

Accelerate Your Marketing

By Sharon Berman

As humans, we need to break down time into manageable chunks and create milestones that give us a chance to reinvigorate ourselves and start afresh. January 1 tops the list of these "blank slate" benchmarks. For professionals this can also mean creating a new annual marketing plan.

While I've grown up in business thinking in terms of an annual marketing plan, I'm not certain that continues to make sense. Business and product life cycles are so fast now that planning for a full year really doesn't work. Consider how seemingly only yesterday, Nokia was the most recognized cellphone brand and BlackBerry was the coolest phone. Yet both companies are now fighting to stay in business. Flip Video's heyday endured, it seems, about six months, and then production ceased. Undoubtedly, a yearlong marketing plan would not have benefited those companies.

Such an accelerated life cycle is similar for lawyers and other professionals. The lifespan of your new website is 24 months, if you're lucky, and that's with many modifications in between launching it and starting anew yet again. Blogs and other social media vehicles keep the pressure on to produce substantive content. After all, last week's blog post was last week — old news.

In this environment, it's wise to think about a marketing plan in terms of shorter time periods. Currently, we are a little more than halfway through the year, but what's left? Is it the second half of the year, a six-month whole, or two time spans of 12 weeks each? Though each of these time periods is considered independent, they're all connected. So, what you do now paves the way for the next time frame and later, a new year.



Accelerating Your Marketing

Focusing on smaller units of time helps accelerate your marketing. In today's time-compressed world, doing so has become critical in order to keep current, let alone gain a competitive advantage. When you only have 12 weeks to make an impact, you don't have the luxury of time and must begin immediately. Over the next three months — August, September and October — it's prudent to look at your marketing agenda and think how much you can accomplish if you are focused.

When we talk with clients, the challenge is not a dearth of effective strategies or even marketing initiatives. Instead, it's how to achieve those goals because each of them involves putting together some foundation that does not yet exist. Those projects can be anything from packaging a practice area so that it aligns with what's hot in the marketplace to launching a webinar or seminar series to distributing an e-newsletter. The steps involved for each project are not so insurmountable that they couldn't either be well on their way or launched over the next 12 weeks. You only have to fix your attention on them and make a steadfast commitment to get each job done.

For most professionals, the challenges we usually encounter when we work in this way are our own resistance, distraction and uncertainty. We ask ourselves if our strategies will work. We worry over the potential for failed project investments and colleagues' negative reactions. There is also the ever-present pursuit of perfection that can leave many projects stuck on someone's desk while the debate continues over just the right message.

Again, think of how you would achieve your objectives if you let go of those doubts. The only certainty is that there is no such thing as getting a job done perfectly. If all law firms were certain that exhibiting at the next conference in a target industry would get prospects to call, then all firms would be exhibiting at conferences. Yet there are still many conferences with business development potential for law firms, and no one is there.

If you focus an intense spotlight on the next three months and move past obstacles, you will gain the edge when the following three months arrive. You will have created marketing momentum and will launch the next period's initiatives from a stronger threshold. Suddenly, the boulder you're pushing uphill will seem a lot lighter and smaller.

Building Relationships

It's important to remember that even when

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looking at a marketing plan over a shorter time horizon, there are aspects of business development that can't be rushed. Relationships and trust take time and have their own rhythms. If a potential client has no need for your services right now, that individual has no need to call you. Rather than engaging in activity for activity's sake or frenzied marketing, it's better to take a thoughtful approach to the significant aspects of marketing you can expedite.

You can begin to draw more of these prospects into your universe if you communicate with them more regularly. For example, you may have handled several matters or transactions for clients in the same industry and have determined that there's more business to be had in that area. You can start an industry-focused e-blast or mailing, write for industry publications, or host webinars targeted for those in that business. In short, you can position yourself as the lawyer who understands the industry you want to reach. Another strategy is to regularly create and distribute your own news, which will contribute to your increased visibility and

name recognition. This can be accomplished by positioning yourself as an expert spokesperson in the media, and also through writing, speaking, blogging and other means.

Additionally, increasing the number of outbound referrals you make can quickly advance your marketing. Listen more closely when speaking with other professionals for triggers that may prompt opportunities to refer others, and ask more questions that will ferret out those opportunities. Although not always directly, outbound referrals lead to inbound referrals, as peers become aware that you're the person who creates business for others.

Working Smarter

In order to propel your marketing, you want to think about how to market smarter, not harder. Recommence things you've effectively done before but may have stopped, such as regularly posting to your blog and distributing those posts, sending timely client alerts, and reviewing your website stats and Google Analytics results.

Repackage existing, worthwhile material that extends beyond deals done, verdicts or settlements. Evaluate trends, changes in your practice area or industries you work in, and your clients' perspectives, and then repurpose that information in an article, blog post or media pitch.

Moving Ahead

In today's marketplace, it's important to realize that there is a time warp of sorts and that those who lag behind will fall more behind than they might have in the past. Conversely, those who gain a competitive advantage through their accelerated marketing will realize a larger gain than before — for a short period of time.

Ramping up your marketing brings better and more results over time, but as in all professional services marketing, it may not happen as quickly as you'd like. To reap the greatest rewards, monitor your results, make modifications where needed, and keep moving. Marketing momentum builds even greater momentum and helps you achieve what you're after — results. ■

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