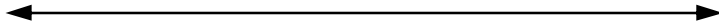


TEN FAILURE TRAPS



In getting started on your journey through the maze of marketing options before you, it will be important and even critical to avoid the pitfalls which can slow you down or even prevent you from ever reaching your ultimate goal. The best way to do this is by learning and profiting from the mistakes which so many others have made in the past. Have you ever pondered, for example, why some marketing efforts are highly successful while others fail? Or, have you ever wondered why some businesses, with less than average technical skills, seem to have clients clamoring for their services while a lot of "crackerjack" practitioners don't have clients or income commensurate with their superior competence?

The reason that so many with less than average technical skills can almost literally "coin money" is because they have mastered some of the most basic principles which form the foundation of a solid marketing and development program.

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Those who are technically skilled and who may be fantastic service providers, but who just don't do as well as their skills suggest that they should, usually have no real appreciation of these basic marketing principles. Those same fantastically talented people who aren't excelling as they should, have often been victimized by failure traps. These traps are the all too common impediments to cost-effective marketing and growth. We call them the "10 Practice Killers."

Developing a successful marketing program is not easy. It will not happen overnight. It will happen only when you make substantive changes in your own work habits and the way your firm makes decisions. It will never happen if you too, fall victim to these same failure traps.

The marketplace is unforgiving. If too many of these impediments apply to you or your firm, you will not experience growth and your rationalizations will only stand in your way. Your income will remain small and your marketing efforts will be doomed from the start.

As you review the "10 Practice Killers" which follow, please keep an open mind. You may recognize some that could apply to you. Your first reaction may be to rationalize that they aren't a problem for you or that it just isn't possible for you or your firm to change and do any better. Understand though, that the marketplace is unforgiving. If too many of these impediments apply to you or your firm, you will not experience growth and your rationalizations will only stand in your way. Your income will remain small and your marketing efforts will be doomed from the start. If you allow yourself the luxury of rationalization you will soon be in your office, with all of your excuses, but with less of the success

you deserve. You'll be watching your competition grab a greater market share, developing an increasingly competitive advantage, and taking away those clients who could, and should, have been yours. The consequences of not taking action can be dire. Let's now examine those lethal marketing mistakes and learn to recognize and avoid them.

PRACTICE KILLER #1: *Failure to truly service the client.*

Clients can rarely tell the difference between work of the highest quality and work that is barely one step ahead of a lawsuit. You are better able to make that distinction than your clients. But if you have serviced the client well, he or she will think highly of you.

This is just as important as doing great technical work. Remember that servicing the client has more to do with whether or not that client perceives you as having done a good job, than it does with whether you actually did a great job. We all know competitors who are not "at the head of the pack" when it comes to their skills, but we also know that there are competitors in this category who have solid, profitable businesses, plenty of clients and dollar bills falling out of their pockets. On the other hand, we also know competitors who are tremendously competent technically, but are just not "making it". Why is that? The answer probably lies in the fact that the more highly skilled person hasn't learned to service the client, while the other, less

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competent person, has made a science out of servicing his or her clients.

If the prospective or current client perceives us to be inattentive, inefficient or ineffective, they may act on the premise that we are just that. The factual reality of the situation, who you really are and what you have to offer, will remain irrelevant, immaterial, and inconsequential to that client.

PRACTICE KILLER #2: *Failure to make tangible what is intangible.* Research shows and common sense tell us that perceptions are usually formed by appearances. It has been said that in marketing, consumer perception is reality. This "reality" will usually be based upon what people can see, taste, smell, feel and hear. But clients can't do those things with most services. They can't try us out before they buy or contract for services, so they make the decision to hire us based upon appearances, perceptions, and the promises we make to them. How well we make, or fail to make, our service tangible to clients will greatly influence their perception of our service. How we package service, how we present it, and who presents it become a vitally important part of our overall marketing efforts. If the prospective or current client perceives us to be inattentive, inefficient or ineffective, they may act on the premise that we are just that. The factual reality of the situation, who you really are and what you have to offer, will remain irrelevant, immaterial, and inconsequential to that client.

PRACTICE KILLER #3: *Failure to differentiate.*

Unfortunately, many of our services are viewed as commodities in the marketplace. Most of the time, clients

can pick another firm and get the same work done. Clients have a lot of choices. If you want to be something other than a "member of the pack," you have to differentiate yourself in the marketplace. Admittedly, it's not easy to do.

Try asking yourself three questions:

1. "What special skills or abilities do we have that allow us to provide more value to clients?"
2. "What is it that we do differently that creates value in the minds of the consumer?" This might include packaging, information, or accessibility.
3. "How do we articulate those differences?"

The last is the key question. It is just not enough merely to have distinctions between your firm and others in the marketplace. You have to be able to articulate those differences to all clients, past, present and future. If you want to have a real competitive advantage, make sure you can articulate your unique selling position. In the process of determining how you can better differentiate yourself from the pack, you'll want to spend a lot of time analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of your competition.

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PRACTICE KILLER #4: *Failure to view the practice externally.* Too few service providers appreciate the fact that the clients they get, the fees they charge and the amount of

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money they ultimately have are all significantly related to "how they are doing" relative to the competition. Your competition provides the means to determine whether you grow or shrink, get more clients or not, and are more profitable or not. Since your competition provides the consumer with service alternatives in the marketplace, you have to measure your efforts against your competitor's efforts. What really counts is how you are performing relative to your competition -- as it is perceived by your clients and prospective clients.

PRACTICE KILLER # :5 *Practice development actions are too diffused or too narrowly focused.* Many times, firms which suddenly get the urge to "do some marketing," launch a number of activities all at one time. The problem is that too often these activities are not coordinated. They do not have a specific target audience in mind. In short, the owners equate marketing with physical things like mailers, newspaper ads, TV , or radio spots, and firm brochures. These scattershot efforts are most frequently launched without sufficient analysis or planning. It takes both analysis and planning to maximize the chances that a firm's efforts are going to reach the intended target and hit it effectively, in such a way that the prospects take the time to notice the promotion and take some sort of action.

Usually, when the typical unplanned storm of activity doesn't produce the results which were expected, the firm decides to stop marketing all together. What is wrong with this picture? If they're not doing too many things businesses will often go to the other extreme. They will "sing themselves a lullaby" by having only one, single marketing tool which is supposed to somehow magically improve the business's position in the marketplace. In the rush to "do some marketing," that one tool alone soothes the firm into believing it is doing something about marketing. However, it doesn't even approach a comprehensive marketing strategy that will get them where they want to go.

PRACTICE KILLER #6: *Paralysis from over analysis or the lack of a defined decision making process.* If you are working without clear goals, if you don't know what you want to accomplish, when you want to accomplish it, and who will be "in charge" of reaching those goals, your marketing is probably going nowhere.

Most of the time successful service businesses have either someone who assumes a leadership position regarding marketing, or there is a definite process in place which determines the plan and ensures it's implementation. Usually, marketing committees or attempts to launch projects with the idea of "seeing what will happen" or "getting our name out

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there" will waste your time and money. Every marketing consultant has horror stories about the inordinate amount of time it takes many businesses to make decisions. The greatest cost involved with any marketing program is the business lost while business owners sit around and talk about things that are irrelevant.

PRACTICE KILLER #7: *Not having a vision for the future.*

If you don't know where you want to go, there is no way you are ever going to get there. General goals such as, "we want more clients" or "we want to make more money," never substitute for having a clear vision. A vision means being able to pinpoint specific types of clients and case matters which you want to attract.

You must also be able to specify other benchmarks of a successful business. What will your charges be for certain matters? What will your hourly rates be? What will your business consider acceptable for performance of such things as billable hours, realization rates, and returns on your investment of time and money? You must have a vision for all of the numerous components which determine the ultimate success of the business, for the kind of clients you want, how you'll service them, and for your financial benchmarks.

Then, you must determine what you can realistically accomplish and when. If you have a vision, you have a

better chance of getting where you want to go with your marketing efforts. You will start down a path leading to optimal use of all of your resources and the success you need to leave the competition in the dust.

Without a vision, you are going to misdirect your marketing efforts. You'll contact people who are really not the best targets or you might develop the wrong messages about your business. The bottom line is that you'll waste time and limited resources at a time when business capital, the talent of your people, and your money should be maximized. Without a vision your marketing efforts will fail, you'll get frustrated, conclude that this marketing stuff doesn't work, and watch as your competition gets stronger.

PRACTICE KILLER #8: *Neglecting internal organization and systems.* If you develop a good marketing plan, bring people to the door, and then sell them on the benefits of the business, you are going to be in deep trouble if you can't service them well, in a way which is consistent with the expectations you have encouraged by your marketing efforts. Your marketing success is going to have more to do with all the "little things" your organization does routinely, without even thinking, than with all the big, grand public splashes which you may implement. This should not be surprising.

You should market not only to get more of the right kind of

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clients in the door, but also to broaden your client base and maximize referrals. Since 30% - 80% of new business is referred by individuals, maximizing those referrals must be a major part of your marketing program. When phone calls aren't returned promptly, when staff isn't knowledgeable and pleasant, when timetables aren't met, when clients are shocked upon getting the bill, and when the clients get a general feeling that you didn't have enough time for them or weren't caring enough, the resulting perceptions (which may have nothing to do with the quality of the service you provide) aren't going to have a positive impact on referrals for new business.

All of your office systems will determine whether or not you meet the promise. If your marketing and selling efforts encourage expectations that are not fulfilled, people will not be satisfied, and they will talk. They'll talk to family, friends and co-workers who may have been thinking of coming to you. Sadly, these prospects will only be told about a less than satisfactory experience. You don't need those "soldiers" out there cutting your marketing efforts off at the knees with negative remarks!

PRACTICE KILLER #9: *No measurement or accountability.* You'll never know how well your marketing efforts are doing if you don't have some predetermined benchmarks and objectives with which to check your progress at key

intervals. Even an initially superior marketing strategy will fail without these benchmarks in place. Not only do your marketing efforts have to produce results, but your people have to be accountable for what they do or fail to do.

If people are assigned responsibility to implement a program or to maintain contact with a key client, some means must exist to determine if these things have been accomplished.

If there is no accountability, you substantially decrease the odds that your marketing efforts will proceed smoothly and achieve the desired results.

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PRACTICE KILLER #10: *A short-term mentality or desire for a "Quick Fix."* There is tremendous pressure today to "do some marketing." Many times, businesses soothe themselves by hiring a consultant, creating a brochure or doing "something" to scratch that marketing itch. Just because you do "something," it doesn't mean that clients will immediately follow. Let's study an example. I have worked with a number of businesses to implement local cable television advertising programs, including creating a set of personalized TV spots that would run locally on stations such as CNN, TNT, ESPN and others. I told companies not to expect any significant volume of calls within the first three months of the program. It wasn't realistic to expect any appreciable response before that, nor was it reasonable to even begin the program if they weren't willing to commit to trying it for at least eight to twelve months. It takes a

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significant period of time for marketing programs to begin to have an impact. Many companies would ask if they could try it for a month and see what happens. I asked them, "Why bother?" Even if the program could work spectacularly if given enough time, a company with such a short-term mentality would pull the plug on it because the program didn't produce immediate results. Firms with a marketing orientation such as this, guarantee the failure of any marketing venture they pursue.

Think about these "Practice Killers." If you believe that too many were applicable to your business, stop and analyze what you can do to change those policies and attitudes in your business. This will help you to prevent your company from sounding the "death knell" for any marketing programs you may initiate.