

# 4 Steps to an Effective Marketing Plan

By Amy E. Buttell



**A**cquiring new clients is the lifeblood of any financial planning practice. There's no better way to accomplish that task than to create and implement a marketing plan. And in today's turbulent economic times, the power of an effective marketing plan cannot be underestimated. Consumers are looking for solid professional advice during these uncertain times. Just because demand for your services may

be increasing doesn't mean you can sit back and watch new clients stroll through your door.

An effective marketing plan defines and organizes your marketing efforts, so that you are focused on implementing the vision of your practice through targeted efforts, rather than trying to be all things to all people and ending up being nothing to anyone.

Marketing is equally important to new

and mid-career planners. In fact, planners who have been in the business for years may find themselves competing with newer planners who are more marketing-savvy, says Andrew Boneparth, CFP®, of Ameriprise in Boca Raton, Fla.

"I think the need for a marketing plan arose for me in the last third of my career more intensively than it did in the previous two-thirds," he says. "I think it had a lot to do with just the maturation

## 5 Questions to Ask a Marketing Communications Firm

If you're looking for help crafting a marketing plan—and perhaps help executing it, too—you'll need to carefully evaluate local marketing communications firms. Marketing experts recommend asking the following questions to assess a firm's qualifications and potential fit with your practice:

### What will my firm receive as a result of this engagement?

"Will they be getting a memorandum with specific recommendations, or a report, which is an assessment of the organization," asks Dan Weinbach of The Weinbach Group Inc. in Miami. "Is it going to include an action plan? (Planners) need to understand what they are buying, and along with that, they need to understand what time the consultant is going to be investing in developing that marketing plan, because the time investment is going to indicate not only what they can expect in terms of quality, but also what they can expect to pay."

### Does your firm write and implement marketing plans?

"A financial planning firm needs to have an eye on if and how they are going to hire this consultant to implement the plan," says Weinbach. "There are companies out there that just do marketing plans, and having a great marketing plan doesn't do a lot of good if you don't have someone to put the wheels in motion."

### Are you a marketing communications firm or an ad agency?

"Make sure you are getting a marketing firm, not an ad agency," says Rodger Roeser of Eisen Management Group in Cincinnati. "Going to an ad agency for a marketing plan is like going to a podiatrist and expecting help with pain in your back. An ad agency buys ads, and what you need is a marketing plan; that comes before buying any ads."

### What firms have you worked with that are similar in size and business type to ours?

"You want to know the firm's client mix—do they work with organizations that are roughly your size, with similar business cultures and challenges," asks Charles Epstein of BackBone Inc. in Boca Raton, Fla.

"Do they have a track record in your particular sector? If they don't, it's not necessarily a deal killer—so long as they demonstrate an understanding of your needs, issues and objectives."

### Who will be working on my account?

"You want senior-level expertise working on your account, not the marketing interns or new graduates," says Roeser.

Weinbach advises paying attention to the chemistry between the marketing firm and your financial planning firm, saying: "How do I get along with these people? Do we speak the same language? Do I like them? Am I comfortable sitting in the room with them? Chemistry is a really important part of the formula."

—A.B.

of the practice and the better understanding of what you need to do in terms of marketing."

When constructing a marketing plan, it makes sense to follow these steps, suggested by experienced planners and marketing communications experts:

### Step One: Define Niche and Audience

A robust marketing plan is based on a business plan that clearly defines your niche and your potential audience, says Kristin Harad, CFP®, of VitaVie Financial Planning in San Francisco.

"My niche is that I am a financial planner for new and expectant parents and people with young families," she says. "So I have what could be conceived (of) as a small niche, but it really drives my marketing plan. I can then find those marketing channels that will put me in front of the types of people that I want to work with."

Nolan Baker, CSA, of Baker Financial Services in Toledo, Ohio, agrees that

defining your niche and then finding your audience based on that niche is vital.

"I'm very, very focused," he says. "About 85 percent of my clients are currently between the ages of 55 and 75. I focus on retirement distribution planning." Baker's focus on that niche drives him to concentrate on several types of marketing, including radio shows, monthly seminars and the dissemination of free financial planning reports.

### Step Two: Target Internal and External Audiences

Attracting new clients is one of the most important objectives of a marketing plan. But don't get so busy bringing in new business that you neglect your current clients.

"There are few things worse than a client who feels neglected," says Alan Guinn, managing director and chief executive officer of The Guinn Consultancy Group, a marketing company. "Not communicating with clients on an ongoing

basis creates missed opportunities for you to keep your name front and center in the mind of your client."

For Lantern Financial LLC in Boston, identifying a target market of engaged and newlywed young, professional couples not only helped propel the firm's marketing efforts, but also their entire business.

"Being able to develop a new service most fitting to your target market is not the only benefit to having a marketing plan," says Kinski Nastasia, who handles public and media relations at the firm. "It also helps our business identify strengths and weaknesses and analyze our market conditions and how we compete with our competitors."

### Step Three: Consider Marketing Channels

Harad recommends that you spend some time brainstorming the different marketing

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channels where you might be able to reach your target audience.

“When you have a niche and have defined that, you immediately carve out a whole section of channels where you can be marketing, so you can start focusing your efforts instead of just showing up and doing ‘anything,’” says Harad. “So for me, with a focus on expectant parents and families with children 5 and under, I could advertise in mom’s club newsletters, speak at mom’s club events and attend birth and baby fairs.”

Baker takes his marketing efforts to his targeted external audience and his current clients and breaks them down by the month, pegged to financial events such as the tax season.

“Each month we have an event and an action, such as a specific mailer, and we also run seminars,” he says.

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### Step Four: Create the Plan

When creating a marketing plan, many planners go to outside marketing experts, such as independent contractors or local marketing communications firms. The sidebar, “5 Questions to Ask a Marketing

Communications Firm,” on page 7 provides guidance on what you should ask any firm or independent contractor you are considering hiring to create your plan, implement it, or both.

Lastly, make sure you follow the above steps and come up with a plan before you start marketing.

“The biggest mistake that many make—even seasoned professionals—is to jump to tactics (such as), ‘Gee, I think I’ll take out a big Yellow Pages ad or get a billboard or run a spot on the radio,’” says Lin Gensing-Pophal, author of *Marketing with the End in Mind*. “Those may all be appropriate, but what I stress with the people I work with is that it’s literally impossible to know (what’s appropriate) without first taking the important steps of identifying specific goals and objectives and selecting a specific target audience.”

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## FPA Resources

Check out these and other FPA resources designed to help you maximize your marketing efforts online at [ShopFPA.org](http://ShopFPA.org):

### FPA Business Solutions 2009

Attend the premier business management conference of the year for cutting-edge marketing sessions. Early-bird registration closes Jan. 23; register online at [www.FPASolutions.org](http://www.FPASolutions.org).

### FPA Business Solutions 2008: Sales & Marketing Track

This audio CD set includes five sessions on growing your practice through intelligent marketing, taking control of your firm’s growth, building your business through client events and public relations; the art of selling to the affluent; and the professional referral method. Also, check out the technology track from last year’s conference for more marketing and practice management resources.

### FPA Marketing Toolkit

This toolkit gives you the best practices, guides, models and ready-to-use templates for tactical marketing campaigns, public relations efforts, measuring implementation and effectiveness and much more. The toolkit also includes a consumer-focused PowerPoint presentation addressing the need and value of financial planning.

### FPA Consumer-Oriented Brochure Series

The “Ask Your Financial Planning Professional About...” brochure series lets you choose from seven relevant topics to educate your clients through a high-level question and answer format.

The “Client Marketing” brochure series includes eight general topics designed as an introduction to help you engage consumers who might be working with a planner for the first time. One package includes 50 brochures. Personalization with your photo, company name and logo are available with a minimum order.

### Marc Freedman on Marketing

The FPA Press title, *Oversold and Underserved: A Financial Planner’s Guide to Effectively Serving the Mass Affluent*, by Marc S. Freedman, CFP®, offers an innovative and energetic approach to marketing that you’re unlikely to find in other titles.

### VLC Sessions

#### Promoting Your Practice During Recessionary Times

Presented by *Claudio Pannunzio*

Learn tips for zero-cost communication strategies to help build your credibility and your book of business.

#### How to Grow Your Business through Referrals

Presented by *Jonathan A. Mintz*

Get suggestions for building better relationships with lawyers and CPAs.

#### Growing Your Strategic Alliances

Presented by *Susan Bradley, CFP®*

Move beyond referrals to focus on collaboration and building an adviser team.