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## Marketing for growth

### The marketing programme for professional services organisations

Marketing invisible and intangible services can be a challenge. It is hard to get your prospects excited by the thought of getting a tax return compiled on time or preparing an employee handbook.

Most companies simply rely on trying to tell their prospects that they offer the best service. But surely every accountant says that — I have never seen a firm of accountants claim they offer an average service. And therein lies the problem and the reason for the Howardsgate **Marketing for Growth** programme.

How effective is your marketing? How many new clients were won as a direct result of your recent marketing activities? If you stopped marketing tomorrow, would it make much difference? Do you spend a small fortune on marketing without getting the right results?

The **Marketing for Growth** programme aims to help you develop a marketing strategy and a plan. And where do we fit in to all of this?

We can help you develop the strategy and the plan and we can then work with you to implement it.

So where do you start? At the beginning with the proposition.

#### Step One: Understanding your business

Most people mistakenly believe that marketing is only about the hard sell of products and that it merely refers to a series of activities like PR or advertising or direct mail campaigns.

The first step is to look at your service offering. Simply selling on providing a 'better service' is not good enough. You need something different.

Your clients are a good place to start. By asking them why they chose you and what they like and dislike about your company, you can begin to build up a useful picture.

Do you have a business plan? What is the current utilisation of your staff? What percentage of their time is spent on fee-generating work? What are your most profitable services?

To successfully sell a high-value service you need to develop a relationship with your prospects and you need to position your company as one that offers more than your competitors.

Most service professionals wrongly assume that their prospects are buying their expertise. In his book, *Selling the invisible*, Harry Beckwith hits the nail on the head:

"In most professional services, you are not really selling expertise because your expertise is assumed, and because your prospect cannot intelligently evaluate your expertise anyway. Instead, you are selling a relationship."

You need to focus time and effort on building effective relationships.

#### Step two: Review the marketplace

It is important to understand your competitors. Are they winning more business than you? How do they market?

It often surprises me how vague people are when talking about their ideal client. Before you start marketing, you need to visualise your ideal client - do not think about them in pure abstract terms. Create a 'most wanted' list of companies that you would like to have as clients. The key is to focus your activities on the right prospects.

## Step three: Develop a winning proposition

If you do not have a clear proposition or a concise marketing message, then how will your prospects understand what you can do for them?

Most business professionals understand what they do, but most cannot articulate it properly. They talk about processes when they should be focusing on outcomes. Most marketing messages do not pass a prospect's "so what" test.

Having defined your ideal client, you should look at what you can do for them. Put your clients at the centre of your marketing message by asking yourself some simple questions:

What are the main concerns of your clients?

What problems do you solve?

What services do your prospects want?

You need to develop a problem solving, results-driven marketing message.

You also need to position your company, services and people in the mind of your prospects. In many cases you will be in competition with a prospect's apathy and reluctance to do anything as much as you will with another competitor.

For example, most organisations will already be using an accounting firm to undertake their annual audit. What will make a firm change its auditors? A lower audit fee? Well maybe, but it is painful to change, so apathy usually wins.

So how do you get around this apathy? There are several ways, but one is by focusing. Al Ries calls it the **Law of Contraction** and it gets many business people breaking out in a cold sweat.

Most service companies offer a wide range of services and the thought of narrowing their focus to just one or two scares them. By narrowing your focus, you can become an expert in your field. This does not mean that you stop offering all your other services — it is all about positioning.

By appearing to sacrifice some opportunities you can actually position your firm as experts, and so create a winning business strategy. We can show you how to use positioning to your advantage and so develop a strong brand.

## Step four: Create a marketing plan

The marketing plan is the key component for managing your marketing activity. The first stage is to look at the supporting infrastructure. This includes:

- the available marketing collateral
- the website
- prospect database
- current networking activities

The clever way to market is to identify those firms you want to work for and then target them. We call this creating a 'most wanted' list. This way you can target your message.

Activities could include:

- direct mail
- networking and public speaking
- seminars
- PR and articles
- email
- online marketing techniques

In our experience, telesales campaigns are not particularly effective for professional firms like accountants, and we would recommend that you concentrate instead on those activities that are most likely to get results.

Networking is a good source of contacts and a proper networking strategy is essential. Remember that the key is to build relationships and to position your company as experts, thus creating the need and desire for your services in the minds of your prospects.

The marketing plan should include a range of monthly activities and a system for measuring the relative success of each activity.

This is intended to give only a brief insight into our marketing programme. Our approach is always tailored to the needs of the individual client.

Want to know more? Claim a **FREE** two-hour session with Tim Baugh — call 01707 392552 or visit [www.howardsgate.co.uk](http://www.howardsgate.co.uk) today.