

Growth Strategies

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Act Like an Owner to Break Into the Leadership Circle

Eileen P. Monesson, *PRCounts, llc*



The role of the accounting marketer has evolved since its inception nearly thirty years ago. Once considered primarily an administrative position, a number of leading accounting marketers have been welcomed into the ranks of partnership. Accounting marketing is finally taking a strategic seat at the leadership table.

In the early days of accounting marketing, many firms did not realize a return on their investment. This was largely due to the fact that marketers were charged with carrying out tasks rather than implementing strategic marketing plans. While tasks are important and necessary, marketers that focus on tasks instead of strategy cannot make a positive impact on a firm's long-term growth.

"Partners at a lot of accounting firms are blind to the value that a strong marketer can bring to the table. Marketers have to be strategic and involved in the process to move the firm forward," says Burt Bierman, CPA, senior consultant with The Rainmaker Academy in Nashville, Tenn. and a former partner with J.H. Cohn, LLP (12 offices, 120 partners, 1,000 total staff).

Marketers in large and small firms are now being asked to provide guidance and direction on initiatives that are

significant to the future of the firm. These include, but are not limited to, merger and acquisition strategy, product/service management, and niche development.

This evolution is natural. Businesses in industries such as pharmaceutical, information technology and banking rely on marketing to define the company's strategic direction. Marketers provide advice on emerging business opportunities, develop new target markets, and launch innovative products and services.

The accounting industry, on the other hand, has been slow to accept the true value that a marketer can bring to the firm. While the value of a CPA can be measured by tracking new business, billable hours and realization rates, it is harder to measure the importance of marketing. Still, several marketers have proven their net worth and have been rewarded by being named partner. Several themes emerged as *Growth Strategies* spoke with these marketing pioneers about how they broke into the leadership circle.

Deliver Results

Partners expect marketers to deliver results. "I define my success by the success of my partners," explains Brett Flickinger, marketing principal with Dugan & Lopatka, CPAs, PC in Wheaton, Ill. (1 office, 8 partners, 62 total staff). "We

measure the results of marketing by tracking the number of new clients, revenue growth, cross-selling, niche growth, etc. This allows me to show my partners the value of marketing.”

Marketers must consistently communicate results to the partner group and staff through channels such as the firm’s internal newsletter, intranet, team meetings, partner retreats and an annual “report card.”

“I focus on results and promote my achievements throughout the firm,” states Michael Mattia, partner with EisnerAmper in Edison, N.J. (10 offices, 180 partners, 1,200 total staff).

Demonstrate Effective Leadership

True leaders motivate and empower their team to deliver results. “Marketers on the partnership track should always act like a leader to be considered a trusted resource, mentor, advocate, and visionary for the firm,” advises Sally Glick, principal and chief growth strategist with Sobel & Co. LLC in Livingston, N.J. (1 office, 20 partners, 80 total staff).

It is not enough to just lead the marketing function. Marketers must be perceived as esteemed members of the firm’s executive team. This requires marketers to look at the entire business for opportunities to grow, save money, work more efficiently and generate revenue. “Show that you are passionate about the firm’s success and do what is needed to ensure that it grows,” states Leisa Gill, stockholder/marketing director with Lattimore, Black, Morgan & Cain in Brentwood, Tenn. (3 offices, 45 partners, 400 total staff). “I work hard to understand our client base, industry niches and services so that I can align the firm’s resources with its strategic direction.”

“I always ensure that our marketing initiatives are in line with our goals before moving forward,” says Lori Colvin, marketing partner with Armanino McKenna, LLP in San Ramon, Calif. (5 offices, 39 partners, 300 total staff). “I also invest the time to learn about developing trends in accounting so that I can strategically position and market our services.”

Be a Strategic Team Player

Teamwork is critical to the success of the firm. “It is important to establish that you can work well with a team of partners and staff that will drive profitability,” says Glick.

Just as partners need to know that they can depend on the engagement team to deliver a high-quality product to the client, they also need to know that they can rely on the marketing team to deliver high-quality communication and promotion programs. “The role of an accountant is to

bring in revenue. My role is to help the firm grow,” adds Gill. “We have to work as a team to produce the desired results.”

Demonstrate Your Value

“Marketers who want to be a partner at their firm must demonstrate the value that they bring to the table,” says Colvin.

Colvin makes sure that the partners understand that she has a unique perspective. “Since I am trained in marketing, I bring a more creative and innovative set of skills to the firm than a CPA. I know the importance of communicating our value proposition to clients,” she adds.

“**Become an advocate for yourself and find strong partners to be an advocate for you.**”

Remember that it doesn’t pay to be modest. “Become an advocate for yourself and find strong partners to be an advocate for you,” Mattia says.

Manage the Product Life Cycle

Products and services progress through four life cycle stages that marketers need to manage:

- ✓ Introduction stage, during which the firm builds awareness
- ✓ Growth stage, during which the focus is on developing a brand preference and increased market share
- ✓ Maturity stage, during which the main objective is to defend market share while maximizing profits
- ✓ Decline stage

During the final two stages, the firm needs to reposition the service by adding more value, becoming more efficient, reducing production costs or discontinuing the service. Audit and many other accounting services are either in the maturity or decline stages of their life cycle, which means that the firm must focus on new product and service development to reposition these core services.

To take an active role in product and service management, marketers must thoroughly understand those products and services. “Marketers need to learn as much as possible

“I don’t know you...so why would I buy from you?”

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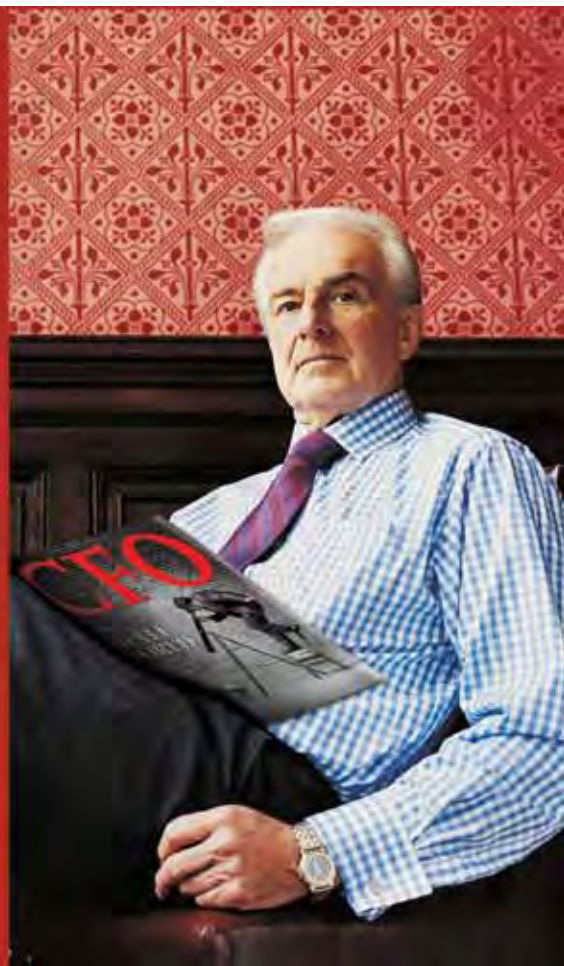
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about accounting to effectively do their job,” suggests Francine Miller, partner with Layton, Layton & Tobler, LLP in Las Vegas, Nev. (1 office, 5 partners, 11 total staff). Marketers can then take this knowledge to reposition products/services for growth. “If you can make recommendations and communicate in their language, partners will see the benefit,” Miller says.

Establish Personal and Professional Goals

Communicating personal and professional goals to the partner team and developing a plan of action to achieve those goals is important for marketers who want to be named partner. While it is often very clear what a CPA needs to accomplish to be named partner, those requirements often are less apparent for marketers.

“While I was being recruited, I discussed partnership with the managing partner,” states Neil Fauerbach, partner and director of business development with Smith & Gesteland, LLP in Madison, Wis. (1 office, 14 partners, 70 total staff). “From the beginning, I had business development, visibility and education goals. Marketers that want to be partner should develop a plan and get the managing partner to agree to it in writing.”

It is expected that more marketers will achieve partnership in the coming years. For this to happen, “marketers should think like an owner,” says Mattia.

“Being a partner is a lot of responsibility,” notes Bierman. “Marketers need to demonstrate that they have what it takes, even more than a CPA candidate would.” 

About the Author

Eileen P. Monesson is a founding principal with PRCOUNTS, LLC. The firm is dedicated to helping its clients use the power of public relations to drive their personal, organizational and corporate brand. Ms. Monesson has nearly thirty years of experience in public relations, strategic marketing and business development and spent the past twelve years as a senior marketer for several accounting firms. She can be contacted at 609-570-2150 or emonesson@PRCOUNTS.COM.

