CPA
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May. 08, 2017

If you're like the majority of accounting firms, most of your new business comes from networking and referrals. This is perfectly normal—referrals are marketing gold, and always will be—but be careful not to lean on them *too* much.

The problem with referrals is simple: you have zero control over them. You just never

What most firms don't realize is that there are far more prospects *outside* of their immediate network looking for help—and not just *any* help, but the specific kind of expertise that firm has to offer. In today's highly digitalized market, it's less and less important where you're physically located, and increasingly important what you can do *better than anyone else*.

If you're really committed to growing your firm, you need to turn your website into a marketing machine. Invest the time and money to do this right up front, and then step back and let your site do its job. While you're focusing on more important things, like taking good care of your clients, your marketing platform will be automatically generating a healthy pipeline of high quality potential clients and nurturing them for a sale.

Firms that use a digital marketing platform are consistently generating 20+ quality leads a month—and their referral traffic is just frosting on the cake.

So, are you ready to get serious about growing your firm?

Let's talk about the four essential ingredients of a high functioning CPA firm website:

- Well defined niche
- Thought leadership
- Conversion focused website
- Lead nurturing tools

Well Defined Niche

If we asked you to write one sentence defining your firm's offerings, how many other firms could reuse the same sentence for themselves? If we hid your logo and firm name on your website, could prospects still differentiate you from other firms, based

really well—and they want it to be done *fast*, with solid, well-vetted processes and without a lot of fuss. They want a firm that understands the nuances of their industry and can help them avoid common pitfalls long before they happen. They want a firm with incredible foresight and *depth*, not just breadth, of expertise.

It doesn't matter how long you've "gotten by" without claiming a niche—the tide is turning quickly, and the firms who insist on ignoring it will eventually be left behind.

It's time to decide: where does your firm's greatest value lie? Is there a specific industry you've found yourself working in the most over the years? Is there a certain service your team excels at the most, or that you truly do better than anyone else? Do you have a unique approach or perspective that certain clientele would appreciate?

As challenging as it is to identify a niche, there's an even bigger challenge: *owning it*. This is where most businesses falter. Be honest: do you have the guts to funnel all of your marketing efforts into one specific niche, meaning that you'll be actively *excluding* any prospects who don't fit your target audience?

For this to work, you need to be all in.

Is it scary? Oh yeah. Is it worth it? In time, definitely. Is it necessary? Moreso every day.

If you still want to put off finding your niche, fast forward another decade, when cognitive computing will be handling most of the tax and accounting problems you're hired to solve today. KPMG is already using IBM's Watson to expedite audits, and H&R Block has implemented that same technology to simplify taxes. Once this technology starts working its way through the industry, only those who have hunkered down into a niche will be left to survive.

Positioning your firm is so important that we've written a 30+ page guide on it.

Thought leadership has become an essential tool for attracting new clients in the digital era. The idea is to position your firm as an authority in your area of expertise (niche) by publishing regular content that shows off not just your skills and smarts, but your ingenuity and forward thinking.

This isn't about keeping up with trends—it's about setting them, and this is where most firms fail. Those who are creating content aren't going deep enough, usually just glossing over simple, surface level issues.

Firms that commit to creating real, thoughtful content on a regular basis are seeing a 200% lift in website leads and a 100% lift in website traffic in 12 months. How does this happen?

Thought leadership...

- Drives more traffic to your site.
- Demonstrates your expertise more effectively than your site copy ever could.
- Nurtures leads across all stages of the buying cycle.
- Guides prospects to the next step in the buying cycle.

Here's how to get started:

1. **Write within your niche.** Stop writing vague blog posts with general tax or business advice and start owning your niche through your content. Everything you publish should reinforce that you're an expert in this specific area.
2. **Introduce bold ideas.** Follow current conversations online, pick the newest, boldest, most exciting ideas, and see if you can push them a step further. Publish your ideas in thoughtful, well-written blog posts on your website, and consider guest blogging on other prominent sites to attract new traffic.

3. **Identify and solve client problems.** Think of a common problem your clients

work with you.

5. **Get on social media.** Long form content isn't the only way to build a reputation of authority. You can also accomplish this through social media, but contributing to community discussions, sharing relevant content, and engaging with prospects and other experts via Facebook and Twitter.

Today, when clients make initial contact with you, they're usually pretty far into the decision making process—certainly much further than they were on first contact years ago. These days, clients find the information they need online, and only initiate a conversation when they're ready to make a move.

And if they *don't* find the information they need online? They're much more likely to pass on your firm altogether than to reach out to you to get their questions answered.

The way that clients seek out and select firms has evolved. You need to keep up, or you risk being left behind.

A Conversion Focused Website

So let's recap: the first ingredient of a successful firm website is a well-defined niche, which allows you to clearly differentiate from your competitors. Ingredient 2 is meaningful thought leadership content, which drives high quality traffic to your website.

Now, Ingredient #3: you need a "conversion focused" website to house all of your great content and, more importantly, to use it to convert leads into clients.

Most firms still lack the proper emphasis on educating and informing potential clients in a way that moves them toward a sale. Because most of your clients are now reaching out to you later in the sales cycle, you can no longer rely on your sales team's charm to woo them into making a commitment with your firm—you need to

using language in your content that matches what your prospects are searching for.

Despite how much has been written about SEO over the past several years, most firms are still struggling. Luckily, this is one aspect of website design that's relatively easy to hire out, at a cost that will easily justify the time savings on your part.

Strategic Calls to Action

If you really want a website that converts, you need to pair that rock solid SEO with some effective calls to action (CTAs). First: do you *have* CTAs at the bottom of every page, at minimum? And do these CTAs actually inspire action?

Get rid of all the phoned-in calls to "learn more." Beef up your CTAs with stronger offerings that are both more specific and more relevant to the client's problems. Your page content should touch on problems your target audience is likely facing, with your CTA and subsequent content being presented as the solutions.

Here's an example of an effective call to action on a services page. This offer is hitting visitors right at their pain point, with a free marketing assessment they can benefit from *right now*. They'll get this assessment in exchange for an email address, which adds them to the firm's mailing list.

Lots of firms offer free consultations, which are nice, but they're way too big of a commitment for a prospect who's early in the buying process.

For those who are too early in the process even for the free assessment (they're not ready to share their email address), this site also offers relevant articles, which allow visitors to dig deeper into the firm's expertise without directly interacting with them.

User-Focused Workflows

Is it easy for new visitors to navigate through your website and find the information

can easily navigate it. (See also his related service: The User Is My Mom.)

Here are 3 signs that your website is NOT user-focused:

1. You have 10+ links in your navigation bar. This is wildly overwhelming to a new visitor.
   - THE FIX: Most of those links should be buried a layer or two deeper into the user workflow. They're available if the user is truly interested in reading them, but they're not part of the *primary* workflow.

2. You have links scattered all over your pages, giving the visitor countless workflow options and making it unclear where they should go next.
   - THE FIX: Make sure you have one big, bold CTA at the bottom of each page, guiding the viewer to *the next page*.
3. Your website talks mostly about who you are as a company and very little about what you can do for prospects.
   - THE FIX: Focus on *them*. How can you make *their* lives better?

When you tie together these key elements—solid SEO, strong CTAs, and a user-focused workflow—you'll have a great foundation for a website that actually converts. You should be aiming for a minimum of a 2% conversion rate on your website, with most high performing firms reaching 3-5%.

Lead Nurturing

Even if your website is 100% on point from a marketing perspective, the majority of new visitors still won't bite, simply because they aren't ready. We call these folks "early stage prospects"—they're researching and kicking around some high-level ideas, but they're a long way away from making any concrete decisions or spending any money.

If you want to eventually win some of these prospects, you need a plan for nurturing

Monitor. For those with more than 3,000 prospects on their list, you'll want a more advanced service like InfusionSoft, HubSpot, or Act On.

Once you have your technology in place, it's time to do some basic segmentation. Take a look at what you have to offer prospects—an assessment tool, a free consult, a helpful guide—and map those offers to the appropriate stage in the buying cycle: early, middle, or late. (You already know what an early stage prospect is—as you can guess, a late stage buyer is someone who's close to making a purchase decision, and a middle stage prospect is somewhere in the middle.)

Next, you'll need to set some basic parameters to determine where a prospect might be in the buying cycle, based on how much they interact with your firm's marketing efforts. For example, if you send a series of five emails to new email list additions, and they click the follow-through links on at least three of those emails, you might promote them from early to middle stage.

Eventually, with the right nurturing campaign in place, cold prospects will begin to warm up to your firm, and when the time is right, some will ultimately become your clients. If an email list of 1,000 people garners you just 10 new clients, and your list doubles in size every year (thanks to your powerful, lead generating website), you'll have 160 new clients in 5 years.

And the best part: this can all happen automatically, behind the scenes, while you focus on your real work.

Are You All In?

Now, here's the part that trips up the majority of firms: you need to decide whether you're in or out.

If you want a growth plan that *guarantees* results and ROI, you need to commit to the

marketing sounds "too complicated."

So now we ask you: are you ready to fully commit to your firm's growth?

The fact that you're still reading suggests that you're at least toeing the line. What's holding you back?

Clearly, because you're here, whatever marketing efforts you have going on right now aren't bringing in the kind of business you'd like to see. Stop wasting your time and money on small, random spurts of marketing and invest in a real, cohesive, *proven* plan.

And if you need help, we're here for you.

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