

The Seven Principles for Attracting More Clients

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Master these Seven Principles and you'll grow your business

If you are going to attract more clients to your professional service business, you must market those services. But you can't market haphazardly and expect consistent results. You must market according to proven principles. This article outlines those principles and gives you the keys to growing your business with less struggle and effort.

1. Marketing is a Game

Not many business owners see marketing as a game. They see it as a struggle. But it's only a struggle because they are unaware of the rules of the game and how to win the game.

Let's look at a game most people are familiar with: baseball. In baseball there are four main activities: throwing the ball, catching the ball, hitting the ball and running. Pretty simple. If you took a person who was highly proficient at these four activities, but didn't know the rules of baseball, and had him join a baseball team, he would struggle for some time. Until he figured out the rules of the game, baseball would be mysterious and perplexing.

It's much the same with marketing. Most of us know the fundamental activities of marketing--networking, writing, speaking, sending emails, and the like--but we rarely see it as a game with very specific rules that lead to attracting clients consistently.

The marketing activities we engage in seem random and subject more to luck than intention. If we could discover that hidden marketing rulebook that explained how to move a client along the bases with some degree of predictability, marketing would be less of a struggle and much more fun as we began to win the game with some regularity.

Introducing Marketing Ball

Marketing Ball is the name we gave to the process that finally makes some sense out of the game of marketing. Marketing Ball outlines the rules, the skills and the moves required to win the game.

Marketing Ball is built on the simple premise that everyone who is now a client was once a stranger and that the purpose of marketing is to build a relationship with a prospect until they feel comfortable doing business with you.

Those relationships are built one step at a time through a very logical and methodical process. Even if you don't realize you're playing Marketing Ball, it's still happening in the background. But as you master the game you'll discover that you can convert prospects into clients more quickly and reliably.

In Marketing Ball, as in baseball, you move prospects around the diamond one base at a time. You start at home base armed with your marketing message. When you deliver that message, your aim is to get your prospect onto first base. You're on first base when you have the attention and interest of a prospect.

Once a prospect is on first, your next marketing activities are designed to get them to second. Second base is when a prospect is ready to explore working with you. Third base is where a prospect is ready to buy from you and home plate is where you've consummated the sale and started working with your new client.

Mastering the game of Marketing Ball is a matter of understanding and practicing the "marketing plays" between the bases and gradually moving a prospect from a complete stranger to a paying client.



Marketing Ball isn't about getting home runs by delivering a perfect marketing message (there isn't such a thing), but by moving prospects around the bases as they learn more about how your services work and how they will benefit from working with you.

2. Having the Right Marketing Mindset



If marketing is a struggle for professionals, it's not only because they don't understand the game of marketing, but also because they have a poor attitude about it. And this attitude, or what we prefer to call mindset, colors our approach to marketing and tends to result in our avoiding most marketing activities.

A marketing mindset is how we think about marketing. It's our attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, expectations, fears, fixed positions, assumptions, and limitations. You could say that our marketing mindset is the "water that we swim in."

The mindset affects us profoundly, but we don't see it because it's so close to us. Our actions are shaped by what we focus on, what we believe, what we think and what we assume. And if these beliefs, thoughts and assumptions are negative, we see marketing as something bad, something to be avoided.

Here are a few of the beliefs, thoughts and assumptions we've heard from independent professionals over the years. Do any of them sound familiar to you? Do you operate from any of these as if they were the gospel truth?

- Marketing leads to rejection
- If I ask for referrals it will sound like I'm begging
- Marketing doesn't work for this kind of service
- I don't have the time to market myself
- Only people with sub-standard services need marketing
- I can't start until I know exactly what to do
- I'm not qualified (educated, experienced, etc.) enough yet
- Marketing is a bother and an interruption to people

And these are only the tip of the iceberg! In working with clients, we've discovered that most are attached to literally dozens of thoughts and beliefs that lead to marketing avoidance.

How marketing mindsets work

The response most of us have to negative marketing mindsets is to resist them. For instance, you've heard that networking could be useful to your business. But you don't enjoy it due to your belief that "nobody who attends networking events needs my service." But you resist that, put on a happy face and try your best, struggling through every event that you attend. Ultimately your experiences verify your beliefs and you give up networking as a waste of time.

When you're stuck in a negative marketing mindset, everything that happens lines up with that mindset. People want reality to be consistent with their beliefs, and this makes it hard to change a mindset.

Sometimes something will happen that challenges your belief, and things can change very rapidly. For instance, you may go to a networking event and connect with someone who turns into your best client. You then start to question your belief about networking because the new evidence is that it worked for you.

Start questioning your mindsets

What has occurred to very few of us, however, is to start questioning our mindset even before we have any observable evidence that it just may not be true. This is a simple but extraordinarily powerful approach, as it undermines our attachment to the beliefs that may be holding us back.

When we don't question our limiting beliefs, we automatically become subject to them. When we start to sincerely question them, we may discover that what we were so certain was true may be the exact opposite.

Is it really true that all marketing leads to rejection, that asking for referrals is begging, that you don't have time to market yourself, that you can't start until you know exactly what to do? Perhaps not.

Once you start to inquire into your mindset, with the intention of discovering the truth, you may surprise yourself and actually realize that the opposite of these beliefs are just as true or truer. In our personal experience, we've discovered that marketing leads to acceptance, that asking for referrals is a contribution, that there is time to do marketing and that you can even start without knowing exactly what to do.

Learning and mastering this process of inquiry regarding various limiting marketing mindsets can transform your outlook about marketing forever. For many people, this has turned their experience of marketing from one of struggle, effort and poor results into an experience of ease, engagement and consistently good results.

3. Understanding the Language of Marketing



Marketing actually has a language. And the purpose of this language is to get attention, generate interest and motivate people to take action to find out more about our services.

If you understand this language and speak it fluently, you'll be more successful at moving prospects around the bases of Marketing Ball and ultimately turning them into clients.

The language of marketing is based on what we call "Marketing Syntax." Syntax is the order of things. Syntax creates meaning. For instance, the order of letters in a word give that word meaning and the order of words in a sentence give that sentence meaning.

We also discovered that the order in which you present marketing ideas determines the meaning the listener attaches to your message. In other words, if you deliver your marketing message in a certain order using marketing syntax, you'll get more attention and interest than if you use a different order.

For instance when people ask us what we do, we often answer them literally, that is, we tell them our label or our process. We say, "I'm an accountant. I prepare taxes for small businesses." That's accurate, but it's not a very attention-getting message. **The listener is thinking, "What's in it for me?"**

The first three steps of marketing syntax are as follows:

1. Target Market - That is, whom do you work with?
2. Problem/Challenge - What issues do your clients have?
3. Outcome - What results do your clients get?

This syntax can be used anytime you communicate about your business, verbally or in writing. And when you use it, your attention value will go up dramatically. Let's look at these steps in a little more depth.

When someone asks what you do, the first words out of your mouth need to be about whom you work with. This creates focus: "I work with small independent credit unions" or "I work with retailers on the East Coast." When you identify who your ideal clients are, your listeners can immediately know whether or not you can help them.

Next you tell the problem or challenge you address. "...who are being beaten up by outsourcing" or "...whose profit margins are shrinking." When you mention a problem, you hit a nerve. Problems are where people live. It's what they are thinking about. And if you can address their problem, they will realize you know something important about them.

Finally, you communicate the outcome you actually deliver. This is what a client gets if you work with them. "We help our clients maintain their profit margins in an outsourcing economy."

With this understanding of marketing syntax, you can start to develop your own personalized marketing message.

4. Creating a Powerful Marketing Message



Once you understand the basics of Marketing Syntax, you have the building blocks that enable you to create marketing messages that actually communicate the true value you offer.

The problems most professional service businesses encounter in developing such a message include the following:

1. The message isn't directed to a target market.
2. The message fails to hit a nerve.
3. The message talks about services, not solutions.
4. The message tries to say too much and gets unwieldy.
5. The message doesn't say enough and becomes cryptic.

All of these are relatively easy to solve, as these examples show:

Isn't directed to a target market:

Every marketing message should start with something like: "We work with this kind of client..." or "We help this kind of client..." (insert the appropriate demographics or psychographics).

Fails to hit a nerve

Talk about a problem, challenge, issue, pain, or predicament that is symptomatic and clearly observable. Say: "We work with managers who are struggling to reach their financial targets." This they can understand, and it hits a nerve. Don't say, "We work with managers who are marginalizing their optimal financial opportunities." Huh? Don't laugh, we've heard worse.

Talks about services, not solutions

When you talk about services, we need to translate what it means to us. If you get right into solutions, results and outcomes, we see the immediate benefit. "We offer a retention maximization program," isn't as good as, "We have a service that will help you retain your best employees." Now that has value.

Says too much

To get someone's attention, you need to communicate in meaningful sound bites. Run-on sentences or worse, messages with multiple targets, problems, and solutions, will only confuse people: "We work with large and small companies in the broadband and microwave industries who have management, marketing and financial issues and want to dominate markets at the lowest cost while retaining high-performing and self-generating managers/leaders." Expect confused looks.

Says too little

You might understand the message you've come up with, but your audience many need some translation. "What do you do?" "I'm a management consultant." Wait, what's wrong with that? Nothing except that it's meaningless except to other management consultants. There's no target, problem or solution. And so the twenty questions game begins.

Next, you expand your marketing message into written marketing materials that communicate about your services in more depth.

5. Developing Persuasive Marketing Materials



What's persuasive? Many think of overly exaggerated hyperbole. But that's not the case. Good marketing information educates your prospect about how your services will benefit them.

Marketing materials are what come after your main marketing message. Once you have someone's attention and interest, you need to provide enough information so that they will know if you can help them or not.

Marketing materials, such as a Web site, brochure or presentation also employ marketing syntax. They open with a discussion of the target market, continue with an overview of the prospect's situation and challenges and then discuss desired outcomes and solutions.

Marketing syntax continues with the following elements:

1. Stories or case studies of clients you've succeeded with.
2. Benefits, advantages and features of your services.
3. Background on you and your firm for credibility.
4. A call to action to let the prospect know what to do next.

Let's look at all of these in a little more detail. The purpose of this information is to answer the unasked questions lurking in the back of your prospects' minds.

Stories or case studies

These answer the question, "Have you worked successfully with clients like me?" This is a very valid question. And you don't answer such a question conceptually, you simply outline a number of case studies that explain what you did for your clients and what results you produced. This is very persuasive and gets prospects thinking about how they could get similar results.

Benefits, advantages, features of service

This answers the question, "How exactly do your services work?" Prospects want a snapshot of what it will be like when they are clients. What will happen, how long will it take, how will they be involved and exactly what process or methods will be employed?

Background on you and your firm

This answers the question "Who are you, and are you credible?" Interestingly enough, this is not the biggest question most prospects have. So it doesn't need to be the first page of your Web site. But many are interested in your background, experience, education and even some personal information so they can get a sense of what it would be like working with you.

Call to action

This answers the question, "What do I do next to find out more?" People are hesitant to pick up the phone or even send an email until they know more about how you start working with clients. Tell them what will transpire once they contact you. Show that you are accessible and easy to work with. And give them a reason to contact you now (not someday).

The great thing is that all of this information can be communicated efficiently and effectively on a Web site. It's a powerful marketing vehicle that is often under-used by professional service businesses.

Now you are ready to take your marketing message and materials and get them in front of prospects through a variety of marketing strategies.

6. Determining Marketing Strategies



Once you are armed with the previously mention marketing principles, you are ready to choose marketing strategies or activities that get your message out into the world and in front of prospective clients.

Let's revisit Marketing Ball. The marketing strategies you employ depend on where your prospects are located on the Marketing Ball model. Remember that the purpose is to move them around the bases. First are marketing activities to get prospects onto first base.

From stranger to affiliation to attention

Your first step in moving from home base to first is developing affiliations with those who could be possible clients. An affiliation is a connection between people. If you belong to an association or organization, you

have an affiliation. If you went to the same college, you have an affiliation. If you belong to a church, you have an affiliation with all the other members.

Your first marketing task is to form affiliations with groups and organizations who are made up of prospects or those who can lead to prospects. These are the people who will be most receptive to your marketing messages. Whether you network, make calls or send mailings, if you have created an affiliation first, your message will be more readily accepted and you'll get the attention you need to get onto first base.

From attention to familiarity

Going from first base to second base is a longer process where you get to know your prospect and they get to know you. People like to do business with those they know, like and trust, so your next task is to stay visible and become familiar to those you are affiliated with. Doing such things as networking actively, adding members to your e-zine list, and meeting with others over coffee or lunch builds your "familiarity factor." Then once you are more familiar, prospects want more information.

From familiarity to information

Even when people know you by name, they don't necessarily understand what you really do for your clients. Your next job is to provide the information that lets them know who you work with, what challenges you address and what outcomes you produce. Important information tools are Web sites and articles such as the one you're reading now.

From information to experience

The final stage before getting to second base is providing more of an experience to your prospects. Going beyond information, where you tell people what you do, is to actually demonstrate the value of your work. This can be accomplished through case studies, presentations and, in some cases, offering a sample of your work through presentations, executive briefings or tele-classes.

From experience to the selling process

With a sufficient amount of affiliation, attention, familiarity, information and experience, prospects are much more likely to want to explore working with you. You might say this is where marketing ends and selling begins. When you get to second base you are engaging in the selling process and learning how you can help this prospect specifically. Selling is much easier if you have played the marketing game well up to this point.

Because this article is more focused on the marketing process, I won't go into the details of the selling process here. But now you know the most important strategies of the marketing game and how to play to win.

7. Creating Marketing Action Plans



Even after you've developed the foundation of your marketing, which includes understanding the game, maintaining the ideal marketing mindset, creating a powerful marketing message, materials, and strategies, you have one more important step towards marketing success.

And this step is creating a marketing action plan. You might think of this as a marketing blueprint, much like an architectural blueprint. This action plan is your step-by-step guide in implementing your marketing strategies.

An ideal marketing action plan includes the following elements:

Your target market

Who exactly will you approach? Who are your potential clients and where can they be reached?

Price

What will you charge for the service you are offering?

Strategy

How will you get the word out? What is the specific strategy you'll use to market your service? For instance, this might be networking, speaking, publishing, or mailings.

Purpose

This is the ultimate result you hope to achieve by implementing your plan. For instance, the purpose of a speaking plan may be to "Get 10 new clients valued at \$5,000 each."

Intended results

This is everything else you intend to accomplish through this marketing strategy. So in addition to attracting more clients, you may want to a) get more exposure to your target market, b) increase your credibility, c) add names to your email list, c) sell products at the presentation, d) improve your speaking ability.

Strategy game plan

This is your actual approach to implementing your strategy. If you've chosen a speaking plan you need to determine where you will speak, how you will get engagements, what topic to speak on, what handouts and materials are required, and what offer to make after the talk. This will often take some research and assistance to avoid major mistakes in your implementation.

Marketing materials and resources

What written or other marketing materials will be needed? And what other resources will be required for success? This may include money, information and assistance.

Offers and call to action

For many steps of the plan you may need to ask someone to take action. You will need to approach organizations and ask them to book you. At the presentation you will be selling your ideas and ask them to buy your concepts. At the end you will deliver a close that asks your participants to request a follow-up.

Follow-Up

Once you have implemented your activity, you need to follow up in some way, shape or form. You can't just cross your fingers and hope the phone starts ringing.

Action steps and timeline

The final step in your marketing action plan is to outline, in chronological order, all the steps you will take.