



InGenius

Review

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A review of
great thinking
from

INGENUITY MARKETING GROUP

a marketing and training firm that works primarily with professional service organizations and small businesses.

We offer strategic marketing planning and coaching, marketing program development, and curriculum and training mainly in the areas of consultative selling, professional service marketing, and customer service.

Wendy Nemitz



Dawn Wagenaar



Ingenuity Marketing Group, LLC
welcomes Dawn E. Wagenaar



We are delighted to welcome Dawn E. Wagenaar as a principal in Ingenuity Marketing Group, LLC. Dawn comes completely prepared to bring fresh ideas and plenty of experience to the practice. She was most recently marketing director at Boulay, Heutmaker, Zibell & Co., P.L.L.P. Her previous marketing experience includes six years at a medium-sized local CPA firm and two years at a regional national insurance/financial services company.

Dawn specializes in all areas of marketing including team building, creating a marketing culture, business development and creation of and implementation of marketing plans. She has performed marketing consulting for a variety of small businesses and also has an expertise in training.

Dawn has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Augsburg College as well as a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership from the University of St. Thomas. She is a member of the Edina Chamber of Commerce, member of the Education Committee of the Association for Accounting Marketing as well as Vice-President of the Minnesota Chapter of the Association for Accounting Marketing. She is also co-founder and co-president of a women's networking group called Women In Networking.

Dawn lives in Hastings with her husband, Scott, her daughter (who is the cutest baby in the world), Bella, and their golden retriever, Sadie. In her free time, she enjoys reading, gardening, yoga, and spending time with friends and family.

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BRANDING IS HOT – SO WHAT?

A guide to branding for professional service firms

By Wendy Nemitz

Principal, Ingenuity Marketing Group

Branding used to be for cattle. Now it seems to be for CPAs and lawyers. While you don't have to burn your brand into your flesh, branding can still hurt your pocketbook and not make a darn bit of difference to the growth of your firm. Before you wield the branding iron, here is some information you should be aware of.

What is a Brand?

A brand is the promise you make to clients and potential clients about what it will be like to work with you. Your brand promises a certain experience. While many people think a logo is the brand, a strong logo and visual identity package is just a part of a vibrant brand. Your brand includes:

- ~ *The stories you and your staff tell about the firm*
- ~ *The stories your clients tell about the firm*
- ~ *The name of the firm*
- ~ *A strong positioning statement, key messages, and tagline*
- ~ *The visual image of your packaging, including logo, type, brochures, stationery, proposals, and website.*

One of the strongest consumer brands is McDonald's. I know this because my best friend and I took our 13-year-old daughters on a tour of southern Europe a few years ago. We had a layover in Athens and both girls headed straight to McDonald's in spite of several local options at the airport. That bright yellow "M" told them everything they needed to know. They both knew exactly what kind of food, service, experience, and price to expect. They trust the brand.

Why Should You Get a Brand?

Success in branding in the commodity market is well documented. Schroeder Milk, for example, documented a 12% increase in sales almost immediately after the packaging was redesigned. Instead of their more traditional

design on milk cartons, their new brand implied "clean, hip, modern, fresh" and was distinctly different from other choices. Branding in the professional service market is more difficult to chart because of long sales cycles, however, you get an immediate impression of a firm by simple things such as:

- ~ *How firm members talk about their work and their firm*
- ~ *How a business card or website feels and looks*
- ~ *If materials are clear, concise, and speak to you*
- ~ *The clarity of messages*
- ~ *The ease of remembering their name and look*

Even if you have done some branding work, have a terrific website and smart advertising, the two most common impressions of your firm are formed by the words that come out of your staff's mouths and your business card. Too many firms fail to teach their staff how to communicate key messages about what the firm is and what it does. They introduce themselves without a message, complain about small details of their work, or leave no message at all. Every person they meet is a lost opportunity. You have to make sure your staff really understands your brand and can communicate it.

A business card that looks like the 1970s or looks like it could belong to any company only communicates your phone number. It leaves no impression, develops no recognition, and tells nothing about who you are and what you do. It is also a lost opportunity.

Process

While many graphic designers claim the most important part of branding is visual, I do not agree. The most important part of branding is in the minds of your professionals. Your sales force, whether as new deal closers or as keepers of client relationships, include almost every member of your firm. How they talk about the firm is paramount to branding. Branding in a professional service firm involves creating and communicating stories. A good graphic designer can create an attractive logo. The secret of good branding is in integrating what staff, clients, and the public think and expect from your firm.

That takes place in the mind.

A complete branding process in a professional service firm would involve:

STEP ONE: Selection of a small team of five or fewer to act as firm liaisons. If a large group has decision power, we tend to get the “least objectionable” rather than a strong, compelling brand. Work with this team to establish timeframes, expectations, and budget. Examine select competitors.

STEP TWO: Interview clients to document their stories about working with you. This is the most often skipped step and one of the most important if you want the branding process to work. Rather than just guess what resonates with your clients, ask them! From these interviews you can also gain:

- ~ *The firm tagline*
- ~ *Key messages*
- ~ *Case studies*
- ~ *Client feedback*
- ~ *Testimonials*
- ~ *Copy for your website and support materials.*

STEP THREE: Involve your team in the branding process throughout. If you don't they will not understand the branding process and resist change. Hold small group meetings in various departments using a tool called Appreciative Inquiry to find out when firm members felt part of the team and did their best work. Tell them what clients say about the firm. Involve them in giving feedback on the visual design and tagline.

STEP FOUR: Translate stories and experiences into visual images. A good graphic designer will translate them into visual images for consideration by the brand team. Posters of various concepts can be created and posted around the firm offices to gain buy-in, solicit feedback, and build excitement.

STEP FIVE: Select the logo and other collateral designs. The brand team will not only make a final decision on the logo, but also choose letterhead and collateral materials. This is the second place your branding process can lose steam. Good branding is not gray, not safe, not pleasant! Strong visual brands make a statement about you. They provoke disagreement. Not everyone “likes” them. Trust your designer.

STEP SIX: Introduce the stories and brand to the whole firm at a firm meeting. It is critical that staff learn your key messages and tagline so they can integrate the messages into how they talk about the firm.

STEP SEVEN: Finalization of brand program, including:

- ~ *Firm story / key message training and integration into everyday use*
- ~ *Sales training using the brand*
- ~ *Collateral materials, including:*

Letterhead, envelopes, labels, tax return and proposal covers, thank you cards, fax sheet, and other printed materials.

Website and email design.

Firm brochure and other collateral service brochures.

Firm communicator with clients such as a newsletter or other regular communication.

Avoid the urge to hold onto stocks of old stationery. Burn it. Jump into the new brand! Use a variety of games, contests, and mini-training discussions to help people get excited to use it. (It may take some time — change is difficult for many. Expect at least one curmudgeon attorney to keep his old business cards and refuse to use the new ones.) Send out press releases, announce the new brand to your clients, launch your new website.

If you are interested in knowing more about how branding can help your firm grow, call either Dawn Wagenaar or Wendy Nemitz at 651 690 3358.

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