

The Real Holy Grail of Professional Service Firm Marketing and Business-Development Effectiveness

by Suzanne Lowe

Published on October 6, 2009



To grow revenue and market share, professional and B2B service firms keep looking for the business version of the Holy Grail in all the wrong places: "Hire big-time rainmakers!"; "Acquire that hot boutique firm!"; "Revamp our website!"

All too often, those ballyhooed initiatives fail to deliver on the expectations of increased effectiveness in an enterprise's marketing and business-development efforts.

Narrowly Focused Initiatives Aren't Working

Moreover, marketing and business-development leaders from small professional service firms (PSFs) and large global enterprises are increasingly taking it upon themselves to champion initiatives that they passionately believe will directly benefit the marketplace future of their firms.

Many narrowly focused initiatives to improve PSFs' and B2Bs' marketing and business-development results aren't necessarily wrong, but they're not working. To understand why, we have to take a step back to see the underlying problem.

The Root of the Problem

Professional and B2B service firms must face the fact that they have a critical, fundamental problem: Marketing and selling functions aren't effectively integrated throughout the enterprise. Their organization-wide disconnects prevent them from competing effectively, impede their financial success, and hinder them from delivering optimal client service.

The *real* Holy Grail is a lot closer than they realize. It can be found by ensuring that marketing and business development are integrated into every function: They must become part of *every* person's job.

The Structural-Integration Imperatives

PSFs and service B2Bs should consider using three structural frameworks to connect marketing and business-development functions. I call those frameworks the "Integration Imperatives."

The three structural frameworks pertain to the process, skills, and support of marketing and business development. Firms can use them along with cultural frameworks to break down the silos that have crept in to their marketing and business-development functions.

1. The Process Imperative—expand the range and shine a spotlight on it

The Process Imperative calls for PSFs and B2Bs to create a broader purview for their marketing and business-development functions, and to better prioritize all marketing and business-development initiatives.

It also includes making the marketing, business-development, and client-service processes more discernible to everyone in the firm, and more obviously iterative.

2. The Skills Imperative—grow the people

The Skills Imperative calls for executive managers to reframe advancement pathways for practitioners and nonrevenue-generating staff, and to more clearly direct the steps every professional can take toward competency growth in marketing and business development.

3. The Support Imperative—reframe administrative relationships

The Support Imperative calls for PSF and B2B managers to reframe the lateral working relationships among administrative peers in human resources, information technology, finance, legal, and other operational functions.

The Cultural Integration Imperatives

In addition to the three structural solutions, PSFs and B2Bs should consider using three cultural "Integration Imperatives" to bring marketing and business-development functions together.

They include the adoption of an updated, well-assimilated common lexicon about marketing and business development; the creation of new, formal collaboration, shared accountability, and co-leadership models for marketing and business development; and the practice of making more explicit the expectations about how everyone can contribute to marketing and business development.

1. Articulate a new meaning of marketing and business development

The first cultural imperative is to articulate the new meaning of marketing and business development for the enterprise. It addresses a particularly vexing hurdle to integration: The definition of *marketing* and *business development* varies widely from individual to individual, firm to firm, and sector to sector.

Not surprisingly, one's understanding of a term leads directly to one's expectation about his or her role and job function—and that is no small matter.

2. Create new collaboration, accountability, and co-leadership models for marketing and business development

PSF and service B2B executive managers can adopt a second cultural imperative: increasing formal avenues for collaboration, shared accountability, and co-leadership on marketing and business development.

Sure, PSFs *do* encourage their people to collaborate or share leadership with their colleagues, but typically those pathways are obscure and unevenly available.

A friend told me recently: "I wish I could count on the work I'm having to *convince* people to do. All this asking and favor-building; all this monitoring, negotiating, and coaxing. It's a huge waste of time and energy. Wouldn't it be better if I could hold people accountable?"

3. Make more explicit the expectations about how everyone can contribute to marketing and business development

The third cultural paradigm is to make more explicit the expectations about how everyone can contribute to marketing and business development. Many PSFs and service B2Bs have made great strides in using internal communication when a particularly important internal "expectations" message arises.

But executive managers also must apply a potent new kind of cultural glue: reviewing and integrating job descriptions, checking and integrating reporting relationships, and reframing performance-management guidelines to ensure that people understand how they are expected to work together in new ways toward meeting the organization's revenue, market-share, and client added-value goals.

The Holy Grail Lies *Inside* the Enterprise

Sometimes, the best answer is right under your nose. Professional organizations must look *internally* to improve their marketing and business-development effectiveness.

Ultimately, when they apply structural solutions to erase their marketing and business-development disconnects, they will improve their firm's value to clients. And that's a competitive imperative.



[Close this window](#)

[Copyright notice](#)

Copyright © 2000-2013 MarketingProfes.com

All Rights Reserved.