



Finding your inner marketer Contribute to your firm's marketing efforts by tapping into your personal strengths.

By Anne Scarlett, first printed in *Modern Steel Construction*

Do you dread picking up the phone to introduce your firm to total strangers? When management asks for volunteers to work the tradeshow booth, do you sink into a chair to become invisible? If the marketing director invites you to join her at a networking dinner, do you come up with creative excuses to be unavailable?

It's true: Some people find marketing activities to be less than appealing. But in today's ultra-competitive and sophisticated business world, they're essential. Marketing is an effective way to spread your message with clarity to prospective clients. Marketing opens doors to otherwise nonexistent opportunities. Marketing and sales—along with operations, human resources, and quality services—keep your firm in business. And let's venture closer to home: Marketing can ultimately put more money in your pocket.

So now that we've acknowledged marketing's impact on your wallet, let's talk about how you can personally contribute to the marketing effort for collective benefit. Last year readers of all experience levels responded with much enthusiasm to my MSC article "10 Things Entry-Level Engineers Should Know" (June 2006). This article expands on one of the (apparently) more challenging aspects of your career: marketing.

For the record, I don't accept the excuse that an engineer's personality is not well suited to marketing. Someone out there knows that you are able to both advise and listen to others; that you are tenacious; that you pay attention to detail and are highly analytical. Someone thinks you are fun! How do I know? Because to succeed in engineering, regardless of specialty, you must possess these skills. These are transferable skills that can be tapped to help find your inner marketer. Below I've outlined just five (of many) skills that add value to the roles of engineer, marketer, and engineer-who-contributes-to-marketing.

Communicate.

As an engineering professional, you can't possibly be a hermit. Never accept the concept that being an engineer means having poor communication skills. You are a social being that communicates with someone about something multiple times a day, every day.

How this transfers to marketing: About 99.9% of marketing success resides in good communication. Reflect upon times when you have communicated well in your life, in any context. What did you learn to do differently and what worked well? Perhaps words like frequency, reiteration, active listening, consistency, queries, confirmation, brevity, affirmation, openness, and empathy come to mind. How many times have you heard a parent reflect upon a situation with their child, in which, at long last, there was a communication breakthrough? Something worked in this situation, and it can be transferred to other areas of life.

The trick: Think back on lessons you've learned from your toughest communication experiences and use the positive ones as models to guide you in your business interactions.

Pay attention to detail.

In the field of engineering, you have a pointed awareness for subtle occurrences that can have an impact on your technical solution. You remain up-to-date on the variances between building material options in order to specify the best product for the application.

How this transfers to marketing: Keen attention to detail benefits virtually every phase of the marketing effort, from uncovering leads buried within obscure information, to creating collateral that is accurate in its content and presentation, to picking up on hints from a prospective client during a face-to-face conversation. Attention to detail elevates a marketer from mediocre to great.

The trick: It's so much easier for a detail-oriented person like you to find "it" if you know what "it" is! Educate yourself on your firm's marketing goals, intentions, and processes. In most firms, this information is available if you simply inquire about the big picture business goals and learn how your firm is using marketing to achieve those goals. For example, if you become aware that your firm decided to make a shift into a particular emerging market, you'll then be able to do your part in paying attention to developments within that market. And, if you are helping the marketing team with an RFP, you will add value by double-checking to make sure that the submission truly responds to every aspect the client has requested. With your help, things will be less likely to slip by unnoticed.

Persevere, aka practice.

When tackling a complicated engineering problem, do you quit in frustration at some point? Or do you know, intellectually, that there is an answer and you will resolve it? Because you care enough to read this professional development article, I'm assuming that you persevere. You stay the course until you get it right.

How this transfers to marketing: Why wouldn't you do the same for marketing—e.g., rehearse for formal presentations or even casual business development visits? Practice— with perseverance—until you have reached a point of satisfaction, or better yet, excellence.

The trick: Use the many resources available to you. Someone in your firm feels comfortable in front of an audience. They are confident, natural, and fully capable of making give-and-take connections to achieve positive outcomes. At least one of these people will be more than happy to practice with you. Incidentally, many accomplished speakers attribute their success to practicing.

Analyze and Strategize.

An engineer's job involves analyzing information and using logic—and strategy—to reach optimum solutions.

How this transfers to marketing: Firms that have a solid marketing strategy—often revolving around growth in profit or revenue—will greatly benefit from your analytical point of view. Your involvement, for example, is essential to strategically

growing business with existing clients. You have the rapport, trust, and ability required to expand the client relationship. You also speak the client's language, which helps shape the messages directed at your target audience.

The trick: Through open and frequent collaboration with the marketing team, you will add significant value to analyzing, developing, and executing strategy for company growth.

Reward yourself!

Are you going to tell me that marketing is a drag just because you're an engineer? Believe it or not, there are some people that find marketing to be (gasp!) fun. You get to interact with interesting people. You have a chance to explore beyond the formula-driven nature of engineering. You get to experiment with innovative approaches. It just requires figuring out how to have fun beyond your comfort zone.

How this transfers to marketing: If it isn't fun to prepare a project fee for an RFP, think of the reward when the project is won and you are personally recognized as a contributor. When you are requested to attend an after-hours networking function to meet potential clients, think of the rewarding evening you may have later on, relaxing at home. If you don't find marketing meetings enjoyable, think of the positive, bottom-line results you and your firm will reap from your efforts and hard work.

The trick: With the right attitude, an open mind, and an easy laugh, you may discover that marketing is fun. If not, then my personal trick is to power through by offering myself rewards upon completion of a task.

You are competent in your technical profession, and you've got the transferable skills to make a valuable contribution to the marketing effort. Your input, cooperation, and active participation will only strengthen your firm's marketing success!