

5 steps to become the professional services firm of choice.

by Jeanne Urich, Service Performance Insight

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This is part two of a two-part series designed to provide five practical steps to create a winning services marketing approach. Part one outlines the first two steps. This article provides the last three steps to help turn your organization into a premium professional services firm.

Here are the five steps for designing an awesome marketing approach:

1. Understand the business development value chain.
2. Focus on high-impact business development activities.
3. Know and reinforce the qualities that are most important in selecting a PS firm.
4. Create memorable positioning and messaging that tells a story.
5. Bring your go-to-market strategy to life with sales tools.

With this “cookbook,” you’ll energize your professional services marketing efforts.

What qualities are most important in selecting a PS firm?

Companies today have more professional services choices than ever before. And they have better tools to research and evaluate potential providers. If this is their first experience with a new technology provider, they’re likely to seriously consider the technology vendor’s services or a large system integrator.

The playing field becomes broader and more competitive for companies considering an upgrade or migration to a new release. After using current technologies for a while, buyers now have internal knowledge and competency. They must evaluate risk against flexibility, geographic coverage and price.

They want their services providers to provide specialized knowledge and expertise. They want straight talk about competitive technologies and alternatives to help them make the right decisions for their business.

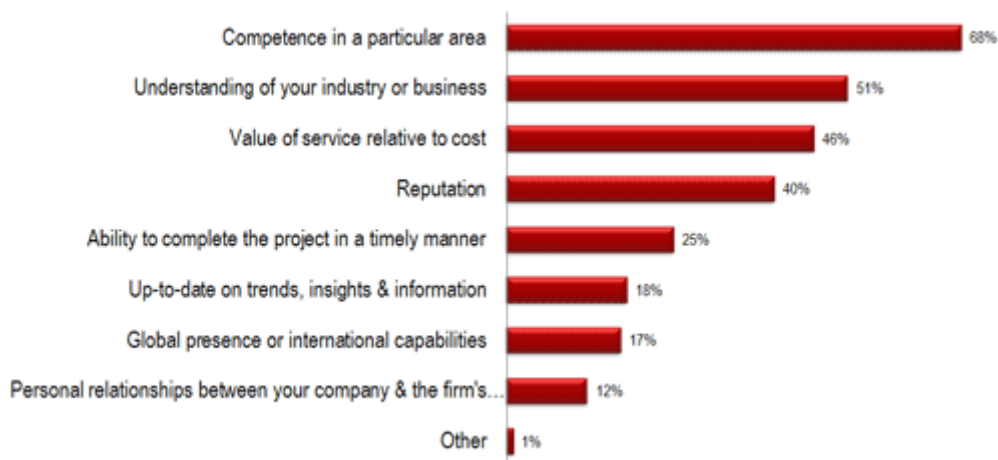
So how do prospects select a PS provider?

As Figure 1 shows, research suggests that today’s professional services buyers make decisions based on specialized knowledge, experience, techniques and reputation. Loyalty to the technology provider’s PS firm can be undermined if clients feel they don’t have strong relationships with senior firm managers, they believe the future of their technology provider is in doubt or they think they overpaid.

The more tech-savvy marketplace increasingly expects unique business processes and vertical industry knowledge from their professional services providers. They also increasingly demand fixed-price or value-priced alternatives to transfer more technology and process risk to their professional services providers.

With more research tools at their disposal, they're willing to search for and select new specialized providers with the deep expertise they require. Although a one-throat-to-choke buying strategy still provides leverage, clients are more willing to try new providers if their vendor investigation uncovers some with a quality reputation, deep technical knowledge, business process expertise, local coverage or better value for the price.

Figure 1: What Qualities Are Most Important When Selecting a PS Firm?



Source: Economist Intelligence Unit.

Positioning made easy

Selling and marketing professional services means creating a tangible and differentiated point of view (what your brand stands for — why you are different). Your point of view — based on your specialized qualifications — makes your firm unique and compelling.

To be effective, your market position must tap into your prospect's critical business issues, such as time to market, cost reduction, risk reduction, improved business visibility and business consolidation or expansion. And do this all while showcasing your competitive strengths and past successes.

You reflect this through a positioning statement and messaging. A positioning statement, sometimes called an elevator pitch, should reflect your competitive position in the market. Messaging involves creating a consistent storyline. There is a theme, a plot and a set of key ideas.

To succeed, your positioning and messaging must:

- Be accurate.
- Be succinct.
- Be differentiating.
- And most important ... be relevant!

Distill your positioning into a memorable, simple two-sentence story:

For [target customer] who [statement of need or opportunity] we provide [service name], which is a [service category] that [statement of key benefit; compelling reason to buy]. Unlike [primary competitive alternative], our solution [statement of primary differentiation].

Positioning has four core components:

1. What are your target customers' unmet needs? What problem do you solve?
2. Will your target customers recognize they have this problem? What triggers a need for your services?
3. How will you satisfy those needs in a unique way (differentiated value proposition)?
4. How can you prove it?

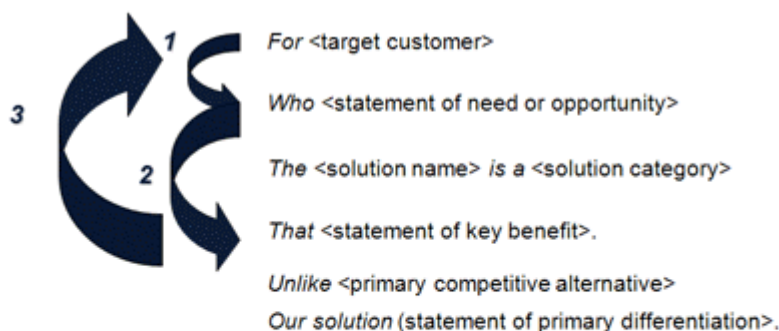
Positioning and strategy are two sides of the same coin. You should be able to write positioning statements for every market you pursue and every solution in your strategic plan. Statement of positioning is not the tag line. Tag lines and press releases reflect your positioning.

Why PS firms must care about positioning

Positioning focuses on customer value and ensures you don't get lost in the details. It also helps you think about the critical reason the customer wants to buy and how you will be different. Your statement keeps you in line when describing the solution you're going to build. Furthermore, your team will stay on track with the customers' — not your company's — critical elements.

When the company understands the positioning statement, they'll be on the same page and consistent in all communications. Positioning should be done before designing solutions. And it will contribute in the development of selling tools that demonstrate customer value.

Figure 2: Positioning Made Easy



1. Are your target customers self-referencing; do they have a common unmet need?
2. Does the statement of key benefit fully satisfy the need?
3. If you offered the target customers the benefit, would they feel satisfied?
4. Can you support your benefit statement with proof? Twice as fast ...
5. Do your success stories support your primary differentiation?

Source: Service Performance Insight, July 2013.

Make your go-to-market strategy stick with sales tools

Too often great marketing programs fall short of expectations because they don't empower the sales force. In addition to capturing prospects' attention and unmet needs, your marketing programs will come to life only if you build a comprehensive set of sales tools to engage and ignite your sales force.

Start with an understanding of your sales methodology and design sales tools that reinforce your go-to-market approach. For example, translate your market positioning statement into a sales qualifying questionnaire and train your sales force to recognize the target buyer's business issues and buying triggers.

To effectively launch your new marketing program, create a series of focused internal sales training events to roll out your new sales tools. These could include qualifying questionnaire, customer presentation, customer references, sales success stories, solution datasheets, estimating guides, solution project delivery plans and so on. Refer to Table 1 for an example of sales tools and when you'd use them.

Your services sales management should certify the sales force on the new go-to-market program. They need to verify that the sales force clearly understands target buyer's business issues and your positioning. Prime your selling efforts by creating a targeted prospect list and calling campaign. Reinforce your launch with monthly prospect webinars, white papers and case studies.

Once you've launched your new marketing program, follow up with initial clients to get feedback and suggestions for improvement. With your initial clients, do whatever it takes to turn them into delighted references and possible sources of follow-on work.

Table 1: Selling Stages and Sales Tools

SELLING STAGES AND SALES TOOLS					
Sales Process Steps	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
	Prospecting Conduct Initial Assessment	Qualifying Create Value Proposition	Proposal Confirm Value Proposition	Decision Reach Agreement and Close	Solution Delivery Transition to Delivery Team
Sales Process Activities And Milestones	Generate new prospects (via referrals, networking, trade associations, conferences) Look at existing customer base for opportunities Identify initial sponsor/ally within target company Assess Business Need	Probe and assess needs with prospect/ customer Create a buying vision that maps our solution to business needs and value Deliver proof to sponsor that needs can be met	Evaluation plan to demonstrate to decision-maker our ability to meet their business needs Assess potential (revenue forecast, internal dependencies) Ask for the business Issue the proposal	Present Master Service Agreement Present Statement of Work Negotiate terms and conditions Close the sale	Solution Presentation Ensure smooth handoff to Delivery Review Customer Hot Buttons and our Commitments Deliver Project Plan Introduce Delivery Team
Outcomes Goals	Initial sponsor identified	Buying vision and access to decision-maker	Value demonstrated and proposal submitted	Signed contract	Satisfied customer (repeat business, reference)
Sales Tools	Sales Guide Suspect Database Prospect Profiles Customer References Messaging Framework Whitepapers Corporate Presentation	Datasheets Case Studies Success Stories Follow-Up letter Opportunity Assessment Estimation Worksheet	Proposal Template Demonstration Kits References Proposal Review Checklist Bid/Win Team Review	Negotiation tips Master Service Agreement Standard Statement of Work	Project Initiation Sheet Project Templates Project Plan Customer Reference Template
Required Documents	Customer Profile Sheet Account Plan Qualifying Questionnaire CRM lead input	Deal Capture Checklist Proposal Request form Scoping Questionnaire Environment Survey CRM prospect input	Risk Evaluation Scorecard Proposal Template Estimating Worksheet Master Services Agreement Education Course Schedule CRM update	Customer Engagement Contract Template Statement of Work Template CRM Update	Contract Information Sheet Project Orientation Guide CRM Update
Customer Buying Process	Identify business needs	Determine requirements	Evaluate options	Negotiate	Implement and evaluate success

Final advice before building your awesome marketing program

Awesome services marketing takes the same amount of energy, focus and planning as creating your delivery methodology and tools. You wouldn't dream of assigning junior consultants who lack an understanding of project delivery to create your methodology, right? So why relegate your services marketing efforts to a junior team that doesn't understand your customers' business issues and how your firm is different and unique? Bring together your strongest business developers along with experienced solution architects to design your go-to-market program.

Run your awesome marketing projects the same way you run your client projects: Create a project charter and project plan with a dedicated project manager. Also, ensure all members of the services marketing project team have the time and knowledge to develop awesome sales and marketing materials.

After you've created the initial program, develop multiple waves of sales training and cement the program with high-quality sales tools. Pilot the program with an initial set of target prospects and continue to refine and improve it. Make sure your clients are delighted with the engagement and will provide great references.

Awesome marketing programs galvanize and cement your business value and market positioning while energizing your sales and delivery team!

About the author

Jeanne Urich, Service Performance Insight managing director, is a management consultant specializing in improvement and transformation for project- and services-oriented organizations. She has been a corporate officer and leader of the worldwide services organizations of Vignette, Blue Martini and Clarify, where she was responsible for leading the growth of their professional services, education, account management and alliances organizations. Urich is a world-renowned thought leader, speaker and author on all aspects of professional services.

Source: Service Performance Insight, July 2013.