“When you are marketing a company of the reputation of BDP, you have to be true to that brand”

James While
Building Design Partnership
The five essential roles of a marketing director

New research on increasing marketing effectiveness shows that in order to move their firms ahead, marketing directors must assume five strategic roles: the lookout, the hunter, the nurturer, the maximizer and the promoter.

Role 1: The Lookout - Defining and Identifying the Most Strategically Important Prospects/ Clients

Too many marketing directors and fee-earners know only who the most strategic clients used to be, not who they should be now and in the future. There simply is not enough vigour and focus on this ever-changing group. Defining and identifying the most important ‘growth potential’ clients should be the foundation role for every marketing director. Other strategic roles depend on this foundation and, in many cases, are simply useless until the marketing director assumes the role of Lookout.

So what did our study reveal? Only 19% of the respondents ranked it as their most important goal over the last three years. Perhaps these respondents think they already know who their most strategically important clients and prospects are. But in reality, most firms haven’t truly assessed their most strategically appropriate clients and prospects. Admit it: even your firm says ‘yes’ to too many potential clients that won’t be very profitable for the firm. Even your firm is vulnerable to serving shrinking segments of the marketplace and missing out on those that are expanding.

Marketing directors should ask themselves:
- Is it my role to analyse and report on the profitability of current clients?
- Should I be leading our firm’s targeting and segmentation studies and other market research to help define and identify the most strategically optimal clients?
- If not, why not, and what will I do about it?

Role 2: The Hunter - Acquiring the Most Strategically Important Prospects/ Clients

Study participants ranked this role second most important of five strategic marketing roles in the last three years. This goal has been the traditional purview of professional service marketers, and it encompasses numerous critically important initiatives: differentiation, positioning and branding; client value-added events; advertising; direct mail; publishing; speaking engagements and numerous communications tactics.

This goal is also highly important for business developers: arranging business development appointments with prospects and clients; responding to RFPs; presenting proposals and other acquisition activities. Of course professional service firms need to acquire clients. But many of them are stuck in continuous ‘acquisition mode’.

Marketing directors should ask themselves:
- Is it my role to evaluate the cost of emphasising client acquisition as a goal over other critically important roles,

By Suzanne Lowe and Larry Bodine

Are Marketing Directors Tuned Into What Really Makes Them Effective?

While analysing the data from the recent study Increasing Marketing Effectiveness at Professional Firms, we were struck by the way fee-earners and marketers ranked the importance of their firm’s marketing roles. Their rankings reveal that many professional firms (at least our study’s 377 respondents!) have a too limited view of what their marketing directors’ roles could and should be. Professional service firms are still marketing in ‘survival’ mode, and have not prioritised their marketing directors’ roles toward astute growth.

Our research sought to help marketers learn about metrics to achieve greater effectiveness for their marketing strategies and tactics. In order to do so, we had to find how well aligned marketers’ initiatives are with their firms’ strategic marketing roles. We suspected that a lot of marketers are wasting time and resources measuring the wrong things. The results revealed that many marketers are not assuming the roles that would increase their individual effectiveness, nor helping their firms move ahead in the marketplace.
including client retention and growing our revenue with those clients?

• Is our firm too often looking to replace revenues from departed clients because their projects have ended or because their loyalty has switched to competitors?

• If a more strategic focus on this role is not within my purview, why not, and what will I do about it?

**ROLE 3: THE NURTURER – RETAINING THE MOST STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT PROSPECTS/CLIENTS**

Respondents deemed client retention to be their most important goal. Professional firms should be applauded for recognising that retaining profitable relationships is one of the most critical springboards to real growth.

Marketing directors have excelled at the tactical marketing aspects of helping their firms retain clients. Using CRM applications and internal communication networks, they have done much to strengthen their firms’ infrastructure to manage client relationships. But much of professional marketers’ work toward this goal has been based on their historically strong focus on communications. As their role becomes more strategic, marketers will have to work hand in hand with business developers and fee-earner leaders to manage key client accounts.

Marketing directors should ask themselves:

• Is it my role to lead my firm to develop client account teams, and to structure a greater alignment with our fee-earners and/or business development professionals?

• Should I guide my firm to become better about retaining clients?

• If this goal is not within my purview, why not, and what will I do about it?

**ROLE 4: THE MAXIMIZER – INCREASING THE FIRM’S REVENUES WITH ITS MOST STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT CURRENT CLIENTS**

Astonishingly, respondents ranked this goal the least important of the five strategic marketing roles. What?! Do these firms not need to grow their books of business with strategically important clients? Is retention enough? This finding strongly implies that marketing directors and senior marketers are not leading their professional colleagues to embrace one of the basic rules of marketplace leadership: grow your revenues with the best clients, and your competitors won’t. It involves a keen focus on deepening the ties with loyal clients.

The 20th century marketer would simply communicate more to the current stable of clients. Now, marketing directors can lead the charge by guiding their firms to develop innovative solutions that meet their clients’ emerging needs.

Marketing directors should ask themselves:

• Is it my role to develop our firm’s strategies to discover the future needs of our most strategically prioritised clients?

• Even if it’s never been done before, should I be working with fee-earner practice leaders to stimulate the development of new services?

• If not, why not, and what will I do about it?

**ROLE 5: THE PROMOTER – INCREASING THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF THE FIRM TO ALL AUDIENCES**

If you want to see evidence of the evolution of the professional services marketing, take a look at the findings on this role, which encompasses most firms’ public relations and media relations activities, as well as internal marketing tactics. Respondents indicated a serious split in their perception of what’s important and what’s not:

• 40% of our respondents ranked this goal as their last among the five.

• Yet more than 22% ranked this same goal as their first among the five.

None of the other four strategic marketing roles featured this amount of divergence.

This finding reveals that there is a distinct subset of professional service firms whose main marketing goal is still largely ‘communications’ or ‘image’ and whose marketing orientation has not yet matured to more tangible, client-focused and measurable priorities. If a firm has not yet identified its most strategic clients (and worked to acquire, retain and grow business with them), any efforts to increase its image may be directed at the wrong audience!

Marketing directors should ask themselves:

• Is it my role to help my firm’s fee-earners understand the importance of prioritising marketing roles that are more meaningful, non-ignorable, and client-focused?

• If not, why not, and what will I do about it?

**OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

As senior marketers shift their roles to be more strategic, they may find the need to educate non-marketing fee-earners about what it really takes to grow a professional service firm in today’s competitive environment. Especially in firms where the marketing function has focused mainly on communications, there may be some resistance. In most cases, resistance is more passive than overt, and responds to ‘internal marketing’. The findings of our study provide great data for marketers to overcome internal barriers to realigning their firm’s strategic marketing roles, and simultaneously increasing their own professional effectiveness as marketers.

**WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS**

The role of the marketing director will continue to expand in the next ten years. Marketing is evolving from an art into a science – and for professional service firms, it’s about time. The sooner professional service marketers can assume the roles outlined here, the sooner they can begin to increase their own effectiveness and that of their firms.

To obtain the complete 80-page study *Increasing Marketing Effectiveness at Professional Firms*, and its accompanying 68-page case studies report, visit: www.expertisemarketing.com/marketing_study_results.html.

_Suzanne Lowe is the founder of Expertise Marketing, LLC and the author of Marketplace Masters: How Professional Service Firms Compete to Win._

_Larry Bodine is the founder of the LawMarketing Portal, www.LawMarketing.com, and a strategic marketing consultant based near Chicago._