



Putting together a Marketing Campaign in support of IFA Sales Objectives.

Let's start by looking at two ways in which you *shouldn't* do it...

1) Principal's whim

A bad marketing campaign would be one that's based on the Principal waking up in the early hours of the morning and deciding to do lots of advertising for a few weeks in the local paper 'to drum up more business' simply because *he's* had a good idea for an eye-catching ad.

2) New for new's sake

Another ill advised marketing initiative would be launching a 'new service' to – for example – high net worth clients where the 'newness' consists of nothing more than the production of an extravagantly costly brochure, full of arty photos of your team and a hidden schedule of higher fees/charges.

If either of the so-called 'marketing campaigns' outlined above proved to be successful, it would be more by luck than judgement because they fly in the face of all the sound, common sense rules that underpin a good marketing campaign.

The hallmarks of a successful marketing campaign would be as follows:

- It would have a clear purpose and objectives
- It would tie in with the sales objectives of the company, as identified in the overall Marketing Plan
- It would have a clear budget
- It would be well thought out, offering clear benefits to the target market.
- It would be clear about who must do what to achieve results (allocation of responsibilities)
- It would be monitored regularly and amended appropriately

Example 1 – A business-to-business campaign

Let's take a typical example. Imagine that you have stated in your Business Plan that you intend to develop stronger relationships with other professionals in your area – perhaps solicitors and accountants. How would you set about achieving this objective through marketing?

First of all, you need to indulge in some corporate soul-searching. Everyone will be ambitious for the growth and success of the company but you don't want to end up with egg on your face. And that means being realistic about what you can achieve and only promising what you know you can fulfil and what resources (time and money) you can devote to it.

In our example, you have decided that you want to get closer to the solicitors and accountants in your area.

Before you can approach anyone else, you need to know your own company and its strengths and limitations.

You need some definitions. Start by asking: 'What is our area?' 'How far are we prepared to travel to do business?' (Set parameters beyond which travel eats into profitability to an unacceptable level.) Then ask: 'What type (size) of accountants and solicitors are we going to feel comfortable approaching?' 'Are we happy to deal with the bigger, national companies or do we think that their needs would be better met by a National IFA?'

Having identified the size of company you want to approach, you need to ask: 'What are we offering?' 'Why would they prefer to deal with us?' This means that you need to have a clear idea of what sets you apart from the other IFAs operating in your area. Make a list of your unique corporate strengths. Perhaps you have a high level of technical expertise in one particular area or perhaps you know that your (or your team's) qualifications are above par for your area.

Having completed the introspection process, you can then start to think about your campaign objectives and begin setting clear targets. You should also think about how much money you are prepared to set aside purely in pursuit of this campaign.

Here is an example of a clear marketing campaign objective:

- “We will work to develop a relationship with 10 professional connections in the xyz area over the next 12 months – to the extent that they are referring clients to us on a regular basis.”

When people talk about a campaign strategy, they tend to talk in terms of various ‘strands’ that come together to form a strong, coherent theme. Another way to express this concept would be: ‘There’s more than one way to skin a cat’ – in other words, there are a number of different marketing techniques that you can employ in pursuit of your clearly defined objective. They all fulfil different roles and you should give them all consideration. Because the more strands you have to your marketing activities, the more your message is reinforced with your target market.

Is advertising relevant?

Many people think that advertising has to form a central part of any marketing campaign. But consider our marketing objective – developing professional relationships. You can see that advertising by itself is ill-suited to this specific cause – unless you want your company to sound like a ‘lonely heart’ advertising for friends.

Of course, advertising can be formulated to achieve many different things for a company. Where a message needs to be delivered quickly and accurately – for example to publicize an event occurring on a specific date – it is ideal. And the ‘drip feed’ of regular corporate advertising in appropriate publications can help to increase awareness across the board, not just with a particular segment of the market that you are aiming a specific campaign at.

Having said that, probably the best methods to achieve the objective we have set ourselves in this example would be a combination of initial market research, networking, PR and some tactical direct mail.

Tactical Networking

'Networking? But that's not marketing!' I hear you protest, and I beg to differ. Networking is one of the oldest techniques employed by the successful salesman/marketer in any industry. The trouble is that the results of networking are not always immediately apparent. The process of winning someone's trust to the degree that they will make referrals to you may be a lengthy one. But the key to getting most out of your networking is to do it tactically across the company.

Start by identifying the list of companies that you would like to target and the contact details of key staff. Check amongst your own staff to see whether they already have any contacts at any of these companies. Make it a personal objective for staff to actively pursue any contacts that they already have in place. A database with accurate information is critical – but remember the requirements of Data Protection. Use your database to note all contacts made with your target group – be they social or business. Join local relevant trade bodies and clubs (from Chambers of Commerce through to sports clubs) and ensure that you make time to attend any networking events that they arrange – especially if there is an opportunity for you to speak about your company.

Use your database to conduct regular mailings with your corporate news and to ensure that none of your target contacts is neglected for any length of time. If no decent networking forum exists in your area, set up your own! Your company doesn't need to pick up the tab for everyone else because other companies are also willing to pay for the opportunity to network. A quarterly meeting of local professionals over breakfast at a decent venue with a guest speaker is a good format. Set a cost per head and put it on your invitation. Ensure that as many people as possible from your company attend and that they spread themselves among the other guests.

Public Relations

Whatever PR Agencies would have you believe, there is no particular mystique to PR – especially at a regional level. Many business editors on local newspapers are desperate for news from local companies and sending them the occasional Press Release is hardly likely to result in your being publicly grilled and humiliated by Jeremy Paxman on primetime TV. So why the reluctance to share your news? Contact your local business editor and ask what types of news stories are of interest. If you do set up a networking

club, keep the local press informed and try to get the business editor to attend your meetings. If this option is not possible, think of other stories that have news value: industry awards, appointments, new service launches, new office opening, anything that you do for charity, etc. It is worth bearing in mind that your Compliance Department will view any Press Release as an 'advertisement' and will want to clear it before release.

Having been through the exercise of corporate soul-searching at the start of your campaign, you should have a clear idea of your *unique service proposition* – why local solicitors and accountants would choose to do business with you rather than your competitors. Being armed with this insight will give you the ability either to write – or to brief a marketing agency to write – a good direct mail leaflet for you to send to your target audience. Follow this up with a personal 'phone call to suggest a meeting.

Follow all the steps outlined above and you will have done all you can to fulfil your marketing objective by means of a coherent campaign. What's more, the many strands of your campaign will have resulted in what we marketers call 'a halo effect' meaning that your message will be reinforced as people will have seen you in a variety of different media.

One last tip. When you do get in contact with your target professionals, think of ways in which you might be able to cement the bond (for example by organising a joint seminar or by agreeing to a joint service endorsement programme). Above all, be professional when dealing with other professionals.

Example 2 – A business-to-consumer campaign

Here is another business initiative that many IFAs have been considering in recent years – the move away from a remuneration-through-commission structure and towards one where clients pay a regular retainer for advice. If you are considering this initiative, then you think it through very carefully as a marketing campaign.

Before even starting any work, you need to consider the following questions:

"What can we charge for the service?", "Are we providing a menu of services or a 'fixed' service", "How many people do we need to convert to make it profitable?", "What are our

competitors doing?”, “Will we alienate any of our existing customers?” This will help you to set the targets for your marketing campaign which could be expressed in terms of: “Over the next 12 months we will aim to convert x% of our existing clients to a retainer-paying basis and acquire xx new clients on retainers”.

Having decided that the conversion process will ultimately be profitable, you need to test your clients’ reaction to the proposal. You should do this by selecting a research sample from your own client base. Choose those clients that you would identify as being obvious targets to convert to a retainer basis. (The ones who will (a) be open to the idea and who would benefit from it and (b) have the most complex financial affairs so that they need regular input from an adviser – usually the high net worth individuals and the self-employed.)

From your own knowledge of these people, and what might appeal to them, you can start to put together a draft ‘menu of services’ with a scale of prices attached. Then you should meet with them, talk through your plans and gauge their reaction.

Once you have the right mix of service levels and charges to make the proposition look attractive, you can start to develop the literature that you will use to support the conversion process.

There are two ways in which you can alert your customers to your new service proposition – one is to ‘launch the service’ with a blitz of publicity – advertising, PR and a well-argued direct mailshot to all of your customer base. (You should try to use PR in support of this approach as people do tend to believe what they read in the papers.) The alternative – and probably better method – is to adopt a piecemeal approach and to roll out the concept gradually to clients only on a face-to-face basis. Either way, it is important to have literature (and Press Release) which sets out the service and the argument for change in an appealing and convincing way.

It’s also important to review the progress of your campaign regularly to ensure that you are on track to meet your conversion target and that there is no evidence of disaffection amongst your client base.

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