



Don't Be Fat and Happy! Even in the best of times, your firm should not let up on marketing efforts.

By Anne Scarlett, first printed in *The Zweig Letter*

At last, your business is where you want it. Revenues have risen in recent years; you've streamlined operations and increased profitability; you have a solid presence within established industries; and bonus time will be highly rewarding. In short, you are fat, dumb, and oh-so-happy.

Wait a minute. Happy, sure. But why fat and dumb, you ask? Consider these questions: When was the last time your company examined its strategic marketing approach? How frequently have you checked in with your clients to ask their perspective on industry trends and how you can best service them in the future? Where was your company considered to be an 'expert' within the past year — conferences, publications, associations? What marketing activity has your company put on hold because there wasn't enough time with such a robust workload? Finally, who within your company is looking towards the future — market shifts; global economic factors; development of internal resources...and a marketing approach to support your vision for that future?

True winners do not take their success for granted. Instead, when the going gets good, they reinvest. In fact, firms with an annual average revenue and staff growth of 20% or more increased their marketing budgets by 33.3% from 2003-2004, according to ZweigWhite's 2004 Marketing Survey. And if these fast-growing firms have not yet surpassed your level of success, then they certainly intend to do so. They are looking for any opportunity to move beyond you, in order to make your clients — and your profits — all their own.

Your firm is successful for good reason. It likely took a combination of creative thinking, risk-taking, discipline, lessons learned, and commitment. Don't lose sight of the attributes that got you to where you are today. Before you deny the possibility of a future business rut and decide to push aside strategic marketing planning until 'later', consider these four compelling reasons to self-motivate and take action now.

1. **Be prepared if disaster strikes.** It won't be this good forever. Be ready to squelch the negative impact from uncontrollable factors. Maintain a healthy business pace during difficult economic climates caused by world events by owning secure, enduring client relationships. To prepare for the unexpected, focus on relationship-building as a key element within your marketing approach. This could include offering entertainment with an emphasis on personal connection, providing vehicles for your clients to enhance their career, using your network to bring good people together. Relationships do work: 32% of respondents in ZweigWhite's *2004 Marketing Survey* acknowledged 'personal selling and relationship building' as their most worthwhile marketing investment.
2. **Grow the talents of your staff.** Since new hire availability is at an all-time low throughout the A/E/C industry, your firm must take extra measures to retain valuable staff. Widening the pool of internal marketers helps to keep your staff engaged and committed to the firm. Invest in your people; offer training designed to enhance their marketing abilities — presentation skills, business development through networking, article writing. Share your vision to develop them into future leaders, which requires an increase in their marketing involvement. Build a mutual trust by engaging them in client maintenance to prepare for an eventual transition of key clients.

3. **Stay ahead in the game.** Don't let your guard down! Competitors are relentless in their pursuit to gain market share. Their marketing efforts won't stop, even if yours do. Take this opportunity — while business is booming and morale is high — to critically examine your firm's marketing approach. Identify holes in your process: how's your follow-through post conferences? Toss out activity that is overused and underachieving: must you really send out another pretty postcard featuring a completed project, or could you instead collaborate with your client to co-author an enlightening white paper on the project's innovative solutions? Obtain credible market research on what works for your A/E/C industry competitors and beyond; use this insightful research data to revitalize your firm's marketing approach.
4. **Inspire fresh ideas.** Infuse a positive form of urgency within your culture. An urgency, for example, to respond to your clients' future needs before someone else does. *The Zweig Letter's Hot Firm 2004* List noted that 69% of fastest-growing industry firms plan to introduce new services to their existing clients this year. As a component of your strategic marketing plan, position your firm as the indispensable service provider of choice in your established markets. Go directly to the source; conduct client perception surveys to identify industry trends, then followup with innovative ideas on how your firm can best support your clients in the future.

Don't let up on marketing, even in the best of times. Clients and prospects will value your attentiveness; internal colleagues will rise to the occasion; competitors will remain in second place; and you will uphold your current status of oh-so-happy.