

VISUAL IDENTITY



Before we talk about specific marketing tools, let's address the concept of visual identity. If your service business is going to have a varied number of marketing tools working in the community, then people are going to see the business' message through a variety of vehicles. Remember, prospects do not care about your message and will ignore it for the slightest reason. But, if your messages are coordinated to project one, consistent visual identity, theme, message or slogan, then, even if prospects are only marginally exposed to your promotions, there is a much higher chance that they will recognize your messages and associate them with your business. Coordinate all of your marketing tools to help reinforce the recognition factor by prospects and others. If your firm's name is consistently presented in a certain unique style, or there is a logo always used in your promotions, or a unique element that can be grasped

quickly in passing, consumers will recognize it and identify your firm more frequently. If nothing else, this consistency reinforces the firm's name, which means that prospects are more likely to think of you when they do actually have a need. They will probably not fully read the ad or promotion if it is visual, nor are they apt to listen to it or even pay attention to the complete message if it is a TV commercial or radio spot. However, consumers will begin to recognize the firm name and thus, the image of the firm is enhanced.

As you start your marketing program, you should decide upon a number of marketing tools to achieve your objectives. These marketing tools, when coordinated, always dramatically increase the effectiveness of the entire marketing effort. This marketing mix creates a synergy which can propel a firm toward its goals. Understand and appreciate that these tools will not do the job alone. No single ad, newsletter, brochure, direct mail letter, or TV commercial is going to do the total job of creating new business. These tools, when employed together, can only educate prospects about you. They may also generate leads and they may enhance your reputation or image in the community. They might even pre-sell a prospect on the firm. But, after the marketing tool has done its primary job of generating an inquiry, only a live body, the professional or the service provider, can sell the firm. Your marketing tools can only generate the inquiry. Each tool works differently. Only after you know how each

tool works,
can you decide upon the proper mix to employ in order to
achieve your objectives.

I hesitate to talk about marketing tools, because the amount of
time doesn't allow us to do justice to the range of options you
have and all the nuances of using these options successfully.
But, let's talk about some of the tools in your marketing
toolbox.

Brochures

Brochures are often the first tools service businesses think
of when their thoughts turn to marketing. Consider the typical
business brochure. It is usually filled with fluff like how
cost-effective the firm is, how the services are of the highest
quality, and how the people really care for their clients.

Many brochures are, unfortunately, little more than an ego
trip for the owner. They might be great to give to a relative
so that they can impress their friends, but they do little to
develop new business. The most important ingredient in any
successful brochure is to present information relevant to the
prospect. This information must really be needed and wanted
to make a decision as to whether to even contact you or not.
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prospects can easily spot verbal puffery and disregard it. They read the same claims in every other business' brochure. Focus on what you can do for prospects from their perspective. Deliver the message in a manner which is credible in their eyes and avoid exaggerated, unsubstantiated claims that are not credible in anyone's eyes and will be disregarded. Provide solutions to problems and benefits for individuals, rather than promoting what you have to sell. People want to see credible, relevant information, so don't try to be "all things to all people." If the brochure serves as a background piece for the whole firm, it is fine to be comprehensive. If it is the only means of conveying information to prospects, it could not possibly provide meaningful, relevant information to all prospects.

Even though you are trying to be focused and brief, remember to include enough information to "cross-sell" your clients. By describing all of the firm's services, you reduce the chance of losing business because a client didn't know all that you do. Preparing an inclusive brochure can certainly help a firm to focus on and develop its image. It can also help to instill among the staff a sense of pride in the business. Typically, a brochure is not going to sell the client, but it can help to reinforce the decision that has already been made.

Newsletters

Newsletters are another very valuable publication and marketing tool. They are particularly useful in maintaining an ongoing relationship with clients, prospects or referral sources. If it is well written and provides relevant, practical information to an audience, a newsletter will actually be welcomed as having some real benefit, rather than just being perceived as another marketing "fluff piece" and disregarded. Your newsletter can help to enforce the perception that you continue to care about the client, even after they've paid their bill. Clients and prospects want information and they want to believe that people who are providing business services for them are genuinely concerned and interested in their affairs. Studies repeatedly show that what clients want most from their service providers, far more than affordable costs, competence, integrity, or results obtained, is genuine concern and interest in them personally. A newsletter allows you to demonstrate this almost automatically. A good newsletter will always help maintain to client relationships if it is oriented toward the clients' interests. Remember, clients want information that will benefit them, rather than general news about your business. The contents of each newsletter may change but the subtler marketing messages should always remain the same. It should remind the customer, "We are here. We have not forgotten you. We care about

providing you with relevant and beneficial information. We are a very successful business and these are all of the services we can provide for you, or for your friends, family and coworkers." These subtle messages are reinforced every time your newsletter crosses the prospect's fingertips, even if they don't read the entire issue. You must remember that the average person only keeps a newsletter in hand for between 15 and 45 seconds! People usually just take a quick scan and skim the articles and most clients won't really read anything at all. But, even their quick scan will leave an impression of a quality firm, reinforce a positive image, and remind them of all the things that you provide.

Your priority should be to "cross-sell" a client or prospect. If an article demonstrates your expertise in an area which he or she needs, it will be remembered. Like your business brochure, all the newsletter can be expected to do is stimulate an inquiry. Your business must pick it up from there and convert the inquiry to a sale.

There are many service businesses that think about publishing a newsletter on a regular basis and have, in their mind, their ideal type of publication. However, this ideal publication typically involves a lot of planning, design work, and production work, and it can take a good period of time before a business is in a position to launch their perfect newsletter. Remember this, the most important thing you

can do in marketing is stay in touch with your current and former clients on a regular basis.

If you're thinking that a newsletter is a good idea for your business, keep in mind that it's not the format of the communication that is most important. The most important thing is touching your clients. When it comes to client communication tools, many service businesses decide they want to do a newsletter. However, by the time they think about it and plan it out, it could be 6 or 9 months before they can get the first issue off the ground. What's happening to the clients not being communicated with? They're drifting away from your business. You're losing out on referrals and repeat business. Once you do initiate contact again, it takes a number of touches for clients you have not been communicating with on a regular basis to get the idea that you've started to communicate with them again.

Here's an option that many businesses do not think about. Because the most important thing is to touch the clients on a regular basis don't be afraid to use your letterhead to create a simple newsletter to convey your message. You'll be hitting your primary targets, have a successful marketing message, and your letterhead is a perfectly appropriate format on which to deliver your message. If you can't communicate with the perfect tool, start communicating with your clients now by using a more simple, direct approach. People will not read

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and absorb it, but they will remember that you are starting to touch them.

Television

Although television is often the most costly medium, it can also be one of your most cost-effective marketing tools. When you consider television, expand your view beyond the major market broadcast stations or local independents who broadcast to a large geographic area. If the "reach" is too broad, money is spent on communicating with individuals far beyond your service area and is wasted. Save your limited resources for people who you think are really likely to become your clients. If you have a small or medium sized firm, you may feel that those who are using television have a tremendous competitive advantage, and they do. They usually have name recognition and credibility in the marketplace, and this means that people who might have otherwise visited you will now view the business being marketed on television as a legitimate option. This means that local offices like yours get fewer of the better referrals and clients.

Small and medium sized businesses do have a legitimate option which will allow them to compete with those firms broadcasting on network television. It is local cable advertising and it allows your commercial to run locally on

such stations as CNN, ESPN, TNT, Lifetime, MTV and others. A local cable system is cheaper and offers a more highly targeted audience than independent TV stations. Businesses are using this medium to stand out from the crowd.

Radio

Radio permits precise targeting of well defined audiences. Production costs can be low and many times advertising slots can be purchased reasonably. The message will be limited, about 120 words per 30 seconds. Your spot should repeat the businesses name and phone number at least three times and your theme should be consistent with your other marketing methods.

Newspapers

Newspapers also allow you to target specific audiences. Since they are published frequently, ads can be placed or changed very quickly - sometimes within 24 hours. Repetition is critical to effective newspaper marketing. The size of your ad must be at a cost which allows you great frequency. The smaller ads which run over a longer period of time may very well have greater impact on your intended audience than a few large size ads which are soon forgotten. An ad which

becomes a fixture in the same place for a long time can usually establish identity and name retention. The disadvantage to newspaper promotion is that it can be costly and grossly ineffective. Since any one ad competes with so many others on a page, it can easily be overlooked. You can help minimize this oversight with repetition and consistent placement on a certain page or in a specific section.

Direct Mail

Direct mail, when properly used, can be the most effective marketing tool of all. While potentially profitable, it is also the most risky. It is a very difficult marketing tool to use effectively. There is an entire body of knowledge and techniques that must be woven throughout a direct mail campaign, if it is to produce meaningful results. Don't assume that in order to use direct mail, your material must be in an envelope. A number of tests have concluded that "self mailers" tend to bring in the best response. Among their many advantages are that you have more control in targeting a specific audience, it can be very personal, you can have the prospect's complete attention for a short time, it can be done quickly, results can be more easily measured, and you have the ability to do controlled tests before mailing to a larger audience. Many times, service businesses feel that in order to be successful, a direct mail campaign has to generate a certain percentage response rate in relation to the quantity of

pieces mailed. People often cite the expectation that a mailing should generate a 2% response rate or it is a failure. This is entirely wrong, as what counts is return relative to investment. I have done extensive direct mail campaigns for lawyers which pulled 0.0005% response, yet generated \$7.00 net for every dollar invested, including production and creative expenses. These returns were directly traced to the direct mail campaign and in addition, other business was indirectly generated by referrals that originated because someone saw those direct mail promotions. Those promotions also increased name recognition and enhanced the effectiveness of other marketing tools as well. These most certainly were successful marketing campaigns regardless of the relatively small response rate.

Unfortunately, many people in business have not grasped the fact that marketing professional services is very different from marketing products. Standard measurements used in product marketing are irrelevant in professional service marketing. Use direct mail if you have a clearly defined market and the ability to reach it, and use it if you can identify a problem and offer a specific service to solve that problem. If your message is too general, results will suffer. Yet having the best market in the world will do you no good if you can't reach it. Make sure that you have compiled or purchased a current and accurate mailing list of prospects. This database can prove invaluable to you so spend both time and money on putting

together the best possible list of names, addresses and other helpful information. You must also have the means to follow up each mailing. People rarely buy directly from a mail promotion. What you hope for is a "lead" or some expression of interest from the prospect, and then it is time to follow up.

As was mentioned earlier, there's a very scientific method to achieving successful direct mail marketing results. Consequently, there has been much already written on the subject on which you should become familiar with before attempting to "fly on your own." In the absence of sufficient time for research, many business will turn to a specialist in this form of marketing to direct and guide the creation, production, fulfillment and follow up of their direct mail marketing. The use of such a consultant/specialist can prove very cost-efficient and profitable. Whether you do your own homework or retain a specialist for direct mail marketing, here are several hints, reminders and random thoughts to keep in mind as you develop your campaign.

1. Always talk about solutions to prospects' problems.
2. Describe major benefits for all your services.
3. Direct mail should not be expected to close the sale.

4. Your direct mail promotion can be a useful tool in identifying prospects who may need your services in the future.
5. Offer some free information, a pamphlet or audio cassette on a specific topic.
6. Once someone requests it, you have his or her name and address. Now spend more money on consistent follow-up to that highly qualified prospect.

Public Relations

There are three important differences between public relations and marketing.

1. Communication is the main purpose of public relations. Marketing, in addition to communication, includes all considerations of need assessment, benefit analysis, and selling.
2. While public relations seeks to change attitudes, marketing attempts to encourage specific response behaviors such as "retain me" or "refer clients to me." Public relations seeks to change attitudes.
3. Public relations does not define the goals of the business. Marketing, however, is an all-inclusive activity. It not only defines goals, but is also

concerned with identifying and targeting population segments, developing product/service offerings, and meeting a host of client needs.

The primary purpose of public relations is to enhance or maintain a firm's image. It is about forming attitudes and it is about creating or reinforcing positive perceptions of a businesses skills and abilities. It helps to build credibility, which is, of course, important to a professional service firm.

Yellow Pages

Businesses that jumped on the Yellow Pages bandwagon early reaped tremendous benefits. It is now extremely difficult to compete cost-effectively, so many businesses are down-sizing their ads and spending those dollars on other media. A Yellow Pages ad can serve one of two purposes:

1. It can make it easier for people to find you if they already know who you are.
2. If someone doesn't know how else to select a particular service provider, a Yellow Pages ad can hopefully direct that person to you.

Offering large blocks of type which prospects will not read, making it hard to find the firm name, or not having an attention getting device, won't help you win an interview with prospects who "let their fingers do the walking." Like

any other marketing promotion, a Yellow Pages ad must be carefully thought out and executed in a style consistent with all of your other marketing materials. Most importantly, it must certainly reflect your goals/objectives as specified in your Strategic Plan. One final word. Design and produce your own ad and don't rely heavily on the Yellow Pages representative or phone company staff to create your ad.