

Get More Prospects to Say 'Yes'

How Professional Service Firms Can Tip the Scales

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Many professional service firms find that getting clients through the door is tough these days, and the competition for available business is fierce. So what is the silver bullet that gets prospective clients to hire you regardless of the economy and instead of your competitors?

Add more and more value to your service.

One of the most significant marketing lessons to be learned is that people want value. It may seem oversimplified, but all human beings are motivated the same way. All decisions are made by balancing investment against perceived returned value.

Perceived returned value is the only reason people part with their money. When you create the perception that there is abundant value in your professional service, choosing you becomes obvious to prospective clients.

As soon as your competitor adds more perceived value to their service than your firm has, the scales start tipping in its favor. However, the better you know and understand your particular clients' wants, needs, motivators, and pain, the more value you can provide — and claim in your marketing.

Take a few minutes right now to look at your own materials and Web site through fresh eyes. Put yourself in the shoes of a prospective client and ask, "What do I get?" Now ask, "How can this firm or company solve my problems?" And finally ask, "Why this firm instead of another?" If there are no obvious and compelling answers to those questions, it is time to create everything afresh from your clients' perspective. Yes, you will have to spend

money, but what is the cost of letting all that business go elsewhere? It goes back to your own pain...

Is the cost of not doing this greater than the investment in materials that work? Only you can make that judgment.

So how can you add value to your professional service?

• Quality

What quality do clients expect from your work? Explain this by defining exactly what quality means to your clients. Is it precision? Sustainability? Excellence? Superiority? Reputation? Worth?

ly do they expect to see preliminary drafts and final results? How does your work delivery compare with the competition? How can you one-up them? Can you promise delivery of your work by offering a bonus of some sort if you don't deliver on time? Remember the power of Domino's old offer, "30 minutes or it's free."

• Expertise Provided

How does your level of expertise compare to what your competition offers? How does that benefit your clients? For example, if you're a lawyer who earned an

have unique processes or equipment? Do you possess any copyrighted materials or contracts that streamline your work and benefit your clients by saving time and effort? How else can you embellish your offering to create more perceived value that is meaningful to your clients? If they don't know they're getting something special, they can't possibly perceive it as a benefit that tips the scales in your favor. Spell it out. Remember, though, that you must explain these in terms of how they benefit your clients, because prospects will not necessarily make that leap if you simply list your services.

• Guarantee

Do you offer your clients a guarantee or assurance of your work? Do your competitors offer anything? Guarantees are all about reducing your prospects' perceived risk and making them more inclined to engage you. Can you formulate a promise that eliminates or reduces the risk a client has to take when they hire you? If you are confident in the quality of your work product, and how much would it actually cost your firm to reverse the risk from your clients onto yourself? Even if the guarantee is challenged from time to time, the goodwill earned in making the client happy will more than pay off in referrals and repeat business.

• Price

How does your price compare to the competition's in terms of the same levels of service, quality, response time, expertise, etc? To define exactly what price means to your clients, you must understand if there is a specific cost for your service that they expect to

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Simply listing the word 'quality' in an ad won't do it. You must define the quality you provide in as many qualitative terms as you can, even if they seem obvious to you. Oftentimes, when you state something that your competition doesn't, it appears that they don't provide it.

• Time

Is the timeliness and responsiveness of your service to your clients comparable to or better than what they would receive elsewhere? This refers to the various aspects of delivering your work and how long it takes to initiate a project and submit work or changes back to your clients for review. What exactly does 'time' mean to your clients? How quick-

LL.M in Taxation, and you simply list that as part of your signature, it just boosts your ego. But if you explain to your clients how that extra schooling and knowledge will save them money and protect their interests, you effectively turn that distinction into a client benefit. Determine what special talents, personalities, employees, or technology your firm possesses that add value to your professional service. Is that being communicated as value-added to your potential clients?

• Services Offered

Does your firm offer an impressive range of services that can help your clients in some way? How so? Explain this in terms that benefit them. Do you

pay. Why is that? Can you offer packages of services under a larger fee that offer the perception that clients are getting a lot of value for their money? Can you add or subtract services to adjust the package price? Can your services be quoted on a pre-determined fee basis that eliminates the perceived risk factor of the client paying too much in add-ons and extra work?

• **Perceived Level of Service**

You should strive to control how potential clients perceive your firm. This is about how your clients compare you to other professionals in the market who do similar work. Although it is subjective, how can you tip the scales of this perception? To add value to your perceived level of service, you must thoroughly understand your market and your competi-

tion. How can you change or reframe the emphasis of your clients' screening process or their encounter with your professional service to create a special experience that is uniquely yours?

A word of caution, though, when using any of the above value-added techniques: do not fall into the trap of using just single-word descriptions. Firms typically use single words to describe themselves when they don't understand their own innate value. Relative terms like 'quality,' 'price,' and 'service' are meaningless because people expect these things in all interactions with professionals. These terms don't state anything uniquely yours.

So, the only way to compete head-to-head with a firm that offers the same professional serv-

ices at a similar price is to offer more perceived value. These can be subtle or explicit value differences. It can be as simple as an info-packed, regularly updated blog or a Web site that is really easy to navigate. It can be the extraordinary way clients feel they are treated, or it can be more-attractive payment terms or a guarantee that your competition doesn't offer.

Think of this in terms of a scale. The more you add to one side, the more the scale is weighted in your favor and the less resistance there will be to purchase. There comes a point when you've added so much value to your own service that it simply doesn't make sense for a client to look elsewhere. That's the position you want to be in.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that sometimes

people do business with a particular firm because they just plain like it. But once you define all the reasons your clients secure their professional services from you, keep giving them more of the same. Truly, the more you give, the more you get. Adding more value is about going that extra step to be perceived as a cut above your competitors.

If you want more prospects to say yes, make your firm or practice outstanding by tipping the scales in your favor with exceptional value.❖

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