

Six Questions That Will Change the Way You See Your Accounting Firm's Marketing Program

By Jean Marie Caragher

With another tax season completed, this is the perfect time to identify the improvements needed for your marketing program. Here are six questions that will get you thinking – and change the way you see your accounting firm's marketing program.

1. Where did your new business come from?

If you have a process to track your leads, proposals, wins and losses, then you can answer this question. If not, now is the time to start. Despite the variety of customer relationship management (CRM) and sales management programs, Excel is the software CPAs use most often to track new business development. Create a spreadsheet to capture: the prospect's name, contact person, referral source, services to be provided, estimated fee, estimated decision date, next steps, and whether the opportunity is ultimately won or lost. Consistently tracking this information enables you to identify your most important referral sources, to thank them, and to send leads their way. It also highlights the marketing initiatives that result in lead generation.

2. Which clients did you lose and why?

CPAs lose clients for a variety of reasons, including the sale or dissolution of a client's business, poor client service, not being proactive enough, and fees. What percentage of your lost clients was in your control? Or out of your control? Which of your lost clients should not have been your client in the first place? This information can serve as a learning opportunity for your entire team regarding new client selection, client service and communication.

3. How often are you communicating with your clients and prospects?

Are your clients receiving valuable information from your competitors rather than from your own firm? To be considered your clients' "trusted advisor" or "business advisor" and their CPA, you must provide them with tips, alerts and guidance about how they can be more profitable, save taxes, and improve efficiencies, as well as educate them about tax and audit rules and regulations. Your face-to-face and telephone conversations with clients can be supplemented with e-newsletters, webinars and seminars to share your thought leadership or intellectual capital. You want to be the go-to source when your clients and prospects need solutions for their challenges and concerns. This will translate into special projects and new business referrals, which should be added to your new business development report (above).

4. How is your website contributing to your lead generation efforts?

A CPA firm website is a must have and needs to be more than a static online brochure. Upgrading the website is a top marketing initiative of CPA firms. Upgrades include responsive design, search engine optimization, videos, blogs, archived e-newsletters, links to social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube) and sharing thought leadership

through inbound marketing. With the right strategy and components, your website can be a source of new business leads for your firm.

5. How do your clients rate their level of satisfaction with your firm?

Do you ask your clients questions related to client service and satisfaction? If your firm is like most CPA firms, your answer is no. The majority of CPA firms have no formal client satisfaction program whatsoever. In the 2011 PCPS CPA Firm Top Issues Survey, retention of current clients showed up on every segment's top-five list. Yet, retention of current clients only made two groups' top five in 2013 (sole practitioners and firms with 11 to 20 professionals). CPAs are confident in their ability to retain clients, but are primarily unwilling to measure their satisfaction. Client retention is necessary for firm growth. Client service can be a point of differentiation. Read our complimentary eBook, [*Client Satisfaction Surveys for Accounting Firms: The Answers to Your Most Frequently Asked Questions*](#), to make 2015 the year you begin to measure client satisfaction.

6. What changes are you willing to make to improve the results of your marketing efforts?

Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Pick one initiative – it may or may not be one of the above – and create a plan of action. This will change the way you see your CPA firm's marketing program by providing information to help you make smart decisions.

About the Author: Jean Marie Caragher is president of [Capstone Marketing](#), providing marketing consulting services to CPA firms, including Brand SurgerySM, marketing and strategic planning, inbound marketing, retreat facilitation, and training. She is the author of *The 90-Day Marketing Plan for CPA Firms: How to Create the Roadmap for Your Firm's Growth*. For more information, contact her at 727-210-7306 or jcaragher@capstonemarketing.com.