

Patience and Persistence

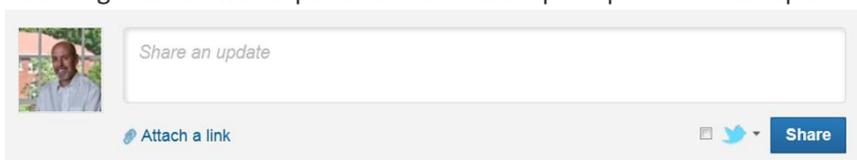
They are the opposite, right? Wrong. Not in the marketing trade. In industrial and professional services marketing, the deals just don't close that fast anymore. Maybe they never did. The good old days that were never that great.

The most asked question of our firm this year has been: how do we market our mid-sized, professional services firm these days? Consulting firm, insurance brokerage, architecture firm. The answer in the abstract is: you have to be *patient and persistent* at the same time. "Patient" as in, we just won an assignment from a proposal we submitted four years ago. "Persistent" as in, staying active in the right media channels.

A Less Abstract Answer: Content Management

The more specific answer is that you often have to wait for a client or a marketplace to make their own assessments. They need to come to the realization that what you do can benefit them in a material way. You can't force a relationship, a positive opinion or a referral.

We don't have it right when we ask for referrals via linkedin from people who hardly know us or who hardly know who we want to know. We do have it right when we respond to the linkedin prompt: "Share an update" or "What are you working on?" So, being persistent is about staying active and being productive. One way to be productive is to produce content.



Most clients in the professional services space are sitting on top of mounds of information. It's in their proposals, in their client recommendations, on their hard drives and in their heads. Most professionals in fact have more information than they know what to do with (or than they even know they have). The problem is, it isn't organized. I refer to the organization of all that content as "content management." Pretty simple. What is less simple, is getting the executive to do something about that mound of information.

Taking Action

The following prescriptions are working for our clients. It is a one-step-at-a-time approach.

Subject Focus. Determine the topics in which you have good subject matter expertise and simultaneously determine which topics will gain traction in your marketplace. What are the "hot topics," trends and emerging issues that dominate the conversation in your business space? You can use marketing research to help determine or dimensionalize it but in most cases, executives have good natural instincts for the issues.

Choose carefully—the topics you choose should derive from your brand and will, in turn, help define and reinforce your brand identity. The first rule of internet content management: you are what you talk about. Create a balance between the most fundamental topics that cannot be ignored and the issues which are newer, perhaps controversial or are more niche oriented or specialized. If you are addressing one of the more fundamental topics, focus the lens. Create a more proprietary or fresh way to address the topic. If you are covering a more specialty or even esoteric topic, make sure you relate it to your primary subject matter.

Create “The Text.” The “text” is a topic-specific document from which everything else can flow. I like using white papers as the main text. Think first of broad topics or categories of topics and then determine the sub-topics. Make an outline. Aim for between ten and twenty topics organized under four or five categories.

A good text outlines the principle, explains the theoretical basis for it and provides practical examples and applications. Support your argument as broadly as possible before introducing examples but do introduce examples, particularly if you can feature examples for which your firm is responsible. And, it doesn't hurt to pay homage to work done by others in your field (especially if they are not directly competitive). My rule of thumb is a two to ten page white paper.

Divide & Conquer. Divide the topics into logical categories and assign them to your executive team. The best way to “assign,” actually, is to get volunteers who are genuinely enthusiastic and knowledgeable about a particular topic. The particular individuals you include depends on several factors: the number of topics, the size of the team and alignment of the right topic with the right team member. The key to it is to 1) choose and assign topics that truly interest different team members and 2) set goals in terms of output that create a habit or a routine but that do not become a burden.

What can happen here is a “friendly competition” between authors. Let's say three different team members are each writing four white papers per year. There is a natural tendency to compete or at least compare with the output of the others on the team. That is usually a good thing.

Identify Channels. Once you have a start with a couple of white papers, you can begin reformatting the text to meet the needs of different formats and channels. These typically include: blogs, social media posts, speeches, webinars, PowerPoint decks. The principle here is that a single text can be broken down or expanded for use in multiple channels. And, that multiplication can, and should, happen concurrently. Flood the channels but use discretion in two ways: 1) choose channels that suit your audience and 2) adapt the text to meet the needs and customs of the channel.

If you have three executives at your firm each producing a new text every quarter and then adapting that text to meet the needs of different channels, you are going to be busy. But, remember, there is tremendous efficiency in this approach because you are working off a relatively small number of texts. As the system matures, others can assume responsibility for reformatting. Executives are good at subject matter, but not necessarily formatting.

Create Accountability. The best way to do this is to agree to a production schedule. Decide on the publication frequency of white papers, blog posts, webinars, etc. Put it on a calendar...begin with the ends in mind. Make a pact with your colleagues that you are going to be accountable to the calendar and to each other.

Back to Patience

So what is happening out there while you are producing and managing content? Your marketplace is reading it. They are learning, becoming familiar with you and your firm. They are conditioning themselves. Your persistence with content is turning the market towards you. You are reversing the flow from you and your firm pursuing them, to them pursuing you.

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