

## 22

## Working with the Professionals

*People who truly are effective have the humility to recognize their own perceptual limitations and to appreciate the rich resources available through interaction with the hearts and minds of other human beings.*

—Stephen R. Covey<sup>1</sup>

If the CPAs in your firm don't particularly like marketing and sales, it's logical to hire marketing help. After all, if other people can bring in a wide variety of work, you can spend more time selecting and doing the type of work you like. Unfortunately, most CPA firms don't use marketing and salespeople very well.

Marketing and salespeople tend to be creative, outgoing, aggressive, persuasive, and quick to act. CPAs are usually more deliberative, cautious, and introverted. Although these personality types complement each other's weaknesses, they often cause conflict. These differences, and the difficulties they cause, are natural and should be planned for as part of engaging a marketing person for your firm.

The conservative CPA and the creative marketing director are prone to frequent and volatile collisions. In the best of cases, smoldering beneath the surface are the doubts and fears that accountants and marketing support personnel have about each other.

A veteran marketing director lamented: "My managing partner is not a leader. How am I going to get my ideas implemented if I can't get a decision out of him? He always seems suspicious of my recommendations. When we finally do start a program, he wants a payback next week. If the payback doesn't come, he wants to pull the plug and rethink our marketing approach."

On the other side, a managing partner said of his marketing director: "I don't know what she does all day. My partners are glad she is here, but she

## 218 Power Tools for Better Selling

hasn't brought in any business yet. She turns her time sheet in late and she is always wanting to spend money."

It is clear that both of these people need to gain some understanding of the other. It is pretty difficult to value the differences in business style when they aren't clearly understood.

Anecdotal evidence bantered around the Association for Accounting Marketing is that the average life of a marketing coordinator or director is about 13 months. For both the CPA and the marketing professional, this is a tremendous waste of investment. Marketing support personnel are excellent resources for accounting firms, as they are for any business. According to Art Bowman, firms that utilize the services of marketing personnel grow faster than ones who do not. In his *1999 Special Report on the Bowman Top 100* firms, Bowman reported that firms who use marketing professionals grew 14.5 percent, compared to 11.2 percent growth at firms with no marketing specialist on staff.

### Clarify and Agree on Roles

One reason why accountants and marketing/sales people don't always get along is the lack of clarity about what marketing people can do. Generally they *cannot* sell your services. People who want to hire you want to have a relationship with *you*. You would not have your secretary hire a lawyer for you; why do you think anyone would hire you by proxy?

Marketing and sales people can produce marketing collateral. They can handle the logistics of seminars and newsletters. They can produce leads—prospects. They can research possible clients. They can edit articles for you. They can develop ads and obtain publicity. They can manage your Web site. They may even be able to train you and your staff on customer service or sales. *But they aren't you!*

Ultimately, your prospects and customers want to judge you and how you'll work with them. They want to know that you are informed about their industry and issues and can communicate with them. They even want to know that you care about them! For instance, one big firm in California decided to do a seminar for prospects. The firm arranged a two-day golf outing at Pebble Beach and lodging at a five-star hotel. The seminar was aimed at top high-tech CEOs and cost several thousand dollars. Because the accountants didn't want to take the time to invite their contacts personally, they decided to leave it up to the marketing people, who mailed invitations to lists of people, such as subscribers to *Forbes* magazine.

Although the idea was interesting, not one of the several thousand executives who received the mailing signed up. If you're going to commit a weekend to a new firm, you generally want to talk to a *person*, even if the golf and accommodations are great. The event flopped, costing tens of thousands of dollars even though it wasn't run. The professionals abdicated responsibility and never should have run the event unless they were sure they could personally obtain enough people to make it work.



*People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*

— Ken Blanchard, *The One Minute Manager*<sup>2</sup>

Using marketing and salespeople properly takes awareness and planning. You wouldn't buy a computer and program and deliver them without training to someone who'd never used that system. You need to train yourself to use marketing help effectively, and you need to make sure you have the right person who can work with you.

Lou Mills, whom we met in Day 9, began hiring solid marketing support personnel a few years ago. He says, "When I originally hired our marketing manager, it was for outside sales to generate leads. But I think our marketing manager has developed as more of an internal resource. What this person will do from a marketing standpoint is that he will help our younger people: coach them, develop them, help them generate leads, help them generate a process for them to attack a certain target list, for example. We also have another individual up in Everett, which is part of the Puget Sound region, who focuses on financial institutions, not-for-profits, and auto dealers. We are going to be hiring a business development officer for our manufacturing and construction niches because we want to attack that market to gain dominance. So we will use them in that process.

"Then we have our marketing coordinators who help us make sure the seminars are set up, make sure that the contacts are there, and also make sure that the professionals are involved in generating prospects. If one of my partners says, 'I want to do a seminar and get these people there,' and they totally hand it over to the marketing person, they can't really expect those individuals to fill the seats. We need our partners and senior managers to work with the coordinators to fill the seats. The biggest failure in that process comes when we don't work together with our marketing support."

## How to Cope When Worlds Collide

One of Stephen Covey's seven habits in *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*<sup>3</sup> is "to seek first to understand, then to be understood." Both the marketer and the accountant must take time to understand the other professional.

Marketing and selling is a high-energy, fast-paced culture of innovative ideas and aggressive initiatives, where failure is a part of the business. Marketers have learned to deal with the extraordinary failure rate of marketing and sales. (Even the best salespeople close only one in five sales, and a direct mail campaign can be successful when 99 percent of the mailing produces no results.)

Accounting is a fastidious culture of conformity and compliance where the penalties for mistakes are very high. CPAs generally do not have constitutions that will allow too much experimentation.

Some marketers approach accountants with excellent marketing ideas—but the ideas are better suited for a product-oriented business. "Let's run some advertising, make some cold calls, and mass mail our brochures, and the business will come rolling in," they advise. When the bucks are gone and the business doesn't roll in, the CPA wonders, "Where's the payback?"

Marketers see the tremendous potential for selling accounting services. They see the huge void of marketing talent in the profession. But they do not see the minefield of conservatism. Accountants see the possibility of hiring someone to do a job they don't feel equipped to handle. When this idea person comes in trying to update the reception areas, publish a newsletter, promote community involvement, and go after new business, the CPA freezes and they part company.

A good friend who is a dynamite marketer went to work for a 100-person firm, but within nine months he was burned out and bitter. He had been busy starting good marketing programs. What he didn't expect was the silent negative uprising among the practice partners that cooled the managing partner's zeal. He left the firm, dejected and depressed. He knew that the programs would have worked, but he never was allowed to launch any of them.

## We Need Marketers

Marketing professionals are indispensable to today's successful and growing accounting firm. Bob Gaida explains his success: "I was the first partner to hire a marketing professional in our firm. By 1992 I was attracting well over \$1.5 million worth of new business a year. I found my time spent, at first, on total marketing to create a practice and, now, serving and facilitating that practice—getting out to the marketplace and making sure that the promises

are being kept. So you can imagine that \$1.5 million booking pace was starting downward. There are only 24 hours in a day. So my thought was, how could I increase my hit ratio? That was the key to me. Every meeting I need to go to, I really need to have a higher prequalification. It's got to be almost like a no-brainer, that it's worth my time being there, and it's got real benefit coming out of it.

"Well, I didn't know how to fine-tune my own ability to do that. I thought I was already, probably, at the level of being able to do that, so I wasn't going to be able to gain time by making myself more efficient or better educated in the process; not by much, anyway. So I said, what if I could get a person who is used to selling an intangible product? After a few experiments with different individuals, I locked onto one where the chemistry between us worked real well. So this person went out all day long, having a breakfast meeting, having a midday lunch, mid-afternoon dinner, going to various seminars, going to gatherings . . . 'sniffing around.' And he would bring me high-quality prospects. When I went into that meeting, I was well scripted. We already knew who was who, what the background was, who the spheres of influence and top decision makers were, what their challenges were. And I could come in now and pick up from that point and go toward closure. That's how a marketing professional works the best. All of a sudden I was back up to doing seven, eight hundred thousand a year in new business."

Depending on the size and complexity of your firm and the sophistication of your marketing and selling team, you may need one or more marketing support persons in your firm. Firms often give titles to compensate for limited authority and money. Therefore, a person with the title of marketing director may really be operating as an assistant. At the end of this chapter, you'll find some general job descriptions of various marketing positions. These will help you delineate the job responsibilities when you are ready to set up a marketing position.

### **Introducing Marketing Staff into Your Firm**

When new marketing or sales staff join an accounting firm, it is important that they completely understand the firm's services and its people. When my wife joined Xerox, she attended their sales school. The primary focus of the training was gaining product knowledge. Over the next few months, before she was allowed to interact with customers, she studied product manuals, demonstrations, and presentations.

It is crucial that new marketing staff members gain product knowledge early. They also must learn about your firm's culture. Even those CPAs who

## 222 Power Tools for Better Selling

support marketing initiatives are put off by actions that seem impulsive. Impulsive actions can occur when a new person doesn't understand the business. To be successful, a marketing person has to take into account the conservative nature of the CPAs and their preference for consensus-based decisions. You can't assume new marketing staff know this. They may not have worked with accountants before, and many textbook examples of successful marketing efforts are more "flashy" than most CPAs want to use. So early on, make clear the types of marketing efforts you're willing to pursue and how decisions are reached in your firm.

**Newcomers at Work**

*According to a research study in the Journal of Applied Psychology, newcomers who received realistic—including negative—information about the organization they were entering had less role conflict and were more productive. The more involved employees acted in their work, the better response from the organization, which, in turn, predicted their future commitment.*

At the same time, encourage marketers to take initiative and reward them for it. If you set it up so that they just do what you tell them they can do, you won't get many fresh ideas and approaches. Be prepared to approve new ideas. If you take weeks to OK a new idea, marketing people often will lose their enthusiasm for the work.

Once the marketer begins to understand your service mix, it is time to focus on the marketing skills of the firm's people. The marketer should spend time in-house with the best marketing minds at the firm. Then the marketer should accompany them when they meet with clients and prospects to observe and determine the factors that make them successful.

The very first market every marketing director must deal with is the CPAs on the firm's staff. Before you can sell successfully to the community, you must sell the value of the firm to the people inside.

**Marketing Resources**

Directly after the summary in this chapter are two resources that will help your firm's marketing program. I've placed them on separate pages so that you can easily make copies of them for the appropriate people. The first, a Nine-Step Plan for New Marketers, is a blueprint that new marketers in an

accounting firm can follow to get your marketing program up and running and on-track.

The second resource is a list of marketing position job descriptions. People who know their specific responsibilities are more likely to perform them.

### **Summary**

Traditionally, the different styles of marketers and accountants have created conflicts and ineffectiveness. Define what you expect from your marketing staff members and tell them what to expect from you. Work to understand people different from you. New business and enhanced client relationships will benefit you both.

### Nine-Step Plan for New Marketers

You must know that your first market is your own firm. Use this plan to get started:

1. ***Plan to use your first three to six months to get to know each of your firm's key partners.*** It is your job to understand each of the partners and key staff people in your firm. Your managing partner is your boss—therefore, “study him until you know what makes him tick,” advises Chris Hegarty, author of *How to Manage Your Boss*.
2. ***Spend months learning your product lines.*** CPA firms tend to have a helter-skelter array of services that have cropped up. You must have a thorough knowledge of each service line. Ask each staff person the strengths and weaknesses of the firm's service line. Ask what opportunities the firm should be developing.
3. ***Learn how these proposed new services would benefit clients.*** Intuitively you know that those services with the highest benefit will be rewarded best over time. You can make a major contribution if you can stir high-margin cross-selling opportunities into the pot. During the first six months, you should spend up to 50 percent of your time in client offices interacting with your staff, your clients, and the various services that are being provided. You must gain product knowledge.
4. ***Conduct a client loyalty survey.*** Some CPAs will fight this process, but you must have it. There are ways to obtain the information without formal mail or telephone surveys, such as personal interviews. You must know the market's perception of your product.
5. ***Evaluate your competitors to learn their service lines.*** What are the unique aspects of your firm vis-à-vis the competitors?
6. ***Ask each person during the first six months, to help you with a marketing plan.*** Carefully review each of your ideas with each partner before you present them in an open meeting. Otherwise you will run a great risk of having someone second-guess you or ask questions for which you are not prepared. Once you've obtained consensus in an open partners meeting, prepare a simple plan.
7. ***Determine the personality style, value system, and business goals of each of the key partners in the firm.*** Is your managing partner a dictator, an analyzer, or a socializer? In a CPA firm, many partners will be analyzers. Therefore, you must build trust slowly by being organized, consistent, and steady.

**8. *Develop a concrete list of priority items to implement and present them to your boss.*** This “want list” should be well thought out and carefully planned. Position all of your needs without implying that they are nonnegotiable demands. If you present your needs so that your managing partner can also see clearly the benefits to himself and your firm, your success will be surer.

**9. *Establish an evaluation system for all marketing activity.*** If you set the standards, then you know the targets. For example, if you target 100 referrals next year, track those referrals to contacts, proposals, and new clients. If you run an awareness campaign, perform a survey of clients, prospects, and others to determine its effectiveness.

We make money in an accounting practice by bringing in clients and serving them well. Through marketing, you can also change others’ perceptions of your firm members from back-room number crunchers to trusted business advisors. Your success will spearhead enormous energy within your firm.

## **Job Descriptions of Marketing Positions**

### ***Vice President of Marketing and Sales***

This partner-level individual leads all practice development activities of the firm. Among other duties, a marketing and sales VP might:

- Prepare a three-year strategic and one-year operational growth plan for the firm
- Develop growth strategies with senior management
- Supervise marketing and sales staff, both in-house staff and outside consultants
- Coordinate sales and marketing activities with each unit of the firm
- Meet with large core clients and significant target prospects
- Supervise advertising, public relations, and speaking events for the firm
- Facilitate internal marketing and sales meetings
- Ensure appropriate levels of sales and marketing training for all employees
- Mentor marketing and sales professionals and other sales leaders in the firm
- Take responsibility for attaining the firm's growth goals and investing the marketing budget

This VP should be knowledgeable about the firm's markets, its competitors, and its internal skill set. He or she should be able to communicate the firm's mission, vision, and values to clients, prospects, and employees. Usually this VP will have a strong marketing education and experience base in accounting or professional services. In some cases, this person can be a CPA, but only if he or she has significant marketing and sales experience as well.

### ***Marketing and Sales Director***

Usually the marketing and sales director is a manager who supervises other marketing and sales personnel. This person has many of the duties of the VP of marketing and sales but with less total responsibility. In most cases, this person is not a CPA. He or she reports to a partner or owner of the firm, often the managing partner.

### ***Marketing Director***

The marketing director of an accounting firm often has a solid marketing education and experience base. Usually a manager, the marketing director

actually directs the firm's marketing plan and activities. In general, a true marketing director:

- Prepares the firm's annual marketing plan and budget, under supervision of a partner
- Assists with the preparation of niche and personal marketing plans of senior people
- Identifies and researches key markets and target clients for marketing and selling activity
- Takes responsibility for the firm's databases of clients, prospects, news media, and referrals
- Conducts marketing meetings
- Reviews or prepares written proposals
- Initiates and supervises all advertising and public relations activities
- Develops and assures proper distribution of marketing support materials
- Supervises the firm's Internet marketing strategy
- Maintains accountability for marketing results

In large firms, this person may supervise a staff of other marketing and sales professionals. In small firms, the marketing director may be a one-person department.

### ***Sales Director***

The sales director of an accounting firm is the person who can initiate and close sales with prospects. In many cases, a CPA professional may be involved in the selling and closing process. Many sales directors are CPAs. They are at an advantage because of their significant product knowledge. A sales director might:

- Identify and research target prospects within a market segment
- Develop a communications and sales strategy for key target prospects
- Prepare written and oral presentations and proposals
- Coach partners, marketing personnel, and others during the selling process
- Coordinate marketing support activities with the marketing department
- Maintain accountability for sales results
- Conduct sales meetings
- Maintain contact with target prospects through selling strategy
- Supervise other sales professionals

The sales director is a self-starting individual who will attract a large amount of new business to your firm.

***Marketing Coordinator***

There is a great deal of marketing-related administrative work in a well-functioning accounting firm.

The marketing coordinator is generally an administrative person who coordinates marketing functions. Marketing education and background is not as important as good organizational and follow-up skills. A marketing coordinator:

- Maintains databases
- Takes charge of distributing firm newsletters and communications
- Operates direct mail campaigns
- Sends welcome, condolence, and thank-you cards; letters; and gifts
- Coordinates open houses and firm parties
- Coordinates speaking events for professionals
- Publishes the internal firm newsletter
- Updates the firm's Web site
- Organizes and mails press releases
- Coordinates advertising, trade shows, referral programs, and other marketing

***Sales Coordinator***

A sales coordinator is a lead generator for the firm. Through telemarketing, direct mail, and cold calling, the sales coordinator contacts businesses and attempts to develop enough interest for a partner to get involved. The sales coordinator may have many of the duties of a sales director, but usually a sales coordinator cannot close the sale. Normally the sales coordinator is paid largely by commissions.

***Other Titles***

Some firms have proposal writers, research analysts, database managers, direct mail coordinators, advertising and public relations specialists, publications writers, meeting planners, and marketing training coordinators. Depending on the sophistication of the firm's marketing program, these individuals can be anywhere from helpful to invaluable.