

Market your firm

Michelle Daniels shares an affordable 'pick and mix' of marketing ideas to build into your planning.

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Many smaller firms are overwhelmed by the choice of marketing channels available.

It certainly has become a noisy (and tougher) world, when it comes to getting your marketing noticed.

For many of these firms, there's uncertainty around how best to allocate their modest marketing budgets. Which activities would be affordable, but also bring the greatest audience engagement and leads?

You certainly don't have to break the bank to market your firm, but you do need to keep on your contacts', clients' and prospective clients' radars to keep it afloat.

Before you begin

To avoid disappointing results, it pays to be clear from the outset about the clients you want to attract.

Divide target clients or contacts into groups according to relevant profiles for your firm and areas of expertise (for example, private clients, businesses, not for profit organisations, those in a specific sector or location, life stage or stage of business evolution, etc).

This enables you to focus on one group at a time well, rather than spreading your efforts too thinly and for little effect.

It also helps if you have insight from any marketing you've already done and measured. For example, what marketing activities proved better than others for engagement or lead generation? Cut back on areas that didn't work so well in order to finance others that did.

Affordable marketing ideas

1 Play to the current point in the natural, fiscal or business year

Use the current time of year or season to share relevant insights, offers, news or events that put you on people's radars. People will be influenced by and focused on the 'now', so think about the current considerations on people's minds.

Examples here may include considerations around the end of the tax year and start of the next, responding to a new piece of legislation that has just come in, or common activities which clients generally do in a specific season or around their business year-end.

Even if your services have year-round relevance, can an aspect of the current time be used to shine a spotlight on a particular use for them? This will help to make your messages more appealing and relevant.

2 Get personal

If your clients and potential clients have signed up to your marketing, do make the most of personalised or tailored communications. People have become less engaged with marketing communications during the pandemic, but engage more with relevant and personalised ones.

Play this to your advantage and focus on smaller groups with tailored offers and insights – especially as most widely-used email software enables you to personalise. Don't forget to make the calls to action visibly clear and quick and easy to undertake.

Also, as most inboxes are overloaded, why not stand out more by reverting to a printed direct-mail piece from time

to time? This can be done using an environmentally friendly stock. Modern printing technology also enables you to add a personal touch for maximum attention.

3 Keep your social media profiles fresh and engaging

Build a good and loyal following by keeping your social media profile(s) fresh and full of interesting content. In doing so, try and select content that stimulates people to interact with you – for example, run polls or simple competitions, canvass feedback or share content which is fun and interesting.

On that last point, consider giving out helpful tips, ideas, suggestions or offers. Where possible use positively themed and eye-catching imagery or video to help direct more attention your way. People favour images and video over words.

Don't be afraid to feature your services' successes, client case studies and employee stories. The latter two are usually more appealing to followers.

Do respond quickly to any comments your audience poses to you. Also, if you struggle fitting in time to feed your social media, try free software such as Buffer to schedule multiple posts to appear over a given time.

On the subject of LinkedIn, which many firms use, if you have a Company or Showcase page post which is doing particularly well, consider investing a small amount to boost it. LinkedIn will then circulate it beyond your followers to a target audience profile you define.

Also with LinkedIn company pages, don't forget to select the 'notify employees' option for a particular post.

on a small budget



This will nudge and encourage them to like, comment or share it – and in doing so widen its circulation on the network. The same approach applies to LinkedIn Group pages, where you can also ‘notify members’ to a new post.

One final thing to check here is whether you are still on the right social network for your target audience. Respect that different networks have different demographics, moods and tones of voice. Be sure to be on the right one for your firm’s clients, contacts and areas of expertise.

4 Our survey says...

If you need fuel for your content marketing, consider a quick poll on an issue affecting your clients. Use free

software like Survey Monkey and turn the findings into a small easy to read report, white paper or news story.

Be seen to be the spokesperson on this insight and share your findings with your clients, target clients, contacts and relevant press. Ideally, you want to be able to offer some further insight into the research results and subtly relate this back in some way to your firm’s expertise.

Don’t attempt to produce a thesis; it’s better to run a simple survey that’s quick for people to complete. This will help you to get a good volume of respondents and generate some cost-effective publicity from the findings.

With those findings, the majority of people will be more interested in

the headlines and soundbites rather than reading the detail. They will also appreciate an indication of what this means for them as a result, and some pointers on next steps they should be taking.

5 Get out

Depending on who your target market is, try to get out and mingle among them. The more your team’s faces and the firm’s name are visible to them, the more likely they’ll remember you when they have a requirement. In the current environment, consider a blend of online and in-person events such as trade shows, exhibitions, webinars, forums and the like.

Also, see what events your suppliers or clients are running and support them. They’re usually free and will give you the chance to talk to potential target clients and valuable contacts. In fact, your client or supplier hosting the event may be happy to introduce you to particularly useful ones.

6 Collect ideas from your website and online advertising analytics

Look beyond the traffic volumes at the words and phrases people are putting into search engines to get to you. Sign up to Google Console or other webmaster tools and explore what the popular phrases are – and what’s not there that should be. Explore which pages in your site are bringing in the most traffic and which aren’t, then use this information to fine-tune your content and search engine optimisation (SEO).

Ditch keyword phrases and campaigns that aren’t working and focus on the ones that are. Also be

mindful that phrases and descriptions people type into a search engines can change over time. Find out how clients currently describe your business offering and the problems you fix. Be sure to echo their vocabulary in your SEO and marketing content.

Bear in mind that changes are afoot with Google Analytics. Google is phasing out its Google Analytics Universal (which most people use) in favour of GA4. The changes are due to come in at the start of July 2023 but it's worth preparing now so you don't lose your historical analytics data.

Also, if you know your target audience are online at specific times, days of the week or particular devices, opt for those in your online ad campaigns and don't waste money on others. You can specify the time of day, days of the week and devices you want to target in your online ad settings.

Another point, when it comes to online ad campaigns, is to be sure to review these regularly so you continue to get the best return for your ad spend.

7 Create an event to bring clients in

Create an opportunity to bring clients and target clients together either in-person or online. Consider organising a webinar, round table or surgery to discuss a topical issue.

Add extra appeal to the event by getting a speaker (for example, another client or complementary supplier/adviser) to share helpful insight too. A panel of speakers can be more attractive to people's time and interest than one.

Don't forget to follow up everyone who attends to build on interest and move them along the sales funnel – perhaps by sending them a special offer or further insight.

8 Make more of your email signature

If your firm sends out a lot of emails then consider changing your email signature to link to a specific news item, article, guide or white paper each month. This will help your clients and potential clients to grasp your broader range of expertise. It may also act as a prompt for a specific need they have.

In the same way, keep your website fresh with information – especially if a lot of your new business is recommended by existing clients and contacts. Many of those new clients are likely to look at your site before getting in touch.

Do be sure to regularly test the user experience of your site so it attracts and



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retains visitor attention. Also, after a website software update, check all the contact forms and enquiry points are working as they should.

9 Do a good deed

It's not easy getting your business in the press with a PR story about your services. Local journalists, community boards and sector-focused publications will be more amenable to stories of businesses 'doing good'.

Clients are also increasingly interested in a supplier's ethics and corporate responsibility and may select you over another which doesn't come across as so reputable.

See if there's a good cause you can support and think of activities you can do together. Be sure to support one which has a relevance to your firm and your clients. For example, can your people provide specific help or lend a hand with a particular challenge, etc? The more innovative and 'active' the activity, the more people will be interested.

Do be sensitive with how you manage the publicity for this. If you are using the opportunity to blatantly sell your firm, then people will switch off. Talk with the charity about how you can best support them.

Good charities will want to help you too to secure your loyalty. Many

have formed networking clubs of their benefactors to help sponsors gain commercial opportunities from their involvement in the charity. See if this is possible with yours.

10 Capitalise on a news story

If you can harness a speedy response, make the most of a relevant news story to share a view, offer help and insight. This is particularly good for professional firms who need to guide people on the implications of new legislation and the latest economic, political and business developments.

News takes all forms – good, bad, bizarre and, sadly, fake. Be careful that you select a news item wisely and consider the tone and impression you are adopting in your response.

If you can afford the investment, sign up to the platforms journalists use to request expert commentary for an issue they're writing about – for example, Response Source. Many often let you have a free trial to test it out. In doing so, be prepared that journalist deadlines are tight, and you will need to respond quickly in order for your comment to be included.

If you can use the opportunity to build a professional relationship with the journalist, in time this can make you their first point of call when they need an expert comment that draws on your expertise.

Summary

The best marketing is built on a strong knowledge of the target audience. In reality, you probably know more about your clients than you think but that shouldn't stop you trying to find out more. Client behaviour is never static. Their needs, preferences and interests are constantly changing – so are the marketing channels they use.

The good news is that the more you know, the more cost-effective your marketing can be. You can strip out the various activities that will be ignored and focus on the ones that will certainly put you on people's radars. Finally, try and build a bit of agility and spontaneity into your marketing and play to the moment. In our very busy and noisy world, it's more likely to get you noticed.



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