



Strategy, Planning and Budgeting in a New Economy

Developing a 2010 Marketing Plan

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Marketing planning and budgeting season is upon us. In fact, many professional services marketers have been knee deep in research and costing exercises for several months.

If you or your firm is in the early stages of the planning process for 2010, now is the time to put your efforts in high gear, so you can hit the ground running come January 1 of the New Year.

Marketing planning, during brighter economic days, used to be more of a luxury and less of an imperative. But in today's hyper-competitive market, planning is as essential as it gets. Why? When times are a little tight, professional services marketers have to fight their firms' urges to chase every project and pursue every bid – and they have to do it with fewer and fewer resources.

A rock solid marketing plan, built from research and market intelligence, not only points a firm in the right direction and helps ensure focused, targeted, and results-based activity, but it also helps marketers tamp down reactionary forces to keep a firm on task and focused on the highest and best use of its resources – human, financial and otherwise.

At the SMPS October education session, Susan Grattino gave professional service marketers (PSMs) a roadmap for planning.

“Well-thought out plans encourage greater accountability, ensure actions and investment are strategic, and facilitate the achievement of firm revenue and business goals,” Ms. Grattino noted during her October 28 presentation to about 30 SMPS members.

In assembling a strategic plan that yields results, the best place to begin is the end. How many new clients does the firm want and need? How much new revenue? What will success at the end of the year look like? With the answers in place to these questions and others, planning (and unplanned) marketing and business development activity can be tracked back and aligned with the end goal.

Research is the best launching pad for an effective planning process and resultant plan. And research should be an ongoing and catalogued process throughout the year, not just something that happens at year-end to inform a plan's development.

Marketers and technical professionals charged with developing and implementing a strategic marketing plan should be tracking throughout the year:



Industry Trends – Who’s merging with whom? What trends are impacting the profession and our industry? What issues are emerging as top of mind for clients in our market niches? What changes are impacting those very clients? Are their industries consolidating or contracting? Are they growing? Are there governmental or legislative changes affecting them?

The Competition – Who are we competing with? What changes are our fellow industry players making? Are there new market entrants we haven’t faced before? What messages and tactics are our competitors using? Who is innovating and changing the market?

Market Segments – Where do we compete? What types of projects? Within our market segments, what is the project outlook? Are some segments growing? Others maturing? What economic factors are affecting each of them? Where are our competitors emerging? Where is change occurring?

With a range of industry and market data in hand, firms and marketers are now ready to begin aligning external forces – market and industry changes and competitors – with internal factors. The second step in an effective planning process is an internal assessment of a firm’s market position.

“Firms in this stage must engage in an honest assessment of their strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities,” said Grattino. That step is followed by an equally candid assessment of their market position. Where does your firm fit in the overall market landscape? What position does it occupy?

“Is your firm a Chevy, a Saturn, a Mercedes or a Volvo? Are you Nordstrom, offering unmatched service, compared to your competitors who deeply discount and look more like a discount store, like Wal-Mart? Knowing the niche or position your firm occupies is important in the planning process,” Grattino said.

Finally, no planning process can be effective if you don’t know what your best clients want.

Gather feedback from client debriefs, conduct a client satisfaction initiative, gather data from a client survey and incorporate the client’s point of view into your overall process. Effective plans will address what clients want, where their companies and industries are headed, and the key issues they will be working to manage in the coming year. In short, rock solid professional service marketing plans will deliver value by understanding client needs and aligning services and communication initiatives with those needs.



Now, you and your firm are ready for the third stage of planning. Here you will take what you know about your markets, your clients, your competitors and your firm and begin the process of using that knowledge to create effective vehicles and tactics to achieve your goals.

The first step is to define your overall goals. These will include:

- Revenue;
- Number of new clients;
- Retained clients;
- Number of new projects;
- Types of projects and/or market segments served.

With your goals and objectives complete, articulate your company's position. Often, the best way to do this is to craft a short paragraph that truly defines your firm.

"FedEx is a good example. Here's their positioning: 'To deadline-oriented business people, Federal Express is the overnight package delivery service that is the most reliable because of its sophisticated package tracking system.' What's your positioning statement?" asked Grannito.

Leveraging your positioning statement, you will now be ready to define your visual brand, your visual message. Audit your current materials and tools to ensure they are compliant or cohesive with your defined market position.

Finally, assign tactics to achieve your goals. How will you reach the clients you seek? In what way do they want to be reached? What information and/or services do they value? How many new leads do you need to achieve defined revenue goals?

In this stage, you can define the vehicles and delivery channels you will use to reach your targets and meet your objectives – the marketing mix. These include:

- Advertising;
- Public Relations;
- Trade Events and Conferences;
- Corporate Communications;
- RFPs, RFQs and RFIs;
- Branding vehicles, including brochures and web sites;
- Electronic or online marketing;
- Social media;
- Business development – the targeted, face-to-face strategies you and your professionals will deploy to create a relationship.

Execution is often the most challenging aspect of marketing planning. The key is to create an easy-to-follow calendar that governs your monthly, if not weekly, activities. Plot all your tactics into a calendar or some type of planning chart to manage your efforts, from initiation to completion.

Next, it is time to budget. To manage budget creep, contain costs, and ensure dollars are spent effectively, zero-based budgeting is often the most effective. Here, budgets are built based on what a plan is intended to accomplish and tracks to strategic initiatives. Alternatively, many firms simply assign a number for a budget and increase it by a defined percentage every year. Although it may require more work, zero-based budgeting ensures dollars are allocated according to impact and effect and eliminates “sacred cows” and historical expenditures that may offer little or no return on investment (ROI).

Phase four of the planning process includes setting up metrics by which you can measure your plan’s ROI. There are many ways to measure impact and results, including number of new clients earned, new revenue in, number of new leads generated, proposal win/loss ratios, and so on. The key is to align success measurements accurately with your initiatives so you can analyze and adjust your programs going forward to ensure better and more strategic allocation of marketing resources going forward.

“The key to successful and effective planning is knowing what you want to accomplish, understanding how and where to begin, and creating a dynamic roadmap that governs your activities and fosters accountability and measurement,” said Grattino.

As an added value to our members, their firms and the A/E/C industry, SMPS Colorado has teamed with Marketing Evolutions to recap our education sessions. Please fill free to share this with others.



Marketing Evolutions LLP, a strategic marketing planning and business development consulting firm focused exclusively on professional services. Marketing Evolutions LLP offers market audits to analyze and improve marketing investment, marketing planning, strategic planning, and business development training to architects, engineers, contractors, accountants, and attorneys. You can contact Martha and Dena at 303.424.9462 or info@marketingllp.com