



ExpertiseMarketing<sup>SM</sup>

## The Integration Imperative™ February 2008 Survey

### Do PSF fee-earners WANT to Market & Sell?

#### Survey Results, Respondent Comments and Analysis of Findings

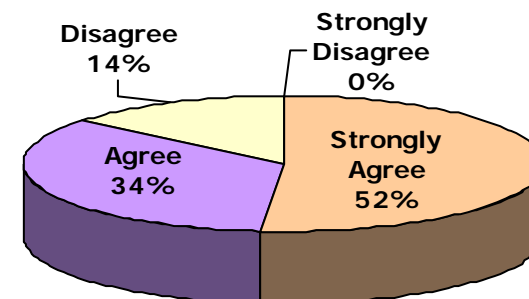
by  
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Many professional service firms (PSFs) still haven't really figured out how to get fee-earners and revenue-generating practitioners to *truly* embrace marketing and selling their services. Sure, more PSFs are employing carrot-and-stick programs to encourage fee-earners to market and sell. But how many firms have intentionally re-tooled hiring guidelines to hire professionals who *want* to market and sell?

The survey results and Suzanne Lowe's analysis are intended to help you find out how your professional firm compares to other PSFs at intentionally hiring fee-earning (i.e., not staff-side) professionals for Marketing and Business Development instincts and skills – and to consider critical issues that will improve effectiveness.

## Q1: Would you like your PSF to make formal efforts to hire fee-earners who want to market and sell?

### RESPONDENT COMMENTS



#### STRONGLY AGREE

- Gotta have customers in any business. What would a grocery store do without persons to buy the goods? No difference in PSF.
- I'm the second 'fee earning' professional my firm hired and the two of us are effectively enhancing business development and marketing - imagine if we got a third person onboard... or heck, several professionals for the marketing department!
- Marketing is a key element for firm and professional growth.
- CSF must have effective business development skills to be successful in their firm and industry.
- Professionals often react viscerally to the terms marketing and business development. But everyone agrees that the client-facing activity that generates sales and revenue is critical to the success of the firm. So what we try to do is outline a program of activity that is centered around presenting and discussing areas of expertise that we know the client is interested in discussing or hearing about. This transforms the business acquisition process from "selling" to "attracting."
- Business development is a critical part of business and it should be resourced seriously.
- Absolutely! A few "professionals" who are not required to bill could make us more money than a whole slew of marketers. In all my years in PSFs, I have only seen one firm (KPMG LLP) that had a professional who was not required to bill. He won the firm lots of business and kept KPMG top of mind by attending functions where clients were present.
- We're moving to this approach.
- These people are valuable because they usually bring significant leads and business with them. They also tend to see BD as more of a priority than the technical professionals.

#### AGREE

- Too much focus is on technical expertise and very little on marketing / selling, yet there is a strong focus on 'growing the business'.
- Both skill sets are needed - dedicated trained marketing staff and professionals who understand marketing and are prepared to dedicate the necessary efforts.
- Fee earners have more of a desire to succeed.
- At a certain revenue threshold, one needs a dedicated, not shared, marketing and sales lead person.
- Although they seem to have other contracts with other firm. So, are they representing PSF exclusively.
- We have some natural marketers who actively participate in expertise marketing -- would like to see more.

#### DISAGREE

- Maybe in the capacity of door-opener, but the clients are primarily hiring the project manager. The other downside that I see is that technical staff will gladly let others cultivate relationships and when those people leave the firm, the relationships go with them. I do agree that trying to turn technical staff into sellers is very challenging, if not almost impossible.
- We have always looked for individuals with 'marketing/sales' personality qualities.
- They are hard to find and once you have them, to keep them focused. Once they have work to do BD efforts have a way of getting pushed to the side. That is never good. A well balanced mix of work and BD is essential and difficult to attain. I believe it still works better if the BD person opens the door and then passes the baton to the design professional when the time is appropriate.

## Q1 Analysis

More than 86% of our survey respondents answered this question positively, with a nearly audible yell, essentially saying: “Yes, of course we want PSFs to hire fee-earners who want to market and sell! It’s vitally important for our firm’s success!”

End of story, right? Nope. Take a closer look at this question’s respondent comments. Now consider what WASN’T said. Except for one person’s brief remarks about wanting his firm to hire for “marketing/sales personalities,” not one of the respondents said he wished his PSF would make formal efforts to hire fee-earners who want to market. All other remarks were overwhelmingly related to business development or selling.

Why did our respondents so wholeheartedly leave Marketing in the dust? I think I know why. But first allow me to introduce an important viewpoint, with humble thanks to my secret friend Sharon for sharing her thoughts.

Business development (aka selling) is a one-to-one activity. At the end of the day, the only people who can ultimately sell are a firm’s practitioners; they are the “products” clients are considering for eventual engagement. But strategic marketing is a one-to-many activity. It is a nuanced, complex, firm-wide initiative that requires a set of competencies that go deeper than the sales-support or communications mantle many PSFs assign to what they call Marketing.

Clearly, any PSF needs practitioners who can -- and who want to -- write and speak well. It’s in collaborating on expertise-based marketing communications (white papers, speeches, seminars) that practitioners can work effectively with their firm’s marketing programs. But for firm-wide marketing, the potential for boundary breeches and confused accountabilities creeps in when those one-to-one fee-earners want to get involved in the one-to-many aspects of marketing. Don’t we all know practitioners who think they’re good “marketers”?

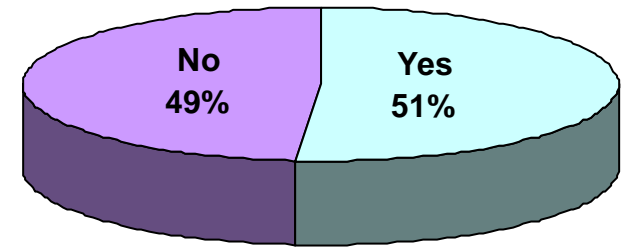
Think about this: No matter how a PSF implements its marketing program, most senior marketers warn fee-earners away from conducting silo’ed client perception research, developing their own sub-brands, hoarding names in their own personalized database, developing their own brochures or distributing their own press releases. These initiatives are best managed by a focused unit of professional marketers or senior leaders with an overarching firm-wide purview.

So – drum roll – here’s why I think so many of this survey’s respondents called for practitioners who want to sell, but didn’t appear to call for practitioners who want to market.

**Most PSF leaders, practitioners and (gulp) even some marketers themselves, are young in their understanding of what marketing is, what it is supposed to do, and the value that it can provide.** In the evolution of professional services marketing today, it’s easier to conceive of the marketing function as sales-support (guiding the development of proposal responses and pitch presentations) or as tactical marketing communications. These functions are very important, of course, but their prevalent use in PSFs (as opposed to marketing strategy functions) indicates there’s a big learning curve about the broader spectrum of what could be a competitively effective marketing function. And respondents’ answers to this question reveal the challenges PSFs face in integrating their Marketing and Business Development functions. I’ll address these challenges in my upcoming book, *The Integration Imperative*<sup>™</sup>.

## Q2: In the last year, has your PSF made formal efforts to hire fee-earners who want to market and sell?

### RESPONDENT COMMENTS



### YES

- We certainly look for team members who are customer centered. Nerds in the closet are not for us. Need communication skills as well as technical know how. There is a need for "task" people but we believe that technical persons can also sell. We look for both.
- Like I said earlier, my firm finally took the effort - it's been three years since they hired my boss (who has nearly doubled the firm's client base) and I'm their second hire.
- We look for professionals who can and will attract new business on the basis of relevant and demonstrable expertise.
- Yes, we hold quarterly staff meetings where everyone shares about their project work with the goal being when technical staff are on site and someone asks 'what's new at Jordan' or an opportunity arises we could assist with they are ready to share about our skill set and recognize the opportunities available.
- We have a "Competency Based" Selection Process that we use for interviewing candidates for key positions, among other areas of focus, marketing and business development is included. Questions are presented as "Describe a situation where you have used this skill, etc." Candidates are then scored and ranked against each other to determine which is the best fit for our firm.
- The only sales people hired in the past year has been fee based.
- We're looking for people with the proven capability to assess needs and close business.
- Have one individual on a fixed monthly fee and one individual strictly on commission who is also representing numerous development companies.
- They have tried with limited success.

### NO

- Again, technical talent is in such short supply that all efforts have been made there.
- Not done formally - marketing and business development are considered an asset but not a necessity.
- Demand for CSP is high...hard to be so selective and past on a good CSP who are not "good" business developers. Currently trying to increase business development effectiveness through formalized training.
- No resources available.
- We hire technical staff who claim to be good at sales.
- Law firms would never do this. Ever.

## Q2 Analysis

Respondents' answers to this question illustrate the ongoing love-hate relationship that exists regarding business development (aka selling) in most PSFs today. When asked if their PSFs have made formal efforts to hire fee-earners who want to market and sell, respondents' answers split almost evenly into Yes and No camps. Intentionally seeking to hire fee-earning practitioners who want to market and sell still appears to represent a frightening cultural hurdle. For many PSFs, the embrace of overt selling is anathema.

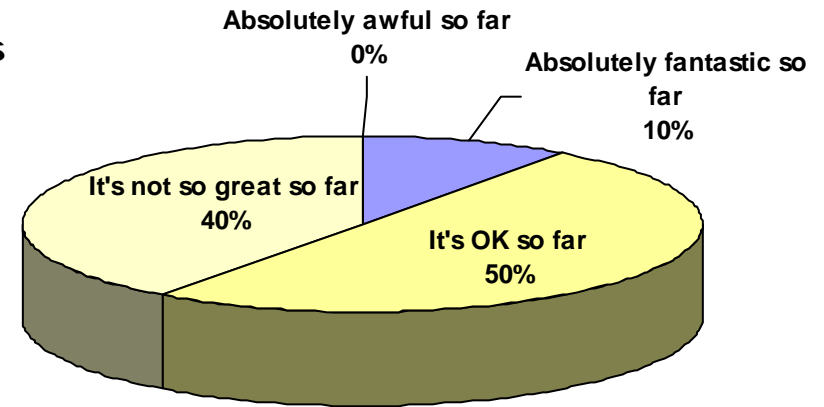
Moreover, the Yes-No split appeared to be quite dramatic. On one side of their comments, respondents presented an extreme rejection of "selling" ("[We'd] never do this ... ever!"). The other side included strongly positive comments, and even ranged to a wholesale embrace of screening practitioners who demonstrate marketing and selling competencies and "fit."

In my upcoming book, *The Integration Imperative™*, I'll explore the dysfunctional meanings many PSFs have assigned to the terms "Marketing" and "Selling," to their own – and their clients' – detriment.

My prediction: over time, as PSFs let go of these out-of-date definitions, and as they become more focused on competing, and serving clients, effectively, the "Yes" side of this chart will increase in size.

**Q3: In the last year, your PSF has made formal efforts to hire fee-earners who *want* to market and sell. How's the effort going?**

**RESPONDENT COMMENTS**



**ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC SO FAR**

- We are making great improvements and causing more business opportunities (cross-selling is huge now) - of course, to marketing professionals we want to pick up the pace more so but accounting firms tend to be slow in pro-actively seeking clients (in fact, they tend to be more reactionary).

**IT'S OK SO FAR**

- We call it looking for the "needle in the haystack". Technical skills and people skills together are more difficult to find. Not impossible, just more difficult.
- This is a hard concept for a lot of people to embrace. They either want someone else to do the business acquisition ( salespeople - doesn't ever work ), or they falsely believe that deliberately attracting new clients is not necessary if you simply do good work.
- We have improved the quality of our hires and probably more importantly, passed on candidates that did not have the right skill mix for the position. Still working on our internal staff's ability to objectively evaluate.
- Once people are fully engaged on projects it is difficult to get them to participate in marketing efforts.

**IT'S NOT SO GREAT SO FAR**

- There was no direction until I came on board.
- Sales discipline is still an issue, even for new hires who were to be focused primarily on sales.

## Q3 Analysis

Only 10% of the respondents to this question said the effort was going “absolutely great!” The vast majority were lukewarm or negative. A review of their comments revealed a clear subset has been distracted by their firms’ critical need for practitioner talent; understandably, this has diluted their focus on hiring for marketing and business development skills or instincts.

But their comments also revealed two other critically important nuggets.

First, it’s a challenge to find the right set of marketing and business development capabilities, especially if the firm has yet to define them for itself! A firm’s recruiters and hiring staffers need standards to objectively evaluate marketing and business development skills. They can’t be expected to conjure them up in a vacuum. This viewpoint repeats a theme that, by now, rings loudly through this entire survey: there are widely varying definitions of marketing and business development, and a general lack of understanding of the value these functions could deliver in a PSF. No wonder our respondents rated their firms’ efforts so harshly.

Second, if there’s no one leading the effort to hire for a specific set of marketing and business development skills and accountabilities, it’s likely not going to be as successful as it could be. Someone, or at least a well-defined team, has to lead this endeavor!

Increasingly, PSFs will realize the strategic significance of redefining their marketing and business development into functions instead of roles. I’ll expand on this in The Integration Imperative™.

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