

10½ reasons why you must improve your presentation skills across your firm

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When we're working alongside departmental and sector marketing teams one of the things we see all too often when we is a lack of focus.

This often turns meetings into talking shops in which insignificant details are discussed at length and the real reason for the meeting - what you want to achieve and how best to get there - aren't touched upon.

This is a waste of everyone's time so here are 10½ steps you can take to make sure your team achieves the level of focus they will need to achieve the commercial success you want them to:

1. Agree your focus

Whether your team is concentrating on a professional practice area, a particular geography or on a standard industry classification, make sure that you agree the exact parameters of your target market from the off.

We have seen a number of groups stall because a consensus on the definition of their remit hasn't been reached (this is also the thing that is most likely to take people into unnecessary and unhelpful discussions and divert them from the jobs that actually need doing).

This will be a little fluid and the definition may be narrowed or change slightly once you have a bit more experience in and knowledge of your sector but if you are going to avoid costly delays, use your first meeting to agree a working definition so you can at least get started.

2. Set clear objectives

Winning work is obviously the primary reason for investing in the creation of a marketing or business development team but, in order to achieve that, you may need to set some interim objectives.

- If you are a charity team or are focussed on winning work from the third sector you may want to increase the number of invitations to tender you receive
- If you are a commercial property solicitor, you may want to get to know more local agents and build a model that will ensure you spend more time with them more consistently
- If you are a Corporate Financier in an accountancy practice you may want to become more closely linked with venture capitalists and business angels or with the corporate departments of the law firms who are promoting themselves as specialists within the industry sectors you want to target

3. Don't set too many objectives

Remember your team will be restricted by time, budgets and resources and if you try to split this limited time, budget and resource across 25 objectives, the likelihood of achieving all 25 will drop dramatically.

To start with set 2 or 3 objectives and make sure everyone around the table knows them and knows why they've been chosen. It is much easier to manage (not to mention encourage) progress if everyone knows what you're doing and why.

4. Make sure your objectives can be measured

Amorphous, nebulous objectives like "raising brand awareness" and "building profile" simply don't work. Make sure your objectives are as clearly defined as they can be.

If we use the examples from the previous section the measures you set could be:

The Charity Team: Tender invitations from charities and other voluntary organisations are to increase from 11 to 20 over the next 12 months

The Commercial Property Team: Increase current referring surveyors from 4 to 7 (better still name both the existing 4 and prospective targets from which you'll generate the additional 3) and make sure there are 6 separate touchpoints between your team and theirs over the next 12 months

The Corporate Finance Team: Establish contact with 3 new VCs/business angels and 3 new law firms; again, if you can put a short list of suspects together these two objectives will instantly become easier

You will also notice that again we're not looking at producing a huge volume of tasks; if your team is going to achieve success the number of tasks required to achieve your objectives you need to keep each list manageable.

5. Base your tactics squarely on the objective at hand

Different objectives in different markets will need different approaches.

For example if you are looking to engage with prospects in a niche industry sector, your best bet will probably be to attend the conferences or networking events that serve those niches. The trade press may be another potential way in.

However if you are looking to tackle a larger, less defined market where pretty much anyone could be a client, things like pay-per-click, increasing the efficacy of your website's SEO or content marketing campaigns may be the best way to drive online enquiries.

The important thing to remember is that no marketing activity works in isolation.

You will need to employ a few different ideas in tandem then tinker with the ratio as you go along and have the data you'll need to inform those changes.

6. Base your tactics on what's required not what you've always done up until now

You *will* need to try *new* things.

Whereas a little networking, a bit of corporate hospitality and a few rounds of golf may have been enough to maintain your current practice up until now, if you really want to break new markets you're going to have to try some new routes into those markets.

However, the good news is that the additional focus you have applied will highlight the events to attend, the publications to write for and the associations to join ... not to mention the businesses and individuals that are active in your chosen areas.

7. Base the tactics required to achieve each objective on the team you have available

To form a successful team you need 4 sets of marketing/business development skills:

- Networking
- Speaking
- Writing
- Research

The important thing to remember is if you don't have all 4 covered, drop any activities you that require the skill you don't have. This will save you doing it badly (or not at all).

8. Make sure everyone knows what they have to do

It may sound obvious but if you make sure everyone leaves knowing what is expected of them and by when, progressing the individual tactics behind each objective will be much easier to facilitate.

9. Make sure that you have the credentials to tackle each objective

The decision to instruct a new solicitor, accountant or barrister is influenced massively by the ability of the person doing the instructing to mitigate the risk associated with instructing that adviser.

The best way to mitigate the majority of that risk is to prove you not only understand the client and their situation but have also already helped a variety of individuals in similar situations successfully achieve what they wanted to achieve.

One of the first things you need to do once you've established your team is to pull its CV together.

Collate client examples, testimonials, case studies and examples of the work you've done in this area.

- This CV will be used verbally when you meet new prospects and make new contacts. It will be used in writing when you follow up after those meetings
- This CV will demonstrate you have the relevant knowledge and expertise and will underline your suitability for the work to even the most risk adverse potential client or referrer

10. Identify who can make things easier

Tackling anything new is always easier with support.

Once you have identified the areas you want to tackle, identify who you know that will help you achieve some quick wins. These people may be:

Colleagues within your firm who understand and have experience within your chosen areas

Professionals who have worked with and/or referred work to your firm in the past who again have experience within your chosen areas

Journalists or conference or exhibition organisers you have worked with in the past who are also involved in more specialist vehicles that complement the geography or industries you want to target

Well known/well connected clients who may be able to introduce you to specific targets or recommend different routes into your chosen areas

'Virtual' contacts; platforms like LinkedIn will allow you to identify who you already know who may be able to introduce you to people you want to know

10½. Don't ignore budgets

You can have the best ideas in the world but if you can't pay for them you will not be able to progress them.

If attending an event or joining an association is going to cost money, try and legislate for that as early in the planning process as you can.

Similarly a contingency fund to cover coffees, drinks or lunches is also a useful thing to have to hand.

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