

## Words Matter: Communicate Firm Strengths with Captivating Copy

By Rachel Gold and Christine Nelson, Ingenuity Marketing Group LLC

**“W**e do tax.” This is a running joke in my office about how accountants often describe what they do.

Then they apologize for their choice of career. Or they launch into an academic lecture about the merits of internal controls. This often carries over into marketing copy that is bland, boring or perplexing.

How do you make accounting interesting? First, you need to be interested. Marketing isn't about trying to get your mind around the arcane details of accounting; it's about showing enthusiasm for dynamic communication and connecting with the professionals who need help expressing themselves.

Once you're tuned in and revved up, there are three deceptively simple steps to creating captivating copy:

- Be authentic
- Find ideas that stick
- Create clarity

### Be Authentic

When we secret-shopped professional service firms, we found that the partners spent 90% of the time telling us about their qualifications. We already knew their qualifications. We'd looked at their Web sites. Marketers still spend too much time trying to build basic credibility and to qualify their people. This should not be the core of your message.

Readers want to know about your culture and the personalities of your people. They want a taste of the experience they'll get by working with your firm. They want to know that they'll like, as well as respect, your people. Consider this Web site copy that Ingenuity created for an accounting firm:

*“When you look forward to seeing your audit team or meeting your accountant for dinner, you must be a client of [ours].”*

Further down the page, the firm talks about their, “Pure enjoyment of the profession.” Those experiences aren't what visitors expect to see from accountants, but they're true to this team and they're

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## Is Your Firm a Leader or a Laggard?

By Jean Marie Caragher, Capstone Marketing

**C**apstone Marketing and Rick Telberg, Bay Street Group LLC, have identified seven keys to success in CPA firm management, namely: leadership, technology, learning organization, marketing and business development, a great place to work, client service and satisfaction, and strategy and execution.

Our research project is quantifying what has long been unquantified: How certain management practices correlate with success in accounting firms. Early results are confirming the research hypothesis that the most successful CPA firms are distinguished by a few key characteristics. As part of the project, we are filtering the survey results to separate the “leaders” in the profession from the “laggards.”

The essential methodology involves sifting the thousands of survey responses by a critically important measure: Is the firm a “Leader” or a “Laggard?” “Leaders”

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**Anne Angera and Sally Glick — Issue Editors**

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## Is Your Firm a Leader or a Laggard

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are firms that evidence above-par, even world-class, performance in the generally accepted metrics of practice management, such as:

- Revenue growth
- Profit margins
- Technical excellence
- Client satisfaction
- Staff morale and tenure
- Professional reputation and brand value

“Leaders” clearly do things differently. And they clearly get superior results. (We will be sharing these results at our session on Friday morning, June 5. Attend our session and take advantage of the opportunity to rate your firm on the seven keys to identify areas for improvement and walk away with essential keys to achieving practice growth and the data to present to your colleagues and partners to win firm-wide buy-in.) Key findings are emerging including:

- Leaders are about three times more likely to adhere to a clear set of corporate values than Laggards
- Leaders are six times more likely to offer thorough and continuous technology training
- Leaders are three times more likely to align training with business strategy
- Leaders are fifteen times more likely to use a marketing plan
- Leaders are twice as likely to support a healthy work-life balance
- Leaders are four times more likely to be able to pass along fee increases without client resistance
- Leaders are ten times more likely to set business goals that are specific and measurable
- Revenue growth of leading firms is 18 times more likely to surpass that of competitors
- Leaders are four times as likely to get everyone involved and accountable for new business development efforts



*An AAM attendee makes friends with some of “the locals” at the SeaWorld networking event during AAM Summit 2008.*

Our research is also identifying the most significant challenges facing firms. For instance, in the area of marketing and business development:

- About 49% never use a business development plan
- Over 86% fail to regularly turn away or “fire” clients that don’t fit their target
- Those that are “more than satisfied” with their firm’s performance in marketing and business development are twice as likely to have all partners and professionals regularly generate new business leads

Statistics are boring without stories. Here is a sampling of what our survey participants are telling us.

Regarding leadership: *“We have developed a very good presence in our market*

*and are committed as an organization to growth and innovation. We have some work to do in getting everyone in the firm on the same page.”* Senior Executive, Regional CPA Firm

Regarding learning: *“We have the potential to be better than we are...To achieve the success we desire we need to continue to develop a more corporate style business model and put processes in place for consistent staff training and development.”* Managing Partner, Large CPA Firm

Regarding marketing and business development: *“We struggle to grow in a competitive marketplace with a lack of a marketing plan and no niche so we are left to fend for general clients, whom are hard to come by as a small player in a big market.”* Senior Executive, Medium-sized CPA Firm

Regarding a great place to work: *“I think we’re very solid and we’ve been around for 28 years, but in many ways we are just now making the changes that will keep us striving for years to come.”* Managing Partner, Medium-sized CPA Firm

Regarding client satisfaction: *“We need to work on relationship management and proactive service. We could also benefit from cross-selling our services to existing clients.”* Partner/Senior Executive, Medium-sized CPA Firm

Regarding strategy and execution: *“We’re struggling to agree on a strategy that’s a driver instead of simply a collection of watered-down buzzwords.”* Managing Partner, Medium-sized CPA Firm

Is your firm a leader or a laggard? Attend our session and find out! **AA**



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