

19 Questions To Ask Marketing Consultants Before Engaging Them

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A Business Development Buyer's Guide For Privately Owned
Information Technology Companies and Solo IT Professionals

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Dear Business Owner,

Let's face it, hiring a marketer isn't exactly easy. Yes, I know, many people, especially guys, believe they know everything about marketing (also about football, politics, investing and women), but when you look at their businesses, it seems the louder and charismatically they brag about their marketing expertise, the deeper shit their businesses are. They are competing on price, struggle from one bidding battle to the next and have a real hard time to keep their clients.

The reality is that choosing a good marketer actually is pretty hard.

Why?

Because you're bombarded with misleading information, dodgy credentials and confusing claims of achievement.

And since those claims are assembled with as much finesse as weasel's wedding tackle, it's easy to fall for them.

Some "marketing experts" sell their expertise for chicken feed, while others try to manipulate the living daylights out of you in order to get hired.

Some try to dazzle you with their academic credentials and alphabet soups behind their names and how many years they spent listening to civil servants (a.k.a. most college professors) to preach about something that they've never done. Yes, this is the description of most college and university professors "teaching" marketing.

Then these people graduate, and with some confusing buzz inside their heads and freshly stamped diplomas in their hands, they knock on your door in search of work.

And by then they are so amazingly prepared for job interviews, that it's easy to fall for the impressive style that often comes without substance.

You can avoid these traps by reading this business owner's guide to hiring IT marketers.

In this report we discuss 19 vital questions that you want to clarify with your candidates to make sure you find the right person.

No, this report is not a complete recruiting guide, but you can integrate the following 19 questions into your own recruiting process.

Enjoy!



Question #1: Which Type Of Marketing Do You Recommend Us To Do?

Answer

Your marketing can be either institutional image marketing or direct response marketing.

Image marketing is used mainly by large corporations and it focuses on building the company's image. That is, it's self-centred not market-centred. It's built on the notion that if you have brand awareness of the company and its products/services, then you automatically become a consumer of that brand.

Well, I know Marlboro, Coca Cola and McDonald's, but I'm a lifetime non-smoker and I die before I start drinking sugared water and eat the glorified crap McDonald's sells.

Image marketing is also very expensive and offer pretty low return on investment. Companies, like McDonald's, spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year on their image marketing programmes.

The other side of the marketing coin is direct response marketing. It has three major components.

1. Two-step process: First you generate a sales lead and then nurture that lead into becoming a paying client
2. Education-based: The nurturing process is educational to help buyers to make informed decisions
3. Results-accountable: You can track your marketing's effectiveness and make changes as you go.

Unless you run a billion dollar corporation, the ineffectiveness of image marketing can soon deplete your purse, and then you're in deep shit.

Now you may ask...

"So, if image marketing is so expensive and ineffective, why do corporations do it?"

Well, they do it because human beings love self-aggrandisement, especially when people spend someone else's, e.g. investors', money. Image marketing is self-centred ego-stroking. It's about...

"Look at us and admire how cute we are!"

By contrast, direct response marketing is buyer-centred. It's about...

"Attention [Target market]! We have valuable free information for you on [Market's biggest problems]. You can access it here!"

So, to make life a bit easier for you, here is a short comparison table

Image Marketing	Direct Response Marketing
Objective: To provide a platform for some corporate chest-beating and self-aggrandisement	Objective: To provide as platform for systematically educating and inspiring prospects to meet you when they're ready to buy.
Suitable for marketing to the unwashed masses "People"	Suitable for marketing to specific market segments "Manufacturing plants between 20 and 500 employees in South East Arizona"
Pleasing board of directors (most of whom don't know marketing)	Becoming more trusted
Appeasing shareholders	Becoming more respected
Looking good to Wall Street analysts	Achieving deeper credibility
Looking appropriate to the media	Creating the perception of a sought-after industrial authority
Appearing politically correct to the general public	Building more brand loyalty
Building brand identity	Accomplishing pre-emptive positioning (Not buy from anyone else.)
Winning advertising awards	Eliminating possible pricing comparisons
Generating one-shot sales	Generating more referrals and repeat business
Motivating action some day in the future	Motivating action right now
It's adorable	It's bankable
Result: Sellers: "Wow, we're truly amazing."	Result: Buyers: "Wow, this company is truly amazing."
Summary: With image marketing, you still need an army of salespeople to generate revenue.	Summary: With direct response marketing, making the sale is the natural climax of your marketing.

The biggest benefit of direct response marketing is that self-qualified prospects contact you when they are ready to buy, so you don't have to chase, beg and bug them, which would only irritate the living daylights out of them.

So, when a marketing consultant tells you that marketing's effectiveness can't be measured, and you just have to keep doing it and spending your money, then you'd better grab your purse and [run for your life](#).

Question #2: Should We Do One-Step Or Multi-Step Marketing?

Answer

One-step marketing is when you try to sell something in one fell swoop. While it works for inexpensive impulse items that are regarded as commodities and aimed at the unwashed masses, it can be a major hurdle when you try to sell high-end, high-dollar products/services that are regarded as considered purchases aimed at carefully selected sophisticated buyers.

The problem is that in the one-step method your time to make the sale is limited, so you have to crank up pressure on buyers. But buyers are sick and tired of high-pressure peddlers and their manipulative methods. They've learnt over the years that they shouldn't trust salespeople, and do their best to avoid them like the plague.

Thanks to technology, buyers can obtain any product information they need, and when they are ready, they can often order products online without ever talking to salespeople.

So, if you choose the one-step method and try to sell in one step, you eliminate the best buyers from your sales funnel and your method will undermine your company as a fungible vendor, your product as a lukewarm commodity and you as a dreaded peddler.

So, don't be surprised that when you contact buyers, they relegate you to purchasing agents where you have to duke it out with an army of your competitors based on the lowest price.

One indication that your marketing is not working is that you have to maintain a large sales force and condemn your salespeople to doing cold-prospecting grunt work, like dialling for dollars and pounding pavement to find doors to knock on.

The multi-step process works because what buyers are looking for is expert guidance to help them to make the best decisions in their own best interest.

And once they've made their decisions, they come back to the providers of the guidance and buy their products/services.

But this approach requires a mental shift that most sellers plainly refuse. It requires that not making the sale is a valid outcome based on the buyer's decision and it's not the salesperson's failure. And most IT companies can't handle this shift.

The salesperson's job should be to facilitate the buyer's decision-making process, as opposed to convincing buyers to buy what the seller sells and what buyers often don't want or need.

And the best facilitation process is a multi-step, education-based, highly-automated stay-in-touch process, so when the buyer is ready, she can request an appointment with the seller and discuss the details of the sale.

Question #3: Which Type Of Marketing Do You Use With Your Own Clients?

Answer

Since my clients sell complex, high-ticket, hard-to-explain products/services to sophisticated buyers, we use exclusively multi-step education-based, result-accountable direct response marketing.

Also, we use this method because it gives us the highest ROI.

And now we have to consider two numbers.

1. At any one time, only some 3% of your prospects are ready to buy.
2. Only 0.5-2% of your market is of premium calibre.

So, it means that only 0.015-0.06% (3% of 0.5-2%) of your market are ready to buy at the moment of your first contact. Let's simplify this, and let's just assume that no one is ready to buy on first contact.

But a significantly larger segment will be ready to buy 6, 12 or 18 months down the road.

So, do you set a sales force on those buyers and harass them until they buy or ban you from your premises or do you set up an automated keep-in-touch system to educate buyers and facilitate their decision-making?

I go with the latter. Granted, it's delayed gratification, but the payback is significantly higher.

The premium calibre market segment is small enough, so it makes sense to try to catch a large part of that segment. And that's what education-based multi-step marketing does.

Since my clients want to minimise and then eliminate their sales forces, we make the marketing process more precise. Sales forces are just costly and too unruly to keep. They are too expensive to have and too stressful to manage.

There is one stipulation here: If you focus on generating high gross revenue, it's fine to have sales forces. My clients focus on high net profit per employee, the ultimate vital sign of a company. In this scenario, every person counts.

Question #4: How Do You Focus Our Marketing To The Right Prospects Without Wasting Money On Others?

Answer

There are a few steps here. First we create your Perfect Client Profile¹, and then we create offers that match what your perfect clients are seeking.

Think about it. Let's say you make cars. Cars come in different shapes and forms. But who is the perfect buyer for your cars?

It is the pope?



It is the Flintstones?



It is Batman?



You see, all three are great clients, but they have drastically different requirements for their cars.

Imagine what would happen if, by mistake, you built and delivered a Popemobile to Batman?

When it comes to matching offers with market segments, I use my insight knowledge I gained during my 16 years in the IT industry as an engineer, project manager and technical buyer.

Many consultants have rough ideas about what buyers want. I have the privilege to have exact knowledge of it because I used to be one for 16 years. When you understand the psychology behind the decision-making process, life becomes easier.

So, we develop...

1. Your Perfect Client Profile – Who exactly we're marketing to
2. Offers that match buyer's requirement(s)
 - a. Your Unique Value Proposition – What exactly we offer to the market
 - b. Your Unique Selling Proposition – Why we are different from the competition
3. Marketing messages that communicate your value to your perfect buyers
4. Marketing systems to connect your offer and your perfect buyers

¹ [Perfect Client Profile Development Toolkit](#) for privately held IT companies.

Question #5: How Can You Have Buyers Contact Us Without Our Chasing Them?

Answer

The same way as you catch fish. You put some bait on your hook. And you use the kind of bait that you know the fish loves. When people go fishing, they go fishing for specific fish.

Every fisherman knows that if he wants to catch carp he has to go to a river and bait his hook with corn or bread.

But if he wants to catch shark, he has to go to the sea and bait his hook with a hunk of meat dripping with blood.

So, pay attention to the location where you try to catch fish and the bait that you use to catch fish.

And, of course, there is the greedy and dumb fisherman who wants to catch everything, so he goes to where the river joins the sea, and baits one hook both with corn and a hunk of pig's liver. What can he catch? Nothing! It's highly unlikely that carps and sharks live side-by-side at the same location.

But the greedy bastard is unwilling to give up carps for sharks or give up sharks for carps. He wants to catch them all. So, day after day, he goes home empty-handed, cursing the fish, the waters, the government, summing up that life is a bitch. And yet again, he has to eat out at the local fish and chips joint. And yet again, his wife and kids laugh their arses off at the old miserable nincompoo and his retarded fishing strategy.

But until and unless he changes his thinking, he keeps going home empty-handed.

So, you know what you want to catch: Create your Perfect Client Profile

You know what "bait" those buyers would bite on: Your Unique Value Proposition

You know how to distinguish your bait from the competition's bait: Your Unique Selling Proposition

Now cast your baited hook where the fish is, and the fish comes to you.

But there is one significant difference: While you can catch and then eat your fish, don't make dinner out of your clients. For dinner, stay with fish.

If you look at the process in a time line, buyers consume your educational materials, and those materials shape their buying criteria. And the better your educational materials are, the more securely those buyers get "hooked" on your bait.

And over the following weeks or months, buyers realise that you're the best thing since sacks of potatoes. You're the bee's knees. You're the wasp's nipples. So, they buy from you when they're ready to buy.

I know this is a simplistic explanation, but I'm just not bright enough to offer you anything better. But it makes the point.

Question #6: What Is Your Formal Marketing Education?

Answer

If you mean schooling, that is, listening and regurgitating college professors' opinions, most of whom have never run businesses, then my answer is "Nothing". We covered a little bit of marketing in engineering school, but that's all.

But for a very specific reason, when I was forced into a career change² in 1998, I decided that instead of learning an important business function from people who've never done it (Let's face it, college professors are really glorified civil servants with union jobs and government pensions – not exactly entrepreneurs), I would learn from the best of the best in marketing. That is, the kind of marketing whose purpose is to generate new business.

So, I've learnt from Jay Abraham, Robert Bly, Dan Kennedy, Jay Conrad Levinson (Guerrilla Marketing), Michael Gerber (E-Myth Mastery Academy), some B2B aces at AWAI (American Writers & Artist Institute) and many others. Also,

- Essentials Of Management Consulting - Canadian Association of Management Consultants – Prerequisite course to obtain the Certified Management Consultant accreditation
- Coaching / Mentoring skills - Coaches Training Institute, Coach University
- Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK (Teacher's Diploma in ESL and Adult Education)
- Military Service – Small group leadership skills and teamwork

And, of course, I've studied the classics of marketing and copywriting, like David Ogilvy, P.T. Barnum, Clyde Bedell, Leo Burnett, John Caples, Robert Collier, Claude Hopkins, John E. Kennedy, Rosser Reeves, Victor Schwab, etc.

Employing or planning to employ someone who hasn't read the works of Claude Hopkins, Vic Schwab, David Ogilvy, Jay Abraham or Dan Kennedy is like joining a church whose preacher has never read the Bible, even if he has a triple Ph.D. in theology.

My problem is that universities don't teach B2B marketing. They are all about marketing commodities (Coca Cola, Tide, McDonald's, etc.) to the unwashed masses.

Instead, I went to learn about how to market and sell premium calibre products/services to sophisticated buyers in the B2B environment.

² When I moved to Canada in 1998, I wanted to continue working in engineering, but the "Institution" barred me in order to protect local engineers with Canadian credentials. So, I was told that my British engineering education was useless, because, in comparison to Canada, the UK is an industrially underprivileged, borderline "third world" country with pitifully obsolete technology and ridiculously subpar talents. Let's just ignore that 99% of Canada's industry is US, Japanese and Chinese. Oh, well.

Then I used my own money to apply what I've learnt in real life. I've failed a few times, and have succeeded a few times. But over the years, my batting average has got quite a bit better.

And I can testify that when you learn something on your own dime, you learn pretty quickly and pretty well.

Here is another important bit to consider...

Based on a 2008 study among industry leaders, by Broderick & Company, the top three criteria companies are looking for in external professionals are 1) "experience in our industry", 2) "expertise in our subject matter" and 3) "Understanding of our business".

In my case...

- I had spent 16 years in the high-tech sector as an electronics/computer engineer, project manager and technical buyer. That experience gave me a kind of industrial insight that 99.9% of my marketing colleagues don't have.
- I participated in the purchase of some \$610 million worth of high-tech products and services.
- I've "digested" over 8,000 pages of high-tech proposals, and sat through over 2,500 hours of sales presentations. I've seen the good, the bad and the ugly and how buyers respond to them.
- I've worked with some 450 privately owned "entrepreneurial" IT clients all over the globe on a broad range of business development issues.
- I've talked to over 5,000 business owners and economic buyers about the ins and outs of how they buy IT solutions.

So, when we look around, we find that most of the world most respected entrepreneurial marketers (as opposed to corporate marketers) have never made it beyond high school. So, it's not the paper that matter but the knowledge. Some people collect paper and some people collect knowledge. I am the latter.

I would also mention an interesting observation here.

Whenever I ask "schooled" marketers what they're reading right now on marketing, most of their responses are is along this line...

"Man, don't you get it? I have an MBA. I don't have to read books or attend seminars. Those are for suckers with money who are willing to spend it on watching scam artists on the stage. I'm a professional. I already know it all."

That is, they graduate and that's it. They stop learning, and spend the rest of their lives applying what they've learnt in MBA school. So, their knowledge soon becomes obsolete.

Buyers hire either someone with impressive alphabet soup after her name to prop up the fragile credibility of their companies or someone with real street smarts. It depends what's more important; the number of MBAs on the payroll or profits. Neither is right or wrong. Just different.

Question #7: Have You Ever Owned And Marketed Your Own Business?

Answer

Realistically, entrepreneurs have a certain mindset. This mindset is drastically different from that of employees.

Employees exchange loyalty to the company for security from the company. Entrepreneurs exchange talent to the company for income-generating opportunity from the company.

So, when business owners sit down with consultants who are salaried employees of large and prestigious consulting behemoths, they can't see each other eye to eye.

Those employee-consultants can't really understand entrepreneurs' problems because they've never experienced what it's like being an entrepreneur.

After all, those employee consultants work for "the man" and get paid regular salaries. Therefore, they can't even fathom the level of ambiguity and uncertainty in entrepreneurs' lives.

Anyone can risk the client's money. It's easy.

But risking your own money, by offering some kind of guarantee for your work, is something completely different.

And after risking your own money a few times, and losing it a few times, as we all do, you develop appreciation for your clients' money.

Without this appreciation, the whole marketing thing is like asking cannibals to use silverware. Technically, they could learn the mechanics of it, but they don't have the mindset for it.

When you invest your own money and fail, you learn from those mistakes.

But when you invest your clients' money and fail, you will keep repeating the same mistake. After all, it's not your money.

Welcome to human nature 101.

Over the years, I've invested over \$1 million of my own money to learn my craft, hone my skills and experiment with my knowledge. I don't say I know it all, but when your own money is on the line, you learn pretty fast. Once I didn't learn that fast, and ended up homeless on the streets. But I learnt a major lesson even from that. Now I'm glad it happened, although it was pretty rough when it happened.

I've been running my own business since the mid 90s, so, while I don't know everything, I've learnt some useful bits and bobs.

Question #8: Have You Ever Worked In Sales?

Answer

Well, if you ask me if I've ever dialled for dollars, pounded pavements and banged on doors to hunt down and try to convince reluctant and apathetic people to fork out money for something they neither want nor need (the short summary of traditional selling), yes, I've done it, and I was a dismal failure. Maybe just because I hated it.

I was trying to sell \$2,000 vacuum cleaners to people who were generated through bingo cards. The fact that "bingo" calibre people, most of whom live in slums and ghettos, don't own even \$20 vacuum cleaners and wealthy people, who could afford \$2,000 vacuum cleaners, don't play bingo, didn't even scratch the surface of my manager's head, let alone penetrating his thick skull. The annual attrition among sales staff was over 500%.

Some say, selling teaches you how buyers make decisions. Yeah, and studying how rocks sink in water teaches you about how objects float. That's horseshit. Well, I'm an expert at burying people, but that doesn't automatically make me an expert at delivering babies. The two skills are at the two opposing ends of the life continuum.

In the world of selling, knowing how to sell is a far cry from understanding how buyers buy.

Imagine that you command an army and you want invade a fortress. You have two options to achieve that:

1. **Option #1: Brawn power:** Search the land for the best battering ram operators, hire them and keep battering the gates of the fortress while the archers inside take out most of your soldiers. Yes, you can win, but it will be a pyrrhic victory.
2. **Option #2: Brain power:** Search the land for the guy who built the fortress and question him about the weak points in the walls. Then, in the dead of night, approach the fortress and at the weakest points, start taking out enough bricks, so you and your soldiers can penetrate the fortress and make an ambush on the army inside.

As a former soldier myself, I tell you, I would go for option #2.

You learn how buyers make decisions when you are a buyer yourself or work closely with buyers. I was a buyer for 16 years.

I'm an introvert, and so are most of my clients. Doing the traditional "chase, hunt, hound and pound" type hucksterism just doesn't work for us.

Granted, I started my sales career in school selling porn, but that didn't last long, and I wasn't terribly effective at it.

The area where I work in sales is copywriting. That is, selling in print.

I can write clear, crisp and compelling marketing and sales messages that result in specific actions on the readers' parts.

The way I see it is that if I can write a letter, print it out in 10,000 copies, send them out to 10,000 prospects and let them qualify themselves and come to me whenever they are ready to buy, well, I prefer that.

I'm just not brutish enough to hustle my muscles to chase down 10,000 people and do the same dog and pony show presentation 10,000-times, hoping that maybe five of them talk to me. Or I'm just lazy. You decide.

I could also say that I'm smart enough not to chase after the market, but that statement may make me sound like a condescending bastard.

So, I just send out 10,000 letters and wait for the response. And the response comes. It always comes.

Peter Drucker once said...

"There will always, one can assume, be need for some selling. But the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product and service fits him and sells itself."

At the dawn of my business development career in 1998, as a greenhorn, I bought into this notion. And now I see it really works.

But do you know what the problem is?

It's that many sales managers and business owners don't recognise brainpower as a valid business asset. They recognise only brawn power. They want to see their salespeople to sweat and crawl over broken glass and rusty nails barefoot and butt-naked to "deserve" their paycheques.

Conventional wisdom puts more value on impressively hard efforts than on quietly achieved results. That's the sad, big and stinky reality.

Question #9: Have You Yourself Ever Hired A Marketing Consultant?

Answer

Considering the hundreds of thousands of dollars I've invested in my marketing education with some of the world's best marketers – real practitioners not college professors (i. e: civil servants) – yes, I've “hired” marketing consultants. I've “hired” them to teach me what they know.

Although, not so much for marketing, I frequently hire all sorts of consultants in areas that are outside my expertise.

Also, over the years, I've assisted clients to recruit over 500 subject matter experts in all aspects of business development, from copywriting to search engine optimisation, both as employees and independent professionals, and some 95% worked out great.

I'm not saying I'm a recruitment genius. I just use different criteria from what most HR professionals use, and that makes my method more successful. I would say that my method is a tad closer to military recruitment than employment hiring.

Question #10: What Is Your Marketing Background?

Answer

Here you can find out lots of things about your candidates. Having an MBA is impressive on the surface and it's an easy answer to the question. But what does it mean to you?

There are some discrepancies right out of the gate.

- You market your products/services B2B (Business to business). MBA courses teach B2C (business to consumer) marketing.
- You market complex, high-ticket and hard-to-explain products/services. MBA courses teach how to sell cheap hamburgers (McDonald's, KFC, etc.), cheap washing powder (Tide) and cheap anything (Wal-Mart). Just read Some MBA case studies.
- You market your products and services to sophisticated buyers with significant technical and/or business expertise and experience. MBA courses teach how to market to the unwashed masses.
- Your marketing consultant should be able to share the risks of marketing with you. MBA courses teach students how to become good corporate employees to earn their paycheques and pensions, and avoid risk at any cost. Whatever risk there is, dump it on the client.
- Your marketing should be multi-step, buyer-centred, education-based, results-accountable direct response marketing in order to create a client. MBA courses teach one-step, seller-centred image marketing in order to create exposure and some brand nonsense. Since image marketing can't be tracked, no one can hold MBAs responsible for failure.
- Your marketing consultant should be able to start on a small budget and show results for the investment. MBA courses teach how to do marketing on a 10s or \$100s of millions of annual marketing budget, most of which is wasted.

Yes, it's dead easy to put a check mark against an MBA on candidates' resumes, but be aware. And we haven't even talked about the large percentage of MBA graduates who cheat and lie in order to get their credentials.

According to the study "Academic Dishonesty in Graduate Business Programs: The Prevalence, Causes, and Proposed Actions", reported by The Toronto Star, **56%** of graduate business students admitted to cheating to obtain their credentials.

The study, which included 5,000 MBA students from 11 graduate schools in Canada and 21 schools in the U.S., was conducted by management professors at Rutgers, Washington State and Pennsylvania State universities. Researcher Donald McCabe also noted "Those numbers are probably under-reported."

This study points out an ongoing trend that lying and cheating in the world of business is just

normal and they are here to stay. So, students learn at an early age that since business is all about screwing people out of their money anyway, using lying and cheating in studying towards business credentials is also an acceptable practice.

In a 2005 study by analysts at Wetfeet, over 800 students, who pursued careers in management consulting, were asked: “Please select up to 3 factors that make your top ranked company appealing to you.” Only 2 (0.25%) people said that “Ethics” was one of their top 3 factors for choosing a consulting firm. (Even the category “Others” was rated more highly than “Ethics.”)

So, what is the alternative?

Inspect who applicants have learnt the craft from and what they have actually achieved.

Spend a weekend at a seminar with Dan Kennedy, Jay Abraham or some other marketing aces, and you run rings around 99.99% of the Ivy League MBAs out there. Only 99.99%, because the other 0.01% realised that in the real world, outside big corporations, their MBA knowledge is pretty useless, and they seek out the same marketing masters.

Since there are no licenses or recognised certifications for marketing, it’s easy to fall for impressive looking alphabet soups after candidates’ names.

And the alphabet soup may look piping hot when you look at it, but it usually cools down quite significantly by the time you hire the person.

One more point...

Writers, graphics designers, web designers, printers, audio and video production people and PR people are not marketing people. Those people can see the trees. Marketing people have to be able to see the whole forest.

And before you plant the “tree”, you need to know the exact location of the “forest”.

Granted, some of these people may know marketing, but let’s remember that every dentist and chiropractor know how the heart works. Yet, they don’t do heart surgery.

They know how to use their own methodologies effectively, but they don’t have required knowledge, skill, judgment and discernment to crafty powerful marketing messages and orchestrate kick-arse marketing campaigns to attract your perfect clients.

So, the question is this:

- Do you want a newsletter that simply “puts your name out” in front of your market and then whatever happens is fine. Or do you want a newsletter that reaches the cream of the crop of your target market, delivers a valuable message and invokes a very specific action from them, so they actually respond to your message?
- Do you want a press release that simply gets your name into a newspaper or magazine or do you want a press release that leads to feature articles, radio interviews, speaking engagements, invitations to write a book and a long chain of profitable consulting engagements?

- Do you want a website that shouts to the world who you are, what you do and how much discount you offer or do you want a website that magnetically attracts the top echelon of your target market and converts the “ready to buy” buyers into paying clients, while putting the “not ready” prospects into a nurturing system? And does all that on almost full autopilot with bare minimum human effort?

These are the differences between simply knowing how to use a marketing method to serve information to your prospects -- versus knowing how to use a method to deliver a powerful marketing message that will result in future sales with strong potential for repeat- and referral business.

Question #11: Do You Usually Work Alone Or In A Team?

Answer

Both. As an introvert, I love working alone, but with a huge difference. You see, some people work alone and give you only the end product on a take it or leave it basis.

I love collaborating with key people from the client's company in an interactive and iterative way. We toss ideas back and forth. It reminds me of my former dentist in the UK³. At the beginning of any treatment, he would give me a little yellow rubber duck, and he told me to squeeze it whenever I felt the slightest discomfort. And upon squeezing, the little duck would quack. That would indicate to Jonathan to stop and discuss with me what was happening.

I work the same way with lots of iterations.

And there are times when I recruit my tried and tested project partners in crime, introduce them to the client and we work the same iterative way.

I do my areas of expertise plus act as a conductor. I conduct an orchestra of professionals. Yes, it's project management and a bit more. Sort of project management from the heart, so people are actually inspired to give their best and brightest to our projects.

But even when I work with my subject matter expert team, I am the primary contact for the client. I also appoint a secondary contact, so if something happens to me unexpectedly, clients' projects are still moving forward.

Just as an elite military commando, my team consists of cross-trained professionals, so if something happens to one person, another person can instantly jump in and pick up the slack, so we still can hit the deadline.

But regardless of how many team members I work with, clients work with me personally, and I personally oversee every aspect of engagements. That makes certain that you get the personal focus, attention and service level that you've invested in, and it helps to avoid misunderstanding by having too many people in the communication channel.

³ I defected from communist Hungary and lived in the UK for 10 years before moving to Canada in 1998.

Question #12: Besides Marketing, What Other Areas Do You Consult In?

Answer

Business development is my main area. That is, an integrated process of marketing and sales. The main focuses are crafting a strategy, writing sales copy, designing and building system that furnishes my clients with a steady stream of top-notch clients from the top 0.5-2% of their target markets.

We know from Pareto that in any industry some 20% of companies produce some 80% of the results. In IT, being conservative, some 5% produce 95% of the results. Realistically, it's pretty much 1% producing 99%. Hence we focus on the top 0.5-2%.

As peripheral area, utilising my military experience, I help clients to build commando-like low-headcount and high-impact business development teams.

I love writing copy and I've learnt from some of the world's best copywriters. For team building I use the expertise I gained in the military, which is famous for building and operating some of the most effective teams. I use that expertise to build cohesive "commando style" low-headcount, high-impact business development teams. And as for system development, I use my engineering background.

I specialise in multi-step, buyer-centred, education-based, results-accountable direct response marketing for privately owned "entrepreneurial type" IT companies that sell complex, high-ticket and hard-to-explain solutions to sophisticated buyers in the B2B arena.

Marketing has many branches and specialties. You have to decide whether you need a generalist marketing consultant, the equivalent of a family doctor or you want a specialist.

As for me, I'm a deep generalist focusing exclusively on privately owned IT companies. I spent 16 years in the industry as an engineer, project manager and technical buyer. I understand that industry inside out.

And while I sometimes may poke my nose into general management and HR issues, I always stay within the confines of business development departments.

My objective is to build low-headcount peak-performance business development departments that use only legal, moral and ethical practices. I know this is hard in an industry that is riddled with bait-and-switch and similar scumbaggy tactics⁴, but we're getting there.

⁴ Rotten Effort by Don Tennant on a Microsoft sales manager's shady methods to make the next sale.
http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/111186/Rotten_Effort

Question #13: What's The Longest Time You've Worked With Any One Client?

Answer

The longest is 11 years and counting, although that's not IT. It's more of a paid hobby with four local family farms that produce organic, free-range meat for the US market. I'm the marketing guy and the butcher.

In IT, I normally work with clients in short bursts in a blitzkrieg⁵ fashion. Get in, do the work and get out. We achieve specific objectives, and then we take a break. I use 4-6-month engagements followed by 6-12-month breaks. Then we "conspire" again to achieve a new level of success together. Then we rest again.

Look for at least two years of client life span in your consultants, so you know that you work with a career marketer not with a dabbler between jobs.

"Don't feed us fish, but teach us how to fish" should be your motto in search of a good consultant. The more your people are involved in the marketing process, the more the consultant can teach them, and the next time they can do it without the consultant's help. All you may need the consultant for a short gig to get her feedback on what your people are doing. But that's only a week or even less not six months or more.

Huge difference.

And be careful with consultants who try to keep you as a client for life. They cut their talons in your bank account and hang in for dear life.

After starting their gigs, good consultants gradually work themselves out of their gigs, making their clients independently capable of marketing.

⁵ (German: lightning war) An all-motorised force concentration of tanks, infantry, artillery, combat engineers and air power, concentrating overwhelming force at high speed to break through enemy lines. Through manoeuvre warfare (defeating the enemy by incapacitating its decision-making through shock and disruption), the blitzkrieg attempts to keep its enemy off-balance, making it difficult to respond effectively.

Question #14: How Can We Measure Your Marketing Success?

Answer

We establish specific metrics at the beginning of our engagements and set up monitoring systems for them. Different clients monitor different metrics, so it's hard to say what to monitor.

In this world there are causes and effects.

Actions are causes and money is the effect.

For instance, in weight loss, going to the gym and training hard for one hour at least four times a week is a cause. But losing 30 lbs within 30 days is an effect.

In my experience, 80% of monitoring should be about monitoring the causes. After all, if you train, you lose weight even if you don't monitor the lost weight.

Also, weight loss is a mistaken concept. Losing 10 lbs is useless if 9.5 are lean muscle tissue and only 0.5 lbs are fat.

Marketing is the same.

What's the use of generating higher revenue if your EBIT⁶ goes down? It's useless. What matters is not what you make but what you actually keep.

So, what to monitor to achieve kick-arse EBIT?

I would monitor soft indicators, like team members' enthusiasm and dedication levels, team cohesion, nutrition, exercise, sleep and stress level. This may sound silly, but apathetic, malnourished, physically bankrupt, stressed out and under-slept people can't produce kick arse work.⁷

And believing that people's personal problems don't affect their work would be rather naive. It does.

Other indicators can be online sign-up rates, website bounce rates (causes), as they both lead to higher sales (effect).

⁶ EBIT: **E**arnings **B**efore **I**nterest and **T**axes

⁷ Read Power of the Full Engagement by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz

Question #15: What Is Your Biggest Marketing Failure?

Answer

Oh, that's easy.

Failure #1: Becoming Homeless

I went flat dead broke a good few years ago. Worse than broke. My number 1 goal was to “achieve” the goal of being merely broke.

After all, Tony Robbins and other gurus' seminars are full of “chronically broke” people who've just forked out \$10,000 plus to attend that life-changing seminar and drove their luxury cars (Jaguar, BMW, Mercedes, etc.) to participate.

In that sense, my goal was to reach the success level of “broke.”

I had lost my home, car and everything and I was living on the streets. Yes, we can say, I'd miscalculated a few cash flow issues in my own business.

Then after a few weeks on the street, I managed to get into a homeless shelter, where I had a great opportunity to live with the sludge of society. Alcoholics, lunatics, drug addicts, newly released convicts and career homeless and hell knows who else. Not to mention that social workers passionately hated me because I was only a short-term client. They loved and adored the lifetime homeless who would need help for the rest of their lives.

While living there, I analysed what had gone wrong, and with the help of the two welfare cheques I had ever drawn, I started again. That is, I continued because the business didn't go bankrupt. I didn't owe money to anyone. The problem was that no one had owed money to me either. Oh, well.

So, I did some hard labour at the local Labour Ready temp agency to earn money for rent and food, and then continued business, accommodating the new lessons I'd learnt both on the streets and in the homeless shelter.

Lessons Learnt

The biggest lesson was that people, no matter how loudly they squeal upon hearing your fees and prices, always have money, but your offer may not be of high enough priority to them.

In the homeless shelter I lived with long-term broke people, but they always had a hefty supply of fags, booze and dope. Granted, they may have stolen some, but, I bet, they purchased some too.

See. They were flat, dead broke, but had money for whatever they really wanted, whatever was high enough on their priority lists.

Since then, this is one of the main lessons I pass on to my clients as we're working on forging their "brass balls" for effective negotiation. They learn that, when it comes to fee/price negotiation, having brass balls is more profitable than the ability to bend over.

Failure #2: Accepting The Wrong Client

I accepted a six-month business development gig with a company in June 2001. The buyer liked that I had studied with Michael Gerber at his E-Myth Mastery Academy, and he hired me to help him to create business development systems in his business.

As a courtesy, I let him pay my fee in monthly instalments.

It all started well, and within three months monthly sales went up by 27%. Then he started taking more and more time off, and kept failing to do his end of the work. To the advice of his wife (who was a government flunky), he tried to dump more and more work on me. I took for a while, and by the time I rebelled against the scope creep, it was too late. He threatened me with calling his attorney and suing me.

And when he refused to pay the last instalment of my fee, I walked away.

Five years later he sued me for breach of contract, fraud, false representation and unjust enrichment at his detriment, and demanded his money back.

He never came to me in person based on my money-back guarantee, but sued me without even contacting me.

I felt my case was strong, because I had his statement both verbally and written that he failed to perform his side of the contract, which caused the problem.

Nevertheless, the judge, misinterpreting my guarantee, ordered me to repay his money.

My guarantee was that I offered a full money back guarantee if the project had failed due to my professional or ethical misconduct.

Although the judge couldn't find anything wrong with my conduct, he still ordered me to repay the money.

Lessons Learnt

In retrospect, I should have seen that it was the wrong client. There were several red flags, which I ignored because I was looking for the exciting project.

Soon after, I developed very strict criteria for client acceptance. If only one criterion is not fulfilled, I reject the engagement.

I can gladly report, that the problem has never repeated.

Question #16: Which Part Of Your Marketing Programme Can Give Us The Greatest Competitive Edge?

Answer

Let's start with this realistic premise. Most of your competitors are pushing buyers towards the purchase pretty aggressively. And buyers hate every moment of it. They tolerate it because they believe every marketer is an aggressive, pompous shithead.

So, if you practise patience in your marketing, you can leave your competitors in the dust.

I could illustrate this point with one of Aesop's fables about the sun and the wind... with a tiny twist.

One day the Wind and the Sun were arguing who was the stronger.

In the midst their dispute, they saw a traveller coming down the road, and the Sun said:

"I know how we can solve our dispute. Whichever of us can make that traveller to take off his cloak wins."

The Wind went first, while the Sun got out of the way and walked behind a cloud.

The Wind felt good about it, since he'd just attended a very expensive workshop on how to remove cloaks from unsuspecting and weary travellers, and he'd also just attended a one-day motivational seminar with the world's best motivational speakers, so he'd learnt the best tricks...

"Don't take no for an answer! Never give up! Keep on keeping on! Go for the jugular!"

Besides, his boss offered him a special bonus if he can make this traveller take off his cloak.

Our hero was motivated beyond human imagination. He was psyched up to the high heavens. He was oozing motivation.

So, the Wind began to blow as hard as it could upon the traveller; his eyes almost popped out in the back-breaking effort. But the harder he blew the more strongly the traveller held on to his cloak. Eventually the Wind collapsed in exhaustion and sat down on a beer crate.

The Sun seriously considered calling the ambulance, but eventually a double shot of whiskey nicely recovered the Wind. Then the Wind let out a sigh of defeat and an unceremonious "Shit!" and it was the Sun's turn.

The Sun came out from behind the cloud, and started shining on the traveller. It took a few minutes, but finally the old man soon took off his cloak because it was just too hot to walk with his cloak on.

And the Sun pulled all this off without attending any motivational seminars and any other cloak-removal workshops.

Kindness effects more than severity.

And this is the essence of business development.

I read sometimes during my military service that a modern army scores one enemy fatality for every 15,000 infantry shots.

For snipers, the result is one fatality for every 1.2 shots.

That's a 12,500-fold improvement by changing the approach from brute assault to patience.

And while you may not want shoot prospects, the example is powerful enough to demonstrate the value in different approaches.

When you start your marketing, seemingly nothing will happen for a few months. And all of a sudden, interesting things start happening, and if you've done everything well, you soon can start counting the money.

But good marketing is not instant gratification, but rather long-term gratification provided you have the patience to wait out the normal incubation period from crafting your marketing strategy to landing the first great client.

So, the main job of your marketing is to keep educating and inspiring buyers until they are ready to do business with you. You don't have to push them, because you just push them away.

Question #17: How Soon Will Your Efforts Turn Into New Paying Clients?

Answer

There are some interesting considerations here.

If the consultant says, you will see results almost instantly, then be afraid, very afraid.

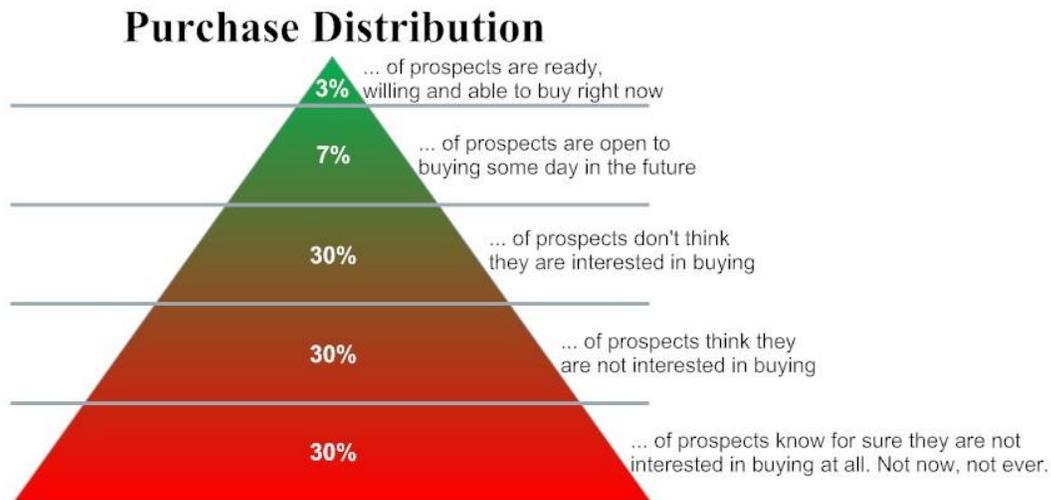
The reality is that it takes some time for the consultant to familiarise himself with your company, its vision, mission, target market, long-term strategy and other little details. Only after this familiarisation can the consultant and your key people sit down and craft a marketing strategy that is in alignment with your organisational strategy.

And after all the initial work is done, you can start testing, and that takes a bit of time too.

It's like agriculture really. You plant the seed and then you have to water and weed the soil even before the seedling comes out.

The other point is measurement.

If your consultant says that marketing is about image and brand building and its effectiveness can't be measured, but should be repeated forever and ever, then save your money and run as fast and as far as you can.



In his book, *The Ultimate Sales Machine*, sales expert, Chet Holmes reports that...

- 3% of prospects are ready, willing and able to buy right now
- 7% of prospects are open to buying some day in the future
- 30% of prospects don't think they are interested in buying
- 30% of prospects think they are not interested in buying

- 30% of prospects know for sure they are not interested in buying at all. Not now, not ever

Let's take the three groups of from the middle of the pyramid...

- 7% of prospects are open to buying some day in the future
- 30% of prospects don't think they are interested in buying
- 30% of prospects think they are not interested in buying

15% of them buy within 90 days. 85% buys between 90 days and 18 months.

I can also report that great clients don't buy are not ready to buy right now. Depending on their internal processes, they buy either within 90 days or 18 months, but they are worth creating long keep-in-touch campaigns for.

But most of your competitors are impatient. They focus on the 3% and ignore the rest. Focus on the 67%, because that's where the best clients are.

Remember, that the sooner you join the buyer's decision-making process, the better gigs you can get at higher fees.

The 3% (ready to buy right now) is now in the final stage of decision-making, and is scouring the market for the lowest price. And since they're close to the buying decision, they're flooded with competitive offers. So, there is no point to enter there. You only get beaten up on price.

Your best buyers buy between 90 days and 18 months, but the 18 months are getting longer and longer.

So, give yourself some time to do the preparations and then let your campaign hit the market.

There are three things good marketing programmes should be able to do:

1. Attracting enquiries
2. Converting "ready to buy" enquirers into clients
3. Being measurable

Measurement makes it possible to improve your marketing.

Question #18: What Can Be The Reasons If Your Marketing Programme Flops?

Answer

A marketing programme has several ingredients. And they contribute differently to success or failure.

The top two contributors are 1) your database (prospect list) and 2) your offer.

Marketing running shoes to paraplegics is futile and not even the best marketing genius can help with that.

Some other reasons:

Insufficient reach: Your marketing campaign fails to reach enough prospects. Look at the percentages in Question #17. The higher the starting number, the higher the percentages are, and the better chance you have to reach your goals.

Poor unique value proposition (UVP): This is the value with which you want to draw your market's attention. It's like a headline of an advertisement: "Tired of Constant Server Crashes?" if you have constant server crashes, then you pay attention and read the ad. Otherwise you pass.

Poor unique selling proposition (USP): Once the headline engaged your prospects' attention, you have to keep their interest by distinguishing your offer from the competition's offers. This makes sure that you can't be commoditised and price-shopped.

Asking too much too soon: If you ask for a sales appointment after the first contact, then you end up chasing buyers away. Buyers are sceptical and terrified that you start bludgeoning them with pushy and manipulative sales pitches. Start the relationship by offering something valuable, and "tenderise" buyers' scepticism with other valuable content pieces. Then buyers come to you when they are ready to buy.

Poor packaging: Yes, even services must be packaged with start and end points. Buyers don't want to buy "consulting". They want to buy service packages to achieve specific objectives that, in time, help clients to achieve specific business goals.

For instance, Building an e-commerce website is an objective. The buyer is willing to invest in

achieving in that objective because she is confident that by achieving that objective she can achieve the business goal of 25% increase in online sales.

Your list is a given, but your consultant can help you to create a new campaign and generate a new list. That may take some time, but it may be better than marketing to a dud, non-responsive list.

When the shit hits the fan, many clients blame their consultants and fire them without evaluating what's actually happened.

The reality is that good consultants recognise their mistakes, and stay with you to correct the problem free of extra charge.

But if you fire the consultant, you may get back his fees, but you're permanently out of pocket on other campaign-related costs.

And the new consultant will start a new campaign at new costs.

So, it only makes sense to keep your consultant, and together figure out what to do.

Question #19: What Type Of Compensation Do You Prefer To Receive?

Answer

This is a sensitive point, but we have to address it. Clients erroneously believe that consultants need monetary incentives to do a great job.

The low-end consultants who work for money certainly do.

The high-end consultants work for something else. Using Abraham Maslow's lingo, they work for self-actualisation. They don't care about your money. They only care about creating something amazing. Something that will make the client piss himself in delight and something the consultant can brag to his mom.

Yes, these high-end consultants charge serious money, but not because they need it but because they want to be taken seriously and treated with respect. Also, not to mention the lifetime value his campaign will generate for clients.

If you offer to pay your consultant 100% commission, then you can get only the low-end and borderline useless consultants with bulging egos and charisma but low skill levels.

Yes, commissions attract aggressive marketers, but the short-term reward pushes them into practices that can be detrimental to your business in the long-run. But they don't care, because by then they are gone. And there you are to deal with the aftermath. One problem is that they can fill your shop with problematic clients that will irritate the living daylight out of your people.

These commission-hungry people go for the quick sale but neglect the relationship bit of client engagements.

By now you know how much prep work you have to do before you can make the sale, but these consultants try to shortcut the courting process and go for the quick sale. But shortcuts lead to shortcomings, and these quick sales are low-margin sales.

If you pay a high fixed fee, you attract people, with employee mentality, who want security and regular paycheques.

I believe the best bet is when consultants share both risks and rewards with their clients. This is the only way to truly collaborate.

So, if it's a short engagement, pay the consultant a flat fee based on what you jointly establish successful completion is worth to you. Never mind hours or idiotic deliverables. Pay for the value you expect to receive. If it's a longer gig, you can pay the consultant a flat fee plus percentage of sales.

But note that when you introduce contingency payment, the consultant may say that as long as he is paid, you can use the copy and marketing mechanism she's developed. When the payment stops, you revert back to your old, dysfunctional copy and system.

The advantage of keeping your consultant on board is that she can monitor success and tweak the copy and other marketing elements for higher performance. And that is in both of your interest.

Now the question is what the best balance is between fixed fee and commissions?

Various studies indicate that 40% of the expected earnings is a fair flat fee and the other 60% is the percentage of sales. And keep the formula simple, as complex formulas are believed to hide manipulative elements in them.

One such manipulative element is when the client says: For the first year you get 40%, 30% for year 2, 20% for year three, 10% for year four and that's it. After five years your client fully "owns" the clients.

However, in year one, the harvest is still pretty sketchy. But by year four, the harvest is pretty bountiful. Yes, you may want to cut the consultant out after five years, but remember that smart consultants keep the performance capability with them.

Whenever there is a percentage part of the compensation, consultants prefer to retain the whole client generation mechanism. If you cut out the consultant, the whole system is gone.

And now the consultant is free to take a ready-made system to your competition. And guess what. Your competition wants to wipe you out. And now it has an effective system to do so.

Commissions motivate salespeople to sell; salaries bind them to your company. Studies by sales compensation consultants suggest that setting salary at 40% of expected earnings could be the optimum formula. Of course, any formula must be tailored to your company, salespeople, product, and sales cycle.

About The Author



Since 1998, after a 16-year industrial stint as an electronics/computer engineer, project manager and technical buyer, Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan has been working with privately held information technology companies and independent IT professionals to market and sell their complex, high-ticket and hard-to-explain IT solutions to high-end, sophisticated clients.

For Tom's free white paper, "More Brain Less Brawn: High-Leverage Client Acquisition Strategies For Privately Held IT Companies In The Knowledge-Based Economy", go to <http://www.varjan.com>