



## Reap real rewards! Build an all-inclusive strategic marketing plan.

By Anne Scarlett, printed in *CE News*

In the November 2006 article *Recall Power — One dozen techniques to make clients remember you first*, point number one was to become versed with your company's marketing approach and plan. Now it's February 2007, and I'm hopeful that most of our readers have indeed achieved clarity on their firm's strategic goals, client development plan, value propositions, differentiators, and key messages. They will now be able to serve as a company ambassador, armed with confidence and solid information.

There are three barriers that may have kept the remaining readers from achieving this clarity. The first barrier is you, that is, if you opted to overlook point number 10 from *Recall Power*: accept marketing as a part of your role. You folks don't need to read any further!

For the rest of you who do indeed believe that marketing is a part of your role, this article tackles two other potential barriers. A. The marketing plan is not readily accessible to — or inclusive of — you; or even worse, B. Plan? What plan? It simply doesn't exist.

### OVERCOMING BARRIER A — GAINING ACCESS TO ALL-INCLUSIVE MARKETING PLAN:

Recently I spoke to a delegation of business leaders from Moldova (the country). They ate it up; well, that is until I spoke about inclusion and sharing of intent in order to move the firm into a unified, consistent direction. I spoke of offering clarity to the growth strategy, and of coaching all levels of staff in terms of marketing tactics in order to realize the bigger vision. Gradually my audience transformed from enthusiastic head-nodding and rapid note-taking to a guarded skepticism. Why the long faces? It turns out that in Moldova, competitors bribe the staff members of companies in order to obtain even the most benign of strategic intent. As a result, these business leaders are too paranoid to share key information with non-shareholders. Instead, they opt to take on 100% of the marketing themselves, rather than distributing the responsibilities to create a robust, 'strength-in-numbers' approach. Yet, strategic marketing is not rocket science, so while strategies are essential to guide firms into making sound decisions, quite often those strategies vary only minimally from one firm to another. As I told the Moldovans, the true secret to success is less about the brilliant strategies, and far more about the *effective follow-through* to realize those strategies. In comparison, our industry is (luckily) far, far less protective of business information.

Which brings us back to you. It's not likely that your firm circulates the complete strategic marketing plan for everyone to see, nor should they! There are proprietary aspects of information within strategic marketing plans. Examples could include: intent to hire a superstar engineer with specific government background in order to get more federal work; intent to re-shape marketing messages mid-year due to an imminent merger that has not yet been announced; shifts in the resources dedicated to specific markets or services based upon sound market research and sales goals; etc. These things, when taken out of context, can be misinterpreted — and possibly even cause alarm — to the staff. Instead, most firms opt to give an overview of the strategic direction, which is a great start. The step that is sometimes missing is what specific actions YOU can take, as a successful engineer looking to grow his/her career, in support of the marketing strategy. It is my belief that the best marketing plans are those that also outline tactics that can be executed at various levels within

the firm, beyond those in full-time marketing, leadership, or ownership positions. This is what I refer to as all-inclusive plan — truly taking into account the contributions that every employee can offer within the context of their own role, and then providing guidance and support to make sure they have the tools to deliver. Let's say, for example, that those responsible for marketing in your firm are struggling with an incomplete database of past project information. This is a common dilemma; many of you have likely been approached — perhaps multiple times — to provide data to include in an imminent fee proposal. So, one goal might be: 'to increase the hit rate of proposal submissions by 15%.' How? Prepare more client-focused packages — spend more time on the client's 'story' and creative, relevant positioning of data, as compared to spending time on the mundane task of actually collecting (and re-collecting!) the data. How? By developing an information gathering process to be championed and re-structured in order to collect the richest data once and for all.

What other potential elements could be included within an all-inclusive plan? Well, another strategic goal might be: 'Focus on clients with a high 'win' potential; only pursue those with a 60% + probability to win, OR those that offer a legitimate marketing opportunity.' In this case, one tactic might include a more stringent go/no go process. This means random principals or department heads (aka renegades) cannot independently decide to pursue a project. Rather, there is a go/no go committee composed of a small consistent group of people, ready to take a hard look at the opportunity before opting to move forward at various stages of the business development process (ie. pre-proposal/relationship building; post-receipt of proposal). Here again, there may be a role for a technical staff person to be a part of that go/no go process, especially if s/he is responsible for preparing the project schedule and fees.

The point here is that these tactical steps can be distributed to include technical staff like you. Believe me, even if the marketing team does not proactively seek out your help, they will be ecstatic to learn of your interest in helping where you can, while also respecting that your primary role as a technical professional is still your top priority.

So what can you do if you are still unclear on how you can help support the marketing plan? Try setting an informal 15-minute meeting to directly ask those responsible for marketing (an official marketing department, department heads, owners, et al) to brainstorm on which aspects of the plan you can personally contribute.

## **OVERCOMING BARRIER B: CREATING A STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN.**

Have you heard the phrase 'paralysis by analysis'? Marketing plans can take all sorts of forms. No one is suggesting that you spend weeks working on a plan if it's going to gather dust. The most successful marketing plans that I have seen include a strategic plan along with a synopsis of the plan that is highly visible, referenced often, and checked against on a monthly basis. This synopsis guides the technical staff to stay in sync with the strategic marketing plan in their every day work activities. Supporting tactical action plans — organized by market sector or service — then serve to strengthen the odds for successful execution.

If your firm does not publish, much less create, a marketing plan, then you're in a bit of a pickle in terms of finding ways that you can contribute and/or ways that you can better serve as an ambassador of your firm's message, intent, et al. It is possible that instead, they have incorporated strategic marketing into the annual business plan, in which case you can most certainly go through the same process of identifying opportunities for inclusion. Some of you already hold leadership positions in your firms, and there is a reason that you became a leader in the first place. You're smart, and you know what you need to do if your firm does not currently have an effective strategic marketing plan. Of course, if you need any help or clarification on how to create an all-inclusive plan and reap real rewards, then please feel free to contact me and I'll be happy to help make it happen!