

# Don't Let Those Marketing Roadblocks Slow You Down

Lessons for Professional Services Firms, Part 2

In Part 1 of this series, my colleague Michelle McCormick wrote about the [challenges inherent to marketing a professional service](#) such as law, accounting, finance, medicine and dentistry. Without retail products to sell, these professions are judged by more-intangible assets such as knowledge, client service, experience and reputation.

Differentiating one organization or professional from another can be challenging for consumers. It's easy for a consumer to research online to find the best wireless headphones, buy them and, if they aren't just right, return the headphones and try another set. But when that same consumer needs legal counsel, tax advice, financial planning or healthcare, they are likely to be facing serious and potentially life-altering situations and decisions. With so much information available online, they certainly can research and arrive at a few options, but how do they ultimately decide which organization or person is their best fit? As Michelle discussed, you can have an impact on these decisions – if you focus on what clients want and then articulate how you can address their needs.

If you work in one of these professional service sectors, you can still use the marketing strategies that the big consumer companies use, including developing and executing plans for [public relations](#), [social media](#), [business development](#), website content, [email marketing](#), advertising and [creative branding](#). Developing a focused awareness campaign that combines these strategies with your organization's goals show potential clients who you are, what you do and why they should choose *you* over another professional.

The challenge often felt by in-house marketers at professional services firms is how to navigate the common roadblocks to putting a marketing campaign in motion.

**Roadblock #1: "We don't have time for marketing. We need to focus on billable time and client service."**

It's easy to convince professionals that a marketing campaign has the potential to increase revenue. It's harder, however, to decide how much time each professional should devote to that marketing campaign, particularly when a senior-level professional already spends time entertaining clients, [networking at social events](#), or serving on local or industry boards. Yet, using [media relations tactics](#) as an example, these professionals are often the most-qualified to handle a relatively quick top-tier media interview that, when published with quotes in an article, can reach and influence potential clients. In general, the time required is pre-interview prep about the subject matter, a review of the journalist's background and the media outlet's profile and reach, the actual interview, and perhaps follow-up questions or emails. The pitching required to obtain that media opportunity is the responsibility of the firm's publicist or marketing department, as is



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delivery of all of the background information about the outlet and the journalist and the follow-up after the interview.

*Remove the roadblock:* Spending a small amount of non-billable time on marketing is often all that is needed to see a high-quality result. This roadblock about time limitations can be overcome by agreeing to allocate a certain amount of time to marketing that can be tracked and measured against results.

**Roadblock #2: "I don't need to do any business development. Besides, I'm really not comfortable with speaking at industry events/writing articles/doing press interviews."**

Awareness campaigns are never one-size-fits-all. Since the asset to be marketed is a person, rather than a product, certain marketing tactics rise above others in terms of effectiveness, and a program has to be customized to meet each person's availability and interest. For example, an accountant who dreads writing articles may be more suited for speaking at industry events, or a lawyer who prefers not to give speeches may be a better fit for writing bylined articles. If someone would prefer not to take media interviews that have to happen immediately to meet a reporter's deadline, perhaps that professional can instead have a background meeting with the reporter at a more convenient time to set the stage for future interviews and provide story ideas.

The beauty of marketing expertise is that any of these tactics can work, and a combination of the tactics based on each individual's preferences can prove to be a program that not only suits their needs, but develops a larger picture of the firm and its bench of experience.

*Remove the roadblock:* The comfort zone roadblock is easily addressed by acknowledging each person's interests and then matching them to the appropriate marketing tactics.

**Roadblock #3: "We don't have the budget."**

Most professional service firms will allocate an ample budget for exhibiting at or sponsoring an industry trade show, taking clients out to dinner, sending holiday cards and paying membership fees for associations. These are all good things to do. But the question is really about ROI: What is the return on each of these investments of money and time?

If a firm allocates some of its budget to purchasing a booth, staffing it, creating and printing new brochures, traveling to the location, and so on, that's undoubtedly a large investment. Is there an obvious ROI, such as meeting leads that will convert to clients? If that happens, then the effort was worth the investment – but if that same firm were to enhance this investment by executing a handful of marketing tactics, the return could be much greater. Examples of this enhanced effort could include booking a speaking engagement at the conference, scheduling on-site meetings with reporters to talk about trending topics, submitting a bylined article to the event sponsor for placement in the publication that all attendees receive, and posting on social media during the conference.

Even after the event, a marketing tactic can be executed by developing a client alert email that contains key takeaways from the conference, followed by posting it to the firm's

website.

The results of these efforts would be face-to-face interactions with attendees who care about the presentation topic, relationships created with media for future inclusion in stories, visibility of a reprint of the published article to clients and prospects, more followers and engagement on LinkedIn, and finally, drawing visitors to the firm's website, which is likely to lead to further exploration on the site. The positive outcome from all of the marketing touchpoints is a worthwhile expense, given the visibility and awareness that it achieves.

*Remove the roadblock:* The budget roadblock can be overcome, but requires educating the professionals about the value of an integrated awareness campaign and then giving it a try.

#### **Roadblock #4: "I've tried marketing, and it has never worked."**

New clients come to a firm for many reasons. Perhaps there was a referral from a friend. Maybe they met someone at an industry function. They may simply have used a browser search and found their way to the firm. Unless you ask a new client directly, "How did you hear about me/the firm?" or the information is entered into your client intake system, the reason may never be revealed. With so many avenues of exposure available to a prospect (the integrated awareness campaign of media relations, website content, social media and more), a new client may not even recall exactly how or when the firm's name came under consideration.

For a publicist, it is rewarding when a professional is told that the new client read about the firm in a trade magazine, or saw the broadcast interview that happened two months ago, or was impressed by a speech delivered at an industry event. These reasons validate the purpose of an investment in an awareness campaign. But these moments are rare, and it is challenging to get buy-in for what may be vague or longer-term outcomes.

This is especially true for service professionals, whose work involves facts and analysis. It is hard to see the benefit of a marketing placement or result if it doesn't have a direct and immediate impact. One single media mention will never suffice in generating more awareness, so the first result should be viewed as a building's foundation – with each additional result added to the foundation, the building gets higher, more visible and more credible. Earning visibility takes time and must be an ongoing goal and process, rather than one of fits and starts.

*Remove the roadblock:* The roadblock that recalls previous (negative) attempts at marketing can be overcome by explaining the value of an integrated awareness campaign, and the patience and access required for opportunities and results to occur.

*Look for our next installment in an upcoming blog post from my colleague, Jim Jarrell.*

In the meantime, I would love to hear from you. What roadblock(s) have you encountered? Send me a note at [llindley@jaffepr.com](mailto:llindley@jaffepr.com) to share or tweet me [@LizBardLindley](https://twitter.com/LizBardLindley).