

Plan for Networking Success

By Jennifer Beever

Growing a successful business requires effective and systematic marketing, yet not many businesses have a marketing plan. Business owners and managers are often too busy in their day-to-day work to step back and think strategically.

For service professionals, planning is even less common, yet it's all the more critical. Service professionals who work long hours selling or rainmaking and then doing work for their clients have limited time to plan strategically. By creating a working plan for marketing and networking, service professionals can move away from a "seat of the pants" approach to a systematic approach.

If executed well, a comprehensive marketing plan provides many benefits. First, the plan helps keep service professionals on schedule with their marketing activities. Second, the marketing planning process forces the issue of thinking strategically and tying marketing back to strategic business objectives. Third, a marketing plan helps with budgeting expenses and better negotiations with vendors who can see long-term opportunity rather than project work.

The end of the year is an ideal time to begin planning for next year. But before service professionals jump into the nitty-gritty details of marketing planning, they should do a little homework. Effective marketing is based on a clear vision, mission, and goals. These must be identified along with which markets will be targeted and how to position oneself relative to the competition. A vision is how service professionals see their practice in the long term. A mission is how service professionals

work and with whom, including their philosophy and values. Goals are specific and measurable activities that will help service professionals achieve their vision.

The other information required before creating a marketing plan is an analysis of how marketing and networking have performed in the past. Service professionals need to track what referrals they received and from what source, and whether or not those referrals turned into client work. Sources might include published articles, public speaking, networking in associations, and face-to-face marketing within a personal network. In analyzing past performance, it is important for the service professional to remember that networking is a long-term activity with tangible and

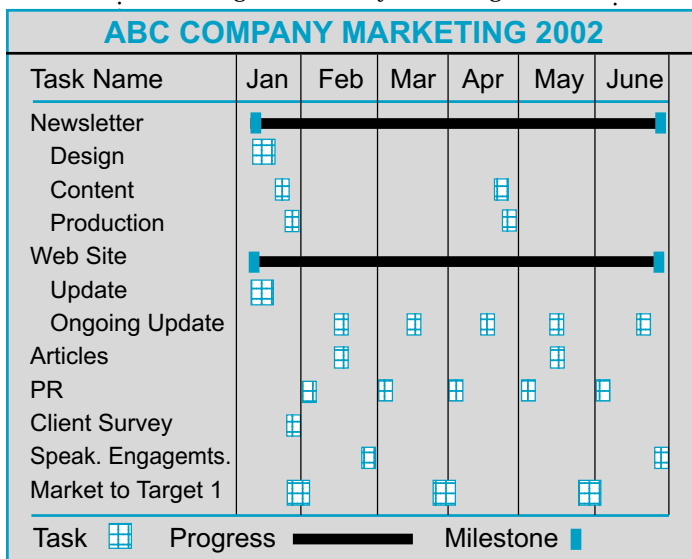
Once the objectives are clear, it's time to brainstorm on marketing activities. Each marketing activity must tie back to achieving the objectives. The first level of marketing activity should be creating clear and concise marketing collateral, including brand identity, logo creation, business cards, stationery and brochures, and websites. If the service professional's strategy and focus is changing from the previous year, these materials need to be reviewed and revised to reflect the new direction. If the marketing materials are still current, the service professional should check inventory levels to ensure that there are enough for the next year's planned activities and schedule ordering more as necessary.

The next level of marketing includes outreach activities. Outreach activities may include article publishing, public speaking, newsletters, direct mail, email and online marketing, and PNG guesting and other networking. Schedule these activities for the year, allowing enough time to prepare each task required to get the job done. For example, a newsletter requires content planning, article writing and editing, layout by a graphic designer, printing and distribution, all of which often takes as much as one month to accomplish. Ideally

a visual timeline should be created using project management software such as Microsoft Project. The timeline should be posted in a visible place in the office to keep track of upcoming tasks. The tasks should then be transposed to the appropriate service professional's calendar so that all tasks are officially on schedule.

When the plan is drafted, it should be reviewed with colleagues, family and friends. If the people closest to the service professional understand his or her objectives and how they plan to reach them, they will be more successful. If an advisory board (formal or informal) doesn't exist, now is a good time to create one. The marketing plan should be discussed with advisors who

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"A comprehensive marketing plan provides many benefits"

intangible results. Tangible results include referrals that result in work, and intangible results include building long-term relationships, associations, and brand identity.

With clear vision, mission, and goals, and a realistic sense of past marketing performance, service professionals can begin to build their marketing plan. The first step is to identify the objectives. Objectives must be clear, achievable, and measurable. For example, rather than stating an objective of "get more referrals," a measurable objective is to "increase referrals from 25 to 40." Other objectives might include specific revenue goals, entering a new market segment, or adding and marketing a new service to clients and potential clients.

Great Idea!

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7 - Optimum cost -price relationship:

Does it cost more to live with the problem than to buy the solution? What alternatives exist that cost less in terms of new budgets. Many times what is perceived, as a problem is not one because it can either be ignored or there is an easy workaround?

8 - Invisibility of new company or product:

Will there be enough time to establish market traction? If you attract attention from a powerful competitor early on, no patent protection or anything else will save you. They'll just pour dollars into marketing efforts and/or legal fees to defeat you and take over the market. It is better to sneak into the market underneath the radar than attract unwanted attention early on.

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Advice from the Experts

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assumptions in the light of reduced investment return expectations.

KR: This is a bear market that rivals those of 1973-74 and 1938-41. Bear markets come along every 25-30 years. We are now about 27 months from the March 2000 peak. Between the bottom of October 1974 and the end of 1975, the market jumped about 45% — those who fled the markets at the bottom missed this huge recovery. The economy and earnings are recovering — the market should follow.

GG: My business remains strong. My clients' businesses, by and large, remain good. The only adjustment I may make is to work a few years longer, or plan on dying sooner. Either way, I can accommodate my retirement planning!

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can provide feedback on how realistic it is as well as how effective the planned activities are in light of the service professional's area of specialization.

Marketing plans are not meant to be static; they should be dynamic, working documents.

Service professionals should review their marketing plan on a quarterly basis to see how they are performing and to make appropriate changes. If referrals are not being generated, the marketing message, the tactics, and/or the target audience may need to be revised.

Marketing planning for the service professional can be completed in as little time as a half a day to a weekend retreat. Service professionals who take this relatively small amount of time to plan will have better control over their marketing activities and budget and better results from planned, systematic networking.

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Successful Sleeping

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for its calming qualities.

3. *Warm bath.* Not hot. Just pleasantly warm. Aromatherapy oils or incense can also be relaxing. This is also a good time to visualize breathing in relaxation — and exhaling stress and tension.

4. *More notes.* Jot down anything else you need to add to your "to do" list. Clear your mind for sleep.

5. *Gentle stretching.* Tighten and then relax your arms, legs, neck, and jaw.

7. *Breathe.* Take several deep breaths. Then take 3 very deep breaths. Hold each for 3 seconds. As you exhale visualize any

remaining tension flowing out of your body.

8. *Follow your breathing.* Gently focus your attention on your breathing. Don't judge, compare, or analyze. Simply observe your breathing....

9. *Hard core cases.* Affirm aloud (but softly) that you sleep easily and soundly through the night. Visualize the most relaxing scene you can imagine (floating on water, lying on warm sand, in a garden, on a cloud ...). Count backwards from 100 or image geometric forms for 60 seconds each.

10. *Obsessive thoughts.* Turn the tables on them by actually watching for the next thought.

Bedroom Environment

Studies have shown that we sleep more soundly in a totally dark and quiet room. If

necessary, use an eye shade and ear plugs. Pillows under your knees take pressure off your back when lying flat on your back. On your side, place a small pillow between your knees. Specially contoured foam pillows are available on the market.

Whatever you do, don't get stressed about not sleeping. If all else fails, take advantage of the time to do — or think about — something you like. You might just fall asleep.

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