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How Much Does It Cost ??

Many times the first question I am asked by prospective clients who call about getting their tax returns prepared is “how much does it cost?”. This is a little like calling a mechanic when your car won’t start and asking how much it will cost to fix the car. Moreover, if this is the first question they ask, it implies that cost is most important. I can say that if cost is the most important thing about getting your taxes done, then you should use one of the many low priced, high volume tax prep shops. CPA firms do not compete with these shops on price but rather we focus on the quality of our services.

Like many CPA firms, our fees are based on hourly rates which are different for each level of staff who works on a client’s return. For 2018 my billing rate for consulting and tax prep work is \$275 per hour, my staff rates vary from \$60 to \$180, plus there is a separate charge to cover the cost of our software, copying, assembly, and e-file tracking of each return ranging from \$75 to \$195. Total fees for individual returns start around \$500 but can be \$1,500 or more depending on the activity, how well the information is organized, and the time we spend answering tax questions. Fees for business, trust, and estate returns usually range from \$750 to \$2,500 depending on the condition of the books and records, plus time spent consulting on administration and tax planning matters.

There are several variables that affect our total tax preparation fees. First is the amount of activity to be reported. Having numerous W-2’s and 1099’s, the details of which must all be entered in order to e-file the returns, multiple states, rental properties, security sales, self-employment activity, etc. all add to the time involved and increase the fees. The second variable is how well the client organizes their information, such as having the related documents, summarizing realized gains and losses for securities sold, including the cost basis for each security, summarizing income, expenses, and equipment used in a business or for each rental, having details of donations, etc. The third variable is the time we spend to answer questions and offer advice to help clients substantiate their deductions or reduce their taxes. Many clients come to us because we do answer their questions and provide guidance on tax planning.

To compare the fees of different tax preparers you must first compare the quality of their work and the additional guidance they do (or don’t) provide. It is inappropriate to compare fees from low cost tax prep shops to those fees of CPA’s. CPA’s are a licensed professionals who must comply with high ethical and professional standards. Unlicensed tax preparers usually have no ethics or standards with which to comply and often lack the training and tax references necessary to provide the same quality of service as CPA’s.

Whether your activity is simple or complex, you will likely benefit from the quality of work and the advice you can expect from my firm. We encourage you to call us to discuss your activity so we can provide a free estimate.

Sincerely,

Brad Borncamp, CPA, CVA, CFP