May 20, 2020 - Liz Bard Lindley

5 Ways to Adjust Marketing Processes in Light of COVID-19

We have been living in a changed world for many weeks now. Adapting to the pandemic has been hard. Marketing and business development professionals must look at the world from a new perspective; work smarter; and change our processes to collaborate most effectively with our internal clients, as well as one another, to keep the momentum of the firm's marketing efforts going.

To that end, here are five ways marketing and business development professionals can adapt to the pandemic's effect on our work environments.

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Tip 1: Look for Efficiencies

Your firm's plan to develop monthly marketing deliverables is probably not working very well right now. Instead of separating out the tactics for marketing and doing one piece at a time, try to integrate each tactic into the broader marketing objective.

For example, client alerts have always been effective content. You could certainly publish a client alert and stop there — or you could leverage a single client alert in multiple platforms that fit in your business development and marketing strategies. Consider taking that single client alert and repurposing the content for social media, the firm website, a media pitch, bio and practice group updates, email marketing messages, pitches for speaking opportunities, and video marketing, all of which work together to bolster your brand and raise the firm's visibility.

Tip 2: Select a Point Person as Liaison between Professionals and Marketing

Marketing teams and marketing committees work together in different ways, depending on the size and type of firm. With everyone scattered in remote offices now, it may help to identify one professional who can take on the responsibility of meeting at least weekly with marketing to represent management, prevent delays, help match opportunities to professionals in the firm, and keep programs on track despite distractions. This relationship is important during the pandemic because it provides a necessary continuity.

Also, consider how you communicate as a team. Pre-pandemic, in-person group marketing meetings were typically favored over emails. Working from home (WFH), however, tends to rely more on email to communicate. But if everyone on a marketing committee is getting copied on an email, the odds are that the string will lose its focus, some may forget to reply to all or questions will remain unanswered for too long. Having a single point person to communicate with every day alleviates these problems.

Tip 3: Help Professionals Adapt to the Fast Pace of Publishing

Many service professionals are experiencing some downtime due to societal disruptions, and they may want to use that time to write client alerts for your firm's website (especially if you have a COVID-19 resources section). This is good news because the addition of original content can improve search results for the firm, heighten the visibility of the professional and remind readers of the knowledge available to them.

However, time is of the essence now. Depending on your firm's current marketing process, the professional may reach out to you, the committee or a colleague to bounce an idea around. This approach can work, but it can also create obstacles that delay the completion of the alert, which may make it outdated by the time you publish it on your site. Help your professionals understand that advisories get stale quickly, so it pays to be fast.

That said, when professionals do decide to write alerts, encourage them to follow your firm's writing style, including format and word count. Adherence to your guidelines will shorten the amount of time required for editing, lessen the need for multiple revisions and make search engine optimization more efficient. (If you don't have a firm style guide, now is the time to create one!)

Also, make sure your professionals keep in mind the point of a client alert: spotlighting the firm's ability to identify issues and help clients resolve them. Many firms rush to publish an alert the moment an industry development is announced, which results in a description of the change without any substantive advice. This lessens the overall value of the alert. You may want to suggest that the professional write in a way that offers insights about the potential impacts of the development. For better readability, it's a good strategy to number or bullet those insights.

Tip 4: Prepare the Professional to Write for Publication

It's important for professionals to know how bylined articles get placed. For example, most media outlets require an article submission to be original and not published elsewhere, including on the firm's site as an alert. Other publications will accept client alerts, sometimes verbatim, or with a request to tweak the alert to suit their readers' needs.

Service professionals also should know that it's a PR best practice to offer an editor a proposed topic rather than a fully written article. There are several reasons to follow this approach. First, editors are short on time; a proposal can be a paragraph or bulleted points that an editor can assess quickly. Second, publications have their own style guidelines. Failure to adhere to these guidelines can result in the article being declined.

Finally, as mentioned before, timing is critical. Digital media allow outlets to publish content as news happens. Readers have come to expect this fast-paced news cycle. If a professional submits a topic two weeks after a pandemic-related issue arose, chances are it's already been covered by the publication and the editor will decline the pitch.

Tip 5: Share the Protocol for Working with Journalists (and What to Expect)

A media relations policy describes how management would like the firm and its professionals to handle media queries. Typically, the policy is part of the onboarding process. With everyone working remotely, it's a good time to redistribute your policy to remind colleagues of the firm's rules for interacting with the media. Highlight the need for anyone contacted by media, whether by phone or email, to notify the marketing team immediately — before doing an interview. The team needs to contact the reporter and get the details to vet the opportunity and coordinate the interview.

For professionals who want media coverage, advise them to be as helpful to reporters as possible. The pandemic has made garnering press coverage very competitive. Professionals can get a leg up by providing a great story idea and/or offering specific commentary about what is happening and how businesses and certain industries are affected. Make sure the pitch goes to the right reporter. After all, they're busy, and we can't impose on their time with irrelevant information.

Also, educate your professionals on what makes a successful pitch. Good pitches are succinct and offer insightful, newsworthy talking points. It is not appropriate to ask a reporter to discern a professional's perspective by attaching an article or client alert.

Finally, set expectations. There are no guarantees that a story will run, publish on a certain date or include the source (which could simply be due to the journalist avoiding regular use of the same sources). Even if the source is included, the quote or comment published may not be exactly what the professional said. Don't let this discourage your professionals from speaking to the media.

Stay Well and Adapt to Change

We hope these tips will help you and your colleagues adjust to the WFH environment, the pace of your marketing tactics, and your methods of interacting and moving programs forward. Integrating your strategies and tactics allows you to build more momentum from any individual marketing tactic and be efficient as changes keep coming.

Do you have questions about integrated marketing? Reach out to me, Liz Lindley, at llindley@jaffepr.com.