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FIRM MANAGEMENT

Accounting Firms and the Art of Marketing

Understanding your firm, your people, your proficiencies will prepare you to understand who are the best fits for your offerings and capabilities.

Gail Perry • Apr. 18, 2016

MARKETING



You can go to college and major in marketing, you can take classes, read books, talk to experts, pursue a variety of avenues for gaining marketing expertise, and while all of that will be interesting and helpful and may even help you create a boilerplate marketing plan, at the end of the day, marketing is an art form. It's a way of recognizing how to build a conduit between two groups or organizations or beings.

You can learn the basics from a variety of resources, but to excel at marketing, you must be able to see the path between where you are and where you should be, between who you are and who you can be. When you ask a musician the difference between playing or singing the notes on the page and making music, you'll get a response that includes a visualization of the musical experience that involves those notes. When a painter looks at the jars of paint and the blank canvas, that artist is visualizing the potential end result and the path the colors will take to get there.

Likewise, when a marketing professional is given the task of creating a message that will present your firm and your services to potential recruits and clients, the expert marketer can visualize the desired end result and the creative ways in which to get there. With marketing, as with the other art forms, there are right-brain principles in motion that not everyone can grasp.

So don't be alarmed if you, untrained in the art of marketing, cannot connect the dots between where you are and where you want to be. That is why we have marketing professionals.

Complicating the matter is the situation where an accounting firm tries to market itself as something it is not. No amount of creativity can mask the truth of who you are. Trying to be everything to everyone is a substitute for not embracing your own reality.

Marketers will tell you that the place to start is with an analysis of where you are, not who you are trying to attract. Understand the features that make you you, your strengths, your idiosyncrasies, your specialties and talents, the things that you do best as well as the things that you do worst. You must know all of that, the colors in your jars, before you can proceed to thinking about the ideal recipient of what you have to offer.

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Identifying your potential audience involves not just contemplating the types of clients or co-workers you would like to have, but the combinations that will make your firm stronger and better. You might think it would be beneficial to be the accounting firm for the movie stars, but if your expertise is in serving companies that provide manufacturing or health care, you won't be serving the actor community with the expertise they need, and you won't be improving on your own strengths, solidifying your firm's place in the structure of the economy.

By all means, include a willingness to grow and evolve when you think about your future, but first ground your expectations in the reality that defines you. Working with a marketing professional, someone who can help you visualize your music and paint your canvas, will advance you in the direction you were meant to attain.

Firm Management • Marketing

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