

PUTTING YOUR BEST FACE FORWARD

According to Capstone Marketing research, the top three marketing tools that generate the most leads for CPA firms are networking, mixers with referral sources, and seminars. What do these three marketing tools have in common? Each brings CPAs face-to-face with clients, prospects, and referral sources.

Networking

Eighty five percent of Capstone Marketing survey respondents identified networking as one of the top three lead generation tools for their firm.

Everyone in your firm has a network whether they believe it or not. Consider the various groups of people in which you come in contact: co-workers, alumni, competitors, classmates, neighbors, family, friends, community volunteers,



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and church/synagogue members. Your primary network may consist of 25 to 50 people. Your secondary network is everyone else, 250 to 300 people.

The goal is to have your partners and staff working their network on a regular basis, which is a time management skill. I once worked with a partner who did not allow himself to leave the office on Fridays until he had arranged his networking meetings for the following week. This process ensured that he would effectively utilize his networking time each week.

Everyone in your network should be contacted twice a year. Blend the media in making contact, *e.g.*, e-mail and telephone in addition to face-to-face.

Create a list of organizations in which your partners and staff are currently involved. Then, add to the list those organizations in which your firm *should* be involved. Consider high profile community and business organizations, and trade organizations that will support your niche marketing efforts. Remember, they will be most effective by networking in organizations that they truly enjoy or have an affinity with. One of my clients met one of his best clients while building a house for Habitat for Humanity.

Provide guidance so your partners and staff know how they are expected to participate in networking activities. Provide training to enhance their networking skills and build their confidence. Emphasize the point that networking is not selling. Networking is building contacts with people with information, expertise, and ideas. It is cultivating win-win relationships by the mutual exchange of help.

Mixers With Referral Sources

Sixty one percent of Capstone Marketing survey respondents identified mixers with referral sources as one of the top three lead generation tools for their firm. Mixers are a simple, effective, fun way to strengthen existing referral relationships and create new ones.

The traditional mixer involves 10-12

people from each organization, *e.g.*, bank, law firm, or financial services company. It can be held at your office, hotel, country club, or other convenient location. Late afternoon or early evening usually works best. Be sure to organize your firm's representation based upon the people attending from the other organization. For example, match the attorney who specializes in fraud with your own forensic accounting specialist.

While your partners and senior managers often attend mixers, your other professional staff also need opportunities to build their networks. Consider arranging mixers for them with law firm associates or junior level lending officers. Also, the venue can be more informal, like billiards or bowling.

After each mixer, be sure to follow up by sending hand-written notes to those people you met. Also, follow through on promises made, *e.g.*, arranging a follow up lunch, adding contacts to your mailing list, making further introductions, or sending an article or other promotional materials.

Seminars

Forty one percent of Capstone Marketing survey respondents identified seminars as one of the top three lead generation tools for their firm. Seminars are an excellent way to demonstrate your firm's expertise, launch a new product or service, and increase your firm's visibility among a targeted industry group.

When organizing a seminar, remember smaller is better. Your seminar will be much more effective with 25 participants with whom you can make contact rather than 100 participants, many of whom you will not get to speak with. Tuesday and Thursday are the best days of the week to hold a seminar; morning is the best time of day.

Also, keep these points in mind:

- ◆ Start planning your seminar at least 90 days in advance.
- ◆ Determine your target audience. Select the topics and speakers of interest to them.
- ◆ Prior to the seminar, call key clients and contacts that have not responded to encourage attendance. Also, one or two days prior to the seminar call all those who have registered to

professional presentation. This is an excellent opportunity for your staff to learn more about the topic.

- ◆ Start on time and end on time. You will earn brownie points by respecting the time of your participants.
- ◆ Confirm your firm's representation at the seminar. Use the seminar topic to determine which of your firm's service and industry specialists

letters to those that attended, those that registered but did not attend, and those that did not plan to attend. Also, create a list of leads and other follow up items identified at the seminar including the names of those responsible for each. Assign one person to manage the list.

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- attend as a reminder.
- ◆ Invite the media. Reporters are always looking for timely story ideas.
- ◆ Rehearse at least one week prior to the seminar to ensure a polished,

should be present. Also, be sure that there is an appropriate number of firm representatives present, usually one for every four or five seminar participants.

- ◆ Follow up. This includes sending

Seminars are a commitment of time and money. When implemented appropriately, they can be an excellent lead generation tool. In fact, one of my clients landed a large client simply by mailing the seminar invitation. The CFO of the company was unaware that my client worked with public companies and needed assistance.

You operate in a relationship business. Spending more time face-to-face with clients, prospects, and referral sources will result in more leads and marketing success. **SR**

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