

ReCourses White Slip

Four Necessary Marketing Ingredients

Oh, if there were just a formula that yielded marketing results. For your clients and for your own efforts in landing new accounts. Never mind that such a formula would probably negate any need for your strategic services!

You aren't afraid of hard work or even great expense in landing new accounts. You just don't want either your time or your money to be wasted.

The same can be said for hiring powerful new business people, including everything that comes with it: significant compensation, well crafted materials, and the never ending meetings to discuss progress. All that is quite worth it if results are achieved. But it can take six to twelve months to start landing the fish you are hungry for, and it's not difficult to face doubts about your direction during that waiting period.

I don't have all the answers to this. All I have is the benefit of seeing deeply inside more than 400 firms now, and that brings certain advantages. For one, I'm going to really know what's worked and what's not. It won't be some passing comment at a convention over a beer where someone boasts about their "new program" and exclaims "how well it's worked." For another, seeing inside these firms helps with a fresh mix of old and new ideas.

Yes, you need a marketing plan, though something that will fit on the front and back of one napkin will work fine. Yes, you need marketing materials. Yes, one person needs to be charged with making this happen.

But there are four things that will do more than anything else in making you successful at landing new business. If these four things are present at your firm, you'd actually have to work very hard not to succeed!

First, you need a compelling positioning. Less than 15% of you have one. I could take your positioning (in other words, “what makes you unique in the marketplace”), hand it to a competitor of yours, and they could say all the same things. Most public relations, advertising, design, and interactive firms are much better at differentiating their clients’ products/services than they are their own. They make three mistakes, typically. They talk about what’s true but not necessarily what’s different. (“We think strategically.”) They rely on things that are not demonstrable during the dating process, confusing why clients come to them with why clients stay with them. (“You’ll like working with us.”) Or they emphasize the wrong things. (“We’ll do things on time, on budget, and you’ll work with senior staff.”) So that’s the first mistake: a positioning that sucks, that’s no different from anyone else’s, and is just marketing gibberish. You may be able to bust into any room, but if you don’t have compelling things to say, you’ll lose their attention quickly.

Second, you need personal confidence. Successful people exude confidence and (potential) clients relax. Do you really believe you are different (see above)? I mean, do you really believe you are better at what you do than most of your peers? If you don’t really believe that, find another field of work where it can be true. If you do believe that, act like it. Get out there and make credible claims, price your work accordingly, and then deliver with great solutions. The first step toward achieving this is focusing your work. Nobody is good at doing everything.

Third, you need connections. In spite of our grandest plans, most great clients come not from your direct efforts but from your indirect ones. These indirect ones include a client connection, vendor connection, employee connection, or supporter connection. If you don’t believe me, list the top five clients you’ve ever had and then tell me how that came to be a client. Probably two-thirds of them were not tied directly to your marketing plan or your staff sales person. They came because you are not shy, because you are proactively involved in the particular community that gathers your clients, and because you follow leads until they die. Do you have a pile of warm leads that are getting stale because you or someone else hasn’t had the time? I hope not.

Fourth, as the principal of your firm, you need to be intimately involved in this process (if there is more than one principal, at least one must be deeply involved). Even when you get old, you should be wheeled into the corner where you can drool intelligently and communicate the weight of this meeting only with your presence. This new business process is not like account service, like traffic, like accounting, or like IT work—it demands your personal involvement. And notice that I didn’t say anything about cold calling!

Finally, there are great clients out there. Work on these basics and keep your mind in the game.

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