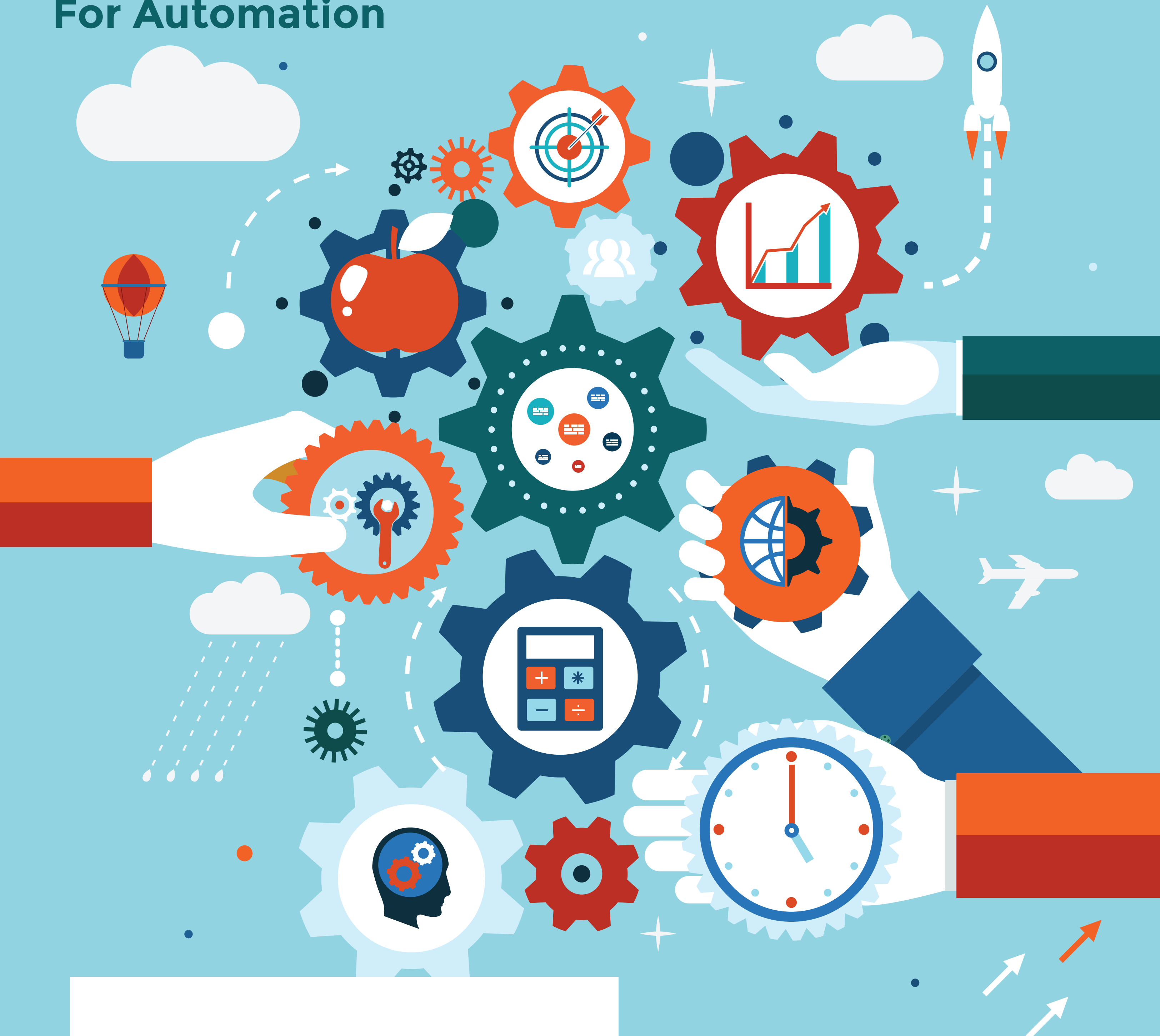
Volume 9 • Issue 1

The Journal of Accounting Marketing and Sales

Growth Strategies

For Automation



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Focus

Features

Growth Strategies: The Journal of Accounting Marketing and Sales is published four times a year by the Association for Accounting Marketing, Inc. (AAM). It is a benefit of membership in AAM. The views expressed in any article do not represent the official position of, or endorsement by, AAM or the author's employer. Association membership for executive and affiliate members is $350 annually with a one-time $50 initiation fee. Association membership for student members is $150 annually with a one-time $50 initiation fee.

It's All About the Experience

Eileen Monesson

Nowadays, marketing is more about the experience the prospective client has with a firm while building a relationship.

Thanks to the Internet, social media, artificial intelligence, predictive analytics and various other distributive technologies, firms can nurture prospects and take them through the buyer's journey. The intention is for the prospect to want to be the firm's client before anyone at the firm even speaks to them.

The Typical Approach

The experience delivered to the prospect is orchestrated based on his/her response to interactions. For example, someone might see an online ad with an offer from a firm. The person decides the offer is important to them. They click through to a landing page for more information. Typically, only material related to the offer is on the landing page. To receive the offer, the visitor must usually enter their name and email address or answer qualifying questions. There might be a "chat" feature to immediately engage the visitor in a "meaningful conversation" or a form to schedule a meeting.

When someone trades their contact information for an offer, they become a suspect. This person may or may not be interested in what the firm sells. But, since they opted in for the offer, the firm now has "permission" to nurture the relationship. The firm continues to take the person through the buyer's journey until he/she decides to become a client or opt out of receiving communications. Until one of these options happens, the firm has the "right" to bombard prospects with marketing stuff.

Experience Marketing

The Experience Marketing Association (EMA) defines experience marketing as a convergence of elements specifically designed to make each and every consumer brand touchpoint a positive one. It is these micro-experiences that ultimately drive brand satisfaction, loyalty and emotional attachment. The three sensory marketing elements EMA suggests on its website (www. experiencemarketingassociation.org) are:

- **Sound** Conversation is a fundamental element of human interaction, and a captive audience provides a perfect opportunity for brands to talk to their consumers one to one. Carefully scripted on-hold and in-person messaging keeps people engaged, personifies the brand, promotes interest and raises awareness.
- **Sight** Whether online or in-venue, consumer experiences vary from one person to another depending on factors such as time, mood, purpose and demographic. Digital signage, custom video and other visual elements can have a significant impact on the overall experience.
- **Scent** This is one of the most powerful human senses, often invoking memories buried deep in the past. Creating positive brand associations through scent engages at a deeply personal and subliminal level. Properly designed and deployed commercial scent solutions can reinforce brand recall and lasting awareness.

Brands using experience marketing tell powerful stories to relate to prospective buyers. These stories are used to paint a picture of what the person will feel as a result of using their product or service.

Expanding on the above scenario, instead of continuing to send the person random information the firm decides would be valuable and important to them, content and messages are curated based on the person's behavior. The goal is to disseminate the right information at the right time and to engage the person in the process.

A marketer focused on creating an amazing experience will use many different tactics to engage the prospect and enrich the relationship. These experiences could include:

- A welcome-to-the-firm call from the managing partner.
- Text message asking if they want more information or have questions.
- Email invitation to join a Facebook page dedicated to the subject matter.
- Sending the firm's book on the topic to the prospect with an invitation to discuss the key points.
- Having interactive "what if" scenarios guiding the person through various outcomes.
- Giving the person the ability to participate in an interactive real time Q&A session.

All the above tactics have something in common: they offer prospects the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with a firm through a combination of traditional and online approaches. People still want to do business with people they know, like and trust. Creating meaningful experiences is an important tactic to help develop that kind of relationship.

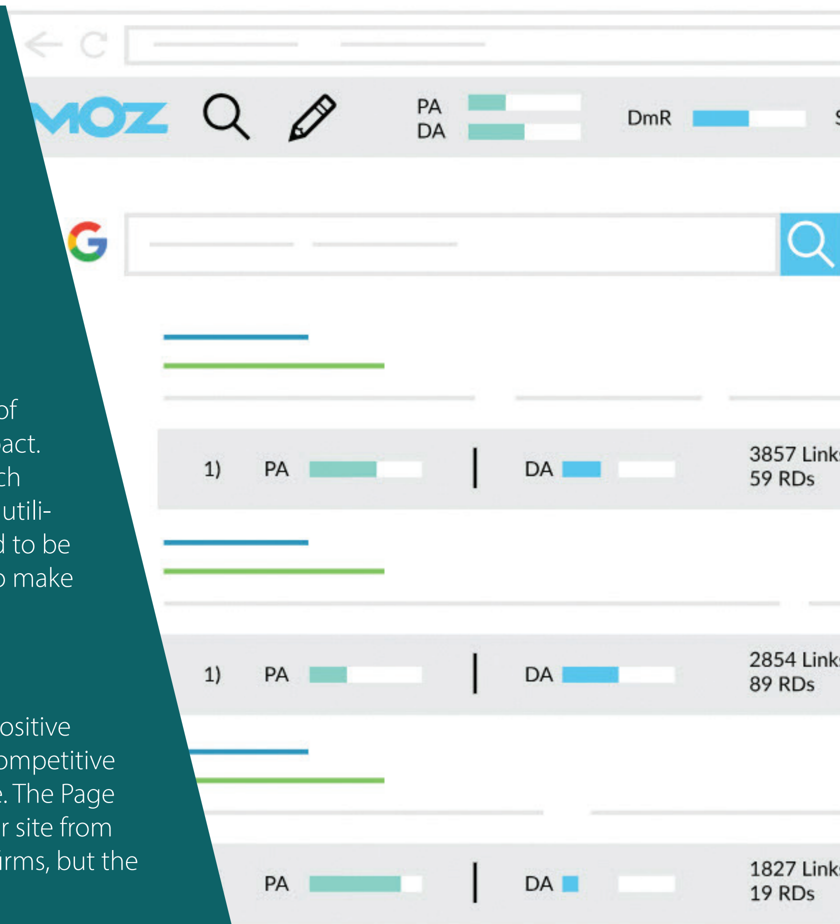
Eileen Monesson, CPC, principal with PRCounts. Contact at 848-459-3130 or emonesson@PRCounts.com.

TechNOWlogy

Preparing you for the future with tools you can use today

Geoff Jones

*You've made your website search-engine friendly. You go to the search bar, type in a keyword associated with your firm, and voilà, your firm sits atop the ranking. It looks like your strategy is spot on. Right? Time to find out with **MozBar**.*



Free Option

The **MozBar** is a Chrome extension that allows you to access a variety of SEO metrics. Its website is a treasure-trove of useful info with tools, modules and an actively engaged community of marketing gurus, but it's the MozBar that makes an instant impact. Of the many modules within the application, the location search feature provides insights not typically available in free browser utilities. Like with most extensions, there are permissions that need to be accepted, and you need to create a username and password to make it truly worthwhile.

Pay Option

While the free website resources and MozBar should provide positive return on energy in most cases, those in markets with highly competitive keywords have legit business reasons to try out the pay service. The Page Optimization feature on MozBar Premium will differentiate your site from the free gang. The $99 per month package will work for most firms, but the 30-day free trial is for the $179 option.

Shopping in an Online World

Automating web experience vital to landing buyers

Christine Nelson

For six years, logistics brand UPS has partnered with consumer behavior measurement company, comScore, to conduct a survey on trends regarding the online shopping experience.

The Pulse of the Online Shopper™ Study reveals what most of us already know about shopping today: it is happening online.

Survey data shows online purchases have surpassed physical store purchases for non-grocery items in the U.S. for the past two years. Shopping also is more mobile. This year, 48 percent of mobile users prefer using their phone to make purchases compared to 41 percent three years ago. Shoppers are also getting more comfortable interacting with chatbots to ask questions and gather information.

In short, at least half of the U.S. population is very accustomed to "browsing" and researching online prior to making a purchase. More importantly, in the same way people like the freedom to browse in a store without being bothered by a salesperson, they want that same freedom with their online experience.

Accounting firms and other service professions can take a lesson from today's retail industry. It's time to create a more self-directed and satisfying shopping experience that keeps buyers coming back and actively choosing a provider.

Of course, selecting a professional service firm is more complicated and riskier than buying a pair of shoes. Buying cycles are longer. More than a dozen touchpoints often are required to engage and persuade prospective clients before they are ready to receive a proposal. Sometimes a strong referral will shorten the courtship, but even then the decision is built upon mutual beliefs that the potential client and service professional are the right fit for each other. This is an emotional decision as much as a logical one.

With this understanding, it's important to view the online buying experience for professional services in three stages: tire kickers, mid-stage buyers and decision validators. Through these stages, it will be easier to conceive of self-directed marketplaces as the future of online lead conversion.

Before exploring the three stages of the professional services buying experience, let's examine the landscape of how visitors experience today's CPA firm online — and the opportunity that lies in making that experience more buyer-centric and less "about us."

Anatomy of an Experience

CPA firms have become much more sophisticated in their approach to online marketing since the turn of the century. Marketers are using more content to demonstrate the knowledge of their professionals. They are using social media to illustrate the firm's culture and to direct visitors to information. They are paying attention to review sites. They are partnering with other professionals to host high-value events.

The problem is marketers are too close to the product. Consider how marketers have traditionally laid out the online experience since about 2005:

- **Home page**
- **About Us**
- **Services**
- **Industries**
- **Resources**
- **Careers**
- **Contact Us**

Sound familiar? The professional services website became formulaic for a reason. It was designed to simplify the search process for early web visitors. Now that visitors are sophisticated with online search and online shopping, it's time to break that mold. Marketers must make the experience match what a sophisticated shopper is used to experiencing — total end-to-end autonomy.

What Do Buyers Want?

To break the mold in professional services online marketing, another insight from the UPS study is very instructional. It finds that 96 percent of all U.S. online shoppers surveyed have made purchases at a marketplace (e.g. Amazon, Wayfair).

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Maximizing BD Efforts with Marketing & Automation

Weaving art and science for maximum effect

Danny Estrada

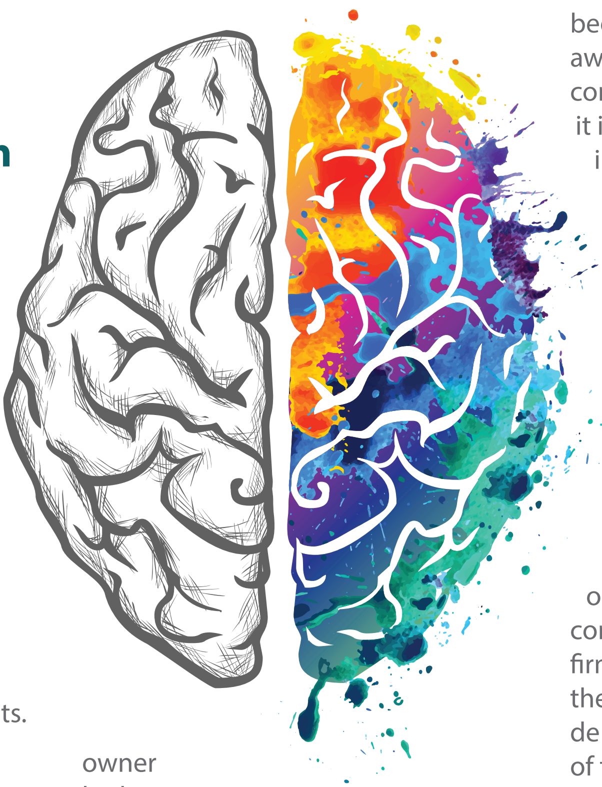
One of the biggest challenges in the accounting profession continues to be how to leverage marketing in a meaningful way when it relates to business development.

In many firms there is still a mindset that landing clients and new work is solely based on relationships and working those relationships when business opportunities are uncovered.

No one is going to debate that business developers or partners are necessary to finalize business transactions, but some firms are starting to see the benefits of leveraging marketing to drive results.

Before diving into the current state of how many business developers and marketing teams work, it's important to consider the distinctive role each function plays. Marketing is actively working on branding and presence and constantly looking to source content for the website and other client communications. In the meantime, business developers are busy building networks, finding new contacts and looking to uncover opportunities to capitalize on.

One thing left out of the equation is the buyer, who often is an executive or business owner looking to solve a need, trying to resolve a problem or unaware there is a better way to achieve their business goals. Many of these buyers are evolving in the way they transact or seek advice and information. This presents a unique opportunity for business developers and marketing teams to work together better. In fact, when done correctly, marketing can have an impact on many different aspects of business development.



The first area to evaluate is the beginning of the process, where awareness and lead development come into play. To build awareness, it is imperative to get the right information in front of the right people.

Mutually Beneficial

There are several implications here. Business developers have the contacts and know what to say to gain further traction with these contacts. This drives a conversation regarding content and what will make a difference in the actions marketing takes, whether dealing with information on the Internet or through targeted communications. Because many firms struggle to create content, there are almost unlimited services delivering canned content. Much of this information is well written and relevant.

However, the information does not always take into consideration geographic location, local economies or other pertinent information business developers use to work their magic in the market they serve.

The "secret sauce" for firms that succeed in marketing toward

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Channeling Your Content

Right combo of platforms key to reaching target

Matt Seitz

You spent weeks working with your tax team to assemble the perfect update on how the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 affects your most popular industry segment.

It took days of back and forth discussions and emails to get the technical information you needed, and another several hours for you to format the piece and secure final approval. You've finally posted it to your blog. Now, your job is done… right?

Wrong.

If this situation sounds eerily familiar – or even if you use an outside source for your content, which made the first part of the story less of a burden – hopefully you realize the hard part is still to come. Specifically, how do you get people to read the content, and then act?

The average piece of content takes 20 hours to create and costs approximately $1,200 to produce. Yet, according to Onboardly, 60-70 percent of B2B content sits unused. In other words, it's not generating traffic on a monthly basis.

I'm a sports enthusiast, so I gravitate toward sports analogies. And when it comes to content, like the famous saying from the movie *Field of Dreams*, "If you build it, they will come." That may be true over the long term (thanks to SEO), but after you publish a blog, you must drive the appropriate traffic to it.

There's no simple formula for accomplishing this. Simply put, you need to figure out how to hit the right audience at the right time in the right place with the right message.

The approach each firm takes with its content is (and should) be different – especially based on particular audiences each one targets with specific pieces of content. That said, consider some proven strategies built around the following platforms when you're trying to hit the right audience with your next piece of content.

- **Newsletter** Are you making sure to include your blogs in regular newsletter updates? These can be firmwide newsletters or targeted to specific industry segments (our preferred approach). Bonus tip: Consider cross-posting content to other newsletters (i.e., using valuation content in a tax newsletter).
- **Social media** You already may be posting your content to social media, but are you keeping each piece visible over time? The world of social media is fast and furious; be sure to promote each piece of content several times. Use a social management platform to schedule posts into the future. And, most importantly, educate your professionals on the importance of sharing content with their networks to leverage the snowball effect of extended audiences.
- **Blast email** Similar to newsletters, consider sending dedicated email blasts for important and/or timely updates. Don't get too carried away with these or all of your firm's emails will start to get lost in the shuffle for your contacts. Save blast emails for timely and relevant updates, and you'll realize much higher open and click-through rates.
- **Events** Depending on the type of content or update, you can turn news, perspectives and insights into a hard copy version and distribute it at live events to reinforce the topic of your event and provide additional thought leadership. Not to mention, you'll also provide a nice takeaway for your attendees. Don't have the time or budget to design and print hard copies for each event? No problem – email them to attendees after the event as part of your follow-up.
- **Industry publications** Share your larger and/or more detailed thought leadership pieces with applicable industry associations. Many local and national associations welcome outside content for their members, so it's a great way to get your firm's name in front of specific individuals within those industries.
- **PR pitch** Think about whether you can leverage media outlets, and if so, how. This most likely depends on the topic and your team's relationship with specific outlets (i.e., print, broadcast or digital), but it is a proven method

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PARTNER POV

John P. Richter CPA

Chief Industry Officer - Private Industries

CliftonLarsonAllen

John P. Richter has worked with the firm's marketing group for the better part of 20 years, spending significant time helping shape CLA's marketing messages and activities the past 15 years.

"But make no mistake I'm a finance guy," said Richter, who's been with CLA for nearly 35 years. "Everything I've learned about marketing comes from the school of hard knocks. I'm not even going to pretend to be a marketing specialist. That's why we have team members; that's why we have professionals."

Did CLA have a marketing presence when you started with the firm?

We had a marketing coordinator in the beginning. I would view her more as an administrative assistant who did business development activities (no offense to her). Honestly, we didn't know what marketing was, and I think a great deal of the profession still doesn't know what marketing is. We commonly confuse business development activities with marketing. And I did, and probably still do.

Were you hesitant to work with marketing?

Not at all. I always saw them as allies, resources and experts to help us project the message. Remember, I learned early on the benefit of focused and measured marketing approaches through the school of hard knocks, and that's where the resources became an important element.

Has anything surprised you about working with marketing during your career?

It's more of a delight to understand how different a profession marketing is versus the professional accounting or finance world I come from. It was an eye opener to come to appreciate what a marketing professional can bring to the table: responses, perspective, focus, measurement.

Delight is a refreshing way to put it. What does that mean?

Helping me, helping us, helping our firm leadership learn the value marketing can bring to help build our brand and presence. It's important because of the creditability it can bring. The sales process is the sales process, the client will get the deliverable; but if you're not known as a firm, you start over with every relationship.

How do you rely on your marketing team?

CLA is undoubtedly the largest unknown firm (they came in at No. 8 on the 2019 Top 100 Firms). An interesting thing has happened as we have grown. There's something about the magical billion-dollar level; there's an expectation of our people, our clients and perhaps the marketplace that we become a better-known enterprise.

So how do you become better known?

We're asking the question, "How do we invest in that branding exercise?" Our marketing folks have taught us the three Cs: Clarity, Consistency and Constancy. We are getting smarter from a branding perspective because you are always building a brand, whether it's a person, industry group, local office or overall firm – intentional or not. Up to this point, that has happened at an individual level, which has built great individual brands or made us well known in specific industries but ultimately undermined the overall brand, in my opinion. We are now focused on intentionally building the CLA brand.

How can marketing have more impact?

Get to know the clients of the firm – who they are, why they buy, what motivates them. You build your brand every day with every interaction. You are constantly marketing. The best resource is our clients. Understand what we do, who we do it for, why and how they hire us, and why they stay with us. And, how those clients can help us build our brand.

What advice would you give partners about working with marketing?

View them as a professional resource. Anything you know about business development or marketing you've learned from others, classes you've gone to or competitors. A professional marketer, that's their job, their focus, so listen to them. Make them a member of the team. Secondly, raise the expectations of your marketing team. The easiest answer is to tell them what to do; the hardest thing is to listen to them and trust the advice they're giving you.

How can marketing professionals elevate their relationship with partners?

The working relationship: make it easy for the partner. Sometimes I find people are waiting for me to give them the answer instead of proposing the answer and offering the direction. Don't just be an order taker.

Marketing Automa to the Buyer's Jou

Understand your clients' motivations, methods, needs to uncover, chart your buyers' processes

Lee Frederiksen

For many accounting marketers, it is difficult to consistently deliver results.

The accounting industry is competitive. You must differentiate your firm in a manner that is relevant and meaningful to prospective clients. Then you must guide prospects through the buyer's journey – delivering the right message at the right time so they decide your firm is the right one to meet their needs.

Successfully attracting and nurturing prospects through the buyer's journey is becoming increasingly more challenging. People are inundated with marketing messages online and in print media. In any given day, your prospects may receive hundreds of messages wanting their attention. The problem is most messages are ignored. Research shows it will take at least 15 to 20 "touch-action" points before a prospect will even start to consider doing business with your firm.

To make matters worse, marketers frequently are challenged to "do more with less." Firms typically offer numerous services to diverse clients in many industry niches. Marketers must uniquely position their firm and professionals as thought leaders, or what we call visible experts, in many different areas. While this may seem like an overwhelming task, it can be accomplished by taking a strategic approach to marketing automation.

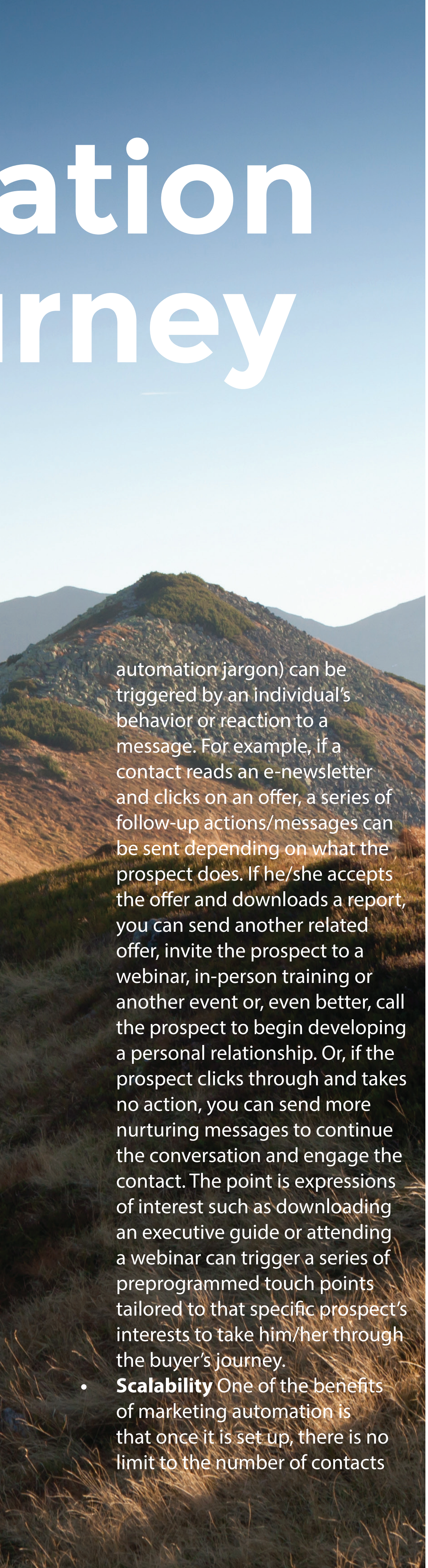
In this article we explore how you can use marketing automation to differentiate your firm and accelerate growth. We'll look at three major stages in the buyer's journey and show how a solid strategy can give you a sustainable competitive advantage.

Let's start by looking at marketing automation's promise and some of the possible obstacles.

Benefits of Automation

Eighty-four percent of the 1,000 professional service providers that participated in Hinge's 2018 High Growth Study view marketing automation as integral to the success of their growth strategy. And, with literally thousands of vendors to choose from, this is a very hotly contested marketplace with more than its share of exaggerated claims. Looking beyond the hype, there are at least three major benefits of marketing automation for accounting firms:

- **Reduced Costs** Automating routine marketing tasks is an obvious win. It allows the marketing team to accomplish more in less time. But there is another hidden cost savings. By applying smart strategies to lead generation and nurturing, firms can reduce the time and resources thought leaders devote to business development. These subject matter (visible) experts are typically in high demand at firms. Marketing automation can leverage their valuable time while producing better results.
- **Personalized Marketing** Nothing achieves a higher return on the investment than a personalized marketing strategy tailored to the behavior of each prospective or existing client. That is exactly what automation can deliver. Programs (or workflows in marketing



automation jargon) can be triggered by an individual's behavior or reaction to a message. For example, if a contact reads an e-newsletter and clicks on an offer, a series of follow-up actions/messages can be sent depending on what the prospect does. If he/she accepts the offer and downloads a report, you can send another related offer, invite the prospect to a webinar, in-person training or another event or, even better, call the prospect to begin developing a personal relationship. Or, if the prospect clicks through and takes no action, you can send more nurturing messages to continue the conversation and engage the contact. The point is expressions of interest such as downloading an executive guide or attending a webinar can trigger a series of preprogrammed touch points tailored to that specific prospect's interests to take him/her through the buyer's journey.

- **Scalability** One of the benefits of marketing automation is that once it is set up, there is no limit to the number of contacts the system can handle. This is particularly helpful to small and mid-sized firms with a diverse target audience in multiple niches and limited resources. Marketing automation can level the playing field and allow a small team to compete against the largest of competitors.

Even with all these benefits, many firms have joined the automation bandwagon only to be disappointed. Marketers must realize a marketing automation system is simply a tool to efficiently communicate with and build relationships with contacts. As with any marketing campaign, it is the strategy behind the message(s) that will deliver the desired results.

How Can it Fail?

While each firm has its own story, there generally are three common reasons for disappointing results:

- **Failed Implementation** If you don't use it, it will not work. Just like CRM or email marketing in the past, your whole team needs to be engaged and using the system for it to work as planned.
- **Flawed Strategy** Automating a flawed strategy doesn't improve it. If you don't understand your potential buyer's perspective and what motivates them to buy, then you are not likely to provide the content relevant to their concerns. Your messages will be off, and your differentiators will provide no competitive advantage. Even worse, you will give the contact the impression that you are not interested in what is important to them.
- **Failure to Learn** No automation strategy works perfectly right out of the box. You must track your efforts and results and learn from them. That means adjusting, trying a different tactic, and then learning from that. Given the sophistication of modern tracking technology, you can learn what delivers the results you seek and what falls short.

So how do you capture the promise of automation and avoid some of these common pitfalls? Let's look at how marketing automation helps you gain a competitive advantage in three key areas of strategic marketing focus.

Building Your Brand

The strength of your brand is your firm's reputation multiplied by the visibility of that reputation within your target markets. Automation can help you drive both of those components.

Let's start with an accounting firm with one or more specialized practices such as a business valuation or online sales and use tax. To promote these practices, you develop specific content that speaks to the issues potential clients face.

As prospects come across your content via organic search, they read (or watch or listen to) your valuable information. In the piece you offer a free download of more in-depth content such as a guide or research report. Marketing automation tracks the download and follows up with additional pieces of content relevant to that prospect's needs.

While simple in concept, this allows you to use pre-developed content to further establish your specialized expertise. If you have chosen your content wisely, it will rapidly establish your firm as expert in that particular issue. While it would be theoretically possible to run such a personalized follow-up campaign manually, it is a practical impossibility.

Now let's take the example of a different firm that focuses on serving 10 industries widely found in their region rather than specialized expertise as a differentiator. In this example they would have a different follow-up workflow for new contacts from each industry. Since that content is only going to prospects from that industry, it can be very specific and use industry terms and

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Online Buyer Experience from page 6

Self-Directed Marketplace Method for 3 Stages of the Professional Service Firm Buyer

Buyer Stage/ Strategy	SEO	Design	Call to Action	Resource	Opt-in	Follow-up
Tire Kickers	Keyword selection and page titles based on buyer pains, desires, interests	Home page directs visitor in one click to explore pain, desire, interest	Invite visitor to view a resource related to their pain, desire, interest	Relevant and high-value video, blog post, Q and A, expert interview	Subscribe to newsbriefs, sign up, download whitepaper, follow on social	Opt-in list to share similar relevant content (newsbriefs, special invitations, video university
Mid-Stage	Sponsored ads, social media, keyword selection and page titles based on niche specialization or client type; narrow keywords by niche pain, desire or interest	Landing pages segmented by niche pain, interest or desire (not by service or industry like traditional sites)	Invite visitor to take an assessment, participate in an industry survey or register to attend a webinar (still tied to their personal interest)	Education and evaluation of the buyer's pain, interest or desire as it relates to firm services and experience (guiding their consideration)	Subscribe to alerts, follow our channel, attend free quarterly events	Narrowing suspect list to short list of high-potential clients; increasingly personalized messaging and resources sent from partners (still soft-sell and informational)
Validators	Keyword selection and page titles inviting contact	Consult sign-ups, automated calendar scheduling, online RFP requests, tiered options to explore	Have a meeting or a consultation	Provider references, proposal based on marketing intelligence that pinpoints buyer pains, interests, desires	Capabilities presentation and team introductions	Confirming engagement

Shoppers emphasized these marketplaces offer (1) better prices, (2) convenience and (3) variety, in that order, compared to shopping at just one online retailer.

What does this mean for a public accounting firm? How can the marketplace model inform how CPAs demonstrate their high value and consultative relationship?

The instruction lies in the buyer experience. Online marketplaces have automated processes and algorithms to keep buyers' attention in a variety of ways. This automation leads buyers from consideration and browsing to the decision to fill their carts and check out. Shoppers are becoming conditioned to this ease of self-selecting and decision-making, and *this* is the model marketers can apply to the professional service firm marketplace:

- **Consideration**
- **Taking an action**
- **Conversion to a new client**

The Marketplace Model

According to Genoo, a marketing automation, training and consulting service provider since 2008, about 94 percent of visitors to a professional service firm website are not ready to buy. Still, something has occurred in their lives or businesses to get them searching.

They are searching at 7 a.m. or 11 p.m., on a Monday or a Sunday, in their office or on the patio. They are actively choosing to learn about CPA firm services. But they are not ready to buy. Just like retail shopping, they are browsing firms. They are kicking the tires. They want to explore on their own time and in their own way … and they can leave at any time.

Typically they land on the home page. But they don't have to. If marketers apply the marketplace model to a professional service firm buyer's online experience, traditional web design is inconsequential. Instead, focus on the three stages of the buyer.

- **Tire Kickers** early in their search process (Consideration)
- **Mid-Stage** narrowing their selection (Taking action)
- **Validators** getting reassurance of making the right choice (Conversion)

To offer a flavor of how these buying stages can align with the marketplace method, the chart shown above outlines end-to-end self-directed campaigns for each stage. This approach can fill in the gaps of online lead generation and nurturing strategies to guide buyers toward conversion on their own terms.

Notice these tactics are designed to go from low touch to high touch, from buyer exploration to actively choosing contact with the firm.

When your online experience is designed for buyers to take themselves through all three buying stages (consideration, action, conversion), then you will begin to notice more interest from qualified leads to follow your firm for valuable, personalized information. You will notice more requests for a consult and more scheduled meetings right from your website. By automating these touches, you create an efficient and cost-effective inbound marketing strategy.

With all of these tools already available to you, (including back-end marketing automation software), creating a self-directed marketplace experience for potential clients is well within reach.

Christine Nelson, Lead Communications Consultant, Ingenuity Marketing Group, LLC. Contact at 612-718-9733 or christine@ingenuitymarketing.com.

Take 5: What is the best process you have automated in the past year?

1

We automated the tax source document input process about five years ago. Tax preparation historically has been a manual process, with preparers taking tax forms and manually transferring the information reported on those documents into our software. Today, source documents are run through **GruntWorx Populate**, with the information on those forms being auto-populated into our tax preparation software with a high degree of accuracy. Now, when a preparer begins a return, it is mostly populated before they start the preparation process, placing them in a more valuable role - that of a reviewer - to ensure the accuracy of the information populated. Some returns are 99% complete after running through the process, simply requiring a review and processing of the final return.

Jim Bourke, Withum, *Partner and Managing Director, Advisory Services*

2

It started with needing a new **customer relationship management (CRM) system** and having our other systems integrate with it. As we started developing and building our CRM and integrating tools, we documented the sales process and full client journey and broke it up into automated widgets within the software. Now we have constancy in client service and accountability throughout our firm as users simply follow the widgets within each prospect/client profile as a guide through the automated process. This has also provided more accurate key performance indicator (KPI) measurements that have produced better forecasting and data for better businesses decisions.

Jennifer Cantero, *Sensiba San Filippo LLP, Marketing Director*

3

We implemented **SharpSpring** for marketing (and light CRM) in 2018. We're able to quickly create landing pages and forms to track RSVPs and create workflows to automatically send emails related to each event. We've created notifications to alert partners/managers if, when and how clients or prospects visit and interact with our website. We're also creating email drip campaigns that target specific clients and prospects, and we're setting up email automations triggered when contacts interact with our content (completing a form, spending a certain of time on a specific page, clicking through on a particular email, etc.). We've also implemented lead scoring to help identify which users potentially are the most valuable based upon their engagement with our digital content.

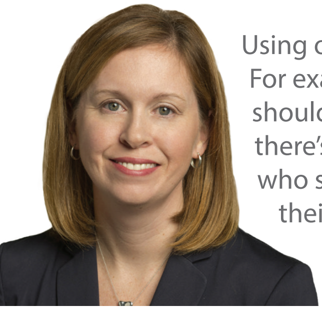
Stacy L. Dreher, *James Moore, Marketing Manager*

4

We have automated reporting functions with **Google Data Studio (GDS)**. Our website collects inbound leads via a Google Sheet integration, which is connected to GDS as a data source. This allows me to draw real-time reports on these leads and tracking - essentially allowing our staff to perform better client service - without spending hours manually digging for this information and updating Excel. An ever-expanding list of resources from GDS (i.e. pre-made templates and cross-platform integrations) allows marketers with virtually no experience on the platform to jump right in and begin assessing the performance of everything from ad campaigns to social media engagement and the website.

Sarah Gray, *Doty, Marketing Supervisor*

5



Using our **marketing automation tool, Act-On**, we've automated select communications to new members. For example, when a user sets up an account on our portal, they receive an email that lists three things they should immediately do to become familiar with the site. With more than 16,000 users, automation ensures there's no delay in getting new users up to speed. Other emails introduce our learning catalog to members who show interest in our CPE, while another directs firm administrators to complete an online info form about their firm.

Colleen Mhley, *BDO Alliance USA program, Marketing Director*

Buyer's Journey from page 11

concepts. It can reinforce the firm's familiarity with both the region and the industry. Targeted specific messages can replace the all too common "one size fits all" messages firms deliver when a single message must go to a diverse audience. This dramatically increases the effectiveness of your brand-building and strengthens your differentiation.

Develop Better Leads

Many firms spend most of their business development effort trying to identify someone who needs their services. With the right strategy, marketing automation can assume most of that burden. Think of it this way – as a prospect opens and consumes your content, they send signals about their interests and readiness to engage. In a very real sense they are self-qualifying themselves as new clients.

Most marketing automation systems have a lead scoring function that tells you when a prospect is exhibiting signs that indicate they may be ready to engage around a specific service. At that point you can either reach out or wait for them to contact you. In either case, you have eliminated the need to have your subject matter experts cold call or attend numerous networking sessions hoping to run across someone needing their service at that very time.

There is another benefit. During the nurturing process these prospective clients have grown to see your firm as having relevant expertise so they are much easier to close.

Call on Existing Clients

The sobering fact is most clients simply do not know all the ways your firm can help them. This is especially true if your firm offers a diverse suite of services. And of course it is devilishly hard to get your entire client-facing staff to cross-refer.

This is another area where marketing automation can help set your firm apart. By putting your clients on a nurture sequence that features additional services that may be relevant to their industry or situation, you expose them to possibilities and solutions you did not realize they might be interested in.

This is something firms always intend to do but seldom accomplish. By grouping clients into broad categories (such as tax or assurance) and tailoring the content to that category, the process becomes relatively easy to automate. Yes, you will still need content that explains the problems your services solve, but you will not have to rely on a partner or business development professional to remember to deliver the right message that addresses the contact's concerns.

Tips for Success

Using marketing automation to gain a competitive advantage is not easy, even if it is strategic, compelling and cost effective. Here are a few tips to make marketing automation more successful:

1. **Know Your Target Audience** The better you know your target audience the easier it is to get your marketing automation strategy right. Invest in research to thoroughly understand their issues, topics and triggers.
2. **Be Strategic** A well thought–out strategy based on the knowledge you gained in your research is vital to your success. Don't automate what you are currently doing without testing your campaign. Ask clients, referral sources and trusted advisors if the message(s) is on point and addresses the pain points identified in your market research. An outside perspective from someone who understands both marketing automation and your market is often most helpful.
3. **Choose the Right System** Develop your strategy before you select a marketing automation system. Some systems may sound great but are not well suited for your firm and what you want to accomplish. Find out which system other accounting firms following a similar strategy are using.
4. **Deliver Value** Developing content can seem insurmountable at first. Devote some of your savings in operational execution to keeping your content fresh and original. Use outside writing or editorial services to leverage your subject matter experts' time.
5. **Be Agile** Test, track results and revise. Repeat. This discipline will drive your success.

Marketing automation tools can be a powerful tool for your firm when they lead a contact through the buyer's journey. By tracking what your prospects are doing in multiple campaigns, and then dynamically sending them customized marketing messages based on their specific behavior, you build your brand and develop better leads.

If done correctly, marketing automation should result in a substantial increase in conversion rates, accelerating the growth of your firm.

Lee Frederiksen, Managing Partner, Hinge. Contact at 703-391-8870 ext. 101 or lfrederiksen@hingemarketing.com.

Business Development from page 7

business development is content driven by business developers. In some cases, marketing teams are interviewing and taking a few minutes of video from partners or business developers that they can turn into a year's worth of written content. In other situations, marketers are interviewing business developers to understand key differentiation points or encouraging business developers to write some of the content drafts themselves.

Once the content puzzle is complete, the focus turns to lead generation. There are two areas that impact business development and marketing. First, the content should be positioned so it leads to a definite call to action. That may involve gathering contact information or driving direction to face-to-face conversation through meetings or events. Otherwise, the firm is educating the buyer for a competitor to capture.

Feedback = Success

The second area regarding leads involves the concept of scoring and feedback. As firms start to develop lead scores, they quickly learn the scoring criteria needs frequent tweaking. Finding the right scoring system requires feedback from business development. And, thinking about how artificial intelligence is coming into play with some of these technologies, there are additional opportunities to learn from the data.

No one really knows how people will react to information until business developers solicit feedback or try to work into creating opportunities. Therefore, it is important to drive feedback back into marketing so future messaging can have greater impact. At the same time, companies can continue leveraging marketing for strategic nurturing while pursuing ongoing opportunities.

The reality in today's marketplace is that multiple forces are trying to influence buyers throughout the sales process. Providing key or supporting information about the firm, a niche or a particular specialty can help influence decision makers, especially when that information is relevant to the prospect's present stage within the proposal or negotiation process. The same message that piques interest is not the same message that may increase a buyer's comfort level or provide support for the expertise that business development is claiming.

Consider, for example, a firm with a specialty in construction. While there is much construction-focused content available, the local economy is strong and there are other implications that matter when business developers meet with construction company executives.

The business developers sit down with marketing to explain these factors and develop some content that will draw attention to their website. Business developers also describe who the key contacts are for this information, so marketing can create nurture campaigns and source possible lists. The team also creates a case study that is available only via download, helping business developers understand which prospective buyers have a higher level of interest.

After putting the information on the website, a few leads start to trickle in and marketing meets with business development, only to find out the responders are good but not exactly the ideal candidates for their services. Marketing then adjusts the message and makes a few tweaks to the case study.

Some time goes by; quality leads are coming in and a few opportunities are progressing. The contacts who are a part of these opportunities are now receiving additional content that educates and differentiates the firm. Finally, at the end of the nurture stream, the prospective clients are periodically receiving a few client testimonials to help support the sales process. Ultimately, the firm starts to gain new clients and expands market share in their construction niche.

Of course, this example is a high-level look at the process, but it serves as a good guideline and template for how business developers and marketers can work more cohesively to drive business for the firm. We all know people buy from people they like, but there is process and science that can impact the modern professional services buyer's experience and shape just who it is they like.

Danny Estrada, Founder, E Squared Strategy & Management Consulting. Contact at 917-476-573 or destrada@ e2consulting.net

Q&A Dr. Karlyn Borysenko

"Zen Your Work: Create Your Ideal Work Experience Through Mindful Self-Mastery" author and contributor to forbes.com

You've registered for the 2019 AAM Summit and it's time to select your sessions. You are captivated by the June 13 session "Playing Politics: The Psychology of the Human Workplace" that will encourage you to "play the game" at work. But before you meander too far down the road of negative assumptions, note that the presenter is Dr. Karlyn Borysenko. With an MBA and Ph.D. in Industrial Organizational Psychology, Borysenko will not tell you how to manipulate co-workers and supervisors for your own personal gain. Instead, she will show you a new way to think that she guarantees will be a game-changer professionally and personally.

Q: Will you encourage Summit attendees to engage in office politics?

A: First, I want people to see politics means influence. It's more about who you can, and who you need to, influence to achieve your goals as well as your organization's business objectives. Politics can be used for good or bad – it's up to you to decide how to use them. You can use your influence for the good of your organization or for the detriment. But remember it's always in everyone's best interest to use your influence in positive ways.

Q: What led you to apply your knowledge and strategies to the workplace?

A: My interest in pursuing a Ph.D. in Industrial Organizational Psychology came from real-life experiences in the workplace that were problematic and unsatisfactory. I once felt issues in the workplace came about because of failures in procedures, but then I learned there is a psychological basis for most workplace conflicts. I met a lot of people moving through these issues by applying theories and beliefs. Their success sparked my interest.

Q: What's the biggest takeaway from your book?

A: Most people think of mindfulness when they think of meditation. But it's so much more. The book offers mindful techniques at work without meditation. People who read the book and hear me speak should walk away with the knowledge they have choices. There is always a conscious decision made in everything you do. You are not tied or bound to anything. If you are in an uncomfortable situation at work or facing an issue, ask yourself how you might be contributing to the situation or issue. And if the situation or issue is not helping you live your best life, make the decision to remove yourself from it.

Q: What's the most important thing you can do at work?

A: Start by bringing an optimistic and "can-do" attitude to work. This is easy for about 50% of the population, not so easy for the other 50%. But if you infuse an unapologetic, almost unreasonable optimism into your work space, the impact on your productivity and the productivity of others is almost immeasurable. Every business metric we measure goes up if we can make others around us happy at work. Being happy at work is a choice – it is not dependent upon what happens to you or what a co-worker says to you. It is a conscious choice to be happy no matter what.

Q: Do you feel your concepts are more relevant today based on workplace demographics or are the concepts timeless?

A: The concepts and techniques have always been important, but they are particularly compelling now. In today's business environment, people bring their whole selves to work, and employers must appeal to workers' emotional and human needs. This requires employers to have a softer touch. Where the workforce used to be somewhat dehumanized and robotic, the environment has changed and the concepts I teach will do nothing but become more important to attract and retain talented and engaged workers.

Q: Who do you find is more open to your approach to mindfulness at work – men, women and/or specific age groups?

A: My non-scientific answer is based on my own experience – women between the ages of 35 to 65 seem to be the most receptive and energized, although men are open to the concepts and can greatly benefit from incorporating a mindful approach at work. I have found women in that specific range have experienced a rougher time in the workplace and often have issues surrounding their confidence and self-esteem. My work shows them they have value and helps them regain their confidence in the workplace. We also realize, as we get older, that the things we thought were true in our 20s are untrue, and we are less willing to tolerate insincerity and falseness.

Are you mobile friendly?

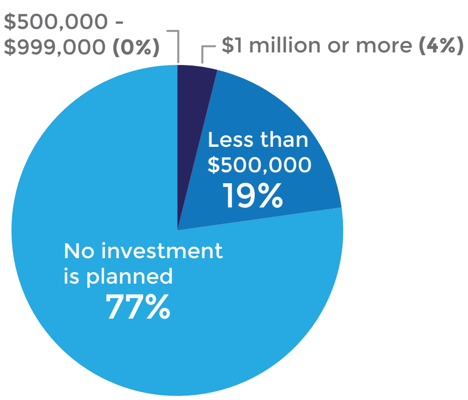
Smartphone users who discovered a new company or product while conducting a search on their smartphone

Source: Google

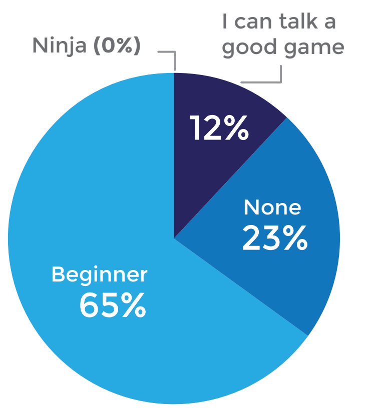
WTF is Blockchain Anyway?

AAM members were asked about their knowledge and implementation of blockchain in their firm during the March AAM Minute poll. How do you measure up?

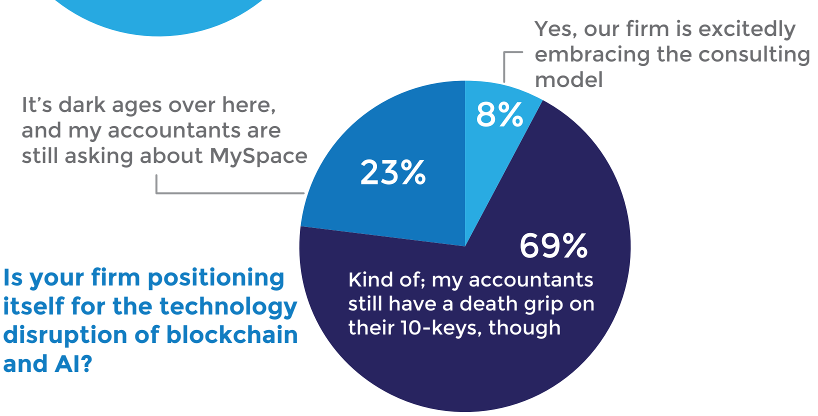
What is the approximate investment your organization will make in the next calendar year in this area?



What is your current level of blockchain understanding?



Is your firm positioning itself for the technology disruption of blockchain and AI?



Make sure to check out the June AAM Minute to participate in their next poll!

by the Numbers

Keeping Up

27%

Percentage of all firms that responded to **AccountingToday's** 2019 "Year Ahead" survey of more than 800 firms of all sizes that feel keeping up with technology is an issue

Top 5 Marketing Priorities of High-Growth Professional Services Firms

Differentiating our firm from competitors
59.2%

Choosing the right marketing mix
44.7%

Developing a content marketing plan
43.7%

Modernizing/re-designing our website
35.9%

Improving the performance of our website
34%

Source: Hinge 2019 High Growth Study. Respondents were asked to provide gross revenue for 2016, 2017 and 2018. Hinge only reviewed firms that generated more than $1 million in annual revenue. 349 firms met that criteria.

Content Utilization from page 8

to gain broad exposure. To really be successful at this (especially at the local level), you'll want to nurture relationships with key influencers at important outlets (e.g., specific editors and reporters). Alternatively, if you just want to blast your news out there and hope someone bites, you might consider a service like PRWeb.

- **Influencers** While this can work on different levels, strive to create a network of industry influencers to share your content. The authority of your content will get a big boost if key influencers share it along with your own professionals. Even better, see if some of these influencers are willing to contribute, or participate in, the creation of content to co-brand your firm.

For many of these strategies, you can use the same piece of content in several different ways, which helps to prolong its shelf life and maximize its ROI. Additionally, don't discount of the power of repurposing existing content. HubSpot reports that 76 percent of its monthly blog views come from historical content (i.e., older than one year), while 53 percent of its traffic comes from just 12 blogs! I ran that same analysis for my firm and found that 32 percent of our monthly traffic comes from 10 blogs. This shows you how important it is to not solely focus on new content, but also optimize your existing content.

To further illustrate this point, a few years back our firm wrote a blog on the tax consequences of converting your home into a rental property. While it consistently ranked as one of our top-performing blogs, we sought to keep it performing well and capitalize on its high traffic volumes, so we updated images, added new information and included links to other relevant blogs on our site. Not only did this help to maintain traffic volumes on this blog, it led to more premium content conversions on that page and increased traffic on the related, cross-linked blogs.

One other quick tip: Depending on the sophistication of your content calendar, you may want to build your distribution strategy into its framework. Whether that includes any of the items listed above, or any additional tactics that your firm utilizes, accounting for your distribution strategy up front could be a great way to track its success.

Finally, content marketing efforts that don't integrate accurate measures won't deliver the ROI you and your firm desire. No matter which distribution methods you use, make sure to measure your results – quantitatively and qualitatively – and evaluate your efforts.

Matt Seitz, Managing Director, Sales & Marketing, Clarity 2 Prosperity. Contact at 440- 915-7043 or seitz.matt@gmail.com.

Consultants' Corner

What one task should marketers automate, and how can they easily execute it so they can be more productive?

Since many marketers don't have the luxury of a fully staffed department (or, as Anne Angera says, are a "party of one"), one of the best things they can do is put a robust dashboarding system in place. This can automate data aggregation and provide meaningful analysis on what needs to be focused on right now: Are partners and managers keeping up with their customer experience activities? Is original content being created for the blog or newsletter? What does our pipeline look like and are any follow-up tasks overdue or missing? Being able to triage your efforts is critical when resources are constrained and helps you focus your time on doing things that best contribute to the growth of your firm.

Jeff Pawlow
The Growth Partnership
jpawlow@thegrowthpartnership.com

Automating your content program is key to not only your productivity, but also to the success of your outbound communications program. Consistency in delivering timely, relevant content to your target audience is critical and helps you build an audience. Employing a social media management tool will increase productivity with sophisticated scheduling options, multi-channel posting and competitive analysis. This allows you to schedule posts across your social platforms in advance, set up content for repeated posting and queue up content to be delivered at times where engagement is most likely. Social media managers typically offer a central tool for engaging with your audience and provide reports to measure post performance.

Leanne O'Gorman
Thomson Reuters – Checkpoint Marketing for Firms
leanne.ogorman@thomsonreuters.com

I'm a huge fan of automated lead nurturing and client email sequences to stay in touch, but save time. Set these up for prospects as well as clients. An easy one is a new client welcome sequence. You can still send out a welcome packet, but then introduce new clients to the firm and team with a series of three automated emails (one a week) sharing key resources on your website, introducing your newsletter/blog/videos, and pointing them to the bios of the team they are assigned to. It's proactive, consistent and one less thing to think about when onboarding clients!

Dawn Wagenaar
Ingenuity Marketing
dawn@ingenuitymarketing.com

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