

PRODUCTIVE MARKETING PAYS DIVIDENDS

David Shelton

Author of "The Business of Advice"

There are two main challenges for marketing: how to find the time to organise it and how to maximise its productivity.

The case study summarises how to invest a day to overcome these challenges and achieve commitment to the plan. The benefit of spending a day is that it gets the key people involved and each marketing exercise runs smoothly because everyone knows in advance what is going to happen and what they have to do.

Sally Frank has a business philosophy that she drums into all her staff: "Fail to plan and you plan to fail".

The repetition of this often annoys her team, but they know she is right. So when it is time for Sally's business to undertake the annual marketing workshop they know it will be a day of detail, but that it will save time and money over the coming months.

Sally's approach is relatively straight forward because she knows exactly what she wants to achieve: a clear one year marketing plan. She gathers her advisers and key support staff together because she wants to make sure that the responsibility for marketing is shared across the business. She knows that if one person has to do the job they will fail; lack of time will always beat them.

Sally splits her planning day into four parts:

- *review last year*
- *idea generation and filtering*
- *planning the individual marketing exercises*
- *finalising the overall plan and "common sense" testing it*

Review of last year

The first hour is spent reviewing all the marketing activity from the previous year. The typical questions are: "what went well?", "what went badly?" and "what are our learning points to factor into this year's plan?"

Idea Generation and Filtering

This fills the second hour and, to make it fun, Sally award prizes for the best and worst ideas. She makes sure everyone is involved and uses different brain-storming techniques to help this. The first part of this section is about generating as many ideas as possible; the second part evaluates the ideas, using a Checklist (which follows) for testing marketing activities.

Planning the individual marketing exercises

For the individual exercises (or campaigns) Sally splits the team into groups of 1 or 2 to work these up. She uses a simple template (see below) to make sure all angles are covered and to help everyone else understand what the campaign is about. She insists on clear objectives to make sure she can measure the outcome.

Finalising the overall plan

Finally, the team take all the individual campaigns and log them onto the 12 month calendar. They work on the basis that the first quarter is confirmed, the second is in initial implementation and the final half of the year is provisional. At each quarterly review they roll the plan forward, so the provisional quarters gradually move forward and are confirmed.

The "common sense test" allows them to sort out any bunching of activities and workloads and make sure the whole plan is manageable and viable. Sally calls this the "common sense test": her question is "does this stack up, does it look sensible, can we do it?"

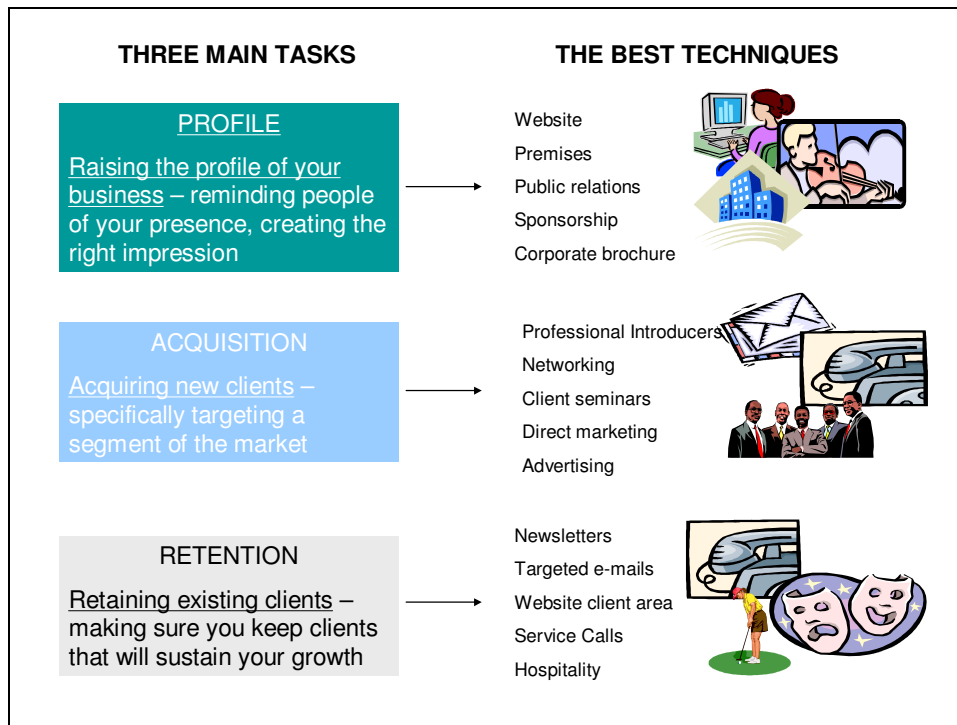
There is some re-working after the session to tidy up the plan but they then press on with the first quarter.

Sally admits that there are many other things she and her team could do with the day, but reckons it is time well spent to have her marketing organised a year in advance.

In summary, marketing for advice firms is about acquiring and retaining enough of the right type of clients to achieve the long term expansion, profit and value targets of the business.

The chart that follows shows which marketing techniques are best suited for the three tasks of raising profile, acquiring clients and retaining them.

for more information go to www.businessofadvice.co.uk "



As the chart shows individual techniques can be more effective for some tasks than others. The lists above are not mutually exclusive because techniques overlap. For example, a series of well placed press articles will always raise profile but, at the same time, generate a few enquiries. However, a well targeted mail-shot should generate a lot of enquiries but have less affect upon the overall awareness of the business. The mail-shot may go to a few hundred people but several thousand may see and read the article.

The split between profile, acquisition and retention will allow you to organise your marketing activity and prioritise where you want to use a majority of your marketing budget and resource (typically time). Mature advice businesses will typically spend up to 60% of the budget on client retention, 30% on new client acquisition and the rest on profile. This is because keeping the existing clients, built up over many years, is a priority. There will be less pressure to acquire large numbers of brand new clients and further raise the profile of the business in these circumstances.

Alternatively, a brand new business should spend 30% of its budget on profile, 60% on acquisition and just 10% on retention. Clearly the priorities are very different as reflected in the budget split.

When you have decided on where to concentrate you should design the individual marketing campaigns. The checklist that follows can be applied to any marketing activity.

- What are you trying to achieve?
- What is the activity about?
- Who are you trying to influence?
- What do you want them to know?

- How will you communicate?
- When will this happen?
- Who will do the work and what will it cost?
- How will you know if it has worked?

The following example shows how this works. This is about issuing a seminar invitation: note that we cover the questions on "how and when" in one column.

Seminar Invitation							
ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE What are you trying to achieve?	PROPOSITION What is the activity about?	TARGET Who are we trying to influence?	KEY MESSAGES What do we want them to know?	METHOD & TIMING How will we communicate? When will this happen?	RESOURCE & BUDGET Who will do the work and what will it cost?	MEASURE OF SUCCESS How will we know if it has worked?
Seminar Invitation: "Pensions in Divorce"	To achieve 15 attendees directly in our professional introducer target market	Seminar to professional introducers on pensions in divorce – to encourage them to refer appropriate clients to us	25 key contacts in 10 accountants and solicitors	"We are experts in pensions planning" "This is complex – you must be aware of it" "This is relevant to some of your clients" "We provide specialist, impartial advice"	Set up list 15/1 Draft letter and invite 15/1 Mail out letter and invite 22/1 Follow up phone call – 29/1 Letter re-confirming all details – 1 day after positive response Reminder phone call day before event Event 22/2	Andrew and Joanne Letters and invitation – £50	15 attendees in target group

The table shows how to apply the checklist and, at first sight it may look simplistic. However, we can all recall apparently simple marketing exercises that have failed due to lack of organisation or attention to detail. These questions may take you a few minutes to answer but they can save a lot of time, money and effort when they are correctly used.

Finally plot each campaign on a year planner to see if the overall plan works and if the scarce resource in the business is used to best effect. Avoid bunching, key dates and holidays.

Because time and resources are limited there are several things you can do to maximise your chances of success. You should:

- give the job of "marketing" to someone who has time to do it
- take time to plan ahead
- work through the detail of individual marketing activities, particularly how and when prospective clients will be followed up
- use the right marketing techniques for the job
- measure the outcome of all marketing exercises and use this to improve future campaigns

- test all marketing ideas (from brochures through to mail-shots) with the Checklist.