tax charge, it will likely delay paying you. (You know that from the other side of the equation it's a best practice to require a new invoice with the proper sales tax charges for

audit-preparedness.)

So you'll want to make sure your department has a system to stay up-to-date on all the latest changes, whether that's software or a dedicated staffer who stays on top of them.

Info: For the full report, go to vertexinc.com/sites/default/files/2021-02/2020-Tax-Rate-Report.pdf

Exposure 2: Expanded economic nexus

Ever since the Supreme Court's Wayfair ruling, your business has likely focused on new economic nexus laws.

And we're not done yet! Currently, all but two states (of those that impose a state sales tax) now have economic nexus laws for online sellers.

But 2021 will likely be the year the remaining holdouts get on board:

- **Florida:** Senate Bill 126 and House Bill 159 were postponed when the legislature adjourned early due to COVID-19. The effective date was set for July 1 last year.
- **Missouri:** House Bill 2 would require remote sellers to collect sales tax and marketplace facilitators to collect tax on third-party sales. If passed, your effective date will be Jan. 1, 2022.

Exposure 3: New taxes on digital ads

This final one we gave you a heads-up on a few issues back (*please see C&CA, 3/11/21*).

Maryland recently became the first state to impose a sales tax on digital advertising, including website ads. That went into effect March 14.

But it won't be the only state to do so. The following four states currently have similar bills in progress:

- Connecticut
- Indiana
- Montana, and
- New York.

We'll keep you posted on these bills, as well as any new ones.

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.

■ Did company do enough to stop online bullying?

HR manager Wendy Mills pointed at the computer screen and said, "That's what Jessica's been complaining about."

CFO Bill Keeper looked at Wendy's screen and nodded. "Unfortunately I've seen this blog before," he said. "Some of my employees have posted some nasty comments about her."

"So isn't it about time we stopped it?" Wendy asked. "Look. Someone called her a 'no-good, lying #\$\$&#!'"

Bill was visibly frustrated. "I've talked to the people responsible and told them to cut it out," he said.

Not on company computers

"But I mean, it's all taking place outside of work," he added. "And they're not using company computers – we checked on that."

"Still ..." Wendy sighed.

"How far are we supposed to go to control something like this? It's employees' personal lives," Bill said.

"Well, Jessica wants it stopped," Wendy answered. "She's pretty upset about it. She works for you. They work for you. We should be able to do something."

After Bill refused to press the matter further with his employees, Jessica sued the firm for failing to stop what she considered harassment.

Was the company at fault?

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



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CFO & Controller Alert (ISSN 1081-9592), Issue date April 12, 2021, Vol. 27 No. 601, is published semi-monthly except once in December (23 times a year).

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The comprehensive healthcare strategy that's bringing in the ROI

■ *Integrative care attacks chronic conditions from many angles*

In the face of an increasingly complex healthcare system, a shift to easier and more complete systems is happening.

One of those systems: integrative care. It treats the whole person – including mental health – providing multiple treatment options and measurable results for a more comprehensive health care.

Reduced health costs

Employers stand to benefit. From an ROI perspective, integrative care pays back much more than one times its value.

Take back pain, for example. An integrative approach could save upward of \$6,000 in healthcare costs per employee per year. Where do the savings stem from? Avoided surgeries,

unnecessary doctor visits and reduced pharmaceutical spending.

You will save money in absenteeism, too. Companies that offer integrative care have cut the days lost per year due to medical absences. With the musculoskeletal example, the average person with an issue can lose 12 days of productivity per year.

However, by engaging in integrative care, which focuses on both short- and long-term care, employers can help

employees address current symptoms while simultaneously providing preventive care.

Info: Bill Gianoukos, CEO and co-founder, Goodpath, Cambridge, MA

FOR MORE ...

For another strategy to help manage chronic conditions, go to cfoandcontrolleralert.com/health-coaching-curbs-chronic-condition-costs

Finally! Procurement and Finance align

■ *Top 2021 priority for this key department will be music to CFOs' ears*

Granted you'd like it to be most departments' top priorities every year, but for 2021, cost reduction assumes the top spot on Procurement's agenda.

That's the word from the recent Hackett Group 2021 Procurement Key Issues report.

And considering the strategic importance of this function, that's great news. Here are details for Finance so you can support them in this noble quest.

Wanted: More strategic sourcing

The instability brought about by the pandemic isn't going away

anytime soon, but Procurement shops have recommitted to cost reduction as their No. 1 priority.

And along with technology, they want to leverage business partnerships to do it. A big part of that: a more strategic sourcing process.

That's where Finance can help. You want to be sure Procurement has all the tools and understanding to help evaluate the true profitability of each supplier relationship. That includes capturing non-price value from those relationships. Offer yourself and your team up as a resource.

Info: You can download the full report at thehackettgroup.com/2021-procurement-key-issues-2012

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

■ **When's the next time you can expect a Fed rate hike?**

If anyone in your company has been asking the "will they or won't they" question when it comes to the Federal Reserve raising interest rates, we can end the debate.

Put it down for a "won't be" this year. Or next year for that matter.

Our best chance of seeing rates on the rise won't happen until 2023. And even that is just a possibility.

Powell matches with economists

That comes courtesy of Fed Chair Jerome Powell in his most recent Fed policy statement.

Powell reiterated that the U.S. economy is extremely fragile right now, though there is new hope of a strong recovery brought on by the COVID vaccine and President Biden's massive stimulus package. In fact, Powell recently said the recovery has progressed "more quickly than generally expected" and believes it's further strengthening.

At this point Powell said he'll be watching inflation most carefully to keep it as close as possible to that 2% ideal.

If you're looking for additional reinforcement on the timetable, this should do it. The Fed's projection matches the majority of economists recently surveyed by Bloomberg News.

Those pundits predict two quarter-point rate hikes by the end of 2023.

(For Powell's recent statement, go to federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/files/monetary20210317a1.pdf Bloomberg economist survey data available at bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-14/fed-to-hike-rates-in-2023-but-dots-won-t-show-it-economists-say)

New ACH account verification rule kicked in March 19, with an asterisk

■ *WEB Debit Account Validation Rule won't be enforced for a year*

Businesses that rely on automated clearinghouse (ACH) debits from customer accounts now have more work to do to guard against fraud.

Nacha's WEB Debit Account Validation Rule went into effect March 19, 2021.

Under it, you, as the originator of the ACH, must verify that the account to be used is a "legitimate, open account to which ACH entries may be posted at the [Receiving Depository Financial Institution] RDFI." That's for the first time an account is used, as well as when an account changes.

However, if you're not *completely* ready, you're catching a break.

Good faith efforts buy you a year

Nacha recently announced that it won't be enforcing the rule for an additional year. That's provided that your company is working in good faith toward compliance but

still needs more time to implement solutions.

Examples of your options

So just what might those solutions be? Nacha provides a list of examples on its FAQ regarding the new rules.

While other options may also work, these suggestions come straight from the horse's mouth, so they'd definitely keep you in compliance:

- Prenotification Entry
- ACH micro-transaction verification
- a commercially available validation service provided by either an Originating Depository Financial Institution or a third-party, and
- account validation capabilities or services enabled by application programming interfaces (APIs).

Info: nacha.org/rules/supplementing-fraud-detection-standards-web-debits

The move that will slow this IT cash drain

■ *Making this switch to your storage strategy can save a bundle*

Data centers are likely one of your company's largest "energy hogs."

Of course you want your techies to do everything they can to keep this expense in check.

But IT refuses to sacrifice any of its functionality to save the company a few bucks.

Fortunately there's a move your organization can make that can do one without sacrificing the other.

And it all comes down to storage.

Let's go to the tape!

Yes, you could do a major overhaul of your data center's design or an upgrade of the equipment in it for

greater energy efficiency. But there's a smaller, much more manageable change your company can make that will result in significant savings.

Talk with your head of IT about storing data on tape instead of relying on spinning disk storage.

The numbers make the case: Storage accounts for 19% of a data center's power. But as much of 60% of that data rarely – if ever – gets accessed. Keeping those disks spinning eats up a ton of energy unnecessarily. Tape media can be stored off-line.

Adapted in part from "Gain Control of Enterprise's Great Energy Hog: The Data Center," by Drew Robb, at cioinsight.com

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

■ Mandating vaccines? 6 questions to ask first

Shots, shots, shots!

With three different available vaccines and a presidential imperative to make all adults eligible by May 1, most people have syringes on the brain right about now.

So should you make the COVID vaccine required for your employees?

It's the question many of your peers are struggling with right now.

Before you require it ...

As you weigh how to achieve a safe and healthy workplace with employees' control over their own health decisions, ask these six questions courtesy of employment law firm Ogletree Deakins:

1. Is a mandatory policy necessary or would you be better off "strongly encouraging" employees to get vaccinated?
2. Would it be better to confine mandatory vaccinations to high risk locales, departments or worksites?
3. Are you prepared to review many accommodation requests? Because you'll get them.
4. Will you need to negotiate with unions regarding a policy?
5. Are you prepared to review and share workers' comp laws and your insurance policy regarding ramifications if there are adverse physical reactions to the vaccine?
6. Will you be able keep up to date on new laws, regulations and guidelines from government authorities?

(Adapted in part from "Can we mandate employees get vaccinated?" in Communication Bulletin for Managers and Supervisors.)

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 Built more trust between managers and employees

In times of uncertainty, there's nothing better than trust between managers and employees.

It helps everyone get through it with a higher level of ease and certainty.

We wanted to help managers who weren't great communicators build deeper trust with employees.

It can be tricky, but in the current climate it was more important than ever.

To help these managers, we gave them these three tips:

1. Show up authentically

One way is to give timely responses.

It shows you listen, even if it's a brief comment on a thread within your communication app or an email that says, "I'm looking into this."

2. Be conscious of how you show up

Relate to people in the environment they're

working or comfortable in. Of course that varies from employee to employee.

3. Be transparent

It's just as important to tell them what you don't know or don't have as it is to tell them what you know and have.

(Jo McRell, Diversity & Inclusion Lead, Facebook, shared this success in an HRMorning.com masterclass)

2 How we boosted the use of this critical benefit

There are very few things that have impacted the world the way the pandemic has. Over the past year, it's caused difficult moments for everyone at our company at some point.

We quickly realized what a big deal our employees' mental wellbeing is and so did our health insurance carrier.

For the duration of the national emergency, they waived co-pays and deductibles for telehealth mental health consultations.

Because a bunch of our staffers were working remotely on any given day, it was going to be challenging to ensure that everyone was aware of this important info.

At no cost to them

Through regular company-wide emails, we recommended that our people take advantage of up to three mental health counseling sessions with the same provider at no out-of-pocket cost.

Because this was such a valuable

**REAL
PROBLEMS
REAL
SOLUTIONS**

healthcare service during these unprecedented times, our insurance carrier also sent out email reminders to our employees.

The response was positive. Then during open enrollment, we reminded everybody one-on-one about mental health care and all the other benefits that were available.

As a result, our people took a much greater interest in reviewing their benefits.

(Julie Bennett, VP of Finance, First West Insurance, Bozeman, MT)

3 Gone phishing? Here's how we stay protected

As the pandemic progressed, we started noticing a wave of email phishing attacks with themes related to the coronavirus.

One claimed to be from the Social Security Administration and asked the recipient to verify our company's email address and Employer Identification Number.

Another message was a false email from the Department of Labor, "following up" with us.

If someone in our office accidentally took the bait on scams like these, it could mean weeks of headaches undoing the damage.

Security smarts

Although very little has remained unchanged during COVID-19, we knew government agencies generally still didn't initiate contact by email.

To keep employees on their toes, we reminded them of this point.

We also advised them to:

- avoid opening suspicious email attachments or links

- forward suspicious emails to reportphishing@apwg.org
- report phishing attempts with the site ftc.gov/complaint, and
- make sure security software is set to automatically update.

Because we sent these extra reminders, we're happy to say we haven't had to deal with any sensitive info being compromised thus far.

(Nancy Ward, Payroll Manager, Hoover, Harris and Co., Greeley, CO)

What CEOs believe is getting in the way of greater growth – would your own Top Banana agree?

■ Watch regulatory risk extra closely during this first year of the Biden Administration

While your company doesn't want to take its collective eye off any of these potential exposures, regulatory risk has assumed a larger place than ever.

Traditionally a new administration brings about a slew of changes in the year following Inauguration Day.

Not only do you need to keep an eye on new rules and regs coming your company's way, but the clawing back of existing laws creates potential compliance missteps.

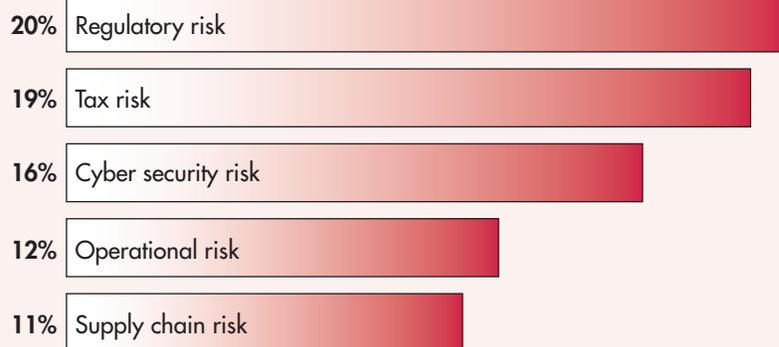
Challenges from all sides

We recently told you about the 80+ "Midnight Rules" recently frozen by President Biden, leaving employers in limbo.

But even current laws are leaving your peers less confident than usual. For example, the number of employers finding the classification of exempt and non-exempt employees confusing has doubled since 2018.

GETTING IN THE WAY OF GROWTH

The Greatest Threats to Organizations' Growth in 2021



Source: The 2021 KPMG CEO Outlook survey, at info.kpmg.us/news-perspectives/industry-insights-research/kpmg-2021-ceo-outlook.html

The good news is that despite these challenge and exposures, 81% of U.S. CEOs remain optimistic about their companies' growth prospects this year.

Sharpen your judgment... THE DECISION

(please see case on Page 2)

Yes, Bill's company lost the case.

The company argued that what employees did on their own time with their own computers was outside the authority of an employer.

A judge, however, ruled that employers have a duty to stop employee-on-employee harassment, whether it takes place at the work site or in cyberspace.

The means of harassment or the location doesn't change the responsibility. The simple facts are that if:

a. an employee complains about harassment by co-workers and

- b. management acknowledges that harassment is taking place, then
- c. management is obligated to take action to stop the harassment.

Analysis: Out of office? Still your problem

These days, employees are more aware than ever of cyber-bullying. And they're demanding that their employers put a stop to it when they have the means to do so.

If your company gets a complaint of this type, courts expect you, as employer, to investigate and take appropriate action – including disciplining or even firing the offenders – just as you would with any instance of harassment.

Cite: Espinoza v. Orange County, CA, 2012 WL 420149 (Cal. App. Ct.) 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.

Smaller office space for larger remote workforce?

Q: We're considering scaling back our office space in the aftermath of COVID-19. We expect some people to continue to work from home this year and others to return to the office. What should we bear in mind for a successful reduction in office space?

A: About one in five companies plans to reduce its office space in 2021, according to an Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (AICPA) survey.

Regardless of your plans for your brick-and-mortar location, now's a good time to review the terms of any commercial leases you hold to see whether they contain an escape clause. If not, such a provision may be worthwhile to add the next chance you get.

After all, the shift toward virtual operations is expected to continue, even after the pandemic is over.

Don't rule out an informal renegotiation, either. It's possible your landlord's plans may have changed just like yours have.

Data security: What types of fraud to watch now?

Q: With scams to access financial and personnel information on the rise, we want to strategically increase our safeguarding efforts. What types of fraud are most common now?

A: During the "Working With Agencies on Data Security" session, held as part of the 2021 American Payroll Association Virtual Capital Summit, presenters discussed three of the most common types of fraud facing employers.

First, social engineering. This scam uses psychological manipulation to trick staffers into disclosing sensitive information – and they try to do it in your name. For example, someone might use a phishing email to pose as a CEO who lost key Finance files.

Action step: It's worth reminding staffers that you'd prefer them to pick up the phone when they're in doubt or to create a new email instead of simply hitting reply when sensitive data is requested.

Second, account takeover. Here, fraudsters attempt to take over email accounts, systems or computers. The weaker the password, the easier their job.

Action step: Ask IT to weigh in on how your company can better protect login credentials.

Third, malware/ransomware. Of course you want to steer clear of malware and ransomware, but you need employees to be on guard.

Action step: Provide them with current, real-life examples of other companies that got hit and how hard.

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

COMMUNICATION KEYS

Always do this on Slack

Business chat apps like Slack and Teams have taken over the workplace this past year – 81% of companies now use them. But they come with their own etiquette rules.

One must-follow: Announce when you're leaving a discussion. Think of a Slack thread like a meeting – you wouldn't just disappear in the middle of it. That's especially important as the boss. You don't want your people wondering why you're not responding.

Info: hiverrhq.com/blog/slack-etiquette

Better business introductions

Hopefully we'll all be at plenty of client meetings and professional conferences very soon. Which means plenty of professional introductions.

Try this advice from career coach Jane Jackson: Introduce people based on rank, never gender or age.

That means the client, guest or visitor outranks co-workers or even the boss and should always be introduced first.

Info: linkedin.com/pulse/business-etiquette-how-make-introductions-career-coach-icf

No more water cooler? Build a virtual one

Even a year later don't underestimate the importance of casual co-worker chit-chat. Leadership experts Karin Hurt and David Dye at Let's Grow Leaders suggest creating a standing water cooler room.

Choose the virtual platform you use most and build it there. Then keep it open for employees to drop in when they want to say "Hi," break from work and talk about whatever they want.

Info: Let's Grow Leaders, at tinyurl.com/watercooler496

Recent developments that can help your business stay ahead

Dependent care benefits expanded in latest relief

If your company offers employees dependent care flexible spending accounts, you have several changes to be aware of.

The American Rescue Plan Act raised the annual limits for pretax contributions for calendar year 2021. This year's limits are now:

- \$10,500 for single taxpayers (up from \$5,000), and
- \$5,250 for married individuals filing separately (previously \$2,500).

As we're already into Q2, you'll want to let employees know ASAP about the new limits.

Make sure everyone realizes these changes don't apply to healthcare FSAs at all. That contribution limit remains unchanged at \$2,750.

Info: For the full text of the American Rescue Plan Act, go to congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/text

Unclaimed property: Spring brings deadlines

Reminder: You may not be up against as many deadlines as in the fall, but a fair number of states have unclaimed property reporting deadlines in the spring.

The states where you may have reporting responsibilities:

- **April:** Arizona, Arkansas, District of Columbia, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.
- **May:** Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Vermont and Virginia.

Note: Your company may not have to report all types of unclaimed

property at this time. Many of these states only require reporting for life insurance in the spring.

The 2020 employer tab for these claims: \$436M

Here's a compelling reason to make sure supervisors aren't cracking the door to discrimination claims from employees.

Or how about 436 million of them?

That's how many dollars your peers spent last year as the result of discrimination claims, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Your biggest exposure? Retaliation claims, which made up more than half of all charges filed in FY 2020.

Info: For the EEOC announcement, go to eoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-releases-fiscal-year-2020-enforcement-and-litigation-data

Hiring in Finance? 35% won't say yes without this

If you're in the enviable position of being able to add to your Finance and Accounting headcount, make sure you've thought through how remote work will factor in to the new position.

More than a third (35%) of job seekers said they'll flat out turn down an offer if it didn't include the possibility of remote work.

That's what a recent survey of job hunters conducted by CareerBuilder uncovered.

Info: You'll find additional survey results at press.careerbuilder.com/2020-12-15-CareerBuilder-Survey-Reveals-a-More-Flexible-Future-Workforce

MEASURE UP

What They Don't Know Can Hurt ... Your Bottom Line

85% Large employers offering a wellness program

60% U.S. employees aware their company offers a wellness program

Source: A 2020 Gallup survey based on 100 million global interviews

With all the effort and expense you put into wellness initiatives, the last thing you want is employees not even knowing what's offered. As you've likely added new options this past year, be sure to put out a reminder about old ones.

Lighter side: Green thumb = more green

You might want to alert Accounts Payable that it can expect an influx of expense reports from garden centers.

Your company will quickly make the money back in increased accuracy and productivity.

Studies have shown that people concentrate better both at home and at work when they're around plants. (So whether folks are still remote or back in the office you stand to benefit.) Tasks performed in the presence of greenery were found to be more accurate and of overall higher quality.

Memory and attention span increase 20% as well, so maybe you might want to "gift" some plants to those folks who can never quite remember Finance department deadlines.

Info: ellisonchair.tamu.edu/health-and-well-being-benefits-of-plants