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Align PR/marketing strategy with goals for communications success - by Susan Shelby

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As marketers of professional services, we know what PR and marketing tools are available and most effective for a desired outcome. Smart marketers conduct their due diligence and market research, execute on PR and marketing initiatives, and then gauge success and outreach. However, possessing marketing knowledge isn't enough. Professional services marketers need to understand their firm's objectives, business development goals, and long-term strategy in order to make marketing and public relations truly effective. For best results, align your PR and marketing strategy with your firm's business goals. Consider:

Bring PR and marketing to the planning and budgeting table

By early fall, most firms are starting to think about planning and budgeting for the next year. Advocate for PR and marketing to be part of that dialogue. Understand your firm's business goals and objectives, and identify emerging trends and projected growth areas where the firm will focus its business development resources. Educate your firm's leadership and technical staff that marketing and PR are integral to establishing and maintaining brand awareness among current and potential clients.

Use the PR and marketing toolbox to educate

Remember that marketers have many ways of evaluating a firm's market perception and brand recognition, so use those tools to educate firm leadership. It's easier to make a case for a marketing campaign or public relations initiative if you know where you're starting. Ask yourself: Who are you trying to reach? What are you trying to accomplish? What are your key messages? What are your internal challenges? Conduct an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to identify key areas on which to focus. Consider a client survey to ask clients for feedback, a worthwhile effort that provides the opportunity to continually improve services and client relationships. A marketing audit can also offer valuable insight into where your firm stands in the marketplace.

Develop an integrated PR and marketing plan

Create a comprehensive PR and marketing plan that dovetails with the firm's business strategy. Define what PR and marketing objectives you're working toward and why specific tactics are included in your strategy. An integrated plan should promote key messages across a mix of earned, paid, owned, and social media as well as traditional and digital marketing.

Don't overlook your firm's major projects as focus points of your plan and ways to promote in the verticals where your firm excels. To generate a steady flow of news and awareness, develop a strategy around project milestones like new wins, groundbreakings, topping-off ceremonies, and ribbon cuttings. Coordinate a team-based approach and devise a mutually beneficial strategy for project team PR, sharing project information and divvying up initiatives and awards to provide recognition for the key players. Use PR tools like press releases, byline articles, media relations, social media, and events to publicize the project throughout its lifecycle, and include client testimonials and quotes whenever possible.

Get creative with content creation and thought leadership

Thought leadership is established by creating content and using it to promote your expertise. Content creation – a favorite buzzword in the marketing world – involves generating material that showcases your skills to prove why you are the best choice to help clients with their projects. Intelligent, thought-provoking, and forward-thinking content elevates the visibility of your firm, builds your brand, and promotes you as an expert. The intention is to earn recognition as a trusted authority in your field by delivering knowledge that teaches and helps others make decisions, not sells your specific services. That's thought leadership.

Measure results

Measuring the impact and return on investment (ROI) of your PR and marketing activities is possible: it just requires advance planning. There are metric analysis tools available that monitor coverage, social media hits, website traffic, content downloads, and news mentions. The trick is finding the data that speaks to your audience, setting up baselines, and measuring on a regular basis.

Strategic planning is essential across all lines of your business. Started early, a thoughtful planning process can yield a robust and effective PR and marketing plan that supports your firm's business goals.

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