

# Marketing Planning Guide

SECOND EDITION

FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

## **Marketing Planning Guide for Professional Services Firms**

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# Introduction

If you are a professional services executive, there is a good chance that you've been involved in the marketing planning process. Maybe you are solely responsible for preparing your firm's marketing plan. Or maybe you are part of a team tasked with planning next year's marketing budget.

This Marketing Planning Guide for Professional Services Firms will introduce you to a process tailored to the realities of modern professional services firms.

We will present the continuum of marketing savvy and show you how to determine where you are, where to head, and how to get there. The more informed you are, the better decisions you can make on how to use your name and reputation to attract more business and continue to service current clients.

From traditional marketing methods to the world of sophisticated online initiatives, this guide will provide you with ideas and insights to transition your firm into a higher growth phase. So fasten your seatbelts. And get ready for an evolutionary look at the function of marketing in the professional services industry.

Let's get started!





# Marketing Then and Now

### Offline

In decades past, marketing was entirely offline: often conducted in-person by partners and managers, almost always in print, and, depending on size, sometimes handled by advertising firms. Whether it was a business lunch or a golf outing, a charity event or a tradeshow booth, professional service firms would get their names in front of potential clients, logos and photos in the hands of buyers, counting on their strong reputations to do the rest.

Many firms grew using these traditional marketing tools alone, but their success was confined to local or regional markets. Few broke onto the national stage. Reputation frequently was based upon generations of service to a solid client base.

Around the year 2000, some firms began to adopt new tools available due to the proliferation of computers and the Internet. And the rest is history.

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Firms now compete nationally—even globally—and marketing is done 24/7. Even more mind-boggling is the fact that buying has changed as well.

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### Online

Today, the world of online marketing has exploded into blogs, websites, web analytics, online video, webinars, email, pay-per-click, mobile marketing, search engine optimization, and much more.

Firms now compete nationally—even globally—and marketing is done 24/7. Even more mind-boggling is the fact that buying has changed as well. The entire purchasing decision process has been affected by online marketing.

It is no wonder that it can appear easier to many professional service executives to focus on the day-to-day work of providing quality work for clients. For many of these firms, marketing planning might sound like this: “Hey, we were just asked to sponsor a golf event. Should we do it?” Or “When does that mailing describing our services go out?” You get the picture.

## Best of Breed Marketing

Without purposeful marketing, business growth becomes a function of luck and individual partner efforts. And there is a mountain of evidence pointing to the value of a strategic marketing plan in creating business growth and profitability. Thus, executives who are serious about growth should view the gains from individual efforts as the cherries on top of a successful, institutional marketing plan.

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Without purposeful  
marketing, business  
growth becomes a function  
of luck and individual  
partner efforts.

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## So, the big questions become:

- Where should your growth come from?
- How do you create a marketing plan?
- How do you integrate online and offline marketing?

Let’s take these questions in order.

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spirlinging\\_up\\_create\\_a\\_high\\_growth\\_high\\_value\\_professional\\_services\\_firm](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spirlinging_up_create_a_high_growth_high_value_professional_services_firm)



# Which Way Do I Grow?

## Deciding Direction

### What are you marketing?

Before we get into the how of marketing, it's important to know what to market. We like to think of this process as party planning. Before you host a party, you make certain general decisions that inform all of your other planning actions. Will it be a theme party? That will dictate the dress code and the type of food served. Will the party be for families? Or will it be adult-only? The audience will determine the time of the party and the kinds of activities and drinks that will be offered. How many guests will you invite? Audience size will determine whether you host a sit-down dinner, a potluck, or a buffet.

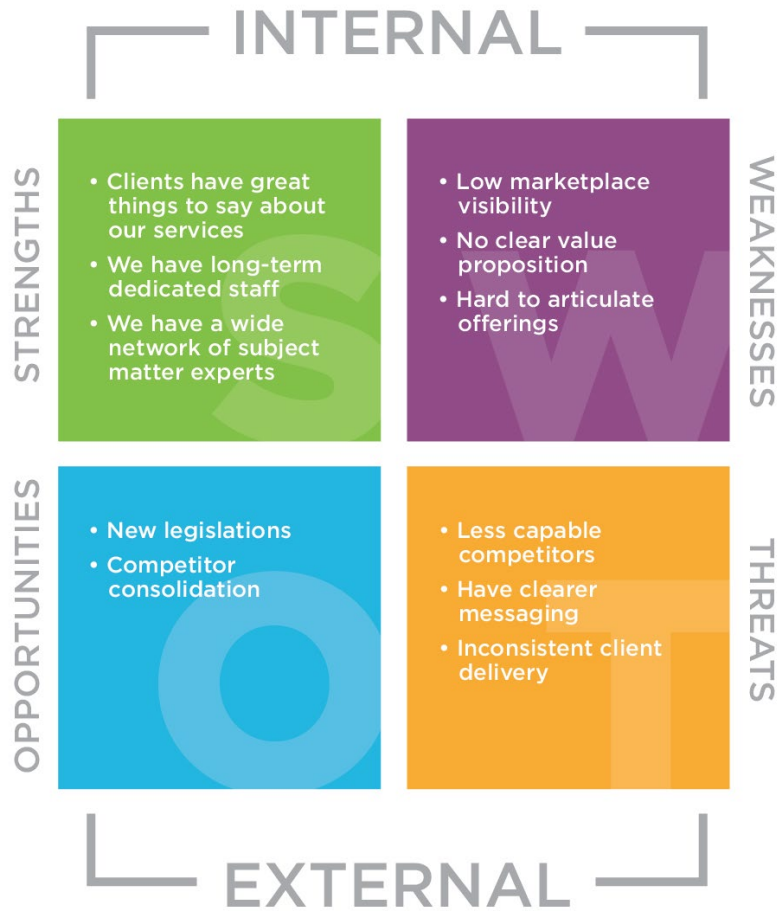
Party planning and marketing planning are similar in this way. Before you can dive into creating a marketing strategy, there are certain foundational business decisions you just have to get right. These decisions will inform your marketing plan. But how do you make these decisions? To keep you on track, we've developed three activities as a guide.





## SWOT Analysis

As you start creating a marketing plan, it's helpful to use a SWOT [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats] analysis to address a firm's most important factors.



The SWOT analysis provides a solid platform to support your strategic marketing plan.



## Goal-Setting

What kind of a firm do you want or need to have? What is your ideal level of growth? Do you want to double in size in five years, for example?

Firms with clear market strategies, built on strong differentiators, tend to grow faster and are more profitable.<sup>1</sup>

## Look Here: Existing Strengths

What industry verticals are already strengths? What kind of services are you good at delivering? Most established firms have a large number of industry/service combinations to consider, since past growth has often been opportunistic. But, where do you offer the most value and enjoy the greatest success? Strengths offer a great starting place.

## Aim There: Projected Growth Areas

Your target audiences may or may not be high growth industries. Committing resources to a target audience with limited growth opportunities may not be a good long-term strategy. This task may require some basic secondary market research.<sup>2</sup>

Research allows you to move away from what you think to what they think.

## Start Where You Are

Consider which services you are best prepared to offer today. After identifying the industries in which your clients are located, look at your service offerings. In which areas do you already excel? By now, you may have several promising practice areas. You may offer a service that is unique or that offers greater value than your competitors. Note these, but don't pick a winner yet. The next task will set you apart because so few firms do it.



<sup>1</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spiraling\\_up\\_create\\_a\\_high\\_growth\\_high\\_value\\_professional\\_services\\_firm](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spiraling_up_create_a_high_growth_high_value_professional_services_firm)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/hinges\\_professional\\_services\\_guide\\_to\\_research](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/hinges_professional_services_guide_to_research)

# Look Both Ways

## The Value of External Research

### Why Conduct Research?

Now it's time to conduct some structured research on possible target client groups. This research will identify not only your best short-term opportunities—your low-hanging fruit—but may also uncover new services that your clients need today. Research can also clarify what messages you need to communicate and which obstacles you need to overcome.

Why is research so important? In a study we conducted for our book, *Inside the Buyer's Brain*<sup>3</sup>, we found that firms that do frequent research (at least once per quarter) on target clients outperform firms that do occasional research (less than once per quarter) or none at all.

Research is the most direct way of learning what clients, prospects, and got-aways really think about your firm and the services you offer. Here's the real key: Research allows you to move away from what you think to what your consumers think. This process often reveals your firm's true differentiators.

Now, you may think that you already understand your audience. After all, every day you work with clients, attend industry events, and read the trade pubs. But by conducting external primary research, you can spot emerging trends in the market that your competitors don't know about. This intelligence allows you to anticipate and adjust—the hallmarks of agile marketing . And for the first time, you can think and talk about issues from your clients' perspective.

Offline messages are mostly to a broad audience and void of specifics.



- One to many
- Untargeted message

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/book-inside-the-buyers-brain>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/blog/story/agile\\_marketing\\_and\\_blended\\_skill\\_sets\\_a\\_successful\\_marketing\\_formula](http://www.hingemarketing.com/blog/story/agile_marketing_and_blended_skill_sets_a_successful_marketing_formula)

Strategy based on research on your target client group shows that firms that do systematic research on their target client groups grow faster and are more profitable than those that do no research. The more frequent the research, the faster the growth.

What you are looking for is a better understanding of what issues are on your potential clients' minds. How are they thinking about possible solutions? What information are they hungry for?

## Types of Research

**Primary Research:** Custom research that is conducted specifically to answer questions of interest to your firm. What do clients like about your firm? Why did a prospect choose another firm over yours? Primary research is developed with the intention of finding specific answers to these questions.

**Secondary Research:** Research that is available through publicly available external sources. Secondary research generally answers questions about the broad marketplace. What is the average growth rate for firms in your industry? What is the benchmark for sales conversions? Who are your competitors? These are answers that can generally be found in studies that look at the entire industry.



### Want to do it yourself?

From step-by-step How-Tos to in-depth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

**Check out Hinge University:** [HingeUniversity.com](https://HingeUniversity.com)

# Message in a Bottle

## Creating A Clear Message

### What is a message?

A message communicates the identity, purpose, and unique nature of your company, beyond its name.

Messaging should be based around a differentiator—a purposely-crafted, compelling reason to select your firm over an apparently similar one.

Don't be afraid of losing business because your message is exclusive. In fact, our research shows that high-growth professional services firms are three times more likely to have a strong, easy-to-understand, believable differentiator.<sup>5</sup> And firms that specialize generate more business.

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Don't be afraid of losing business because your message is exclusive.

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### Creating a Strong Message

One of the benefits of research is that it helps you learn the truth about your firm. It pulls your thinking away from what you think about your firm to a new reality—the one that exists in the hearts and minds of your client or target market.



<sup>5</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spirling\\_up\\_create\\_a\\_high\\_growth\\_high\\_value\\_professional\\_services\\_firm/](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spirling_up_create_a_high_growth_high_value_professional_services_firm/)



Research can reveal your true differentiators:

- What is unique about your firm
- What clients appreciate about you
- What your firm is good at

Saying you have great people or that you provide exceptional value for your clients just won't cut it. How often have you heard the words on-time and on-budget? Your competitors say these things, too.

## Strength-Building for Messages

Your message has to be different. But it also has to be true. In fact, a good differentiator should have three characteristics:

1. It should be true.
2. It should be provable.
3. It should be relevant and important to your

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Saying that you have great people or that you provide exceptional value for your clients just won't cut it. You have to show it and back it up.

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## Need some help?

Hinge offers a comprehensive suite of marketing and branding services to increase your visibility and grow your firm.

Let's explore how we can help:  
[planning@hingemarketing.com](mailto:planning@hingemarketing.com)

703 391 8870 | [hingemarketing.com](http://hingemarketing.com)

clients.

### Mind the Relevance Gap

It is this third characteristic, relevance to clients, where the research we conduct for our clients often reveals a major gap:

The attributes that firms think are most important are often quite different from those qualities most appreciated by their clients.

You can learn more about this common disconnect—and how to close it—in our book, *Inside the Buyer's Brain*.<sup>6</sup>

In a nutshell, research is critical in helping you determine what is most compelling about your firm—from your clients' perspective, rather than your own.

Once you figure out your differentiators, you can use them to develop a clear and engaging message that sets you apart from competitors.

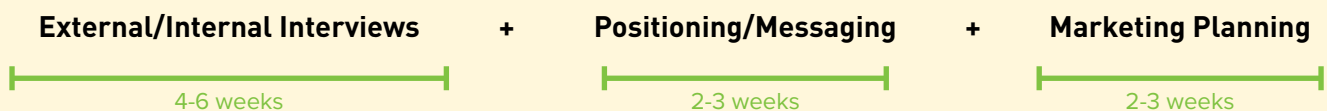
Developing a strong value proposition or message doesn't have to take a lot of time. Here is an average timeline of the evolution of a marketing message.

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Developing a strong value proposition doesn't have to take a lot of time.



<sup>6</sup> <http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/book-inside-the-buyers-brain>

# "X" Marks the Spot

## Arriving at Your Marketing Plan

### Think Long Term: Act Short Term

Strategy is important because it produces better results. In our research on high growth professional services firms<sup>7</sup>, we found that a more focused and developed strategy was associated with faster growth and higher profitability.

Your marketing plan should align with your firm's overall business development strategy. We have seen good results from marketing plans that contain specific milestones, offering a long-term roadmap to grow your firm.

### Limit Your Initiatives

Fewer marketing campaigns, done better, will always produce superior results. Spreading limited funds over multiple initiatives will inevitably lead to underfunded campaigns that are doomed to fail even before they start.

In many cases you will walk away with nothing to show for your efforts. Ouch.

Let's take blogging as an example. You start a blog to position your firm as a thought leader and attract new prospects. But you rely only on "volunteer effort". With no professional writing or editing, the content is spotty and inconsistent. You overlook the need for SEO or a content strategy, so you attract few visitors. And because you have no real offer strategy, you get few leads. The result is that the entire program is a waste.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spiraling\\_up\\_create\\_a\\_high\\_growth\\_high\\_value\\_professional\\_services\\_firm](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spiraling_up_create_a_high_growth_high_value_professional_services_firm)

## Put it in Writing

Let's face it. If it's not written in a calendar, it probably is not going to happen.

Similarly, for both offline and online marketing, if it's not measured, it won't improve. Let's delve into the key questions that will reveal the marketing activities best suited for your firm.

## The Great Eight –Questions Your Plan Should Answer

When you do select a marketing strategy, be sure to give it enough resources to be successful. That may mean using outside help to plan or execute the strategy. Don't dabble. Find out what it takes to do it right and then do that.

We see many firms make this mistake. They come up with what is likely to be a winning strategy. There are high hopes and lots of enthusiasm all around. But when it comes to implementation, they try to cut corners and use resources that are readily available rather than those that truly know what they are doing.

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Similarly, for both offline and online marketing, if it's not measured, it won't improve.

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Talk about penny wise, but pound-foolish. When you are limiting your marketing efforts, you need to focus on making each one as effective as it can be.

### 1. Your Message

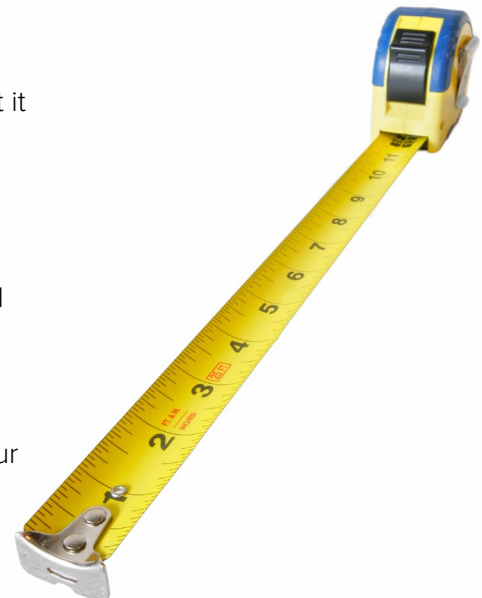
We learned about messaging in the last chapter. Is your message clear? Can a prospect easily describe what your firm stands for and identify what it does well?

### 2. Your Website

Does your website clearly answer what you do and how your firm is different? Has a major aspect of your firm changed since you last updated your site?

### 3. Reaching Out to Your Web Audience

Through your website, are you offering valuable content that engages your audience, creates new leads and keeps them coming back for more?



## 4. Oversight of the Website

Who in your firm will capture the information needed to monitor the effectiveness of your marketing program on at least a monthly basis? There are many great analytics tools on the market—both free and for purchase. You need someone with the knowledge and expertise to track these metrics and offer suggestions and improvements based on the results.

## 5. Weeding the Garden

It's easy to be busy without having much impact. So take the time to review your marketing initiatives. Which ones generated leads and new clients? Which tasks aren't working?

## 6. Networking Working?

Is your staff attending the right events and meeting the right people? Are you tracking your networking leads?

## 7. Marketing Team

Can you clearly identify a marketing role for each person in the firm? Or, is marketing just a function for a few individuals?

## 8. Marketing Budget

Do you know how your marketing dollars are being spent? Are your expenses matched to an itemized budget?

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It's easy to be busy without having much impact. So take the time to review your marketing initiatives.

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## When to Plan: The Planning Cycle

Most organizations develop a marketing plan during the 3rd or 4th quarter as they work through their budget for the coming year. While most of us plan and budget once a year, it's important to make the plan come alive with real events, quarterly reviews, and progress updates. Make sure you put deliverables on the calendar.

## Who Should Be Involved?

The marketing planning process should include your firm's top executives, including business unit leaders, business development (sales), human resources, and marketing. Finding that marketing person can sometimes be a challenge. Sometimes, that person is you!



We identify three typical in-house marketing models below. Depending on size and sophistication, professional services firms come with different levels of in-house marketing expertise.

**1. Evolved marketing staff model:** A CMO and/or a marketing director is involved in a firm's strategic planning process. In this environment, there are multiple mid-level and junior marketers that focus on executing the firm's marketing initiatives.

**2. Limited marketing staff model:** As time permits, a marketing coordinator provides marketing support at the direction of firm principals. This person is rarely involved in the strategic planning process and may focus on creating a marketing calendar only.

**3. No marketing staff model:** The founder and principals operate as seller/doers. There is no marketing staff and some marketing responsibilities may be assigned to a non-marketer, along with other human resources and administrative tasks.

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We recommend monitoring your marketing program on at least a monthly basis.

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## The Importance of Measurements

We recommend monitoring your marketing program on at least a monthly basis. To start, you will want to track contacts (email list size, for example), referrals, leads, proposals and wins.

Are you actually doing the activities you planned? Each quarter, take a look at the cumulative results. Is your marketing working the way you projected?

If not, you can make adjustments at that point. And each year, conduct an annual review in conjunction with planning and budgeting. If you have been implementing a solid plan for a year and the needle is not moving, you need to consider a new strategy.

The beauty of this strategic marketing process is that it keeps your firm focused on strategic growth. That is important because strategic growth adds much more value to a firm than unfocused or undisciplined growth.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, you may also want to track visibility (e.g., keyword searches on targeted terms, press mentions, social media reach and the like) to monitor the strength of your brand within the target group.

But don't get stuck in the weeds. As with any worthwhile endeavor, the first attempt is the hardest. Your firm's first marketing plan will be relatively difficult to hammer out. However, once your management team and firm are used to the process, it gets much easier.



<sup>8</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/online\\_lead\\_generation\\_guide](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/online_lead_generation_guide)

## Sample Marketing Ledger

Here's a sample marketing ledger. You can create your own code structure so that it is meaningful to your team and clearly shows where investments are going. Remember, just using one code for marketing will not be useful as it is too broad.

Here's a sample marketing ledger. Implement a meaningful code structure so you can see where investments are going. Remember, just using one code for marketing will not be useful as it is too broad.

Marketing	Xxcode	Expense Types and Respective Codes
		MKTG - CRM Subscription xx.01
		MKTG Webinar SaaS Subscriptions xx.02
		MKTG Meals & Entertainment - Non Staff xx.03
		MKTG Meals & Entertainment - Staff xx.04
		MKTG Consultants (Outsourced, Online Marketing) xx.05
		MKTG Tax Deductible Contributions (Charity) xx.06
		MKTG Website Updates/Enhancements xx.07
		MKTG Printing / Supplies xx.08
		MKTG Branded Items xx.09
		MKTG Sponsorships xx.10
		MKTG Membership Dues xx.11
		MKTG Postage xx.12
		MKTG Networking Registrations xx.13
		MKTG Video xx.14
		MKTG Advertising xx.15
		MKTG Public Relations xx.16
		MKTG Contests/Awards/Surveys xx.17
		MKTG Subscriptions xx.18
		MKTG Business Gifts xx.19
		MKTG Labor xx.20
		BUSDEV Labor xx.21

## Clear Your Path

You are on the path to success. Clear the way of ineffective initiatives that are difficult to support.

## Re-Evaluate

If you've captured and assessed your marketing initiatives, you are now in a good place to (re)strategize. Step back a moment. Ask yourself: Were your marketing initiatives closely aligned to your firm's growth strategies? Do the

original growth strategies still hold true, or were there unanticipated events that compel you to make adjustments?

### Adjust

If you've been tracking your online and offline activities and evaluating their effects, you can now make well-informed adjustments to your strategy.

Gone are the days when you could plan for a year of marketing and make no course changes along the way. Marketers today have a much clearer view of what engages prospects. For example, you now know which online content produces the highest conversion rates and what factors are driving leads and revenues.

Data about your marketing projects give you the power to learn from your mistakes and your successes. That means firms no longer have to plan on faith. Instead, you can point to empirical evidence to support marketing recommendations. In this new world of marketing, failures become apparent sooner — and the process of improvement can happen on the fly.

Ideally, your marketing plan should help carry out your long-term growth plans. Where do you want your firm to be ten years? In five years? How will you get there?

### Think Agile

Marketing plans, like any other long-term plan, need to be flexible enough to respond to new challenges or changes in the marketplace. This is where the principle of agile marketing comes in.<sup>9</sup>

Agile marketing allows plans to be conceived, executed, implemented, reviewed, and adjusted rapidly based on experience and real-time results. Don't be intimidated by the idea of agile marketing—many firms are already incorporating the principles without knowing it. The concept is simply designed to be a helpful framework for understanding and synching long-term goals and daily activities.

In professional services, agile marketing is well suited to manage both the traditional marketing tactics your firm may use as well as the powerful spectrum of online marketing tactics. All are important elements of any serious marketing plan set on business growth over the long term.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.hingemarketing.com/blog/story/5-traits-of-effective-agile-marketing>

# Updating the Traditional Marketing Plan

## Arriving at Your Marketing Plan

As we've mentioned, there is a place for traditional marketing methods in your marketing plan, as well as online marketing. In this section, you will learn how to evaluate all of the tools with an eye on growing your firm.

### Offline Marketing: The Traditional Approach

Our recent research into the buyers of professional services reveals that over 70% of buyers still turn to their personal and professional networks when searching for professional services firms. So, there is justification for continuing networking and in-person marketing techniques. However, some traditional methods that you may be currently using should be looked at in terms of cost and effectiveness:

- 1. Advertising:** The main problem with advertising is that it is not a reliable brand-building activity. We define a brand as a firm's reputation multiplied by its visibility. So while advertising increases your visibility, it does little to increase your reputation. You might solve that problem by integrating some online marketing tools. Here's an example: Include a call-to-action in your advertising. A good one would be adding a free white paper download to a Facebook ad. Since the white paper demonstrates your firm's knowledge, the ad is now expanding your reputation.
- 2. Networking:** Professional services are sold on the basis of trust, and personal interaction is a proven way to establish trust. But what's the best way to proceed? We suggest that you compile a targeted list of networking organizations. Then consider whether the attendees at those events are mostly peers or prospects. To

Offline messages are mostly to a broad audience and void of specifics.



- One to many
- Untargeted message



expand your reach, pick events where your prospects are likely to be and where you will know fewer people.

On a monthly basis, divide the events among your firm's networkers. Then periodically assess which events bring greatest value. As you meet people, try to be engaged and helpful. If your firm has educational content that might address their problem, by all means send it to them as a follow-up. This can be a great way to start building a lasting relationship.

**3. Speaking:** Public speaking can be a terrific entrée to higher-level networking. As professionals, we have unique perspectives and knowledge we can share that will pique the interest of potential clients needing guidance in an area. If you enjoy public speaking, seek out opportunities — conferences, associations, chamber events, and peer networks. All are wonderful platforms for sharing your expertise with others. If you can schedule one speaking engagement each quarter, you are likely to reap benefits for your organization and enhance visibility and reach of yourself and your firm<sup>10</sup>. But don't forget that, in this age of paying it forward, the intent of such speaking is to educate and not to sell.

**4. Marketing Partnerships:** Teaming with another firm that offers a complementary service makes a heap of sense. For starters, it allows you to host marketing events such as webinars or workshops for half the cost. Second, you can diversify your content and share the workload. Last, it gives you access to another party's list of prospects (and two house lists are certainly better than one!).

It's important, however, to pick the right partner. Your partner should target a similar audience and address similar topics. This

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But don't forget that, in this age of paying it forward, the intent of such speaking is to educate and not to sell.

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<sup>10</sup>[http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/becoming\\_a\\_visible\\_expert\\_a\\_guide\\_for\\_professional\\_services\\_executives](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/becoming_a_visible_expert_a_guide_for_professional_services_executives)



often means that the two parties will have some overlap in service offerings, but you can almost always work around potential conflicts if you discuss them up front.

- 5. Business Development Training for Non-Sales Staff:** On some level, everyone in the professional services arena is involved in business development. For instance, staff members who interact directly with clients can be in the best position to identify new opportunities. The problem is—your staff might not be trained to think that way. Highly-skilled practitioners often focus on getting their jobs done; they don't often have business development on their minds.

According to our research, the fastest growing firms offer some form of business development training to all non-BD staff. Training can help break down some of the barriers and identify people who have natural business development skills. If nothing else, make sure your front-line people can recognize an opportunity when it presents itself and know what to do with it. This can make a big difference.

- 6. Public Relations:** Unlike advertising, PR in its most common form has transitioned well to online marketing. Press releases are relatively easy to write and post to the wires. When crafted with relevant keywords and backlinks, you can make a press release contribute to the search engine optimization (SEO) of your website. Just make sure your news is indeed newsworthy and well-written.

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Marketing is not for the risk-averse. Unpredictability and the prospect of failure lie just around the corner. That means that every day, marketers are learning, growing and being challenged.

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Our research tells us that firms benefit most by implementing a mix of traditional approaches, such as networking and trade association activity, with newer online techniques such as content marketing and social media<sup>11</sup>. Whatever mix you use, your goal is to increase both your visibility and reputation within your target groups.

## Examples of Offline Marketing

☐ Advertising

☐ Direct Mail

☐ Radio

☐ Networking

☐ Speaking

☐ Partnerships

☐ Sponsorships

☐ PR

☐ TV



### Want to do it yourself?

From step-by-step How-Tos to in-depth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

Check out Hinge University: [HingeUniversity.com](http://HingeUniversity.com)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the-social-media-guide-for-professional-services>

# A New Path Forward

## Turbo-Charging Your Online Marketing:

We found that 11% of consumers first turn to the Internet when searching for a new firm. The trend of buyers using the Internet to find, research, and share about firms will only increase as the digital generation ages into new positions of authority. In contrast to traditional marketing, online marketing is relatively inexpensive, works for you all day and all night, and is highly measurable. Online marketing is also continually evolving and improving. But are you putting your best foot forward online? Here are some key activities to consider as you plan for the realities of modern marketing.

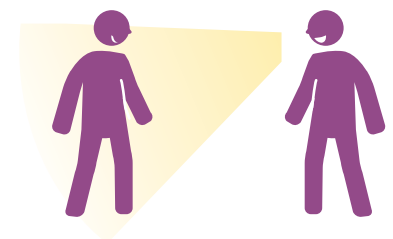
### Invest in your website:

Your website is your key marketing and business development tool. Every prospect goes there to check you out. That fact alone is reason enough to invest in a great web presence. But that's yesterday's news. Today, your website should also bring you a stream of new business. You see, professional services buyers are changing.<sup>12</sup> Increasingly, time-strapped executives use online search to shortlist firms that might be able to solve their problem.

### Is your website designed to generate leads?

A recent study of online marketing for professional services firms<sup>13</sup> found that firms that generated at least 40% of their leads online grew four times faster than firms that did not generate online leads. They were also two times more profitable. Invest some time and resources into your website and watch it turn it into a lead generation machine. [Check out our Lead Generating Website Guide](#) to find out how.

Online, your message is accessible by many yet targeted to audiences and issues.



- One to one
- Targeted message

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/blog/story/meet\\_the\\_new\\_professional\\_services\\_buyer/](http://www.hingemarketing.com/blog/story/meet_the_new_professional_services_buyer/)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/online\\_marketing\\_research\\_study/](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/online_marketing_research_study/)

## Develop a content marketing strategy:

Professional services brands are driven by expertise and client relationships. If your firm becomes a trusted source of practical, educational content, you will begin to develop a following — people in your target industry who not only recognize your expertise but also rely on it. These people are likely to include your firm in their pool of potential service providers when their companies have a need. To take advantage of content marketing, you'll need to create valuable, educational pieces on a regular basis. This content can take many forms: blogs, articles, white papers, e-books, webinars, research studies, podcasts, videos and more.<sup>14</sup>

How does it work? Search engines love content. They reward high-quality, relevant content with higher rankings. And these search engine results in turn provide you with a steady stream of prospects and build your brand.

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Best of all, content marketing works around the clock and around the globe. It attracts prospects based on their interests, not just their proximity to you — exposing your firm to new markets in a world where geography is becoming less and less important.

To help your firm find its content creation rhythm, you'll want to follow a content calendar. Content calendars can be as sophisticated as you want, but we recommend you start small. Consider identifying content themes for each quarter.

Your writers can then craft content that speaks to the theme. Themes give your writing team focus and help you generate enough content on a topic to gain traction in the search engines. Be sure to employ keyword research and SEO techniques when writing any material that will be searchable online.

To get the full scoop on content marketing, [check out our free Content Marketing Guide for Professional Services](#).

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/B2B\\_content\\_marketing\\_guide\\_for\\_professional\\_services\\_firms](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/B2B_content_marketing_guide_for_professional_services_firms)



## Grow your email list:

If your list contains only physical addresses, it's time to consider a change of approach. Modern marketing is largely email driven. One way to begin building your email list is to put some of your more valuable content behind a registration form on your website—when the consumer registers her email, she is rewarded with a white paper.

Keep the form short and sweet so people won't feel like you are asking for too much personal information.

Your email contact database is one of your firm's greatest assets. But making the most of your list does take time and testing. For instance, what kinds of content do subscribers respond to? How frequently should you send email to the list? What percentage will opt out? How segmented are your contacts? The more time and effort you give your list, the greater gains you will receive.

## Embrace lead nurturing:

Generating qualified leads can be a professional services firm's biggest challenge. In the professional services, sales cycles are long and it takes a great deal of time to convince a prospect that your firm has the skills and relevant experience to solve their problems. To address this issue, you need to plan for extended periods of lead nurturing.<sup>15</sup> This can happen through repeated in-person contacts or through indirect channels, such as public speaking or content marketing.

To measure the success of your lead-nurturing campaigns, be sure to track the costs, number of generated leads, resulting proposals, win ratio, and long-term client value.

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the\\_lead\\_nurturing\\_guide](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the_lead_nurturing_guide)

Make time for social media<sup>16</sup> : In marketing, everyone talks about ROI—return on investment. However, with social media, the key is ROE—return on engagement. In professional services, social media is playing an increasingly important role in marketing, though this role today is largely indirect. In social forums such as LinkedIn Groups<sup>17</sup> and Twitter, professionals can demonstrate their expertise by helping people solve their problems. Social platforms are also great ways to promote a firm’s expert content and drive traffic to a firm’s website. Marketers, however, need to be careful not to promote their own content too frequently or stridently.

## Examples of Online Marketing

- ☐ Websites
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Content Marketing
- ☐ SEO
- ☐ Blogging
- ☐ Videos
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Webinars



### Need some help?

Hinge offers a comprehensive suite of marketing and branding services to increase your visibility and grow your firm.

Let’s explore how we can help:  
[planning@hingemarketing.com](mailto:planning@hingemarketing.com)

703 391 8870 | [hingemarketing.com](http://hingemarketing.com)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the-social-media-guide-for-professional-services>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the\\_linkedin\\_guide\\_for\\_professional\\_services\\_executives\\_1](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the_linkedin_guide_for_professional_services_executives_1)

# Life in the Lead

## Staying Current

### Planning Your Content

#### Reuse, Reduce, Recycle

Firms are busy. They struggle with staffing the creation of content. Here is a way to minimize the amount of work: Repurpose! Consider all of the ways that a single piece of content can be used. For example, for every issue/trend/topic of interest, consider all of the formats that can communicate your insights. For topic X, can you offer a webinar + develop a blog post that highlights the webinar discussion + use the content to develop a guide + use the content as material for a speaking engagement? One topic = webinar + blog post + guide + speaking engagement.

Another strategy that will help with resource planning is to identify a theme per quarter. Or consider identifying a key topic per month.

Having identified the right topics and formats, you can now determine the content creators. They can be found in-house or externally. Consider the following:

#### Internal:

- Technical professionals
- Marketing staff
- Management Staff

#### External:

- Guest speakers/writers
- Industry influencers
- Outsourced marketing staff



## Committing to a Calendar

We cannot stress enough that, in addition to quality, the frequency of your content is essential to content marketing success. You need a way to track your efforts as well as a way to implement the strategy you worked so hard on. Microsoft Excel as a tool to develop and maintain your content marketing calendar will work just fine.

## Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Adjusting your strategy is a continuous process, and SEO is crucial.

Do the keywords that you use in your content make sense for your business? Is the consumer searching on them likely to be in your target audience?

You can track results by looking at:

- Rankings
- Traffic from organic search (by keyword)
- Conversions (soft and hard)
- New business

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At the end of the day, there are valid reasons for creating fresh, educational content. With good content, you can:

- Attract search engine traffic
- Use as social media currency
- Educate and nurture prospects
- Qualify leads
- Build trust

This strategy of building trust through content can help key members of your leadership become Visible Experts®.



## Create Visible Experts®

In professional services, Visible Experts® are individuals with high visibility and acknowledged expertise who can command influence within a specific target audience. The benefits are invaluable, as they can:

- Increase firm visibility
- Attract new clients
- Command higher fees
- Strengthen a firm's brand
- Attract strong partners

Check out our Visible Expert® Guide for more information of this topic.

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## Put Your Head in the Cloud

More and more, marketers are relying on cloud services to provide a competitive advantage. As marketers plan for the future they have an array of powerful online tools that can help them reach audiences in new markets. In fact, technology has become almost inseparable from marketing. With the advent of online marketing, there has come an entire new set of marketing techniques (and their inevitable acronyms): search engine marketing (SEM), search engine optimization (SEO), client relationship management (CRM), and content management systems (CMS), to name just a few. Marketing automation has introduced us to such firms as Eloqua, Marketo, HubSpot, Salesforce, Infusionsoft, and SugarCRM.

## Client Relationship Management (CRM)

One way to monitor and assess your marketing and sales pipeline is to use a CRM system. Many CRMs today are cloud based and easy to use — and they meet the needs of both sales and marketing. It would be easy to leave the CRM choice to your IT department. But here are some important reasons why marketers need to influence, and perhaps drive, the selection process:





## 1. Technology is secondary to your firm's needs

Although many CRMs come loaded with bells and whistles, you have to make sure that the programs actually have the functionality you need. At the end of the day, it really doesn't matter if you can send a text message from a CRM if your company's main priority is pipeline capturing and tracking. Sit down with your team and hash out your requirements and budget before blindly evaluating CRMs.

## 2. Process and business rules

Once a CRM is in place, ensure that your team knows how to use the new technology. Don't assume that it is intuitive. Create training procedures and document how information is entered into the CRM. Consider the types of reports you will need: sales, visitor engagement, etc. Consider the segmentation tags that will be most meaningful to your organization.

## 3. Documentation

While you are establishing processes, tags, and reports, be sure the administrator is clearly documenting the CRM's functionality. As more people at your firm use the CRM, requests for new functionality will surface. Clearly define what options can be entered into each tagging field so that when you pull lists they are clean and accurate.

## 4. Training, discipline, and top-down accountability

Let's face it. Adopting new enterprise technology can be a pain. Change is hard and most people prefer the "old way" because it's easy and doesn't require a change of habits. Managers need to adopt the technology themselves and ensure that staff actually uses the new software. For instance, a manager should refuse to accept a pipeline report that is not generated by the new CRM.

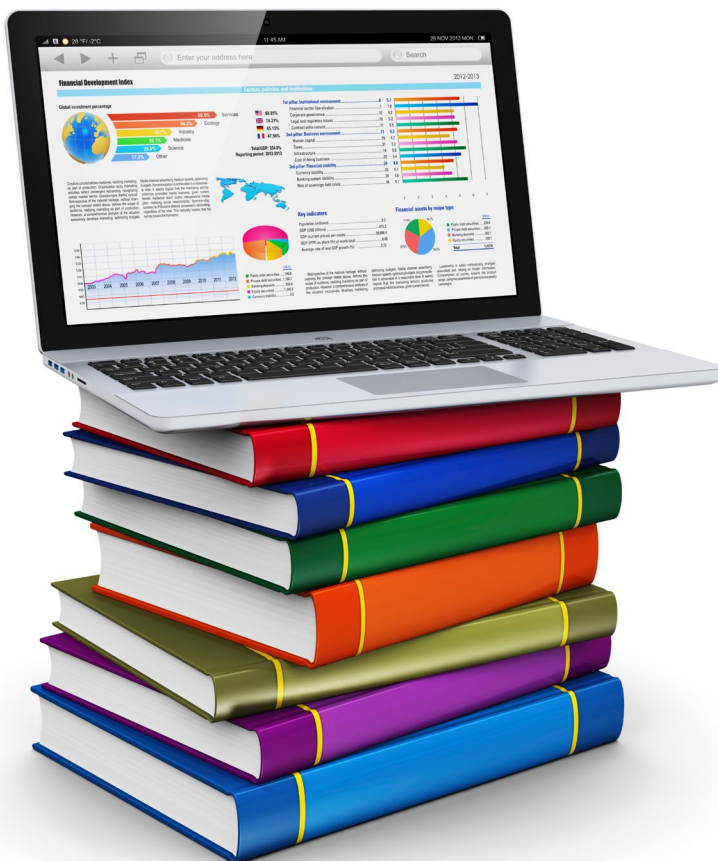
## 5. Evaluate technology regularly

Once technology is in place, make sure it continues to meet your needs. Businesses are constantly growing. New technologies enter the marketplace. Make sure your CRM can evolve with your business. CRM companies upgrade their software regularly. Make an effort to learn about any new features and periodically review your business needs and technology. Technology is supposed to make life easier, not harder. Once you have a CRM that works for you, your marketing planning will take on a new level of clarity.

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# Putting it All Together

In professional services marketing, it's best to keep things simple. When you sit down to write your marketing plan, don't discard traditional tactics that have been working for you just because they are old. If networking, public speaking, or sponsorships have worked in the past, keep doing them. But be sure to add some online marketing tactics to the mix. If this is new territory for you, try starting a blog, creating a lead-generating website or engaging in social media. Evaluate the new tools. Carefully consider their role and value in your marketing, then try them out. Just don't bite off too much, or you will drown in the possibilities.

Today's new marketing tools give professional services firms the power to expand their horizons and reach audiences in distant markets. But your marketing plan has to be flexible. Online marketing gives you the power to recognize what is working and what isn't, and you need to be prepared to make adjustments on the fly. To make the most of your opportunities, you need to have one foot in today and the other in next week!

Happy planning!

# About Hinge

Hinge specializes in branding and marketing for professional services firms. We are a leader in helping them grow faster and maximize their value.

Our comprehensive offerings include research and strategy, brand development, award-winning creative, high performance websites and marketing outsourcing.

Hinge conducts ground-breaking research on professional services companies. We have identified a group of firms that grow 9X faster and are 50% more profitable yet spend less than average to get new business. We can show you how they do it.

To view our full library of research reports, white papers, webinars and articles, please visit [www.hingemarketing.com/library](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library).

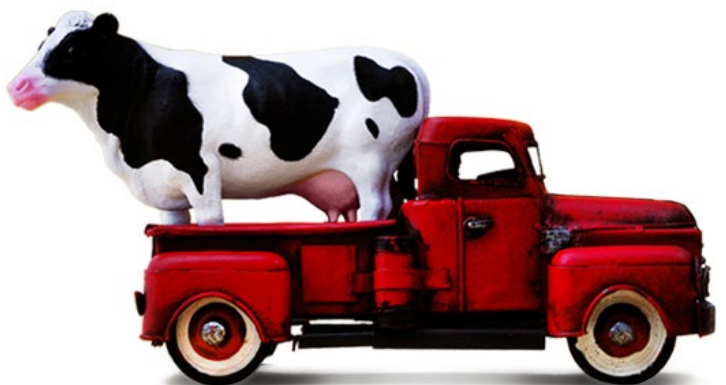
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## Help Us Make this Guide Even Better

We want to hear from you. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource, please drop us a line: [info@hingemarketing.com](mailto:info@hingemarketing.com).

Thank you!



# How Hinge Can Help

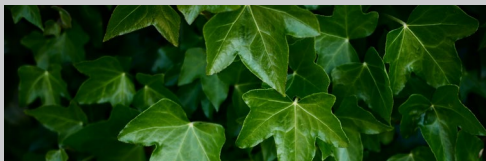
## Visible Firm® Program

Designed to deliver more referrals, higher profits, and faster growth, the Visible Firm® Program will build a powerful marketing platform to engage your audiences and build your visibility. Based on the most extensive research into high-growth firms ever conducted, the Visible Firm® Program will ground your marketing in science and leverage your firm's expertise to draw in the right audiences.

Ready to learn more? For more information, call 703.391.8870 or email us at [info@hingemarketing.com](mailto:info@hingemarketing.com).

## Take the Next Step

Choose the option that's right for you.



### Want to do it yourself?

From step-by-step How-Tos to in-depth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

**Check out Hinge University:**  
[HingeUniversity.com](http://HingeUniversity.com)

OR



### Need some help?

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[planning@hingemarketing.com](mailto:planning@hingemarketing.com)