



# Adopting a Professional Services Mindset

---

**Six Opportunities for Enhancing your Business and Brand**

**DDB<sup>o</sup>**

## Introduction

Eight years ago I moved to another province within Canada to take a position with the brand consultancy Interbrand in Toronto. A few months later the move prompted a tax issue that was not in my favor. Having done what I could to resolve it myself with no success, I engaged a local accounting firm and was assigned a professional. Since I had never met this individual nor worked with the firm before, I entered a new relationship with all the associated emotions and considerations while lacking the technical acumen to tackle the issue myself.

The potential monetary penalty was not overwhelming, but was still material and caused some anxiety. Within the first ten minutes of meeting my new accountant, the issue was dissected, a plan made, and an assurance given that it would be resolved to my benefit. This lifted my spirits immediately, and the promise was actualized when I received money back from the tax authority for the move instead of being required to pay.

In short, I had a terrific experience with a professional service. It was professional because the accountant and firm came with all requisite credentials and experience to handle the problem. But the unique aspect was the personal, comforting nature of the service delivery, which helped cement what is now an eight-year relationship. In fact, I have been so pleased with the professional services provided that I have made the accountant the executor for my estate if my wife is unable to fulfill the role.

This story illustrates the main objective of any professional service business, which is to establish a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship.

This applies to the broad range of professional services including: law firms, management consultancies, advertising agencies, architects, wealth management or private banking services, and accounting firms. The business of professional services is to take away problems and/or capture benefits, and that is exactly what my accountant did for me.

Professional services are fascinating and offer amazing lessons in strategy and management. In fact, Tom Peters, management consultant and author, has said, “The professional service firm – with its obsession with clients and projects – must be the new organization

manufacturers and many others are adopting the practices historically the purview of agencies, accountancies, and consultancies.

The business reasons for this adoption are strategic and include enhanced differentiation and the potential of greater margin in consultative services versus a basic commodity offer or supply of product. These businesses know that the success of professional services is based equally on the quality of the client relationship and on the quality of the solution to a performance problem – and this can be applied to any industry seeking to establish or enhance consultative revenue streams.

# The business of professional services is to take away problems and/or capture benefits.

model.” Having worked in the former Big Six, for a wealth management firm, a global brand consultancy, and now an influential communication company, I have been the recipient of many insights and best practices relevant to any industry.

Because professional services are nearly 100% intangible they must excel at branding, marketing and such other processes as business development and knowledge management. That is why so many businesses regardless of industry now conduct themselves with the mind-set of a professional service firm. Hospitals, hotels, technology companies, travel agencies, retailers, leisure companies, dentists, spas,

This paper explores key challenges to branding and marketing professional services. These challenges take into account industry complexities and anomalies. Frustrating at face value, these are actually opportunities for gaining competitive advantage for those who address them strategically and creatively alongside ample doses of diplomacy, patience and a sense of humor. And remember, the majority of what is covered can be applied to any industry or business.

Prior to addressing these challenges, a quick look at professional services will help set the stage.



**Jeff Swystun** is Chief Communications Officer, DDB Worldwide. He is responsible for the DDB brand including intellectual capital, marketing, internal communications, and knowledge management. Jeff has spoken at more than 80 conferences in over 25 countries. He is the editor and author of numerous books, papers and reports including “The Brand Marketers Report” and “The Brand Glossary.” Jeff’s work has appeared in over 250 publications and on numerous television programs including CNBC’s “Squawk Box” and “On the Money.”

### Professional Service Essence

Whether it be a consulting, accounting, law, advertising or architecture firm, common characteristics apply. Each involves a specialty that demands highly talented people (who can be highly demanding). Most firms also share the pursuit of a new and big idea that can be repeatable and trainable to efficiently and effectively grow revenue. And though their services are offered to a broad spectrum of clients they must be delivered in a customized manner through high levels of face-to-face interaction.

The essence of professional services is that they work to prepare clients for the future, preempt the undesirable, control what can be controlled, and identify new opportunities.

Based on these commonalities, firms tend to share the same business model. They often rely on the notion of leverage in organizational design for profitability, structure and process, and career path strategies. They quickly develop the posture or culture of being either a hunter or farmer originally extolled by David Maister, an expert in professional service strategy. Then they endlessly debate how best to go to market and usually arrive at an unnecessarily complex matrix involving some combination of service, geography, industry, and/or client segmentation.

The primary difference is that a hunter is proactive and aggressive in new business while the farmer attempts to nurture and grow existing relationships. However, today one must do both to be successful. Yet the vast majority of firms are simply terrible at defining their own strategy. Firms tend to react to any opportunity or expression of interest from a prospective client making them quite willing to deviate from “strategy.” Or they chase management and service fads. Or they bluntly apply defined service offerings to a broad range of client business problems epitomizing the maxim, “If you only have a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

In my experience, these strategic issues tend to manifest themselves in six key branding and marketing challenges. Once identified and managed, these challenges can be turned to advantage.

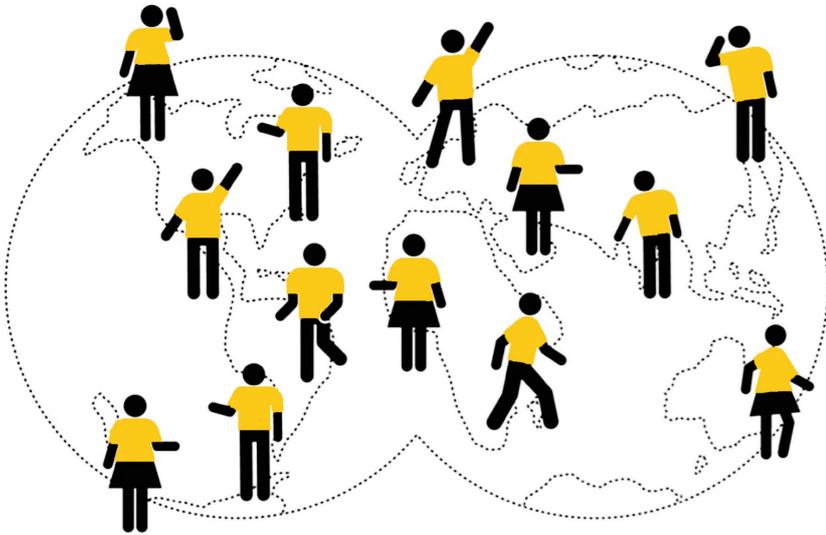
# 1

## Challenge : Are We One Brand?

Looking at a global consulting or accounting firm, one immediately assumes that all offices work in lockstep, processes are uniform, services and methodologies are consistent, and all information is shared in real time across the organization. Often, though, global firms are loose-knit confederations linked only by a logo.

### Are You Truly One Brand?

---



---

The reasons for this are many, including the following:

- Many firms have grown through acquisition and acquired entities retain much of their own culture
- Entrepreneurial leaders in the region bristle at (if not outright ignore) corporate mandates
- Language, culture and practice demand local customization
- With growth, it is difficult to maintain attributes that first made the brand successful
- Financial and organizational policy may create more division than unity

While at Interbrand I learned the phrase, “Brand strategy brings business strategy to life.” This is one of the key issues in professional services: In the absence of a clear business strategy, any brand strategy will do.

Firms often get caught up in their own machinations and lose sight of serving the client. James Brian Quinn wrote in *Strategies for Change: Logical Incrementalism*, “A good deal of the corporate planning I have observed is like a ritual rain dance; it has no effect on the weather that follows, but those who engage in it think it does. Moreover, it seems to me that much of the advice and instruction related to corporate planning is directed at improving the dancing, not the weather.”

There is a fairly simple planning process I have refined over the years. From the articulated and accepted Business Strategy, the Marketing and Communication Strategy is derived. I wouldn't dare propose one template for this transition, but I do suggest that it cover objectives and measurement (both individual metrics and associated targets). Then in sequence, to be determined are: activities that will help achieve the objectives and reach the targets; processes needed to carry out the activities efficiently and effectively; and, lastly, the type of organization and individuals needed to make sure everything happens. The sequence is important because all too often plans start with specific individuals in mind, and that can unduly influence strategic direction.

### Brand Strategy Brings Business Strategy to Life

---



I have seen plans sculpted around certain individuals (“we’ll get Tom on that”). When this happens no one remembers to ask if what that individual is doing is strategically correct and valuable. By starting with activities and processes, the plan is more focused and removes the subjectivity that comes into play. Lastly, the key is to monitor and measure the plan, making necessary adjustments. The individual metrics, the bundle of metrics chosen, and how they relate to each other are all critical.

An interesting example is McKinsey & Company. The firm is driven by a common mission, aspirations and guiding principles. This has allowed them to stay true to a solid yet evolving positioning that provides for changing conditions. Therefore, no short-term opportunities escape them.

It has provided what I call “the guardrails and goalposts” for communicating a long-term vision while allowing for strategic flexibility in how the vision can be achieved. David Maister has often cited the need for companies to establish their “non-negotiable standards of behavior.” Whatever you call it, the McKinsey example provides a flexible framework for their business and brand strategy.

## What Guides McKinsey

McKinsey has a dual mission: to help our clients make distinctive, lasting and substantial improvements in their performance and to build a great firm that is able to attract, develop, excite and retain exceptional people. We support our mission with four aspirations and guiding principles.

### Aspirations

- Serve our clients as primary counselors on overall performance
- Deliver the best of the firm to every client
- Create an unrivaled environment for superior talent
- Govern ourselves through a values-driven partnership

### Guiding Principles:

#### Impact-Driven Professional Approach

- Adhere to professional standards
- Follow the top management approach
- Play an integral role in problem solving, implementation, and capability building
- Build enduring, trust-based relationships
- Strive for superior quality and distinctive impact

#### Being and Delivering the Best

- Serve all clients as firm clients by leveraging our scale and global network
- Develop and disseminate state-of-the-art management practices
- Manage client and firm resources in a cost-effective manner

#### Caring Meritocracy, Committed to People

- Develop and excite our people through active apprenticeship and stretching entrepreneurial opportunities
- Foster an inclusive and nonhierarchical working atmosphere
- Uphold the obligation to dissent
- Respect the individual's responsibility for balancing personal and professional life
- Demonstrate care and concern for every individual

#### Self-governing, One-firm Partnerships

- Live by the principles of participative partnership through involvement, collaboration, and trust
- Benefit from individual freedom and assume the obligations of mutual accountability and self governance
- Maintain a meritocracy
- Operate as one firm

This is a promise that McKinsey makes internally and externally. They are always striving to deliver on that promise and, therefore, their professionals and support staff know, understand and live these values with every interaction. This drives a client experience model that instructs all at McKinsey on how to behave in order to distinguish themselves from others in the “how” things are done, as well as the “what.”

This leads to an issue that firms wrestle with daily. Professional services do not exist without professionals: great creatives at advertising agencies, leading tax attorneys, guru strategy consultants with best-selling books, and award-winning architects. These are the stars that help build the brand but have developed their own brands. The risk is, these stars are mobile and could go to a competing firm or start their own.

Studies have shown that clients leave individuals as often as they do the professional service brand, so it is critical to ensure “stars” understand the value in the association. I conducted a survey on this subject in 2004 on the site, *brandchannel.com*. Jim Speros, now Chief Marketing Officer at Marsh & McLennan who at the time of the survey held the same role at Ernst & Young LLP, wrote, “The firm is clearly the dominant and most valued resource. Ask the individuals to try to get appointments and RFPs without the firm’s brand and you’ll go broke fairly quickly. People are obviously important AFTER you’re in the consideration set.”

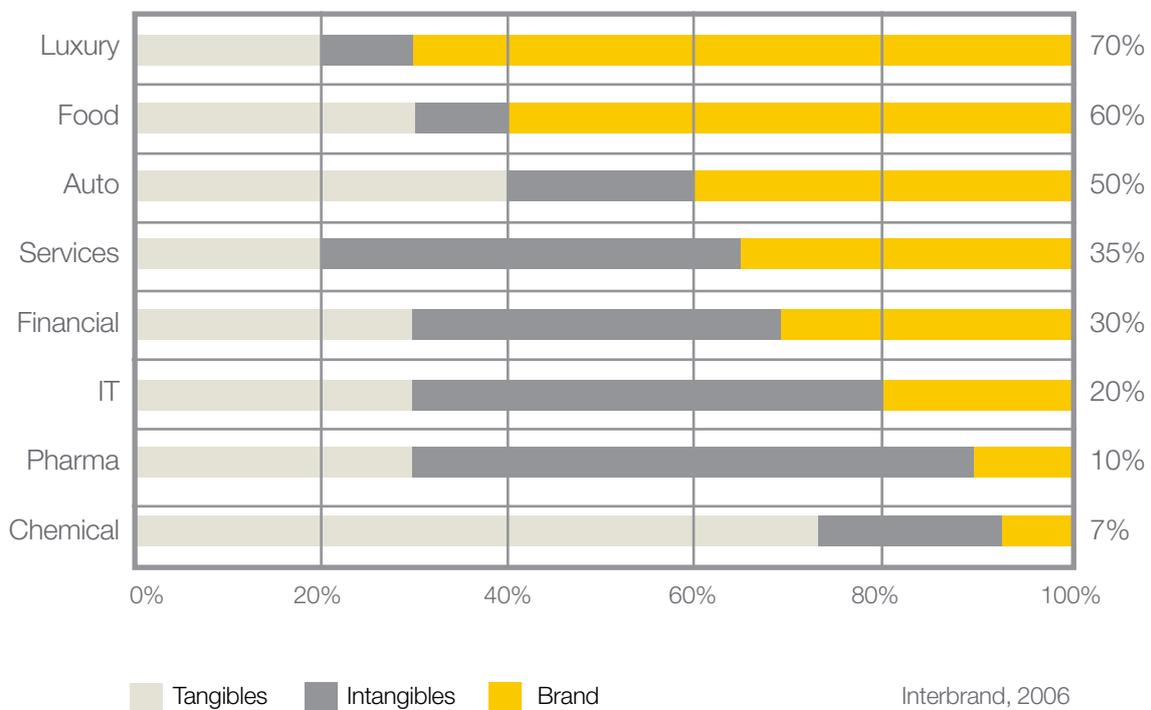
Suffice it to say, a strong brand makes selling easier. It gives a firm permission and rights not available to those without similar awareness and track record. Clearly, I am advocating one brand strategy but not necessarily a 100% rigid one. In fact, flexibility in managing the brand can allow a healthy balance in top-down consistency and local entrepreneurialism. This is the “70/30 Rule” advocated in the DDB Yellow Paper, “*Brand Consistency Redefined*”; more a rule of thumb than a strictly assigned percentage, it is meant to illustrate that a brand can capture more opportunities if some leeway is established in its interpretation and use.

**In fact, flexibility in managing the brand can allow a healthy balance in top-down consistency and local entrepreneurialism.**

## Challenge 2 : The Tangible and Intangible Divide

Professional services are largely intangible because what is actually being sold is a promise. Therefore, there are fewer businesses harder to market and sell. And common marketing and sales approaches do not apply. Yet, there is a great deal of value locked up in services. According to Interbrand, 35% of the overall value of a service is attributable to the brand and a further 45% is “other intangibles.” The other intangibles include strength of leadership, patents and trademarks, and proprietary methodologies.

### Brand Value by Industry



Intangibles are difficult to define, package and measure, and therefore require active and creative management. The challenge to the professional service marketer is to constantly increase and associate the tangibility of the offer. To do so, Philip Kotler suggests addressing the inseparability of service from provider, the variability in the quality of delivery, and the perishability of services (e.g., a strategy today is irrelevant next week). Tactically, firms can invest in thought leadership with white papers, speeches, Webinars, books or other methods that help make more real the firm and what it offers.

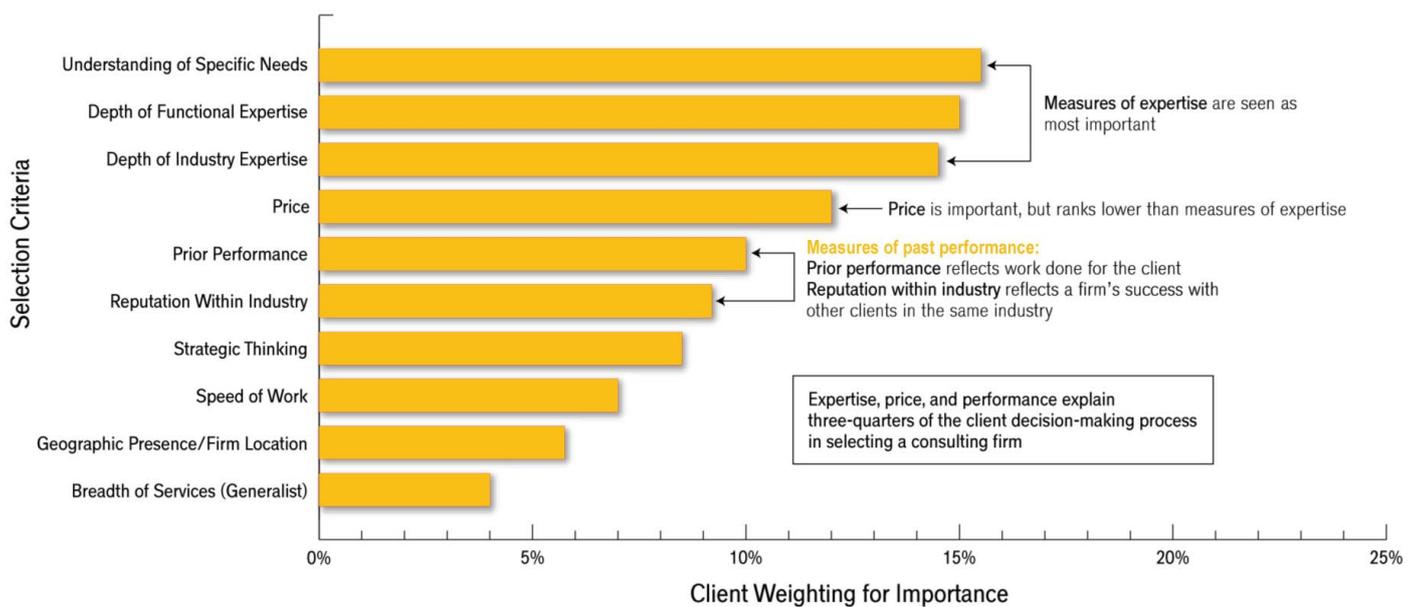
Increasingly this is difficult because what have historically been differentiators are now commodities; strategic advice is being disbursed at no charge just to get in the door, quality is a given, and everyone has great people. Today, marketers will only succeed if they know their audience’s chief concerns and marry capabilities to meet them. This leads us to the next challenge.

# Challenge 3 : How Clients Buy

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famously circumspect detective, Sherlock Holmes, once remarked, “The client to me is a mere unit, a factor in a problem.” That sounds cold but many in professional services do call clients “accounts,” effectively removing the human complexity of the relationship. Peter Drucker opined, “The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits and sells itself. Ideally, marketing should result in a customer who is ready to buy.”

This is a critical observation for professional services. No one goes out daily to shop for a lawyer or advertising agency. Clients purchase the service when they have a real need, and it is the job of marketers to position their firm in the first consideration set (or ideally as the sole choice). From the client’s viewpoint suppliers of services are numerous and largely undifferentiated. So they choose based on indications of quality and expertise.

## Criteria Used by Client to Select Consultancies



Source: "Consulting Client Satisfaction: Leading Firms' Performance, Reputation, and Brand Awareness," Kennedy Information Research Group

Kennedy Information conducted a survey on the criteria used for management consultancy selection. The top three criteria relate to measures of expertise and the balance involve price and prior indicators of performance. It is a highly objective study which missed the critical human elements involved in purchasing professional services. David Maister has pointed out that when buying, clients feel insecure, threatened, are assuming personal risk, and are impatient, worried, exposed, ignorant, skeptical, concerned and suspicious. That is an incredible array of emotions that firms must recognize and mitigate as clients go through the decision process and are being served.

The skill of listening is absolutely critical. Many professionals suffer from the flaw of talking too much about themselves and their firm. A phrase I enjoyed from training offered by DDB’s parent company, Omnicom, and worth writing in ink on your hand before meeting with a current or prospective client is, “Be interested, not interesting.” This was deftly illustrated in an episode of NBC’s, *The Office*, when during a sales call one character complimented the prospect on the size of the fish he had recently caught. Unfortunately, his ignorant companion when onto tell an overwhelming fish story of his own in an effort impress and they ended up losing the sale.

Over the years I have arrived at my own consideration set meant to address the totality of factors a client goes through when buying. These are organized by what the client needs or wants, what gets you to the door, and what a client actually decides on.

It is pretty clear that clients engage professional services to improve their business performance (take away a pain and/or capture an opportunity). What puts you in the first consideration set are many of the attributes identified in the Kennedy Information piece. However, clients actually decide based on a mix of rational and emotional factors. Chemistry is huge as are the human factors of empathy, trust and integrity. Price is always going to play a part, but as Warren Buffet has said, “Price is what you paid. Value is what you get.”

**Rational and Emotional Client Decision-Making**

What do clients want?	What gets you in the door?	What do clients decide on?
Solutions Enhanced business performance Return-on-Investment	Reputation Relevant experience Relevant expertise Proven approach Client List Size Geographic reach	Team’s abilities, chemistry & rapport Understanding of problem Differentiated point-of-view Delivery capabilities Trust Empathy Confidence Integrity Price

Clients keep mental checklists of every interaction. They are asking themselves, do they understand my industry and my business, recognize my personal drivers for decision-making, are responsive and proactive, tell me things I do not know, and do they advise me in language I can understand? In short, do they care enough to make me successful?

While at Interbrand, I was involved in an engagement to rebrand a global consulting firm. Much of our research supported the points made in the previous paragraph and went further to clarify the nature of the relationship between professional service and client. We found that professional services exist in humble but proud support and we used the analogy of Tenzing Norgay, the man behind Sir Edmund Hillary’s successful ascent of the summit of Mount Everest.

Norgay said, “If it is a shame to be the second man on Mount Everest, then I will have to live with this shame.” This epitomized the insight that professional services help make the client successful and that they find satisfaction and reward through the accomplishments of those they support. We went so far as to suggest renaming the consultancy “Tenzing” (which obviously did not happen).

# 4

## Challenge 4: Marketing is a Dirty Word

It should be relatively straightforward: Define your market, identify prospects, find out what they need, present and sell the service to them, deliver to their full satisfaction, and never lose them as a client. Sounds easy, right? Of course it isn't. Over the years I have seen professional service providers either oversimplify their marketing to the point of irrelevance or overcomplicate it to the point of immense confusion.

You cannot dabble in anything you need to do well. And professional services need to market excellently. For years law firms and accountancies disdained the very word "marketing." It was uncouth to proactively seek clients, and though that legacy is being eradicated, there is behavioral hangover.

All now accept that they must "market," but what has resulted are efforts that are largely ad hoc, flavor of the month, or copycat. This has produced a sad irony that even a mediocre but sustained and consistent marketing program beats any of these other attempts. A related thought comes from Seth Godin, who has remarked, "Professional service marketing is certainly among the 'safest' I've ever seen. [But] because it takes no risks, it's actually quite risky."

The risk is even greater today according to a recent study on client propensity to switch, particularly in management consulting, where 72% of purchasers are ready to do just that. These statistics come from *raintoday.com*, a site focused on marketing and sales in professional services. Potential switchers in other categories include:

- IT consulting and services (67%)
- Marketing, advertising and PR (63%)
- Training (61%)
- Architecture, engineering and construction (54%)
- HR consulting (53%)
- Legal services (52%)
- Accounting and financial services (52%)

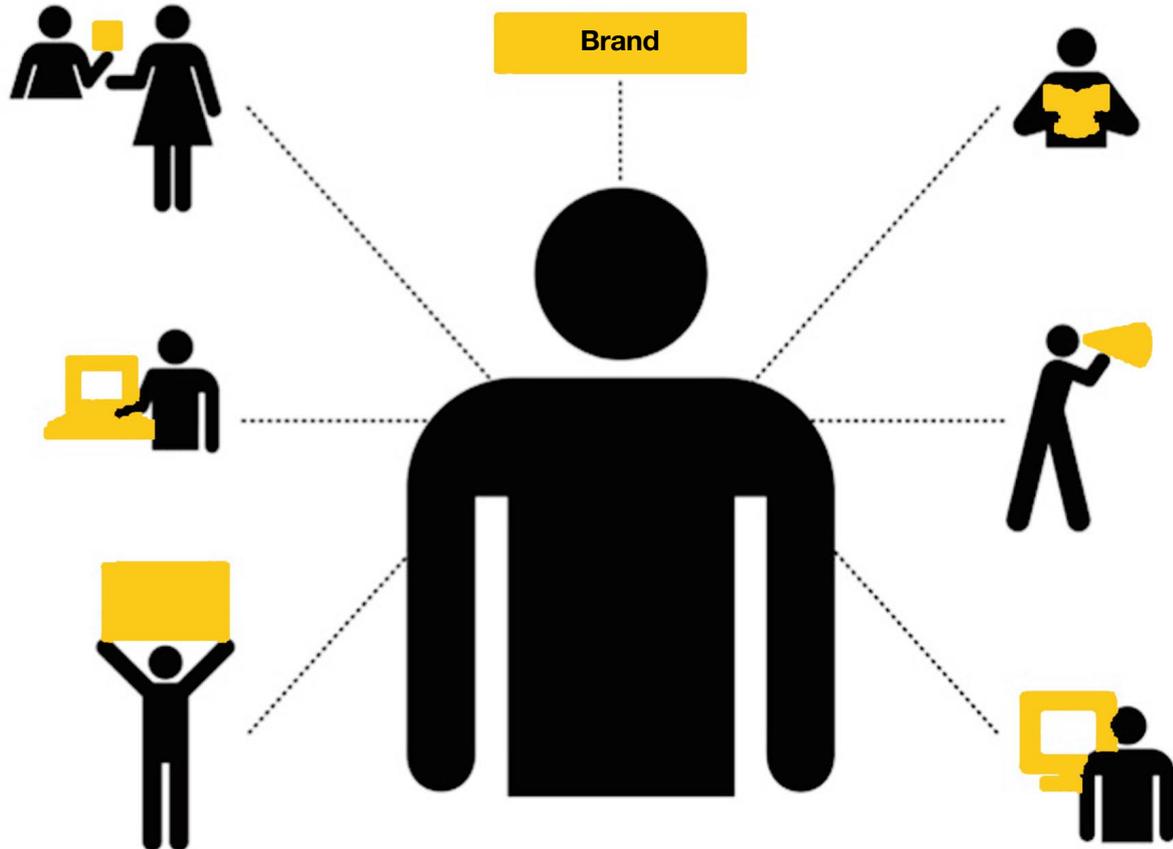
Peter Drucker says that "the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous." Based on the high desire to switch, there is going to be an environment of frantic selling because service quality and marketing are obviously not fulfilling their promise. In this market it is good to be reminded of Seven Fundamental Principles from the book, *Management Consulting: A Guide to the Profession*:

1. Regard the clients' needs and requirements as the focal point of all marketing
2. Remember that every client is unique
3. Don't misrepresent yourself
4. Don't oversell
5. Refrain from denigrating other consultants
6. Never forget that you are marketing a professional service
7. Aim at an equally high professional performance in marketing and in execution

The last point supports the fact that you cannot dabble in marketing. And you cannot make it ad hoc, or follow fads or imitate. A firm must find out what works for them through consistent experimentation married to their values and culture and supportive of their strategy. In terms of available marketing tactics, the list is extensive.

## Tactics and Channels

---



- 
- Seminars
  - Speeches
  - Articles
  - Reports
  - Webinars
  - Podcasts
  - Papers
  - Websites
  - Advertising
  - Email alerts
  - Blogs
  - Social and business networking sites
  - Research
  - Sponsorship
  - Newsletters
  - Brochures

All have some utility and can belong to a marketing strategy. But they should be chosen and applied with an understanding of how each tactic interacts with the others and its frequency of use. So how much is enough when marketing? Too much and the prospect or client feels spammed and harassed. Tara Lemmey writes, "There is a very fine line between good customer service and stalking." Too little, however, and clients or prospects do not feel loved.

The number of "touches" required for a prospect to even acknowledge your existence is an interesting exercise. Broderick & Associates conducted a study that identified the number of touches needed for a prospect to be aware and predisposed to professional services. They arrived at 17. That is 17 times in which the client had some combination of contact with the firm through proactive marketing (e.g., keynote speaker) or just passive existence (e.g., Yellow Pages listing). It demonstrates how much you need to be there when the client is ready to buy. It is an art to stay top of mind and a valuable resource rather than an intrusive annoyance.

Undoubtedly the best marketing tool is the referral. But referrals require more effort than cold calling; that is, consistently delighted clients. The same, of course, goes for up-selling and cross-selling to an existing client. They all demand time, money and people resources. Interestingly, the majority of firms have no formal program for marketing to existing clients. This is difficult to understand when as incumbent you are harder for competitors to dislodge, the sale has a higher probability of success, and a relationship is already in place.

This can be attributed to the reluctance to ask for more but it is also because the majority of firms I have encountered honor, celebrate and reward business gained from new clients far more generously than they do the maintenance and growth of existing ones. One individual in business development at a professional service firm I consulted for bemoaned the fact that his boss "got more excited when we sold a \$500,000 consulting project to a new client than when an existing client awarded us \$1,000,000 more a year in recurring revenue for the next three years."

**It is an art to  
stay top-of-mind  
and a valuable  
resource rather  
than an intrusive  
annoyance.**

# 5

## Challenge 5: Knowledge is the Product and Knowledge (Shared) is Powerful

Tangibility is closer at hand for professional services than most are aware. Brand building in professional services must be built on intellectual assets, whether it be creativity in communications, analytical processes in research firms, or strategy methodologies in consultancies. BCG and Bain have used thought leadership to propel their brands while McKinsey uses it to sustain its brand (McKinsey Quarterly has published since 1964). In his book, *The Wealth of Knowledge*, Thomas A. Stewart writes, “Intellectual assets have become more important than any other because only by means of knowledge can companies differentiate their work from their competitors.”

We hear certain terms a lot in professional services: intellectual capital, thought leadership, and knowledge management – impressive but not entirely plain speak. Let’s break them down:

- Intellectual capital is the (collective) expertise of a professional services firm’s experts (present and past) that embodies the knowledge and methods they use to solve client problems (source: *The Bloom Group*)
- Thought leadership is intellectual capital codified and marketed – and (most important) that the market views as superior (source: *The Bloom Group*)
- Knowledge management is the process and organization used to capture, package and disseminate intellectual capital and thought leadership

Once you remove the jargon and “consultese,” the main take away is that professional services can articulate and differentiate themselves through the quality, uniqueness and frequency of sharing their knowledge. It simultaneously builds the brand and produces real sale leads.

### Thought Leadership Differentiates

---



---

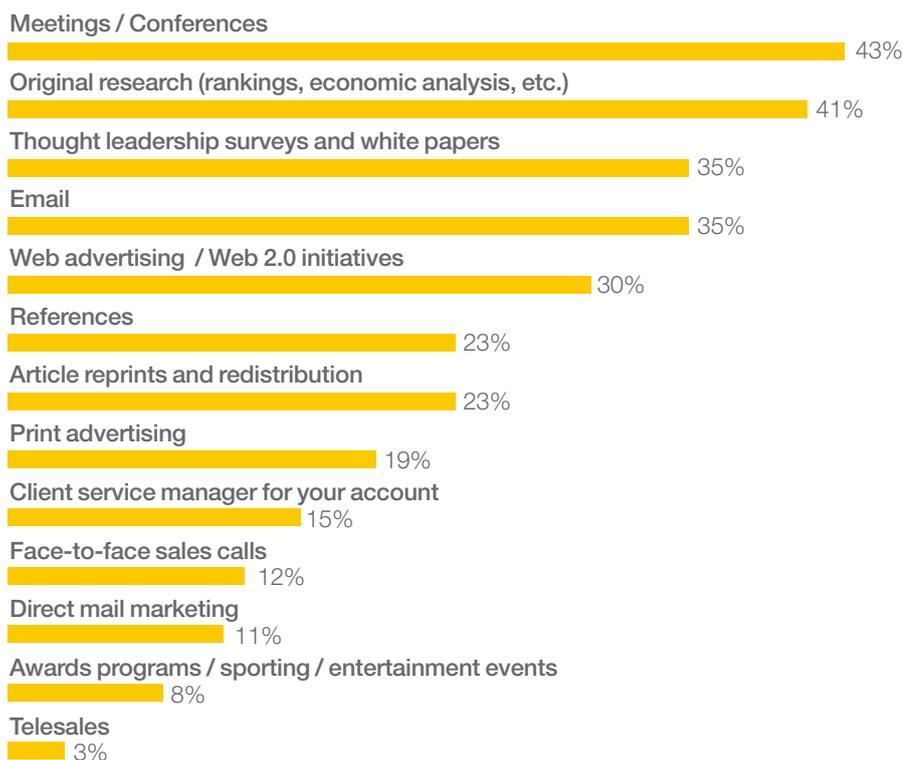
In a recent survey of 179 professional service professionals, The Bloom Group found that the key factors in marketing effectiveness are (in order of importance):

- Strong intellectual capital
- Referenceable client work
- Strong business development capabilities
- Sound marketing strategy
- Strong brand and image

A key finding from the study reveals that those professional services businesses with strong intellectual capital are far more likely to generate substantial market awareness and business leads. Supporting these findings is, *The Economist Intelligence Unit's 10 Megatrends in B2B Marketing for 2008*: "Thought leadership becomes a top priority" is megatrend number one.

### Economist Intelligence Unit Megatrends 2008

What will be the best way for providers of B2B services to market to you in the next 3 to 5 years?



Unfortunately most firms fail when attempting to promote their novel ideas and translate them into actual engagements. It is commonly two problems; packaging and persistence. Or day-to-day operations are given priority and institutional knowledge is never absolutely captured nor shared, which is a shame and costly. And therein lies the challenge *In The Wealth of Knowledge*, Stewart deduces, "A burden shared is a burden halved; an intellectual asset shared is one doubled."

Case studies are the currency of professional services, but precious few firms capture every case or do it in a way that instructs internally or becomes merchandised successfully externally. There are signs of change in how firms approach this. One global accounting firm now compensates knowledge management roles on a par with business development. You know a firm values a department or function when it is given its own leadership and it is run as a profit center.

## Challenge 6 : The Business Development “Cycle”

A few years ago I was the keynote speaker at an accounting firm’s retreat that was meant to address differences between their marketing and sales groups. The goal was to bring together the two for the greater good. With some irony the conference was themed, “Marketing is from Mars – Sales is from Venus.” Through the years, I have seen every possible model for acquiring new business in professional services:

- Distinct marketing and sales groups
- Merged functions
- Practice-specific marketing leads
- Dedicated sales people
- Professionals who take on marketing and sales functions
- External “rainmakers”
- No group or groups (faith in the phone ringing on its own)

I think of business development as the process that spans marketing and sales, not two separate groups or departments. Firms inevitably succeed or fail based on constancy of purpose rather than on a specific model or process. The fact is there is no one right model. Business development is dependent on many factors, including market, service, culture and economic conditions. Key to this is not to run solely with a sales-driven marketing strategy because it is subject to rapidly changing conditions. Instead, firms should focus on a thought-leadership marketing strategy because it insists on the firm leading rather than reacting to the market.

This “constancy of purpose” takes out the peaks and valleys one often experiences in business development efforts. When times are good business development either coasts or is an afterthought. When business conditions are challenging firms experience chaos because they are without process and accountability. A concerted and sustained focus is the answer, so that business development becomes more predictive (but alas, not predictable).

**Firms should focus on a thought-leadership marketing strategy because it insists on the firm leading rather than reacting to the market.**

# The most successful firms position themselves for the sale without pushing it, and this is something that cannot be delegated because it is about establishing a relationship.

We know that in professional services clients buy; they are not sold. The most successful firms position themselves for the sale without pushing it, and this is something that cannot be delegated because it is about establishing a relationship. You cannot change the client's business without knowing the client's business and that requires time, energy, and many other resources.

Professional services attempt to codify and train their people in repeatable processes because this is a mechanism that produces profit. However, repeatable processes will eventually deliver mediocre results and become faddish. It is an unintended law of diminishing results in action. After a time, firms look for business development processes and services that follow a repeatable prescription to leverage staff and broaden reach. But every client is different so every client approach must be, too. Customization is critical and it is important to note the following:

- Your unique selling proposition may not be all that unique. H. Igor Ansoff wrote in his groundbreaking book, *Corporate Strategy*, "It is important to avoid mistaking an abundant competence for an outstanding one."
- Client prospecting programs are valuable for providing guidance for identifying the clients you actually desire, but they need to be incredibly specific and identify fewer rather than more prospects so each can receive authentic and valuable attention. There is the accurate adage that "a sale is not something you pursue, it is what happens when you are deeply immersed in serving the client."
- Clients are skeptical of professional service sales. If they ask for a brochure they are often up-sold to a complete rebranding. If they want a market study of Iowa they are told they need an entirely new corporate strategy. This is why listening is a critical skill in business development.

Broderick & Associates has found that generally one third of revenue comes from existing clients, one third from clients who purchase periodically, and one third from new business. Others have put it at 60/30/10 and I have seen many other splits. The best exercise to go through to determine business development focus is to identify:

1. The overall revenue target for the year
2. The percentage of that revenue from existing clients that will recur with little effort
3. The percentage of that revenue to come from increasing services to existing clients
4. The percentage of revenue that will come from new clients

The last one gives direction to marketing and sales efforts. However, if the firm is in a position to decline business because of demand, one should ask, will this client and engagement:

- Allow practitioners to learn new skills?
- Allow us to command higher fees?
- Allow us to work with more senior people?
- Introduce us to a new market niche?
- Lead us to other work with this client and potentially provide referrals?
- Unseat a competitor's long-term relationship?

Peter Block said, "The personal interaction between the consultant and the client during the initial contracting meetings is an accurate predictor of how the project itself will proceed." That is why business developers cannot be allowed to provide the following rationale for not winning the work:

- They weren't ready for our solution
- They "bought" an individual at our competitor
- We are too big/too small for them
- It was a setup – we never had a chance
- We are too expensive
- They were just kicking the tires

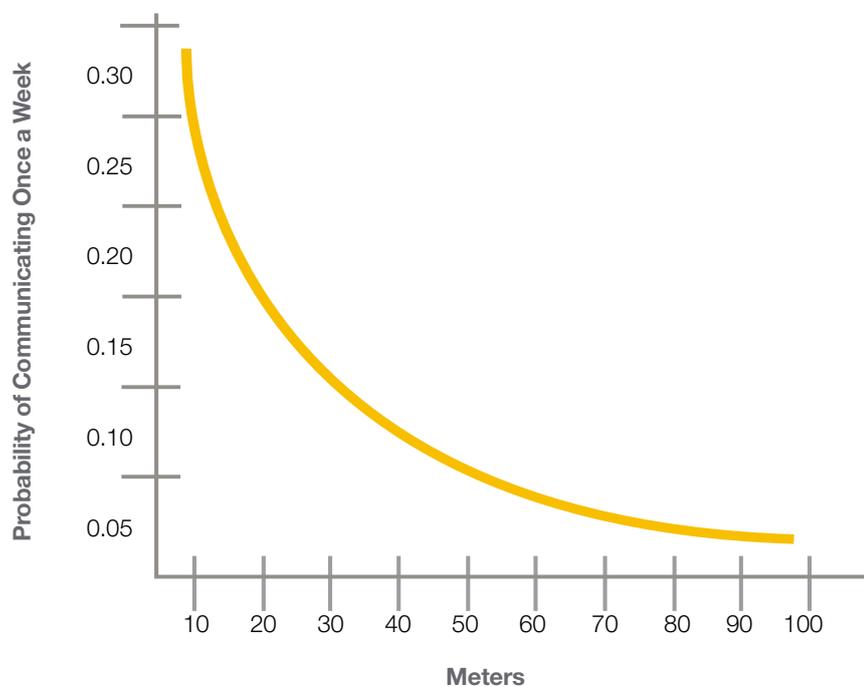
These are all excuses for not addressing the real reason clients engage professional services: **chemistry.**

In terms of gaining work from existing clients – why not just ask them? When asked directly or through satisfaction surveys and other methods, clients love to instruct firms on how to increase their value. The problem is, firms are afraid to ask or are not actively listening. Clients can be honest (sometimes brutally so) but there are lessons to be learned from them all. Research has shown they value proactivity and interest in their business. They want their professionals to lead their thinking through an objective lens, join them for brainstorming sessions about their business, provide analysis of competitive moves, and suggest any and all areas for improvement.

It brings to mind the need to be close to clients. In a landmark study from the 1970's, MIT Professor, Thomas J. Allen did an examination of fellow researchers to determine how often colleagues communicated with each other. The study revealed that 10 meters between desks was enough to seriously limit communications. Eighty or 90 meters of distance seriously impeded face-to-face communication.

### The Probability that Two People will Communicate as a Function of the Distance Separating Them

---



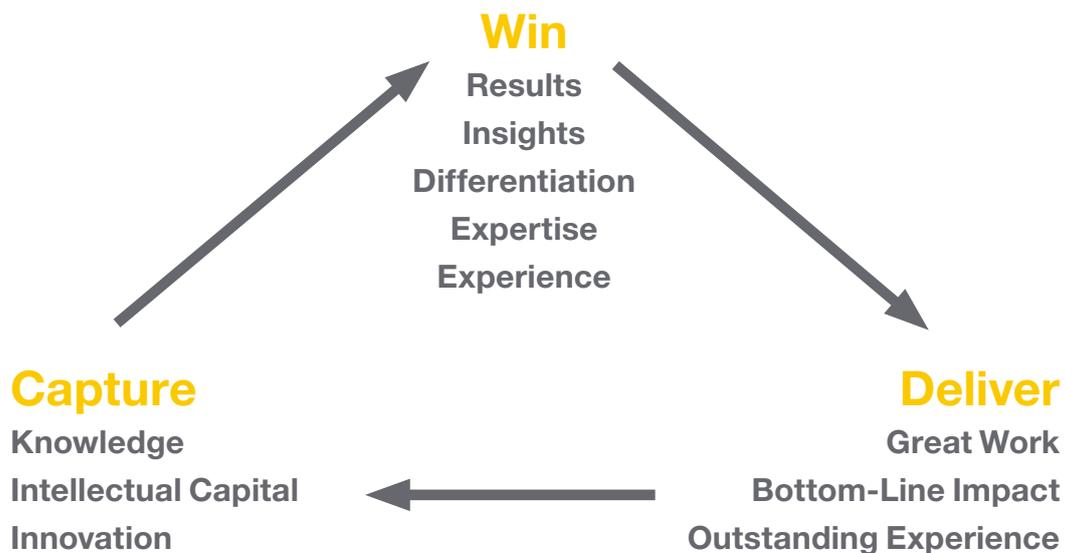
Now take this theory and consider the distance (physical and other) that separate professionals from their clients. We need to remind ourselves that proactive and valuable contact with clients can yield amazing benefits if we cut down the distance (real and imagined) between us.

## Win-Deliver-Capture

Let's review the six challenges in branding and marketing professional services:

- Are we one brand?
- The tangible and intangible divide
- How clients buy
- Marketing is a dirty word
- Knowledge is the product and knowledge (shared) is powerful
- The business development "cycle"

The six are both independent and interdependent. One method of managing the entirety of these challenges is to consider a model called "Win-Deliver-Capture."



It is a very simple concept:

- Firms **win** work based on their track record of results and insights into the client business, how they differentiate and the strength of the brand, along with their specific expertise and experience
- If all goes well, firms **deliver** a fantastic experience and have a positive impact on the client's business
- **Capture** possibly the most difficult, calls on the firm to capture the knowledge and learnings from every engagement and use the information to package and promote valuable intellectual capital, as well as fuel innovation

The intention of the model is to be self-perpetuating to drive new business, increase client satisfaction, and promote brand building. However, there are many, many moving parts each requiring excellence in execution. And reality gets in the way of getting it all done, including: professionals fully or over subscribed to client work, firms rewarding and recognizing certain behavior, and lack of measurement to substantiate sustained investment in activities that differentiate.

The model **Win-Deliver-Capture** though simple in concept is incredibly difficult in practice – it takes significant investment and focus in even just one of the main areas to make it perform successfully. However, if that commitment is made, adhering to this model can pay extraordinary dividends.

## Conclusion

Of course, there are many more than just six challenges when it comes to branding and marketing professional services. Branding and marketing are practices, not sciences, and demand patience, commitment and ongoing experimentation. Firms and the marketers that understand this tend to do well because they:

- Ensure both the quality of the relationship and the quality of the solution with consistent delivery
- Marry the brand and business strategies seamlessly
- Recognize and respond to both the emotional and rational aspects of the client decision-making process
- Experiment with marketing but do so with clear constancy of purpose
- Package and promote their intellectual capital as a prime differentiator
- Commit to business development as a core process and strive to be excellent at it

**And this is a solid checklist for any industry or business not just professional services.**



**Sources:**

The Bloom Group website, <http://www.bloomgroup.com/>

Brandchannel.com and Swystun, Jeff W.N., Professional Services Survey, 2004

Broderick & Associates website, <http://www.broderickco.com/>

Chrzastek, Jennifer D. and Reid Cyndy, Overcoming the Challenges of Professional Services Marketing, Northwestern University Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications, 2006

Interbrand, and Swystun, Jeff, *The Brand Glossary*, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2006

Kotler, Ph.D., Philip, *Marketing Professional Services*, Prentice Hall Press, 2002

Kubr, Milan, *Management Consulting: A Guide to the Profession*, International Labour Office, 2000

Maister, David H., *Managing the Professional Service Firm*, Free Press, 1993

McKenna, Patrick J. and Maister, David H., *First Among Equals: How to Manage a Group of Professionals*, Free Press, 2002

Raintoday website, <http://www.raintoday.com/>

Scurry, Jeff and Wehmeyer, Holly, Strategies for Differentiating the Professional Services Brand, Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications, 2007

Stewart, Thomas A., *The Wealth of Knowledge: Intellectual Capital and the Twenty-first Century Organization*, Doubleday/Currency, 2001

Swystun, Jeff W.N., Brand Consistency Redefined, DDB Yellow Paper, 2007

Swystun, Jeff W.N., Professional Services: Branding the Business of Intangible Advice, Interbrand Paper, 2003

Swystun, Jeff W.N., Professional Services Capabilities, Interbrand Presentation, 2005

**DDB Worldwide Communications Group Inc ([www.ddb.com](http://www.ddb.com)) is one of the world's largest and most influential advertising and marketing services network. With more than 200 offices in over 90 countries, DDB provides creative business solutions by its proprietary philosophy and process built upon the goal of influence. DDB and its marketing partners create and deliver unique, enduring, and powerful brand experiences for competitive advantage.**

DDB is excited by ideas. We invite you to visit our website to share yours and keep abreast of ours. We believe that creativity is the most powerful force in business and that ideas get sharper with more minds rubbing against them.

**DDB<sup>o</sup>**