

# Growth Strategies

## For Culture Shock



# AAM THANKS OUR 2019 CORPORATE PARTNERS



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# The Marketer's Role in Professional Development

## Find Your Part in Personal Planning, Coaching and Mentoring

Eileen Monesson

### Are you curious as to why some firms can attract and retain top talent while others cannot?

The answer is simple. Firms that are successful at hiring and keeping employees invest in their personal development. They provide technical and soft skills training, as well as programs focused on individual development to ensure employees have every opportunity to grow and prosper within the organization.

Recruiting and retaining the right mix of talent continues to be a challenge for most accounting firms. The 2019 Inside Public Accounting (IPA) National Benchmarking Report states professional staff turnover remained steady at 13.7% nationwide, while the average tenure for professional staff is 6.6 years.

Professional development is important to most cohorts of recruits. In *Leading the Social Enterprise: Reinvent with a Human Focus – 2019 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends*, the authors pointed out that millennials want 50% more time dedicated to mentorship and coaching, with twice as much time focused on developing their leadership skills. Fortunately, 59% percent of respondents have an internal training department. This leaves the task to partners, marketers

and staff at 41% of the firms.

### Personal Marketing Plans

One of the Top 10 findings of the 2019 Rosenberg Survey: National Study of CPA Firm Statistics is that organic growth increased from 4.3% to 5.9%. This suggests firms are focusing more on business development. Marketers can embrace the personal marketing planning process to help partners and staff become better business developers.

Personal marketing planning can be effective if partners and staff fully participate in the process. Marketers need to set clear expectations and goals to hold participants accountable on their performance review. Recognition and reward programs will further incentivize participants to meet the desired expectations.

Marketers should be strategic in their approach to personal marketing planning. Set measurable goals and milestones for each person. Celebrate successes and don't accept excuses for not doing what was promised.

"When a CPA says 'marketing,' he/she typically means 'growth.' Many CPAs believe that if the firm is visible and credible, growth will automatically happen," says Gale Crosley, founder of Crosley+Company. "Nothing could be further from the truth. Coaching and mentoring enable the fulfillment of the growth mission. Since most CPAs

have had no training in how to grow, the marketer's role of leading and supporting growth is critical to the future of the firm."

### Mentoring

Nearly 75% of the firms participating in IPA's survey stated they have a formal mentoring program. Even so, only 5% rated the effectiveness of their mentoring program as "excellent" and 2% stated their program was "poor."

IPA found training and mentoring staff ranked lowest for equity partner evaluation criteria. Only 68% of the surveyed firms indicated this was a key criterion for owners nationwide. Marketers should encourage partners to "pay it forward." Mentoring provides staff the opportunity to develop trusted relationships with firm leaders, while helping with employee attraction and retention.

Julie Kantor, founder and CEO of Twomentor, believes successful mentoring programs need to be engineered.

"Mentors and mentees must be clear on their roles and responsibilities," Kantor said. "Mentoring works best when both parties follow a roadmap. Mentees need to drive the relationship by scheduling meetings, preparing an agenda and having written professional goals."

Mentors should be trained on how to work with mentees instead of "winging

it". This is where marketers can provide value. Either identify, interview or select a consulting firm to work with or develop a formal mentoring program and guide with the leadership team.

A guide should include standards on where and when mentors and mentees should meet, what needs to be covered in each session, how to establish SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time sensitive) goals and how both parties will be held accountable.

## Coaching

Only 18% of respondents offer outside coaches to staff members. The other firms either have an internal team of coaches or rely on marketers to be coaches. Regardless of who does the coaching, it is imperative these conversations are confidential, and participants know they are in a "safe" place.

Coaching can help partners and staff overcome limiting beliefs and other obstacles that stand in the way of developing new business opportunities or participating in marketing initiatives. Coaching is an important component of personal marketing planning. People need to feel comfortable and self-confident before they will contribute to the firm's marketing efforts.

"We have a Career Coaching program with more senior accounting professionals mentoring the junior accounting professionals," said Rhonda Maraziti, chief marketing officer with WithumSmith+Brown. "Some of that includes developing and monitoring progress with their personal marketing plans. The marketing department team members are not actively involved with the one-on-one marketing coaching. However, we do work with our practice leaders on the

development and execution of the overarching marketing strategy of the industry or service 'niche,' which could include niche team member marketing activities."

Although the programs discussed above often fall under the realm of human resources, marketers play an important role in successfully implementing these initiatives.

Marketers have a clear understanding of firmwide goals and objectives, dynamics of the accounting business, personalities of the partners and staff, and industry trends. Marketers can provide valuable insight on what the firm needs to design and execute effective personal marketing planning, mentoring and coaching programs.

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# TechNOwlogy

Preparing you for the future with tools you can use today

## Geoff Jones

*Using video conference software is essential. As long as the Internet is available, you can meet with clients and colleagues from basically any device, from anywhere. The challenge is selecting the right option for your firm or business. So, before you start, it's important to know the number of attendees you plan to have, the length of your meetings and the level of collaboration you will need.*

## Free Option

Just like "Xeroxing" documents (using a company name as a verb) became vogue in the day, the same is happening with Zoom. While the platform offers different pricing tiers, the free version is pretty awesome, accommodating up to 100 participants for an unlimited number of meetings. This no-cost option also includes simultaneous screen sharing, desktop sharing, host controls and a raise hand feature. The main drawbacks are the 40-minute time limit on group meetings of three or more people and the absence of cloud storage. FreeConferenceCall.com is another solid, free and highly rated option that offers modern features and — unlike Zoom — 1GB of storage.

## Pay Option

Whereby (formerly known as appear.in) is easy to use. Guests don't have to register to join, and video meetings are conducted through a web browser. No need to do requests; just send a simple URL and you're done. The interface is modern and sleek with drag-and-drop features and call recording. The price — \$9.99 for up to 12 participants and three meeting rooms — is an excellent value.



# Want to be a Partner?

## 4 Marketers Share How They Moved to the Next Level

Dana Bottorff

**As CPA firms increasingly shift their focus to advisory services, the leadership teams that will usher them into the future are expanding the range of skills and experience at the partnership level.**

For marketing professionals, this means a path to partnership has opened at many firms.



**Jennifer Cantero**

**On the Path**

Director of Marketing and Sustainability Jennifer Cantero is on the partnership track after being bowled over by Managing Partner John Sensiba's request in 2018 that she put together a three-year plan that would lead to an equity partnership in Sensiba San Filippo of Pleasanton, Calif. She had been at the firm six years and had deepened the marketing department's role in SSF's growth.

Still, "I had to sit for 30 minutes to wrap my brain around it," Cantero said. "I never thought about

partnership. But if marketers can bring in revenue like the CPAs can, why can't we become partners?"

In plotting her course to partnership, Cantero followed her passions. She put together a plan that calls for building two new practice areas for the firm – consulting to companies seeking B Corporation certification and a marketing niche delivering services to SSF's clients.

Her plan calls for her to bring in one client in 2019, five in 2020 and 10 in early 2022, the year she hopes to become SSF's first non-CPA equity partner. So far, she is on track.



**Nicole Gantz**

**Partner Since 2018**

When Honkamp Krueger & Co., P.C. of Dubuque, Iowa, decided to offer a nonequity partnership opportunity to non-CPAs in 2017, Gantz immediately told the CEO/president she was interested.

"I hadn't seen myself in that role," she said. "I'm a busy mom of three." But with 22 years of experience in marketing and the firm's commitment to family-first and flexible schedules, Gantz was motivated to reach the top of her field without having to leave the firm for another organization that offered a VP/CMO position.

She believes forward-thinking and innovative firms recognize that as they embrace a broader role in advisory work, they need a broader range of skills and talents – i.e. marketing – at the table.

Gantz already had achieved some of the requirements for partnership, including completion of a three-year internal leadership program, and she had participated in HK's mentorship program. Additionally, she has developed a consulting practice, offering marketing strategy services to non-competing CPA firms.



**Eric Majchrzak**

**Partner Since 2013**

As chief strategy officer at BeachFleischman in Tucson, Ariz., Majchrzak became a partner and shareholder by carving out a high-profile role nationally – in part through the Association for Accounting Marketing – as a strategist and search engine marketing (SEM) leader.

"Many in our profession focus their efforts on the local level, and that's important," Majchrzak said. "I took the opposite path to differentiate because I knew there were fewer voices within firms that could speak to what's happening in the

➤ **Continued on page 12**

# Keys to Success: Weaving Sales into a Firm's Culture

## Instituting a Pipeline Can Be Key to Catapulting a Team

Katie Tolin

**With increased competition in the accounting industry, more firms understand the need to infuse sales into their culture.**

To accomplish this, firms implement a pipeline (the “document” of all leads), but a pipeline alone is not enough. Your team members must understand sales are part of their job, and the firm needs to support their efforts with a process and appropriate training.

Developing rules around your pipeline is a solid starting point. What gets added, how it gets added, who adds it, when it has to be added and what information is needed are all decisions you need to make. This consistency ensures you have a holistic and realistic view of the current state of sales in your firm.

### Pipeline Needs Process

Pipeline reviews are how you keep the pipeline updated and hold people accountable for actually taking next steps on leads in a timely manner.

Gale Crosley of Crosley+Company recommends reviewing it every other

week in 30-minute phone or video calls with all partners participating.

“The calls have to be led by the person with authority over the participants,” she says, “and that is most often the managing partner.”

Firms with a larger geographic reach may consider regional pipeline review meetings like those Rea & Associates recently implemented.

“We felt a regional pipeline provided better opportunity for everyone to go through their leads,” says Becca Davis, Rea’s director of practice growth. “To ensure all firmwide specialty teams are represented, a representative is invited to each call and given a voice to help identify opportunities.”

For firms that have been conducting regular pipeline reviews, there is danger in them feeling stale. The key is to mix up what you are talking about in terms of new leads, old leads, leads for a certain service or industry, leads for a certain office, etc. No matter what approach you take, only focus on the highlights.

“Consider using a timer so each participant has the same amount of time,” says Art Kuesel of Kuesel Consulting,

who also suggests rotating leadership of the meetings and infusing an educational component.

### Sales Management

As you look at your pipeline, do you notice some team members don’t have leads listed or, perhaps, not as many leads as you think they should?

Have leads stalled almost guaranteeing an eventual loss? In simple terms, sales management is

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# Keeping Up With the Joneses

## How are Other Firms Evolving? Consider These Ideas

Becca Sensiba

### There is no question the accounting industry has drastically changed over the years.

Things such as artificial intelligence, nurture strategies and automation tools are all technological advances marketers see around every corner. Employee retention and recruitment strategies are another significant shift — cue the rise of casual dress codes, remote work opportunities and a more stringent focus on culture and social impact.

Embracing these changes has a direct effect on a firm's ability to meet the demands of the market.

To stay on top of innovative trends, consultants often are brought in to help firms build a foundation for industry shifts and guide them toward more future-ready practices.

**Here's what three of the industry's leading consultants have to share from what successful firms are implementing and how marketers are playing a role in influencing change.**



### What's Been Successful

Value pricing is a consistent topic of discussion among most accounting firms. Yet many firms are still reluctant to make the shift toward value pricing, said Bonnie Buol Ruszczyk, founder and owner of BBR Companies. However, Ruszczyk believes value pricing is a powerful tool for gaining trust, noting that business owners appreciate the upfront transparency. To implement this method successfully, she recommends firms “have or gain the ability to clearly budget so that they can better assist clients and avoid any major losses.”

Staffing and capacity restraints are another pain point throughout the industry, said Sarah Dobek, founder and president of Inovautus Consulting. To address this issue, Dobek recommends firms evaluate their processes and make strategic staffing adjustments for greater productivity, such as changing the way more straightforward tasks are staffed and executed.

She also asks her clients to assess their client base and determine “who they want to be serving.” She notes many firms habitually serve long-time clients merely because they have been doing it forever — and often charge less than they should. While it can be scary to let go of consistent profit, Dobek has seen firms replace that profit surprisingly fast when they home in on their ideal client base.

“By focusing on who they really are, firms have the opportunity to elevate their niches and see a greater return,” she said.

When asked about innovation, Dobek is quick to say the idea of “being innovative” is often misconstrued. Although she points to things such as chatbots and automation tools as vital to a firm's growth strategy, she believes people often mistake innovation for a new funky idea or flashy design.

“Being bold means finding the things that are not working and fixing them,” she said. “When I think of innovation and moving the needle, it's about finding the root cause of issues, going deeper in an industry, realigning practice segments and being bold enough to know who you want to work with.”

### Shift to Advisory

Successful firms are not shying away from the shift toward advisory services, said Angie Grissom, president of The Rainmaker Companies.

“As we have seen over the years, top firms are becoming less reliant on compliance work and more focused on their role as an advisor,” she said. “This advisory shift affects most areas of the firm, including the professionals being recruited, the way they utilize technology, as well as the service offerings.”

That's why Grissom recommends firms invest in training and preparing current and future leaders to act as the best advisors to clients.

Donna Erbs, chief marketing officer at Andersen CPA (and a client of Grissom's), said the move to advisory services is changing just about everything.

“It changes firm dynamics because firms are now hiring MBAs, cybersecurity

➤ **Continued on page 18**



# PARTNER POV



**Stephen D. Mayer CPA**  
Founder and Managing Partner SD Mayer

In 2012, Stephen D. Mayer left the successful CPA firm he had co-founded more than 25 years earlier to start over again from scratch. He wanted to build a holistic advisory firm in which his staff shared in the profits and which provided clients with financial advisory service throughout their lives. At SD Mayer, he says he's achieved both — and much more.

## **What role did firm culture play in building a new firm?**

When two colleagues from Coopers & Lybrand and I started our own firm in the 1980s, we wanted to create a full-service firm that was committed to our clients, the community and having fun. Even though we were successful, I thought we were missing an opportunity with our clients. Each year we spent a lot of time preparing tax returns but would then hand them off to someone else to do their wealth planning. I thought our knowledge of their business and personal finances put us in a much better position to advise them.

## **How is the culture at SD Mayer different?**

We combine accounting, tax and consulting and tie it in with wealth management. We help clients solve day-to-day problems in the short term and make sure they have a great strategy for the long term. We call it "Accounting + Advisory for Life." I also believe the success of the firm is because of the hard work everyone puts in, so employees share in the value they create. Fifty percent of the firm's profits are shared with our employees. We're very transparent, sharing financial information with them each month. It is not socialism — people work hard, we have budgets and targets they have to meet to be in bonus pool.

## **Hiring is a key part of that success, isn't it?**

We hire a lot of really young people from diverse backgrounds. More than 50% of our current staff was born outside of the United States. English may not be their first language, their degree might not be from a prestigious college, but they have what it takes. When they're reading financial statements, for all the talk about how complicated what we do is, it is really just 1+1. What's more important is their likability. Do clients like them, are they engaged, do they care? If the client likes you, they'll give you a mulligan if you screw up, and they will tell their peers about you when

you do a good job. There is nothing more rewarding than a young person bringing in a new client because a current client referred them.

## **How has your firm's culture affected your marketing strategy?**

We have a great marketing guy who really knows digital marketing. I used to think internet marketing for advisory firms was a lot of BS, but now we are bringing in half our leads through our website. We used to buy canned content, but Google penalizes you when you reuse articles other firms have published. We just hired a consultant to write original articles for us about financial planning, which we feel is far more valuable to clients than general content.

## **How has that impacted your leadership style?**

I have always been a CEO who acted as a CEO. I thought our business needed to run like a corporation and less like a partnership. Partners ought to work with their clients and the staff. I always thought it was a mistake to ask partners to handle things like marketing, IT, finance and HR, so we hire professional staff for those senior leadership roles. With marketing, for example, I make sure I have a decent sized marketing staff, give them a good budget, tell them to drive revenue and then I get out of the way.

## **As we talk about culture change, you mentioned an interesting way your firm has enforced some policies to encourage efficiency, rules and motivation.**

We did a simple thing with time sheets. Every Monday by noon, time sheets need to be in. It's binary: either yes or no. If yours isn't in by noon, you get a minus. At bonus time we add up the minuses and people get penalized. On Monday at noon, we're at 97% compliance and by Tuesday at 9 a.m., we're at 100%.

# The Evolving Role of the Accounting Marketer

Mary Yanocha



## Firms are shifting. Future growth depends on attracting talent, staying relevant and differentiating from the competition.

Growth-minded firms are focused on some combination of expanding service lines and/or geographic footprints, providing broader services to their client bases, pursuing mergers and acquisitions, and harnessing new technologies to innovate service delivery. With this volume of diverse objectives, how does an accounting marketer keep pace?

To gain more insight into the minds and practices of accounting marketing professionals, Growth Strategies surveyed Association for Accounting Marketing members to determine what matters most to both firms and marketers, what firms are looking for from marketers and

where they see the role heading. The good news: while still a work in progress, firms are relying more on marketers as valuable growth allies.

### Reporting Structure

An overwhelming majority of marketing leaders report directly to the managing partner/CEO of their firms. This is good news for marketing, indicating firms prioritize the function enough to give it direct-line reporting right to the top. Among many other benefits, this gives marketing leaders

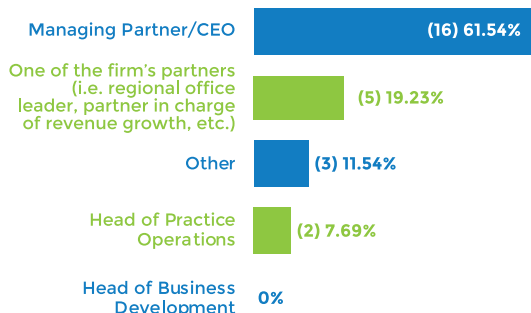
the ability to gain valuable face time, obtain real-time guidance on performance expectations, make quicker course corrections, have a platform to share ideas, and build the rapport and trust needed to keep marketing programming in alignment with firm direction.

Despite the high volume of those reporting to the top, marketing leaders are almost evenly split on having a seat at the table. While 44% report they do have a regular seat at the leadership table, another 44% report only having a seat when called upon to participate.

What is clear is that a small number of participants (12%) reported not having any seat at all, meaning there's still work to do in convincing firm leadership a marketing leader's presence is valuable at leadership meetings.

"Firms need multiple

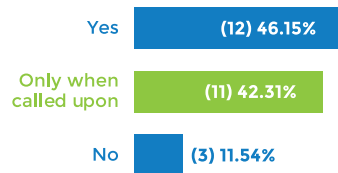
### Who does the head of marketing report to in your organization?



he



**Does the head of marketing have a seat at the table and regularly participate in the firm's leadership meetings? (select one)**



opinions in the room to come to the right answer," said Laura Kucera, principal and chief marketing officer of Citrin Cooperman, a top 25 firm as ranked by Accounting Today. "As marketers, we have a full picture of the industry to help facilitate conversation and encourage out-of-the-box ideas."

Marketing can gather client data and market intelligence, which can play a crucial role in validating and steering business decisions. If marketing leaders are viewed as strategic partners, they're better able to provide relevant metrics, analysis, and recommendations.

The reaction time needed to keep pace also requires that marketers be "in the know" to have critical foresight on what's happening before it actually happens. In cases such as mergers and acquisitions, bringing on new service lines or plotting the next territory in which to open a new office, early warning provides crucial planning time to factor these initiatives into marketing and communication plans and not be caught off guard or sent into scramble mode.

**What Firms Want**

No matter the firm size, expectations for the marketing role are elevating. Attention to client service remains a key priority that marketers are in a great position to support.

"Marketers today need to understand that more and more accounting firms are adopting a client-centric model," said Kate Harry Shipham, head of Chicago-based KHS People, an executive search firm specializing in placing marketers for CPA and law firms. "Firm leaders are looking for marketers that understand their business challenges and proactively seek to address them. Put yourself in the managing partner's shoes," Shipham continues, "and ask: 'How else can I help you?'"

To that end, soft skills such as taking initiative, tactfully challenging the status quo and problem solving are highly valued.

"Accounting firms set the bar very high in terms of expectations," she said. "Marketers who are forward thinking bring a fresh, and often broader, perspective to the business. Those who understand the importance of building strong relationships internally are the ones I look for when recruiting strategic marketing roles."

Being viewed as a trusted advisor to the

business is another trait today's firms want. This means not always jumping to a "yes" at every request a partner makes but having the fortitude to tactfully push back if a strong case can be made for more effective alternatives. Being able to cite hard data, provide examples of what other firms are doing and draw from prior experience will help make a convincing case for different approaches.

"Marketers with a combination of conviction and finesse are the ones who are taken seriously and viewed as credible with a strategic vision in mind," Shipham said.

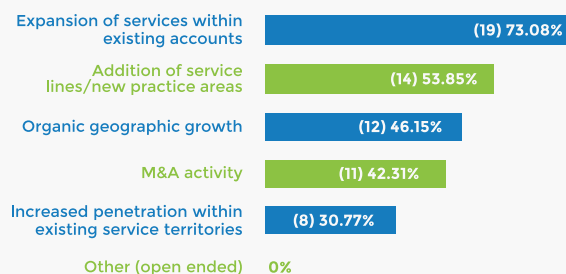
**Growth Strategies & Focus Areas**

"There's been a shift in the industry," Kucera said. "Clients expect us to be more than just an audit or tax provider. The partners are relying on marketing to help convey who we are and the value that we bring to the client relationship. As a firm, we have responded by expanding our breadth of services and branding ourselves as a professional services firm rather than an accounting firm. This has fueled support for a new firmwide advertising and brand campaign that strategically positions us to tell our story differently. Now we are focusing our message on what we want the client experience to be."

Accomplishing these growth strategies is no small undertaking for marketing, particularly when departments are small or teams of one.

"Partners need to understand that one person can't satisfy all aspects

**What have been the main growth strategies of your firm over the past 1-2 years?**



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profession, the transformation that needs to take place, and what the 'future firm' needs to look like."

His strategy made it easier to get a seat at the table and to extend his leadership beyond marketing. Eventually, Majchrzak pushed to get involved in other areas of the firm, leading initiatives around things such as strategic planning, M&A, technology, transformation and innovation.

Marketers must be their own primary advocates, Majchrzak said, but mentors are important.

"Mentors and champions provide voice for you and your perspective when you are not in the room," he said. "I don't believe a marketer should wait for an invitation to become a growth leader, but rather take it."

That requires stepping outside of your comfort zone, he said, and asking for leadership opportunities, volunteering for important projects and showing a willingness to tackle critical issues.



## Mari-Anne Kehler

Partner Since 2019

Some may consider Mari-Anne Kehler's path to partnership at Green Hasson Janks in Los Angeles unique. Following a long marketing career on Wall Street, at Nestle Waters North America and at Deloitte, she was looking to follow her passions in the nonprofit arena. Then Green Hasson Janks – one of the largest Los Angeles firms serving nonprofits – came calling. She joined the firm in 2015 as chief marketing and strategy officer, and added "partner" to her title in 2019.

# Think Like a Partner

Marketers who become partners share certain characteristics:

- Ability to think and act like an owner
- Passion to expand the firm's market reach and service offerings
- Vision to expand the role of marketing and integrate it with the firm's leadership and growth strategy
- Ability to think strategically and to envision the firm of the future

Mari-Anne believes marketers who are planning a path to partnership must use data and KPIs that demonstrate they have skin in the game. By drawing a direct line from marketing activities to the firm's growth, Mari-Anne influenced the partners to become champions of marketing.

"If you act like an owner, you understand what the measures are that partners care about and how you contribute to those."

## Performance Metrics

For non-CPA partners like marketers, the billable hour performance benchmark at the partner level is less relevant than firm growth.

"I set measurable goals to ensure I have skin in the game and to accelerate the firm's growth metrics," Kehler said.

Majchrzak agrees, noting his performance is defined around specific growth goals.

Compensation factors vary from firm to firm and depend upon whether marketing partners are equity shareholders in their firms. Generally, though, increased base compensation, bonus potential and partner-level perks are in the mix.

## What to Consider

While the impact on work/life balance was a concern for some marketers on the path to partnership, working for firms that shared their personal values ultimately calmed their fears. Several marketing partners also were concerned about getting caught in the minutiae of practice management but were relieved those concerns were unfounded.

Cantero of Sensiba San Filippo gave serious consideration to another question: *Did she really want to be in business with these people?*

"It's one thing to work for a company, but to be in business with them – that's a much deeper relationship," she said. "When I realized they were open to me creating the B Corp niche – which I love – they saw the value in letting me shape my path to partnership based on my own passions. I DO want to be in business with these people."

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# Take 5:

## What is the biggest change you or your firm are planning for in 2020?



We have several big irons in the fire, but the largest is strategy development. As we continue down the road of service line and industry specialization, we're building and rolling out our first segment marketing plans! Yes, you read that right. We're working on them right now and are very excited to move forward and spend time and resources in the most strategically significant places for our niches. It's a big but very necessary change.

**Korby Boswell**, *Adams, Brown, Beran & Ball CPAs, Marketing and Growth Specialist*

The biggest change in our marketing plan focuses on getting proactive and data-driven about our niches. We are rolling out a new niche program, led by marketing, which facilitates more consensus and collaboration. We anticipate this resulting in higher accountability and engagement from the leaders of these groups. From a marketing department standpoint, we expect to see two key changes as a result. First, a shift in our workload toward larger, deeper content pieces and industry-specific projects. Second, the ability to report on a dashboard of KPIs.

**Stephanie Chapa**, *Wiebe Hinton Hambalek, LLP, Director of Marketing*



The biggest change our firm is planning for is the research, purchase and setup of a new CRM system. We are looking to encourage better user adoption strategies (more timely and detailed data entry) amongst our staff and hope this better recordkeeping will allow us to more effectively develop targeted marketing to our various audiences (we are an international CPA firm).

**Lori Pohlman**, *The Wolf Group PC, Marketing Communications Manager*



We're expanding out from areas that have worked well for us before. We're branching into social media and expanding search terms as well as deepening and expanding relationships with homeowners' associations in the area we are targeting.

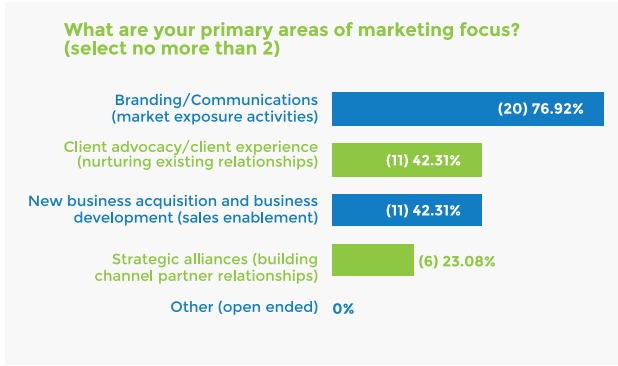
**Richard Rothstein**, *Stitely & Karstetter, Chief Marketing Officer*



We had a historic 2019, our 8<sup>th</sup> strategic merger in a decade and welcoming a new managing partner, the first non-named managing partner for the firm. These significant moves, along with a freshly minted 3-year strategic plan, creates an opportunistic 2020 where we will re-evaluate many of the firm's long-time processes, policies and philosophies while ushering in a prioritized focus on an advisory mindset. The challenge will be how we effectively transition from a task-and-service execution model to a more holistic business advisory model, actively listening and advising our clients on their most pressing business needs, whether that be financial, leadership development, data analytics and security, or preparing for a potential transition or sale.

**Chuck Summers**, *MCM CPAs & Advisors, Director of Practice Growth*





of marketing,” said Katie Tolin, chief growth guide of CPA Growth Guides, a marketing consulting firm focused on helping firms with their growth strategy.

“There are different disciplines within marketing just as there are with accounting roles,” she said. “While many project-based initiatives such as website development, video production and graphic design can be outsourced, the in-house marketing team needs to set the marketing strategy and manage successful execution of all aspects of the marketing plan.”

As firms grow, reliance on marketing also increases. This helps justify the need to hire marketing talent that specializes in areas such as digital advertising and branding, social media, event planning, content development and other areas.

In-house marketers have the institutional knowledge and internal relationships needed to facilitate effective execution of the marketing plan and can shift quickly when the business pivots. Leveraging outside experts when needed provides added reinforcement without bloating internal headcount.

### What’s Next?

Accounting firms in growth mode with entrepreneurial spirits are sharing more with marketing in terms of business strategy and financial performance. But Shipman says that was not always the case.

“Marketers have worked hard to prove their worth and elevate their roles beyond purely tactical order-taking,”

she said. “Marketers are now coming to the table with professional services experience and the qualifications that show firm leaders that they are truly in the business with them.”

Kucera’s team has expanded on that as a critical part of her firm’s client service strategy.

“We are establishing a more institutionalized way of staying on top of what’s going on at our clients and identifying what else we have that can bring significant value,” she said. “This helps arm our partners with a strategy of specific areas where we can add value right away as they have conversations with their clients.”

Forward-thinking firms that value the contribution of marketing are now seeking ways to reward and retain top talent, particularly in such a tight labor market. In some firms, this acumen has been rewarded by making the head of marketing a partner. Other firms have repositioned the role to take on broader responsibilities, working in areas such as revenue generation and client experience, hence the arrival of titles such as Chief Growth Officer and Client Experience Officer.

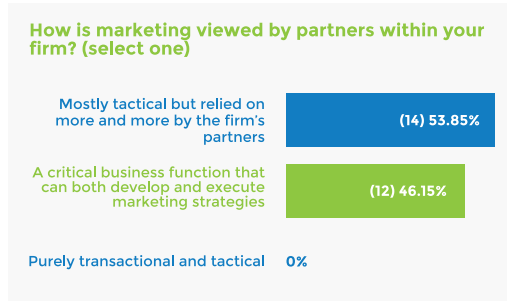
Regardless of title or full-time “seat-at-the-table” status, marketing is no longer an afterthought. Those within marketing are becoming more involved in the business itself, playing a key role in strategy development, growth initiatives, client experience and firm integration.

“There’s a purposeful shift away from using the word ‘marketing’ and a move toward replacing it with the term ‘growth,’” says Jack Kolmansberger, chief marketing officer for Pennsylvania-based Herbein + Company, Inc. “Nobody can say no to growth, but they can say no to marketing. As marketers, we’ve moved well beyond the traditional tri-fold brochure request

of decades past. We see the big picture across the firm, and firm leaders now have a better understanding of what we can do to help drive growth for the firm.”

This added influence requires marketers to possess a deep understanding of their businesses and stay current with the marketing strategies, technologies and trends shaping how we go to market. That means professional development must be a continuous priority.

Even for those marketers who are challenged with getting budget approval to participate in more expensive activities such as conferences, there are free resources such as webinars, podcasts and news sites that provide a steady stream of ideas and inspiration.



If time is not carved out on the calendar to regularly seek out fresh ideas, start now. It will provide the confidence and ammunition to go to bat for new marketing initiatives and avoid stagnation in programming.

### Key Takeaway

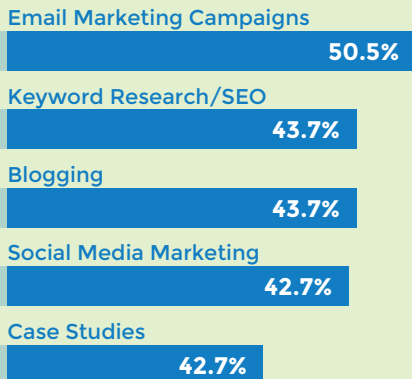
As marketers, we must view ourselves as more than a commodity to the business.

“Act like an advisor, even if you’re not yet viewed as such,” suggests Kucera. “It matters that you have a voice within the firm. Use it to prove that you were hired for a reason.”

**Mary Yanocha**, Chief Marketing Officer, Global Tax Management, Inc. (GTM). Contact at 484-395-4062 or myanocha@gtmtax.com.

## High-Growth Firm Strategies

### Top 5 Digital and Content Marketing Tactics Used



### Top 5 Traditional Marketing Tactics Used



Source: Hinge Research Institute High Growth Study

by the

## Numbers

## Are You Optimized?

# 65%

Percentage of 25-49 year olds who speak to their voice-enabled devices at least once a day

Source: PWC

## Did You Know?

50% of search queries are four words or longer, according to IMPACT |



*As founder of Upstream Academy, a consulting organization that works with more than 500 accounting firms throughout North America, Sam Allred is one of the top strategic thinkers in the profession. He energetically and creatively uses a firm's strengths to successfully navigate challenges they face. He regularly is referred to as one of the major influencers of the accounting profession and the "godfather" of leading positive change initiatives.*

**Q: What has changed the most in the accounting profession?**

**A:** I don't know that there's one single biggest change, but we're seeing a movement toward truly becoming a client's advisor and how technology is affecting that. We've been paid for decades to gather, present and prepare data, and in the not-too-distant future, technology largely will do that automatically. This will positively force us to be trusted advisors. We often use the term "trusted advisor," but quite literally only a fraction of our profession has played that role in the past three decades.

**Q: What is the "secret sauce" to create and establish champions for change?**

**A:** Expertise. A firm that can show they have expertise on their team, really understand their clients' industry and how they move the dials their clients most need to move, that's what allows firms to make the most change. It's hard for anything else to beat that. Those are the firms that will have the greatest success.

**Q: What is the marketer's role as a change agent, and how can they help accountants embrace industry changes?**

**A:** Marketers can help accountants identify opportunities. There still is a lot of need for training to identify what an opportunity looks like and what to do when you see one. Many opportunities are missed because people aren't looking for them and/or are uncertain on how to take the next steps. There is a huge need to change people's mindset on what business development is (quite literally it is helping someone - it is something good). Marketers also can help accountants embrace industry changes through the lens of a team: how do we make the team cross-functional, how do we teach accountants to share value and how do we set them up to be a true advisor?

**Q: Any tips on how to bridge the gap when it comes to embracing cultural change when you're in the "swamp of despair?"**

**A:** If we take the swamp of despair and apply it to just the

area of marketing and business development, we haven't been honest in our profession. Someone can only live in the swamp for so long – without progress – before giving up. So many people self-opt-out of business development because they feel like they're in a perpetual swamp of despair and they feel they're never going to make progress. We need to allow people to say, "Here's what makes me nervous, and I don't know what to do." There needs to be an honest dialogue with an honest plan to get somebody focused on something they can begin to do, so the swamp can be narrowed and shallowed based on what they're encouraged to individually focus on, to show some degree of success.

Progress isn't just the win alone; it's increasing your comfort zone, expanding your network and building new relationships, and dozens of other things. The marketer's role is educating the firm on what progress looks and feels like – have success early and build on it.

**Q: What are the key strategies/tactics to consider for growth and marketing in 2020?**

**A:** Trying to get more people to "opt-in" and stretch themselves. The strategy is to get everyone involved in marketing and business development regardless of their level: listen to the client's needs and figure out how to help even if their firm isn't equipped to handle it. The distinguishable competitive advantage is the "we can help you" mindset.

**Q: What is one piece of advice you can offer on leading positive change?**

**A:** Be honest with people and the swamp they're going through. We never tell people how it really is, which doesn't build trust and unity going forward.

**Q: If you could go back in time and tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?**

**A:** See all the butterflies more. All growth comes through those butterflies. We miss so much personal growth when we try to avoid things that make us feel uncomfortable. Seek out the things that make you feel uncomfortable. Those are the things that open doors to so many opportunities.





how you coordinate the people who implement your sales strategy to drive performance.

“A full pipeline is the result of prior action,” says Crosley. “If nothing has happened in the past, it’s hard to have a robust pipeline today.”

While you can’t change the past, she advises that firms keep an eye on unqualified lead activity to ensure a healthy future pipeline.

To help keep the pipeline full, Dawn Howard, regional marketing director at BKD, LLP, adds leads from CPE-driven events the firm hosts.

“If people made an effort to attend one of these events, it seems like they would be a bit of a warmer prospect that can be added,” she points out.

Davis suggests adding opportunities for existing clients. “We put together client opportunity plans that are updated four times a year, and this is a great way to more proactively see the need for a future service,” she says.

If you are looking for more leads from a specific team member, firm marketing or business development professionals can coach in some instances, advises Kuesel. “Some firms even outsource this function when they don’t have the internal expertise,” he reports.

Ultimately, though, you have to be okay with the fact that not everyone will have a significant number of leads on the pipeline. Actually, it’s quite natural. Crosley compares this to a football game that needs fans in the stands.

“If partners are not on the field,” she says, “they should be in the stadium studying the game and cheering the wins.”

### Use Data Gathered

With a pipeline in place, you have new sources of data to guide your efforts.

“Pipeline data is a leading indicator of revenue growth to gauge how

close you are tracking to goal,” Kuesel says. “It can also be helpful in staffing decisions.”

BKD uses pipeline data to track both new work and lost proposals. Howard also uses the data to lead discussions around lost work from current clients and possible fee increases.

“This helps us look more broadly at revenue growth,” she says.

The recent implementation of a CRM system at Rea allows Davis to provide dashboards for regional presidents to better dig into the data they do have. With more consistent data, she wants to use it to help in forecasting.

“We have a partner who is always pointing out that we tell our clients to do this level of analysis, and we need to do it, too,” she says. “A champion like this will help us do more with the sales data we’re compiling today.”

### Uniform Training

Sales training is imperative for firms serious about growth.

“An effective sales process is important overall, but critical when pursuing large accounts where you don’t want any missteps,” says Kuesel, who recommends setting a threshold for mandatory use of the sales process when opportunities are competitive or exceed \$25,000 in revenue.

Crosley believes everyone should attend sales training starting at the 101 level because it’s the skill set for trusted advisors.

“Half of all sales are to current clients, making this a much-needed skill,” she says, adding that training is then reinforced by coaching and mentoring.

A pipeline review call is also a great time to emphasize positive sales tactics.

“A lot of great ideas are shared on pipeline calls, and it’s one way we help reinforce what others should be doing,” Davis said.

As a result of sales training, firms should see improved performance at the individual level. “Business development is a skill that can be learned,” Kuesel said.

### Driver’s Seat to Growth

Build upon your current pipeline document to ramp up sales within your firm. As a marketing or business development professional, this falls into your purview, and your firm needs your leadership.

“Sharing leaderboards highlighting things like who has the greatest number of leads or dollars in the pipeline is a good way to put peer pressure on others,” Davis suggests.

Cultural changes do not happen overnight, but you can take small steps today that will encourage everyone to understand the role of sales in firm growth. When it comes to reviewing pipeline leads, Crosley says you have to “celebrate your wins and learn from your losses.”

The same holds true as you work to create a new and improved sales culture.

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**Katie Tolin**, President and Chief Growth Guide, CPA Growth Guides. Contact at 330-984-4000 or [katie@cpagrowthguides.com](mailto:katie@cpagrowthguides.com).

experts, professionals with expertise in artificial intelligence, business analytics and other non-traditional services,” Erbs said. “We are seeing HR and even marketing becoming part of advisory services as well.”

Andersen CPA has embraced this trend of non-traditional professionals and has started hiring entire teams of specialized consultants rather than CPAs, including a banker to help clients with loans and banking solutions, a retired military data analytics expert, as well as an IT auditor to lead their advisory services arm.

“These are just examples of what we are doing at Andersen,” Erbs said, “but we see it happen in firm after firm.”

## Marketing’s Role

There is a universal consensus that marketers are playing an increasingly crucial role in influencing and implementing change. Firms are embracing marketing as a strategic part of the business rather than a cost, Ruszczyk said, adding that she sees

marketers becoming increasingly valuable in their firm’s growth strategies, particularly in areas such as mergers and acquisitions, HR and recruitment, where strategic communication is key.

“People are beginning to realize that good marketing is a retention strategy as well as a hiring strategy,” she said. “Because of this, firms are inviting marketing to the table early on in the planning and implementation phases of important business decisions. More firms are accepting the fact that marketers have a unique perspective of the firm that allows them to play devil’s advocate and see the industry through a different lens, and the firms utilizing their marketers are the ones that are growing faster and differentiating themselves in a much better way.”

Grissom agrees that marketers are in a unique position to view the firm as a whole. She points to the fact that buying tactics are shifting.

“Business owners and buyers are

becoming more sophisticated,” she said, “and this points to the need to understand the client more clearly, better manage the buying process and better serve relationships to ensure there are no questions when it comes to client loyalty — and marketers have a tremendous impact on all of these things.”

Similarly, Dobek sees marketers have much potential to influence.

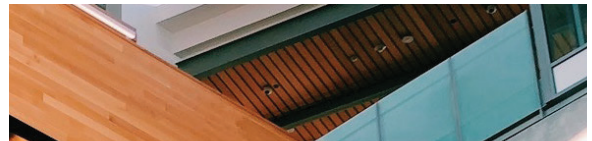
“They are in an ideal position to look at things from a broader picture,” she says.

## Her biggest advice to marketers?

“Understand the profession you work in as much as possible, just like your professionals know their niches; this is where you will influence change and where you will gain the respect of your partners.”

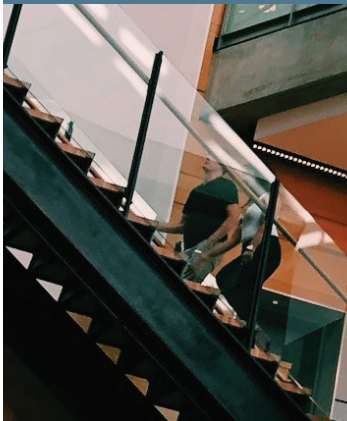
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**Becca Sensiba**, Owner, Ink Craft Content. Contact at 408-482-2077 or [becca@inkcraftcontent.com](mailto:becca@inkcraftcontent.com).



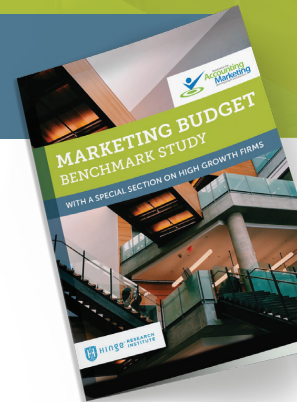
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## How Do You Overcome Objections to Culture Change?



Culture change is hard, especially when it impacts a staff person's processes, habits, and comfort. Involving staff early and often is a major key to success. Inviting them to planning workshops, one-on-one interviews, and conducting surveys to hear and address their ideas, concerns and thoughts will often lead to a successful change in culture as you roll out new tools, policies and processes. When people feel a part of the process and a sense of ownership in changes, they are far more likely to respond positively, as they will see the challenges you see from the same side of the table.

**Mike Jones**  
*Resound*  
mike@resoundcreative.com



NextGen leaders are excited about the future and not swayed by the change that is required to compete and attain personal and professional goals. NextGen are disenchanted - and even become disengaged - when current leaders' response to change is "Be patient" or "You need more experience to fully understand..." or "You can change when you're in charge." Firms that want to have a group of leaders ready to take the baton when you pass it have to have a change-ready culture and not protect sacred cows or "how we've always done it." Define the non-negotiables that can't change - profitability, quality and client experience, to name a few. Then pilot change defined with specific objectives and regroup to assess what's working and not working and then try again.

**Tamera Loerzel**  
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There will always be objections to culture change - and almost 100% of the time it will come from the partner group. "We've never done it that way before" will be the driver for most of the pushback, while, "Why are we still doing it this way?" is the catalyst for change. The firm should dictate what needs to be done, not how to do it. Managing partners need to articulate the reason, reassure the partner group that client service will not be impacted negatively and explain why the change will be a positive for them and the firm.

**Michael Platt**  
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