



The Professional's Guide to **growING**[™]
**STRATEGIES FOR LEADS,
REFERRALS AND FASTER GROWTH**

ingenuity
MARKETING GROUP

CONTENTS

Page

04

Two Secrets of Highly Successful Lead Nurturing

10

**Pleasure and Pain:
Marketing and Sales in the New Economy**

16

Proposals That Win

20

Stay Focused to Avoid Blog Blahs

25

Get Out of the Way and Let Your Firm Grow

31

Woo New Business: Be Virtually Visible

37

Clarify Your Niches

INTRO

What used to work for selling professional services still works — and doesn't work. Relationships are still important — and unimportant. Experience counts — and doesn't count. What we mean is that generating solid leads and closing business is trickier today and more elusive than a Humvee in Europe. Still, hindsight from the past decade is highly beneficial. That's why Ingenuity Marketing Group has compiled the best of lead generation/business development articles and tips from our InGenius Review blog into this handy e-book to share with your sales and marketing department or partners. Find out what every smart professional can do now to generate more quality leads and GROW!

CHAPTER 1

Two Secrets of Highly Successful Lead Nurturing

Many professional service firms have a scatter-shot approach to lead generation. They put information into the world through newsletters, direct mail, e-blasts, trade shows and other stuff in hope that it falls on the right people at the right time. If you throw enough information out there, you can get limited success. But should you really spend precious money to blanket the world with information about your firm? Two secrets of highly successful lead generation are these: know your ideal audience and know their pains.

Best Clients. Worst Problems.

If you're not excluding a lot of people from your list of potential "A" clients, you're not being strategic enough. Review the last few years of financial data for your firm, and identify which clients consistently bring your firm (or you personally) consistent revenue and great experiences.

Your best clients aren't just the ones with the most money; they're the ones who result in the most profit because:

- they value the work you do,
- your people enjoy working with them and are more engaged,
- the work is something you do well, and
- the clients trust your team — and pay promptly.

These are the kinds of clients you want to clone — so these are the leads you want to generate. A common mistake is to think that it's better to have 100 leads of any type than 10 leads of the best type. But 10 “A” client leads are far more valuable than 100 random names on a purchased list. Identifying your best clients will save you money by eliminating marketing efforts that don't reach that audience.

Your next step is to really understand what's important to those clients and therefore the prospective clients or leads you're hoping to reach. You can do this by conducting “A” client interviews and holding client highlighter meetings to identify pains and opportunities that align with services you most want to sell.

Connect with and observe your best clients on social media to see what they're sharing, reading and talking about. Think about the most recent problem you solved for one of your best clients. This client is not the only one who is grappling with this problem. Add the problem to your list of client pains that should be addressed in your marketing strategy.

Why Should They Buy From You?

In his book “UnMarketing,” Scott Stratten gives the results of asking over 1,000 business owners, “Why do you buy?” When selecting a new service provider, most owners cited “a referral by a trusted source” at the top of the list. Right behind that was “current relationship, but have yet to purchase.”

Those are the prospects that have learned about you and started to trust you through your expert nurturing of that relationship. Even better, the third top answer in the survey was “recognized expert in the field,” which is another form of lead generation/nurturing.

This information might not seem new, given that many service providers get their best clients through referrals or a trusted relationship. However, how those leads come to you are changing. Bio pages on firm websites consistently rank as one of the most highly viewed pages on professional service websites. Those warm prospects are checking out your people before they make the decision to call. If, in viewing that bio page, they also find a client story, an article on a key industry topic, a downloadable tips list or informative blog post, those prospects are wooed into staying longer on your site and learning more about your expertise. You are nurturing them to look further and find out why your people are the best choice.

Once they're on your website, get them to do something! Missing that opportunity is like observing a customer in your retail store and never offering to answer a question, point that customer to the right aisle or invite her to sample something.

Really? You're going to let them window shop and leave?

Referral sources also want to recommend the best option for their clients. Are you proving through your online brand, content and differentiating messages that you are the best? Some clients might just take a referral source on his or her word that you're the best, but most are still going to decide for themselves based on first impression — first by what they've found out online and then in the initial meeting. This isn't just about telling leads why you're different from your competition. If it was, everyone could win by saying "better quality," "great service," "leaders in excellence" and all the other overused phrases in the marketplace.

You need to prove that you know what you're talking about by sharing industry insights, trends, tips and updates regularly and in the right channels. If you're a fairly social, in-person networker, you do that through speaking, webinars, videos and tailored events — methods to get in front of your best prospects physically and with your voice and personality.

If you prefer a more thoughtful, behind-the-scenes approach, you have opportunities to write articles and case studies, blog posts and tips sheets. Distribute them in the channels where your audience hangs out as well as on your website. Draw them in for even deeper, more technical conversations, then warm them up for a real meeting.

Lead Them to Act.

Lead nurturing usually breaks down in one (or both) of two places: either you don't have a good system that helps you follow up with leads, or you don't have a system feeding you content that you can use to follow up.

Sometimes professionals don't have good lead nurturing systems because they don't know how to implement one. If that's the case, good sales training with an eye toward the sales process as well as individual coaching on business development strategies can help create this system. Make it easier for your prospects to act by making sure that every communication — whether in person, in print or online — guides them to take action. This doesn't have to be a hard sell. You could invite them to ask or answer a question, fill out an evaluation, share their own insight, download a brochure or join your LinkedIn group.

Everytime your prospects respond to an invitation, you can reach out with additional information. Thank them for their comments. Let them know about an upcoming webinar that relates to their pain. Ask if they would like a copy of a recent article written about their concern. The goal is to keep the conversation going in a way that is personal and focused on the prospect's needs. One of the biggest drawbacks to our content-rich world is that prospects and clients can come across information that is important to them — and you didn't send it first. Embarrassing.

Your goal with lead generation and nurturing in the coming months and years is to become so good at sharing your expertise and knowledge to the right audience and in the right places that you become a preferred source of information. Prospects and clients turn to you first, share the information with their connections and practically build your business for you.

Converting prospects to clients is still about referrals and relationships, but in a new and dynamic context. You are the information hub. You are the experts. Start dangling those carrots of timely and useful information and invite people to take action.



growING™ Smarter Tip:

Establish the Relationship — Sales Will Follow.

Whether you are in South Africa, Italy or Denver, you will find vendors selling all kinds of goods. We've noticed in our travels that people tend to buy things when they establish relationships with the vendors in some way. Pushy vendors get the brush-off. But when you are welcomed into a small Zulu village and shown how to make beer and throw spears, nearly everyone buys something from the stand in the village later. Price alone did not open our purses. Vendors who "warmed us up" with information, questions and genuine interest got our business. How do you warm up your prospects?

CHAPTER 2

Pleasure and Pain: Marketing and Sales in the New Economy

Ingenuity speaks to accounting professionals in every region of the country and in Europe. Most of their stories are variants on at least one of three themes. We have heard about:

Commodity Price Pressure

- With many more responders to every RFP, the bidding war is intense. Winners are often bidding so low that others wonder how the work can get done.
- Even your great clients are asking for price concessions, not only because they are cutting costs but because your competitors are promising lower prices than yours.
- Prospects are eyeing every dollar decision and making sure they shop around. It is much harder to make new sales.

Stagnant Growth

- Flat is the new up. Firms that formerly grew upwards of 10 percent per year are scratching to grow 2 percent. Firms that had more modest growth during the boom are losing market share.

- Firms that put in aggressive sales systems, have strong niche marketing and know their competitive differentiation are holding their own. Those that depended on referrals and word-of-mouth are finding it really tough out there as the low hanging fruit dries up.
- Competitors are calling your best clients and offering some very aggressive pricing.

Transition Planning

- With growth so hard to achieve, senior partners are wondering how their buy-outs will be funded.
- Firms that depend on a few senior rainmakers to bring in new work are taking a serious look at the younger generation and wondering where the rainmakers are.
- Mergers are happening within middle-size firms as small groups of professionals split off to form boutique firms and the rest of the firm merges — the original succession plan scrapped.

What Sells Now

There are two ways to promote your services: through the client's pains or through their pleasures.

Pleasure

Selling pleasure takes the form of lunches, small gifts and information about your company with gentle persistence. You can talk no more than 50 percent of the time during this type of sales conversation. It is about rapport building with the client, but also you and your services and the absolute happiness that the client will experience with you. It is a conversation that requires a medium level of skill.

In marketing, pleasure looks like “happy client” testimonials, an upscale-looking brand and key messages focusing on the talents and service ethic of your people. You can use a lot of advertising because the message is more you-focused. You need lots of sales support materials to hand out at trade shows. You respond to most RFPs that look good because competition is low and you land a fair number of them.

Pain

What works better when competition is tight and prospects are price-conscious is to sell pain. You have to be able to deeply dig into your clients’ or prospects’ psyches and help them identify what really keeps them up at night, their background fears and challenges in this economy. You have to make it safe for them to tell you everything, including how much it might be costing them to keep their current provider. You have to help them feel unsafe with keeping their pain, but safe in handing it over to you. It is a conversation that requires a high level of skill.

In sales, getting at pain takes the form of questions. You have to create intelligent questions that will allow your prospects to think through their issues and fears and then share them with you. If you thought keeping your mouth shut was hard before, pain selling means that you talk for about 10 percent of the conversation, much less than you could when selling pleasure! It is a complete overhaul of most sales systems. The questions have to be non-threatening, but help people open up. If you give them pain statements (“You only have two rainmakers.”), you can easily make people feel defensive, which means you do not get the sale.

Marketing also takes a shift in a pain economy. Instead of focusing on how nice your people are or their outside interests, it is time to differentiate your firm for being the “best place to turn to” for specific needs. You do this through expertise and niche marketing.

Professional service marketing has always been different from other marketing because you are selling what’s in your head and who you are. In a pain sales process, you want to be visible to the markets you serve — a familiar provider — but also credible. Nothing says you know what you are talking about than authoring an article or being featured in the media about your subject of expertise. This kind of public relations lives on beyond a project press release or firm news because your articles show up on Google and reinforce your knowledge and expert status.

Speaking is another classic way to build your status as an expert. Make sure all your speaking engagements are mentioned somewhere on the Web. If your prospect is looking for a new forensic accountant and finds that you have authored 12 articles and given six speeches in this area, your credibility meter rises exponentially. It shows that you are in demand and trusted to provide the right information.

Virtually all prospects now spend some time looking up their next vendors on Google. You cannot afford a dusty website! All those articles and speaking engagements should be featured on your site as well as strong expert-based bios and excellent practice area pages. This is the time to shine on all fronts —your reputation, your personal appearance, your website, your social

media, your Google search results. When people don't want to spend more money you have to prove you're worth it.

Niche Marketing

The other tool that is fueling firm growth right now is owning a niche market — not showing up at a trade show meeting here and there, but owning the whole arena. It is easier to build up credibility in certain niches markets than in your whole geographic area because there are usually trade associations, publications and meetings that define the marketing space. It can take years to own a niche, but there are some great shortcuts that include individual marketing plans for your team members (strength in numbers), niche public relations and a sales pipeline coaching process specific to that niche.

The economy is definitely taking an uptick in many areas and we are busy at something besides sales again! It might look like the worst is over, but don't forget the lessons from 2008 through 2010: Whether the economy is tough or booming, focus on your sales and marketing. Spend money on it; get new training, fresh ideas and more systems. Hone in on the customer base that needs you the most. Step up your game.



growING™ Smarter Tip:

Closing a Sale Made Simple: Conversation Tricks

You wouldn't know it from how much energy most professional service providers put into avoiding it. But it is simply making sure that the questions have been answered, necessary issues have been raised, and potential clients know you would like to work with them. Use these conversation tricks to ask for the business:

- “Your business sounds very interesting and a great fit for our firm. We would enjoy working with you and giving you great service. When will you be making a decision?”
- “We have certainly enjoyed talking through your challenges to profitability. We have gone through the process for cost segregation and how we can analyze the data and help you pinpoint both cost savings and profit improvement strategies. We would enjoy moving forward with this project. When would you like to start?”
- “I enjoy working with family businesses and have been able to watch many of the succession plans we've worked on go smoothly into place and keep both the business and the family happy. Shall we set up a meeting to start working through the major issues?”
- “If we have answered all your questions, may I ask when you will be ready to move forward on this?”

CHAPTER 3

Proposals That Win

Companies spend hundreds of hours writing and submitting proposals. Some are responses to RFPs, some are ideas for services they are pitching, and some are “relationship proposals” when a client or potential client is considering a project and wants to see a proposal.

Many, if not most, of the proposals I have seen are not compelling. Too many seem to speak in French, “we, we, we,” instead of the “you” language that focuses on the potential client’s challenges and needs. Prospects are concerned about two things: the work they want done and whether or not your firm is capable of doing it to their satisfaction. For the best first impression, try the following winning proposal strategies.

Alert the Team

Set a rule that an RFP or any type of proposal request cannot sit on a desk for more than 24 hours before alerting the marketing or proposal team. You won’t put forth your best effort at the last minute. Bring every relevant team member in on proposal opportunities. This includes marketing. If you are working to develop new business, marketing staff can do their jobs better when they understand the strategy. They can help the company develop proposal language that is customized to that industry as well as create ways to differentiate your proposal from the rest. An easy way to alert your niche group and other staff to incoming proposals is to develop a proposal log that lists the prospect, project description, date logged, key team members and deadline.

The team should quickly weigh in on whether the project is worth going after or not. This might be based on industry expertise, ROI, location or potential conflict of interest. To promote buy-in of the improved proposal process, select some go-getters to pilot it and then heavily promote their success in attracting new business. Eventually, the change resisters will wonder what the go-getters are doing right.

Reinvent the Executive Summary

Most of the time, the Executive Summary is the only section that is referred to and re-read. It should be prospect focused and address the prospect's needs and concerns. Explain how this engagement will benefit them and eliminate their pain. Avoid mentioning your firm too much; prospects don't care that it's been around since the Roman Empire.

One of the biggest mistakes companies make in proposals is outlining generic capabilities rather than concrete solutions that reflect a true understanding of that client's business needs. It takes more time, but the executive summary is your primary opportunity to connect on a business and personal level with three or four relevant selling points.

Develop some standard templates such as firm history or firm story, bios, case studies, table of contents, appendices and indexes to assist with quick assembly and a sharp, branded presentation.

Research Thoroughly

When interviewing prospects, almost all of them will say that fee is an issue. This is only true if you haven't made them feel that they want you. By drilling down during your interview process — from the CEO to the controller to key project team members, you will

begin to learn what they really want. It could really be continuity of personnel, more industry expertise or responsiveness.

Ask about challenges on previous projects. Find out what they liked and didn't like about working with other service providers. Your proposal can then address solutions to those challenges and weaknesses. To improve the look of your proposal, assemble copies of proposals from other companies and industries and adapt their strengths as your own, whether it's graphics or content flow. Ask for permission to use the prospect's logo in your proposal for a more custom look.

Leverage References/Testimonials

Make sure references are current and in a similar industry. Prospects like to see clients who have used the same service. Testimonials and case studies are also a great way to talk about your company without speaking in French. Call references in advance of submitting the proposal so they can anticipate a call and engage with familiarity. Provide between four and six to ensure that the screening committee can reach at least a few of them quickly.

Stay in Touch

Have marketing staff call a project committee member regarding the winning or lost proposal to gain feedback for improving your next proposal. Plan a follow-up call about 15 months later if you didn't get the project. By that time, they might be ready for a change.

If you won, take time to celebrate.



growING™ Smarter Tip:

Proposal Quick Tips

- Follow requested RFP standards to the letter. If they require 12-pt Times Roman, use it even if it doesn't fit your branding.
- The brain comprehends graphics 5-7 times faster than text; tell your story with graphs, charts and timelines where appropriate.
- Keep it short, less than 20 pages; the ideal length is 10-14 pages.
- Send your proposal early if possible, before the stated deadline.
- Hand deliver your proposal in an eye-catching package.
- Avoid mailing on Fridays because Mondays are busy.
- If you are presenting to the client, take time to rehearse as a team. Try to be the last to present.
- Send a follow-up thank you note.

CHAPTER 4

Stay Focused to Avoid Blog Blahs

Blogs are simple to create and offer prospects and recruits a more intimate look at your corporate culture. But like a naïve teen who posts his picture and personal information on an interactive web page, a blog can also hurt your firm more than help it.

We've reviewed blogs that are so boring – a regurgitation (reblog) of content from other sites – that it creates an annoying rather than hip impression of the firm. We've also read blogs that are as scattered and inane as a grocery list.

The best blogs offer lots of fresh, insightful content about your firm and industry that is of interest to prospects, recruits, and clients. They may have a lead blogger such as the CEO or a partner, or they may include commentary from a niche group or practice area. The primary goals of a business blog are to give prospects and recruits a glimpse at your corporate culture and personalities, show that you are up to date on industry trends, and increase the fresh content on your website for search optimization.

If you have a blog or are thinking of creating one, consider these best practices to avoid the blog blahs.

Set-Up

You're going to need some help from your web host or site designer on how to set up the blog. One of the easiest options

for new bloggers is to select a hosted site such as WordPress, Typepad, or Blogger. These software providers set up and maintain the blog database for you at a reasonable rate, providing support if anything goes wrong. All you have to do is supply the content. Some companies set up a separate domain or web address for the blog to give it credibility in a particular industry, but posting directly on your firm's website is easier and will do what blogs should do — drive traffic to other information about your firm and generate leads. New web templates offer a blog option right in the design. All you have to do is start blogging.

Policies

Like any marketing vehicle, the blog should reflect your brand. Policies regarding acceptable content as well as the look and feel of the blog should be considered. Think about how you will handle inappropriate postings, photos or other visuals, and create a written policy to circumvent any potential embarrassment, not to mention legal action.

However, we do caution you about over-sanitizing your content. After it has been reviewed and edited by five committees, it will not only be months old, it will be boring.

Once your blog has been running for a while and gained a following, you may decide to allow reader comments, which can be an effective form of online networking and leads. Make sure that your blogging software offers that option when you are ready to use it. Write a policy regarding acceptable commenting practices. Make sure your filters are set to weed out spam and bot junk on the comments section. Most importantly, have someone monitor comments and respond quickly.

It is important for your staff and official bloggers to know that content should remain professional even if on the lighter side. Acronyms and cute slang common in text messaging don't really fit the goals of a professional services blog because not every reader will be familiar with it. Choose clarity over brevity.

Maintenance

Post regularly. If you want to be known as a serious blogger, plan on submitting posts at least weekly. It is helpful to have someone in the firm champion the blog as the writer and/or manager. This person will coordinate with your site manager or the blog host to ensure that posts are updated regularly.

You can also outsource content writing for your blog. Make sure the writer is familiar with your industry and services in order to strategically provide content. You want readers to read other related blogs and go deeper into your website.

Most software programs will automatically archive your posts, but you might not like how they are listed. By going into Archive Preferences in your software, your site manager can configure the file names by date or topic. You can also organize your posts by category. This is helpful if you are writing on different topics, for example "business development" and "book reviews." Test and review your categories early in the process so you don't have too many posts to organize.

Content

Although some bloggers are more like webjournalists who comment on anything that interests them, it's more effective for business

development or recruitment to focus most of the content of your blog on a key theme with two or three related topics. By focusing your content and keeping it fresh, you will quickly build a following of loyal readers who are interested in your topic and will refer others to it.

Keep your posts succinct and by all means proof them before posting! This bears repeating: please proof your content. You want your personality to shine through, but typos and creative grammar will detract from your message. You also don't want to go back and change content once it is posted because most tracking tools will read changes as a new post.

Promotion and Tracking

Let your clients and prospects know about your new blog through social media. Encourage them to post comments if available or email you questions and feedback. Comment on other blogs in your industry and leave your URL to help other readers find you.

There are other options for you to increase traffic to your blog and search engine optimization. This includes RSS (Really Simple Syndication), which allows users to subscribe to your blog, and Trackback features that alert users to other relevant information about your topic at either your site or other blogs. This would be the next phase of your blogging adventure. You can also connect blog posts to your social media, expanding the reach of each post to larger audiences.

Keep it simple in the beginning to decide if blogs are the right marketing tool for you to share quick tips, trends and advice. Use the site's measurement tools to discern the most popular topics, and your blog can support effective lead generation and sales strategy.



growING™ Smarter Tip:

Stand Out From Your Competition.

Go Niche – The online world is noisy. People will refine their search until they get the information they need. Use specific key phrases such as “paternity rights,” “mechanic’s liens,” or “estate planning with gold” and create content that gets noticed. You can use keyword tools or analytics to find out how people are searching for your services, then build your content around those pains and questions.

Use Consistent Images – When a visitor comes to your website, they’re not just looking at the words. We form a gut impression from the images and colors we see. Use images that really convey what makes your firm different, and don’t forget to include high quality, professional but friendly photos on the bio pages.

Make Connecting Easy – Give visitors to your site many ways to connect with your people so they can choose the one they like: email, phone, social media, video, blog or newsletter subscription. Provide these options on the home page and on the bio pages. There are ways to protect your contact information in the back-end of your website, so make sure those are in place before you share it.

Tell Them What’s Next – It doesn’t have to be a hard sell, but make the next step crystal clear for visitors who are in need. When they come to your website, offer an article download, a question box, podcast or special event as a reason for them to stay and learn more. Set up the next step so you can follow up with a phone call or courtesy email after they connect with your site. [Download our Referral Blueprint for a pathway to nurture online leads.](#)

Be Memorable – In your words, images, videos and the general layout of your site, make it as clear as possible why you stand out from the crowd. Brand recognition is one of the top ways that firms are commanding a premium price.

CHAPTER 5

Get Out of the Way and Let Your Firm Grow

Our clients have credentials and degrees and experience that would put nearly every other profession to shame. But whether they have in-house marketers or hire outside people like Ingenuity, they can still miss the boat on marketing their firms well.

Good Marketing Should Foster Firm Growth.

If you look at the tip of the marketing iceberg, your marketing person may do things like hire a website company to build a site or pick a color or two for a new logo. They may help set up a LinkedIn profile and order some promo items with the firm logo.

Nearly anyone can do that. If that is all you are expecting from your marketing people, you are not allowing them to deliver value.

There are real opportunities for growth when you let marketing professionals leverage strategy and technology — and a budget.

#1 Be Different from your Competitors in the Eyes of Your Clients and Prospects. By different from your competitors, we do not mean having a maroon logo when theirs are mostly blue. For a professional service firm, the logo is only a tiny bit of a strong brand. The real genius in branding your firm is discovering what your clients count on you for and what your firm's values really are in terms of how you deliver your service. You need to have everyone in the firm on the same page about the unique

way you deliver value to clients. It is not an easy conversation to uncover, much less articulate in a way that seems fresh and memorable.

Too many firms have mission statements around “excellent client service” or visions about “being the premier firm in the region...” when that is as trite as gum. If we see another tagline that reads something like “Excellence. Service. Integrity,” we will never need another glass of wine to fall asleep at night, we can just read the identical taglines of firms that seem exactly alike.

Professional quality work and client service are the thresholds of what your clients expect from you. What makes you different and how can you express it in a memorable way? Your marketing people can ask your clients, survey your marketplace and come up with memorable ways to articulate these differentiating values and messages.

Once this is defined, teach these key messages to everyone in your firm. Teach the backroom people about how clients value their work. Inspire the front-end people with the results they create. Get them talking! Then let your marketing talent integrate your differentiating themes — what really makes the experience of you stand out from your competitors — into your website, your advertising, your proposals and every other marketing message you send.

#2 Own the “Famous” Reputation as the Go-To Expert. It is no longer enough to know how to fill in a great tax return or even design a great bridge. People need to look to your firm as the “best place to go” when they have a certain need. How do you own that piece of people’s minds? Your marketing people can create strong press and media outreach to get you quoted and

writing on topics in specific areas. Establish a speakers bureau so that your firm experts are out sharing their knowledge. Get active in associations. Actively seek a certain quotient of fame so that people know who to hire.

#3 Escape the Commodity Pricing Trap. Nothing beats the joy out of the profession like being treated like a mere commodity in the RFP nation. The only way to break out of that trap is to be able to clearly articulate your differences and make sure the world knows about them. Without a clearly defined competitive edge and without the talents of bringing it to the attention of the world, you might as well just fill in the spreadsheets with your best price and compete with professionals in Iowa and India. Great marketing people help you stand out as brighter, fresher, smarter or in some way better than the competition.

#4 Dominate a Niche. Being a generalist is very expensive because you have a huge world to talk to. Being the “best firm to go to when you are in this industry...” is a defined target that your firm can deeply dig into. (Hint: Having two or three clients in one SIC code is not dominating a niche.) You need to own it. That means you have to play rugby instead of lawn tennis.

Dominating a niche is a contact sport. You have to know your subject, show up at all meetings and trade shows, write, speak and schmooze. You also need a strong online social presence where you nurture connections who aren't ready to meet in person. Most of the professionals we know are not born sales people. Let your marketing talent organize this niche and tee up opportunities and introductions.

#5 Close Deals. If building your own practice is job one at your firm, sign up for sales training right now. This is not a skill you can afford to lack. We offer basic sales training for people who have had none and know several great people who teach advanced sales training for people who sell services.

Great marketing people may not always be sales trainers but they can certainly diagnose the need for one and get the right trainer lined up. Bring your marketers along to sales calls and watch your close ratios increase as they ask about the prospect's business, goals and family or hobbies. Suddenly the prospect likes you and wants to give you the business.

Big clients tend to require that you sell in teams, which is not like selling one-to-one. Have a sales process and a sales pipeline in your firm. Your marketers should hold people accountable to the process. The days of service partners are rapidly disappearing – everyone has to be able to help generate new business and your marketing team can help each one with individual business development plans.

#6 Know How Your Buyers Buy. Since the advent of the Internet, people who used to pick the accountant or lawyer they went to college with now can shop for one on a Saturday night. They get email newsletters from six firms and get sales calls from two more.

Your marketing people should regularly attend panels of people who buy your services as well as continuing education on buying patterns. Invite a panel of your own clients to speak at your firm and ask them what they value and why they stay. Your marketing people can set up your website, your newsletter and all your firm communications to maximize the experience for clients and prospects.

Your marketing team or consultants should be focused on the big picture of firm growth. If your marketing person is spending loads of time on colors and trinket buying, you may need some help at a strategic level, or, we often find that you may be standing in the way of letting that person make a real difference for you.



growING™ Smarter Tip:

Create Persuasive Testimonials.

- Consider using an outside party who is good at drawing people out. Your clients will tell you that you are “great,” but “great” is hardly compelling sales copy. They will be more expressive with someone they do not know. Make sure your interviewer has done this before; it is an art to draw people out and get the language that persuades.
- Tell your clients who will be calling them and why. A heads-up from you means they will be much more comfortable with the interviewer.
- Always use the telephone or in-person interviews. If you ask folks to write a letter, the letter will almost always be stiff and formal. Again, not compelling copy. When you interview them, you have the chance to craft the words into much more compelling copy. (However, compelling copy should never drive you to make anything up that they did not say. It just gives you a little more license to edit.)
- Craft a variety of testimonial quotes for use in your promotional campaigns.
- Send each quote (any that you might ever consider using) to the clients for approval. Make sure they know it may be used on your website, media releases, proposals and for a variety of promotional uses.
- Whenever possible, use the person’s full name, title, and company.

CHAPTER 6

Woo New Business: Be Virtually Visible

There is a common saying among journalists and other professionals that “an empty office is a busy office.” Anyone caught sitting at a desk or hanging around the office must not have enough to do.

Journalists needed to be on their beats and visible to their sources in order to get first dibs on a great story. They needed to hang around the courthouse and police station, visit schools and sometimes even the local bar or church to find their stories. They didn’t always come back with a story, but it was expected that they better be in the right place at the right time just in case.

In the same way, professionals of the past had to stay physically visible to their clients, referral sources and potential clients. They attended networking and philanthropic events, went to happy hour and took long lunches at local hot spots. Deals were secured on the golf course and at sporting events. The most successful rainmakers, soon-to-be partners sometimes knew more about their clients’ families than their own.

Today there seems to be less emphasis on being out there and more emphasis on using technology to “stay in touch.” The trends of work-life balance, economic necessity and accelerated deadlines have limited the capacity of both journalists and other professionals to simply hang out and see what comes of it.

Let's not lament the good old days too much. Professionals can strike a balance between getting out of the office and also leveraging technology for productive visibility.

Even the world of dating has used technology to help busy people market themselves to the most suitable matches. Keeping that in mind, let's explore the future of visibility for professionals. There are many new ways to get out there and attract your ideal audience.

What's Your Sign?

The new buzzword in the world of professional communications is content marketing. Professionals are getting smarter about attracting the right people and managing their reputations by sharing interesting information. But you have to know what to share.

Imagine telling a story about yourself or your firm at a cocktail party. Do you want to be considered "the most interesting man in the world" or just another accountant? Do you want people begging for your number at the end of the night or asking themselves why they bothered going out?

For journalists and professionals, the story is critical. Is it news? Is it different? Will people say, "Wow" when they hear it? If not, it's not a good story.

What's Your Pick-Up Line?

Now take your great story and test it throughout the various channels available to you. These channels will then continue to share interesting information about you 24 hours a day. When placed correctly, your information will also be shared from one person to another, expanding your visibility exponentially. This

includes your website, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, traditional business media, speeches, webinars, videos, advertising and trade media. We call these channels the “three Ps” of media: Pitched, Paid and Proactive.

You choose these channels by understanding your audience — where they hang out and get their news. Keep in mind that your audience is getting younger. (Anyone who is at least 40 has experienced that sad reality.) They are getting their information online and via mobile devices more than ever before. Craft your story to be consistent, engaging and different from your competition.

Who Do You Desire?

Whether you want to attract time-traveling entrepreneurs or female chief financial officers who love sushi, you need to be clear on your audience. Develop a detailed profile of the “A” client or the “A” referral source you want to attract, then investigate how they gather their information. What are their interests? What do they read? Do they gather their information via mobile device or the evening news? What gets them excited? Where do they hang out for entertainment? Who do they trust for reliable updates on industry trends and strategies?

Wherever they go, you need to be seen there. And you need to be seen there frequently...preferably with an entourage. By that I mean that you should have followers, lots of quality connections and people commenting positively on your information and sharing it. Your entourage builds over time, but it doesn't hurt to have your colleagues and friends talk about you at networking events or share your content with their friends online (or recommend you on LinkedIn).

You can gather this information about your target audiences in time-consuming conversation, or you can hire Ingenuity to do 10 to 15 interviews and gather it for you. The bonus is that we'll translate the answers into the profiles and themes you need to create your story and "pick-up lines."

Wait! Do You Still Live With Your Mom?

Once you have attracted the right people, it's important to take them somewhere nice and classy to learn more about you. For your unknown prospects, "A" clients and top referral sources, they'll often head to your website or your LinkedIn profile to gather more information before they make a decision to take the relationship further. If your website is awful or you only have 50 connections on LinkedIn, that first impression can sour quickly.

The same goes for mentions about you on Google. If a prospect searched for you or your firm name, what would they find? We hope they would find your LinkedIn profile and company page, populated with great status updates and service descriptions. We hope they would find an article written for a popular trade magazine. We hope they would find your affiliation with important networking and trade groups. And we hope they would find an interesting bio, a great photo, a video or white paper about a differentiating service.

The key to visibility today is to know your audience — who you really and truly want to attract for a long-term commitment. Find out where they hang out for important news and information. Start sending them little gifts of insight that rock their world and leave them wanting more.

Once you've hooked them (lead generation), then start wooing them (lead nurturing) and drawing them back to your place (website, social media, videos, events). Then let them make the next move.

What you'll gain is an enhanced reputation with referral sources who feel good about recommending you. You'll gain loyalty and cross-selling opportunities with your best clients because your visibility and credibility will affirm their decision to stick with you. And you'll attract the unknown prospect who didn't realize they needed you so much.



growING™ Smarter Tip:

Are You Using Content Marketing?

Nine out of 10 B2B marketers are using content marketing to grow their businesses. On average, marketers use eight content marketing tactics to achieve their marketing goals. The most popular tactics are:

- Article posting (79%)
- Social media (excluding blogs) (74%)
- Blogs (65%)
- eNewsletters (63%)
- Case studies (58%)
- In-person events (56%)
- Videos (52%)
- White papers (51%)
- Webinars (46%)
- Microsites (31%)

The true genius of content marketing, however, is to design it with a technology platform so that these communication tactics are automatic and seamless with prospective clients. They request the information and the technology sends it out. You make the follow-up phone call to close the deal.

Source: The B2B Content Marketing: Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends Report by the Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Profs

CHAPTER 7

Clarify Your Niches

A few clients in a certain industry is not a niche. Neither is a service that you provide to clients who are either high-maintenance or not likely to engage you for other services.

Niche development has resurfaced as a way for professionals to differentiate themselves, but few have clarified their niches or the process to pursue more business in them. It is not the same as cross-selling and it's not just about identifying clients with similar characteristics. When identifying a true niche, we have found that it has several characteristics. And there are ways of promoting a niche that require awareness and strategy for your entire firm.

What is a Niche?

A niche can either be a specific service or expertise you provide or a type of client/industry segment to whom you offer tremendous expertise and value. You need to be clear about whether you will categorize your niches by service/practice area or client/industry segment. You can certainly identify your core services and types of clients, but to qualify as a niche they must have these qualities:

Your people “get it.” Your people know so much about this area that they add immediate value. Their experience is deep and they require no onboarding to speak the client's language and proactively support them.

Price is rarely a factor. Clients don't cite price as their reason for choosing you. They have a high demand for your team and experience. Clients are your A-List – You want to clone these clients because they recognize your value and they buy additional services from you. They are your strategic foundation.

Competitors envy you. They wish they had the depth of expertise that you have in this area and the caliber of clients. When they hear your name, they think of a specific service or client base.

Thinking about a niche in this way probably rules out a lot of what your firm offers as well as the types of clients you work with right now. Developing a niche is a long-term proposition. There is a fair amount of risk involved to put your chips so heavily into one or a few baskets. But in an economy where professionals are screaming, “I don't want to look like a commodity!!” it could pay dividends down the road to take a very close look at the true potential for niches in your firm.

What is Not a Niche?

Firms will often have one person who is so good at a certain thing that leadership starts calling their service area a niche. The problem with one star service provider is that your star can leave or retire. One trusted advisor is not a niche. To have a true niche, you need to train and develop several people to serve it for the foreseeable future. You also don't have a niche if your entire firm is not aware of it. You can't build a niche in business valuations for farmers or in construction law unless everyone — from administration to leadership — can talk about why you are the best.

Finally, a niche is not something you are fearful of growing, either due to the level of your internal expertise or concerns about the potential client base. You need to commit to staff development and leadership in this niche, emphasize it in your sales pipeline, promote it in your brand messages and marketing and speak about it in publicity. If you don't truly believe — passionately — that your team is the best in this area and the clients you could serve are the best for you, then it's NOT a niche.

Can You Aspire to a Niche?

Of course! That's the fun part about growing a firm. But you must create a different mindset to business development. It is not about sales. It is about identifying the clients you most want to work with, the services you most want to provide and the career you most want to develop. Be as proactive with the vision for your business as you are with your clients.

Get over the fear that clients "can't afford it." If it's something worthwhile, can they afford not to afford it? Selling only occurs when your agenda is more important than theirs. Knowing your clients' businesses well enough to proactively suggest some areas where they can benefit from professional advice is helping, not selling.

Here are other things to consider when clarifying and developing a niche:

Educate your staff. As a partner in a firm or the lead on a client, you can't know everything (unless no one else is doing any work), so it is up to you and other leaders to educate the staff who work on the client about the various services your firm offers now — but also how to identify services you can develop to help them long-term.

One of the most important barriers to helping clients grow is a lack of knowledge about other service areas your firm offers or could offer.

Create “Service Spotlight” cheat sheets for the staff to use.

Put together a synopsis of the service, how it benefits the clients, the team to go to and five questions the staff can ask to identify if there is a need. Even better, have the service team leader come into a meeting and talk about a success story. Stories work the best when educating the staff. They have to understand the needs a client may have and the resources the firm has to solve problems. Most professionals get into their “silos” of knowledge early – education is the way to help them service their clients better.

Sell internally first. Be the inside sales person. If you have a specialty, then first work the inside of the firm. Make sure everyone knows the importance of this service. Tell stories about how your service benefited the client. To get to the firm’s clients, you must first promote the service internally. It is your job to help your whole team understand your specialized area and know how to spot the clients you can help. It is not the team’s job to read your brochure at night and recommend specialized services based on little knowledge.

I worked at a firm a few years ago that was trying to get their financial services division up and running. They started by working with their own clients and then communicating successes. The partners within the financial division slowly built their book of business and trust among the other partners.

Focus on expansion. Most incentive plans that I have seen do not pay for expanding services and I believe this is a huge mistake. It is so much more difficult to bring in new business; work on your existing clients and find out if you are doing all that you should or could be doing to help your clients succeed. Consider this client survey that correlates to the number of services a client buys with how likely they are to stay with a firm.

1 service = 12% 2 services = 28% 3 services = 61% 4 services = 74% 5 or more services = 98% retention

As the results show, if a client is buying five or more services a year, they are basically a “client for life.” When they are only receiving one service, then only about 12% of these clients will still be with a firm four years later. This speaks to the trust growth between clients and their service providers and the commitment the providers have to understanding how to help their clients.

Talk to clients/prospects. Use agendas at client meetings. Be specific about what you want to address with the client – create the environment for them to think in a direct manner, instead of merely asking, “How’s business?” or “Is there anything we can do for you?” An agenda keeps you focused.

Use a client service checklist. These can be filled out when the client service manager/partner in charge of the client has a few minutes to review their file and to think about the client. Since they are simple questions, client team members can also review it and see if there are any opportunities.

Invite a technical expert to a business development meeting. They may ask different questions about the prospect’s business than a partner. This might include a marketing director, an IT specialist or someone in a service area other than your own.

Allocate resources. It takes nonbillable time and money to grow a niche. Once you have identified some opportunities that are worth the long-term investment, you’ll have to back it up with continuing skill development, messaging, visibility and sales. This is the time to invest in a strategy to get out of the blocks quickly and start realizing returns.



growING™ Smarter Tip:

Twitter Tips for Business Development:

Everyone is still trying to figure out ways to use Twitter for business development. Is it more work than it's worth? For some, Twitter has become the main way that they communicate. Others resist the push to get "Twitterpated" (fall in love with short status updates?)

Here's more food for thought in the Twitter debate:

Promote your content. Using Tiny URL translators like "bit.ly," you can "tweet" a news article, newsletter or blog you've posted online. Sending people to your website boosts SEO.

Use Twitter to stay informed. Find people to follow who are credible and connected in your industry. Use that timely intelligence when meeting with prospects.

Follow referral sources. Use the "find people" link to search for them and follow them.

Follow competitors. This is a great way to find out quickly what they are thinking about, working on or promoting — long before they advertise it. They can choose to block you, but it doesn't happen often.

An active Twitter presence can take just minutes a day, but we recommend that you leverage available free software to make the job even easier. Some popular programs like Buffer (buffer.com) and HootSuite (hootsuite.com) allow you to get all updates in one place and update your status across multiple sites simultaneously.



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