

The Rules of Marketing

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Marketing isn't just about networking, submitting proposals, and making presentations. It's about communicating your message to your intended audience —

your prospective clients — using a wide variety of methods, including everything from your website to the way you answer the phone. What does your website say about you? What does the way you answer the phone say about you? Marketing is central to your business, and touches everything you do. It doesn't start when you need work, and stop when you get it. It is a continual ongoing process of using communication to develop your business.

In order to be a successful marketer, you need to develop habits that encourage clear and immediate communication with your clients and prospective clients. In your firm, you need to strive to develop a culture of marketing, so everyone, from the person who answers the phone to the person who signs the checks, is promoting the same message.

Here are ten basic rules that underlie a successful marketing practice:

1. Never wait.

Work is not going to come to you, at least not usually. Don't just sit there: do something! Pick up the phone, write a letter, think about your strategy. Don't be passive, allowing your success to be in somebody else's hands. Take action. Now!

2. The client is the center of everything you do.

Whatever your message, your client or prospective client is your intended audience. Your work, the level of service you provide, and your communications should all focus on the client and their needs and issues. In everything you do, strive to get your message to your client. It's not about you; it's about the client.

3. Relationships are vital.

Build relationships with everyone you know. People don't hire you because you're the best for the job, or because you proposed the right fee. People hire people they like and trust. Trust is strongly reinforced by third-party endorsements, when somebody other than your client or you tells them that you're great. The endorsement can come from anywhere, at any time.

4. Do great work.

No matter how good a marketer you are, you have to have something to sell. Since you're selling design services, it's crucial that you have a good portfolio. But more than this, you need to do your best work on every project, whether it's a "portfolio builder" or not. Your work says who you are as a person and a professional. If you aren't doing great work, your clients and others will notice, and will probably tell others.

5. Get the word out.

When you do your best work, make sure everybody knows about it. Utilize the media intelligently to spread the word about your projects to the right audience. Think about whom you're trying to reach, and what the best way to reach them is. What magazines do your clients read? How can you get your projects into those magazines?

6. Always have a plan.

So you've got it rolling: you're working on projects, you're getting new work. Now what? Where do you want to go? What do you really want to be working on? How do you get there from here? If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably have a hard time getting there. So make a plan of where you want your business to go, and figure out how you get there from here. What's the next step?

7. Be a professional.

There's no excuse for bad behavior. Behave like a professional and people will take you seriously. Act with integrity at all times, and people will want to work with you. Be honest, be forthright, be ethical, and most importantly, be who you are.

8. Remember your friends.

Marketing really is a lot like life. Cultivate business relationships with people you like, and do what you can to help them. They'll remember you, and they'll return the favor. Build up a collection of good will in those around you, and your business will benefit.

9. Be passionate.

What do you care about? Don't be afraid to tell people about it. Why do you want this particular project? Figure out a good reason, connect the project to your passion, and let your passion propel you forward. If you're passionate and energetic about a project, if you seem like you really care, how can anyone doubt your commitment to do your best work?

10. Dream big.

Don't be afraid to dream big. Where do you really want to go? Who do you really want to be? What do you really want to do with your practice and your life? Don't be satisfied with humble ambitions. Allow yourself to reach for the stars. You don't get to be a leader in your field by accident.

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