The new face of professional services

Marketing and business development functions are undergoing significant changes, not only in sectors like consumer goods, durables or retail, but also in professional service firms (PSFs) and business-to-business (B2B) firms like accounting, law, engineering, IT and management consulting.

For these sectors, the new face of marketing and business development began forming before the world’s major economies entered the recession - and their evolution has been hastened by it.

As they contemplate the new face of marketing and business development, managers face unique challenges in directing these functions’ evolution. In addressing these challenges, many firms find they have created a set of organizational silos for marketing and business development.

While these barriers can be overlooked in good economic times, they impede marketplace effectiveness and can become especially toxic in difficult economic environments.

Assessing structural and cultural barriers
Organizational, the "new normal" is deeply integrated marketing and business development functions. But it is all too easy for managers to be overwhelmed by this task. Indeed, where does one start on a problem that can appear so systemic? That's why we developed a tool to help professional firms instantly diagnose their barriers to effective marketing and business development [you can try it here].

In my book The Integration Imperative, I described diagnosing these barriers and/or silos is the first step toward creating this "new normal." PSF and B2B managers need to know: to what extent are our barriers structural (related to our processes, procedures or internal work methods)? To what extent are our barriers cultural (related to our organization's customs and behavioral norms)?

Once these barriers and silos are better understood, creating a "new normal" can begin. At many firms, this evolution is underway, in three powerful ways.

First, managers are reconfiguring their marketing-to-selling processes to be broader than they have been traditionally, and also better balanced to achieve the firm's strategic goals. Then managers are redirecting everyone's advancement pathway - practitioners and nonrevenue generating staff - so that every person gains competency in marketing and business development (from their own functional purview).

Finally, managers are reframing the lateral working relationships among their firm's administrative functions (HR, IT, finance, legal, and other operational functions). They are
requiring them to collaborate formally (not just if they happen to be friends!), share accountability, and co-lead marketing and business development initiatives.

**Savvy clients, savvy professionals**

Another "new normal" in the professions is a savvy client.

There used to be two kinds of professional or business-service firms. The patrician, white-shoe practice didn't have to compete very robustly. Clients sought them. Marketing was grubby work beneath the dignity of the profession. Golf was dignified business development. On the other hand, aggressive service firms hired professionals to market their services like products. You developed a brand; you promoted the brand and eager marketers who "knew everyone" would make it happen.

The "new normal" client isn't buying either one. Your client is highly informed, looking for genuine value and a different -- and personal - experience and outcome.

When it comes to competing in this new environment, the professional firm has to embrace two things: the entire staff sells and the expertise must be remarkable. Old differentiations between seller and server are less valuable to clients, as are differentiations between functions in the firm. The new professional has some specific traits that attract clients:

- Every conversation with clients has to be high-gain and interesting, even if it's a casual five-minute chat. Something is learned, something memorable offered.
- Clients understand explicitly that when the firm is hired, the client gets specific professionals. An old motto: Clients don't hire Ross & Baruzzini; they hire Ross & Baruzzini & you.
- The professional is an expert, a specialist or an acknowledged authority.
- Professional engagements are authentically personal, regardless of the function within the firm.
- Clients should sense genuine caring in a hundred ways.
- Each person at the professional firm is a citizen of the world, in that he understands -- and appreciates -- that clients' business interests are directly or indirectly global.

Underpinning all of the above traits is another important "new normal" for global business success: curiosity and open-mindedness. Most professionals operate partly in the technical world and partly in the human world. Technical issues easily cross cultures, but human ones are inherently interwoven with local culture. Even small and unintentional missteps can undermine confidence.

The first obligation of any transnational professional is to develop an authentic appreciation of culture by being open and curious. An American practicing in the UK may not be expected to be an Englishman, but he is considerably more effective when he seeks a deep understanding of the patterns of UK life. We find that there is no substitute for authentic appreciation and an openness of mind, when dealing with unfamiliar cultures.

**Becoming Acquirers of New Business**

There are many ways firms can expand into the new and unfamiliar territory of being acquirers of new business with "new normal" clients. Every one of them requires patience and risk-taking.

At Ross & Baruzzini, we decided that everyone (yes, every person in the firm) needed to develop a balance of external and internal goals. Everyone is asked to learn, produce and attract. We increasingly see that the way clients value our services depends on the integration of our functional perspectives.

It can be frustrating and tiring. Sometimes it's exhilarating. But mostly, it's slow and steady determination to do something remarkable. And secretly, that's what motivates most people who love professional and business services. The feeling of doing really great work with a great client is why we come to work.
A professional firm that hums
Walk into any accounting, architecture, law, engineering, medical, IT, HR or management consulting firm. If the place is humming, you'll likely find that the partners and principals are quietly changing the game of professional services. Their administrative functions act as true peers; they are engaged in deploying their skills toward constructive marketing and business development outcomes.

This "new normal" professional firm more effectively harnesses people for marketing and selling, no matter what their function or station. And the new breed of professional embodies a global perspective and is himself better integrated with his savvy clients.