

Professional Service Firm Strategies in the New Normal

There's no question that the game has changed. Our business models, corporate cultures, technology, business development, marketing, real estate and staffing strategies are all being questioned and reviewed. What can we learn from our current situation, and how can we improve our businesses to remain relevant in what will eventually be our post-pandemic world?

Last week, I asked the Jaffe team to list the top five things they suggest professional services firms should be doing with their communications and brand strategies in light of the current pandemic. We compiled a comprehensive collection of strategic actions that firms should consider doing now to be ready and competitive in this new reality.

Culture and Brand

Nothing will reveal your true firm culture like a real-life emergency. The pandemic is a time for firms to step up to the plate and express the values they claim to have. Consequently, whether your firm is expressing these values – or not – will also have a significant impact on perceptions of your brand. To that end, here are some steps professional services firms can take to evaluate and influence culture and branding.

- Review how you describe your **firm's culture**, and compare that to how it is performing during the current crisis. Can you make revisions in how you describe your firm culture to better align with the reality? (In the same vein, it's time to evaluate your firm values. Are they merely words on your office wall, or did you live them during the emergency?) Assess your brand and culture on how its performance relates to your relationships with clients, your community and your personnel. Where is there room for improvement? What do you do that sets you apart, especially in light of the pandemic?
- Communicate the status of the firm to employees, as well as potential changes for short-term stability. Meanwhile, communicate with clients to reassure them about the firm's long-term stability.
- Nurture and deepen relationships with staff, teams and clients. This includes re-evaluating your remote working policies to accommodate staff (especially those with childcare needs), as well as creating or updating wellness benefits and programs.
- Amp up charity, community and pro bono activities.
- And, as always, continue to practice empathy.

Website and Social Media

If there's one thing businesses can take away from the pandemic, it's the crucial role technology plays in succeeding in our current environment. There's no debating that your website and social media presences are essential business development, marketing and



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communications tools that are worth your investment. Here are some ways you can allocate your resources to improve on your digital identity.

- Assess your web content. Does your homepage clearly identify what you do, as well as why and how you do it, from both a client and recruiting perspective? Audit your site for outdated content and delete accordingly.
- Is it time to [update your bios](#) to position your professionals better in the marketplace?
- Consider [adding content](#) to your site that speaks to the pandemic, such as how your firm is responding with respect to ensuring the safety of your employees and clients as well as business continuity.
- Could your website use an update, maybe a more user-friendly backend platform?
- Review your firm's social media accounts and give them a visual refresh, such as new banner images. Help your professionals improve their [LinkedIn presence](#) by updating profile descriptions and incorporating a standard, branded banner image.
- Consider creating an Instagram account for your firm that showcases its personality and human side by posting content related to firm activities, such as internal team-building events and charitable activities that respond to the current crisis.
- If your firm isn't using social media, or has a relatively modest presence, develop a firmwide [social media policy](#) and strategy.
- Of course, keep repurposing and sharing content, especially serviceable content that applies your experience to the current situation.

Marketing and Business Development

It's likely that many of your clients have been significantly affected by the pandemic. These are stressful times, and business development and marketing activities must account for this, whether that means altering your sales approach or developing new services. Here are some action items to help you reevaluate and plan your strategies in these areas.

- Revisit marketing and [business development plans](#) and goals. What you developed last year is likely not applicable anymore. You might not have to scrap the whole thing, but it will be prudent to make significant revisions. To this end, plan beyond the pandemic. While we don't know when it will end, have a plan for the latter part of 2020 and begin formulating one for 2021.
- Take inventory of your clients, and determine the ones whose "normal" has been affected the most. How can you be of help? Perhaps there is an opportunity to establish a new practice area. In addition, determine which practice areas will be most applicable to COVID-19 business recovery, and focus on promoting them.
- Do you need to update your firm messaging? The sales pitch that worked pre-pandemic might not be as effective post-pandemic. This goes for messaging in your recruitment materials as well.
- What technologies can your firm tap into to enhance its marketing and business development activities? Sharing thought leadership through video, podcasts and webinars are all avenues to consider.
- Take a look at your CRM system. Clean up contact information, and add new contacts.
- Is there an industry you want to learn more about, perhaps one that will be seriously affected by the pandemic? Research associations in that industry to join to further your

knowledge, and prepare yourself to be a thought leader within those organizations.

Public Relations

While the pandemic has caused significant disruption to personal and professional lives, it also does create some opportunity. Knowledgeable professionals will be able to position themselves as thought leaders on a variety of coronavirus and post-pandemic topics. The following are some professional service PR initiatives your firm can consider as the crisis unfolds.

- Now is the time to speak and write about what it will look like on the other side of this crisis for your clients and their respective industries. You can also position your firm's spokespeople to share their stories about how your firm weathered the COVID-19 shutdown and the remote working environment. The economic impact of the crisis creates ample opportunities for your professionals to be positioned as commentators on forecast stories that predict industry developments going into 2021.
- Speaking of spokespeople, now would be a good time to review your designated firm representatives. Are they still the right people for the job? Are they the best at reflecting the firm, particularly in light of the pandemic?
- Not only should firms share their own stories of resilience amid crisis, they should also share their clients' stories. A pitch like this not only shines a positive spotlight on the client; it also serves as an opportunity for the professional to enhance their reputation.
- This is also a good time to [work on your Chambers USA submission\(s\)](#). Even if the deadline is in November, you can get started on the sections about the firm and attorney biographies. Matter descriptions can be fleshed out and updated closer to the deadline.
- Along the same lines, make time to focus on developing, or updating, [a legal rankings/awards strategy](#) that aligns with the firm's business development goals. Perhaps those goals have shifted in light of the pandemic – what other opportunities now exist that weren't considered before? Identify which rankings the firm will invest time in pursuing, and get buy-in from management.
- Finally, review your firm's [crisis communication plan](#). Did you have to use it during the pandemic already? What needs updating as a result of those efforts?

Never before in our lifetimes have so many businesses experienced this level of disruption at once. Ideally, firm leaders have set up a task force that includes HR, IT, marketing, recruiting and all practice managers so all areas of the firm can be reviewed and adjusted where needed. Now is not the time to sit idle and wait for things to return to normal, because no one can say when, or if, we ever will completely revert to our old way of life. Instead, think creatively and figure out a strategy that will set up your firm for future success.

Join this conversation and share what you are doing, too! Or contact me, Terry M. Isner, at tisner@jaffepr.com to brainstorm ways we can help you be ready to share your story, develop new policies, or redirect your marketing and business development goals.