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terms of how they viewed marketing. In essence, "Marketing sucked...it didn't work... it was a waste of time." These were the sentiments of the partners, Bill Mattingly, CPA, and Dylan Zsebe, CPA, before they started their journey of understanding just a year ago.

Kristy Short • Apr. 21, 2014

The owners of Mattingly Zsebe, PA weren't any different from most practitioners in

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Over time, however, and with the right level of guidance, what Zsebe and Mattingly learned was that marketing does work. They also learned that their feelings about marketing were based in fear—fear that comes from a lack of understanding.

The partners decided to get their feet wet in marketing a few years back. Like most, the economy hit the firm hard. The downfall of the construction industry (the firm's core client niche) equated to a huge loss in book of business. This meant that the firm needed to bring in more business. But beyond referrals, they didn't know how.

"We had our sights set on bringing in new business," said Bill Mattingly. "We purchased a list and sent out letters. We thought that would do it."

When initial attempts at marketing 'failed,' firm owners became dismayed. What they didn't yet know is that marketing is an ongoing process...that it takes time for the seeds of communication to germinate. They were unfamiliar with the two core elements of a successful marketing communications program: frequency and consistency.

"We just didn't give it enough time and effort," stated Mattingly. "We also failed to realize the gold mine of new business in front of us...our current clients. We were so focused on new leads that we didn't take advantage of the low-hanging fruit. It took bringing in a marketing expert to help us see all of this and get our program off the ground and where it is today—rockin'."

Once the firm partners took the time to educate themselves on marketing, they were able to move beyond the fear and see what it can really do.

The Journey of Understanding

With anything that is unknown, we tend to fear it. When it comes to marketing, there are few that fear it more than accounting professionals. And this is

understandable. Historically, marketing has not been an integral element of firm

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So if marketing is simply communicating, then the next step is identifying who to communicate to. Most firms forget about their current clients. The fact is that existing clientele represents a clear path to new sales. Clients already know you; they trust you—the relationship is already established. Unlike prospects, who require multiple communication touch points to engage, your clients are already listening.

"This was the biggest eye-opener for us. We were focused on marketing to a list of leads. What we learned was to first go after the low-hanging fruit," said Mattingly. "We worked to identify clients in need of value-added services. Some of our first campaigns went out to small businesses that did not have our payroll service. We've brought in a lot of business from these efforts."

Firm partners have also implemented regular communications to sell existing business clients on their small business accounting package, which offers complete back office services for a fixed monthly fee.

"We've really blown out our client communications program. We have regular value-add service campaigns running monthly, and we also send out a premium client newsletter every other month. We now know how important it is to stay in front of our clients on a regular basis—not just to up sell on services, but more so to maintain their loyalty long term," stated Mattingly.

Serving as a *Youtility* to Clients and Prospects

Over the course of their journey, Mattingly and Zsebe also learned the importance of being helpful.

"We do a lot of reading around the concept of marketing, to be sure our techniques are effective. One of the concepts introduced to us this year is called 'Youtility,' and

focuses on the importance of being truly useful to clients and prospects," Zsebe

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"We've gotten a lot of positive responses from our Youtility-based communications. People like the information, and appreciate not being solicited to in every email. Serving as a genuine resource for information has further increased loyalty among our clients and brought in new leads," stated Mattingly. "It also just feels good to help. After all, this is the foundation on which we built our firm."

Overall, the firm's marketing is solid. In a relatively short period of time, the firm's communication program has gone from a few letters sent out sporadically (with no follow-up) to a full-scale program with several communications launching each month.

"Revenues are up by about 20 percent since we started marketing the right way," Mattingly reported. "The key has been to stick with it and give it time to grow."

Zsebe added, "Persistence is what it's all about…persistence with your communications program and with education. It takes time to understand what marketing is all about, and until you really get it, you can't *do* it effectively."

Final Words…

The firm of Mattingly Zsebe has come a long way in terms of communicating to key audiences. They come so far, in fact, that it shows in increased revenue. The combination of focused learning, working with a marketing expert, and a stick-to-it attitude has enabled firm owners to build a marketing program that they can be proud of.

"We receive a lot of comments about our communications…that they are helpful, well done, and innovative. We could never have gotten to this point had we not decided to jump in and stick with it," stated Zsebe.

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Stats at a Glance

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