

Systemize Your Marketing: With More than Half the Year Over, It's Time to Get Yourself Organized

By Sharon Berman

With only four months left in 2011, is it too late to maximize your business development results for this year? Not if you leverage the remaining months by becoming organized and systematic in your marketing methodology. Not only will it make a difference this year, but your efforts today will put you on track for 2012. Is there really any alternative? Continue your haphazard marketing and you're likely to miss out on a lot of potential business.

Time and again professionals say that while they market – have lunches, network and more – they would like to get their efforts better organized and more productive. What they mean is that they want to systematize what they're already doing in order to increase the return on the time they invest. Haphazard marketing may be adequate when business is plentiful and money flows freely, but tougher economic times call for more efficiency to maximize the return on your money and time. Casual marketing is inefficient in any economic climate, but the waste is magnified when everyone is watching their pennies and the results they bring (or don't).

So where do you begin systematizing your marketing? Most of the professionals who express a desire for better organization have already built some momentum, which makes it easier to ramp up and improve outcomes. You can, however, also start from a standing position, and create momentum quickly. Either way, the foundation of the process is evaluation and assessment.

Assess your current activities and analyze



the results. Let's say you have been doing a decent, but not stellar, job of rainmaking. You might be reaching out to your network whenever the mood strikes you – a phone call here, an e-mail there, a few lunches or breakfasts a month, one networking or professional meeting a month and perhaps speaking or writing once a year. It's a start, but you can do much better by leveraging those efforts with organization.

Systematize your contact mechanism. List the contacts you want to "touch" regularly – whether once every six months or every other week. Then, take it a step further by coding these people in your database according to frequency of contact so you can pull them up easily. Book the 'touch' call on your calendar just as you would any other important date. Keep the list and your entire contact management system organized and clean by adding, updating and deleting contacts as necessary, including referral sources, prospects, current and former clients, or colleagues who just help you keep your ear to the ground. This way, you are capturing the information systematically rather than just picking names out of a hat – or a stack of business cards – for a random contact.

Close the loop. After you contact someone, make a note in the file or in your contact management system to keep track of your "touch." Then, add a tickler on your appointment calendar to remind you of the next time to contact that person.

Design your system. A "system" is defined as a procedure or process for reaching an objective, as well as a complex of rules governing behavior. Both of these definitions pertain to marketing. What procedures might you establish to achieve your marketing objectives? What rules could govern your marketing behavior? For example, could you devise a method of covering your list of contacts systematically, say by prioritizing them and reaching out to three each week, and then starting anew? Other systematic marketing behaviors might include posting to your blog every other morning or spending 15 minutes on the 15th of each month to determine whom to invite for breakfast or lunch the following month (and actually contacting them by the 20th of the month).

Automate your system. Having a system in place means you focus on the contact rather than the method, and automation reduces your mental effort even more. Review all of your marketing processes to determine what you can make more automatic, such

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as getting e-newsletters out the door, entering contacts in your database after returning from a meeting with new business cards, creating a straightforward method of tracking leads, posting to your blog on certain days of the week with a preset means of transmitting the post to your Facebook friends or LinkedIn network.

Be strategic. Effective systems depend on stable and reliable foundations. Your contact management database and distribution lists must be clean and up-to-date since sending to people who have long moved on will dampen your effectiveness and waste your money. Take a strategic approach to communicating with your networking contacts. Talking with them about the local baseball team may be a good conversation starter, but if that's the extent or focus of the whole conversation, you're not marking and are better served handling billable tasks. Breaking through to exchanging ideas on the work you and your contact are currently doing is how you generate more work for both of you.

Delegate. Can you increase the efficiency and impact of your system by leveraging various resources already at your disposal? There is nothing wrong with having a one-person system, but your efforts and results

are magnified by broadening your system to include assistants, associates, your in-house marketing department, and outside resources such as writers, designers, public relations professionals, programmers and more. Including others in your system will require some additional – but ultimately profitable – organization, such as regularly scheduled marketing contacts and calls. Everyone on your team must know what they are responsible for, and the responsibilities of other team members. Delegate as much as possible regarding the operational aspects of your system, but be clear on roles, responsibilities, and timing. This frees you up for the most important contact calls with your reliable referral sources and hot prospects.

Organize. In addition to systematizing your tasks, “organizing” your marketing is also a practical event. Do you know where to find the pertinent files on your computer or network? Can you quickly put your hands on contact and marketing-related information without shuffling through stacks of papers or searching through subdirectories and files? If not, your task will be frustrating and you will be easily distracted.

Be realistic. Professionals often resist planning these kinds of marketing tasks because

their schedules are unpredictable. Having a system in place for business development, and knowing what you intend to do when, increases the likelihood that you will actually do it – even if it doesn't happen exactly as you've planned.

Imagine yourself standing on a calendar square for Dec. 31, 2011, and looking back at the last six months. What tangible business development results will you wish you had accomplished? What marketing systems should already be up and running and generating leads? Will you wish you had implemented a consistent program of networking, published an article every other month or made regular blog posts that were automatically forwarded to your social networks?

Whatever your results have been up until now, the way to improve those results by Dec. 31 is to get organized now. Look at the next six months and plan what you can realistically accomplish. Then, you can celebrate on Dec. 31, and can turn and look ahead to the New Year knowing you already have a head start on your marketing for 2012. ■

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