

← QUALIFYING CLIENTS →

A well thought-out marketing plan allows a firm to control its own destiny. Rather than having the direction of the business controlled by the next person who happens to walk in the door, marketing allows a business to select its clients rather than waiting for clients to select the business. The purpose of marketing is to get the right type of clients, not just to get more clients.

If the business markets successfully, it has more opportunities to find clones of its best clients. Some businesses continue to reach out and service clients who don't pay, complain constantly, are never satisfied, represent a dying area of business, produce no referrals or new business, and/or who continue to slander the business all over town. Why? By continuing to allocate your resources towards that client, you are working harder and harder with little more in the

way of profits to show for the effort.

If you market well, you are going to attract people who don't qualify to be your clients. Have clear policies on case intake so that clients will have reasonable expectations. Know exactly what it is that you can do for them. Accurately estimate what it will cost and ascertain whether or not prospects have the ability to pay the bill when asked. Effective initial evaluation of clients is critical to effective marketing.

If your marketing efforts attempt to clone your best clients, you should know what they look like. You should seek to attract more clients like your best "A" type clients, and you should also seek to upgrade the quality of existing clients. For your sake, let's hope a substantial portion of firm revenue is derived from "A" type clients. Determine their needs and common characteristics. Meeting their needs and providing them with the benefits they want and appreciate should be an important organized activity. With your lower level clients, maximize potential areas of strength and do what you can to address deficit areas, but be aware of the risk of draining your resources. These clients can take time away from projects and people who are more likely to help you reach your goals.

You should be ruthless about keeping these clients out of your

office so that you have the time necessary to focus on more important clients.

Employ the long-term planning and analysis which is critical to success in today's competitive market and stay focused. Cut out efforts which are not headed in a mutually satisfactory direction. Also it is important not to forget about the rejects. We talk about qualifying clients and not servicing everyone who knocks on your door. That is absolutely necessary.

However, the client you can't service today may be a client you can service tomorrow. Even if you can't service them, the rejected clients, when informed of all the services you offer and assuming you are credible in their eyes, are in a position to refer. If only a small percentage of rejects become future clients or refer, they can still provide you with significant and worthwhile business, serving as some of the most cost-effective marketing you'll do.

Very little is involved in maintaining contact with a reject. You listen attentively to the prospect, identify the needs and explain why you can't accept the matter. Do so in a way which increases your credibility in their eyes. Maybe, given your experience and the size of your business, the amount of money required is beyond their means or they won't be able to afford the fee. Maybe, you just don't like them personally. Maybe they are interested in something which your business

doesn't handle. Whatever the reason, communicate with the prospect so that he/she perceives you as a credible professional business person. You don't have to chase rejects out of the office with a broom. After the meeting, send them a quick letter, perhaps a form letter with a few sentences which are specific to their situation. Thereafter, keep the person on your client list. The cost to you is minimal, possibly less than two dollars a year. Yet, if you have touched them and they are impressed by you, they can be just as likely to refer new business to you as someone else whom you have served well for years.

Given the substantial sum which can be spent on marketing activities, maintaining communication with less likely clients can prove to be both cost-effective and involve minimal effort. After the bill is paid and after the services are rendered, you have a high probability of losing future business and referrals if you fail to maintain contact with the client.

Remember that marketing a professional service is about maintaining relationships with people. You need to use consistent communication. Clients want to think that you care about them even after the bill is paid. People have a lot more options today, and as our services are increasingly viewed as commodities, we have to struggle to maintain awareness of our competitive advantage. There is no best

way to maintain contact. Your key or "A" clients should be offered a special program to add value to the relationship, but whatever you do, the fact that you do something is most important. Clients will quickly forget what you send them, but they will remember that you communicate with them on a consistent basis. The fact that you touch them consistently provides 90% of the value of that communication program. You can maintain contact by circulating articles, giving seminars, sending brochures, publishing a newsletter, or having an open house. It is not necessary to have whatever you send or do be absolutely perfect in the businesses eyes, but it should be sent to them on a regular basis. No communication means that you increase the chance that they will become another businesses clients or refer business to your competition Keep in touch and grow prosperous!