

A Capstone Conversation With Eric Majchrzak



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Shareholder and Chief Marketing Officer
BeachFleischman PC



CAPSTONE MARKETING

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Hello, this is [Jean Caragher](#), President of [Capstone Marketing](#). I am delighted to be talking today with [Eric Majchrzak](#), Shareholder and Chief Marketing Officer for [BeachFleischman PC](#), one of Arizona's largest, locally-owned CPA firms and a Top 200 CPA firm in the United States. At the recent [Association for Accounting Marketing \(AAM\) Summit](#), Eric was named the 2015 Marketer of the Year, an award sponsored by [Inside Public Accounting](#).

After spending nine years as the Director of Marketing for [Freed Maxick CPAs](#) in Buffalo, New York, Eric and his wife moved their family to Tucson, Arizona for his role at [BeachFleischman](#). Eric is responsible for the overall development of firm marketing and growth strategies. He also has responsibility to market [Pinnacle Plan Design](#), a subsidiary practice of the firm. His responsibilities include institutional firm branding, innovation, service-line development, firm growth initiatives, and niche marketing. Eric also oversees the strategic marketing direction of the firm's vertical industry practices, including healthcare, real estate, construction, manufacturing, high-tech, not-for-profit, and hospitality.

Eric was named [AAM's](#) Rookie of the Year in 2006. He was named one of [Accounting Today's](#) 100 Most Influential People twice. Eric and his teams have won multiple AAM-MAA awards. I could go on and on. Eric is a contributing blogger to [Intuit Accountants News Central](#) blog, he's a past [AAM](#) board member, and an accounting industry influencer. Check out his profile on [LinkedIn](#) for more. Congratulations, Eric, and welcome to the Capstone Conversation.

Eric: Thanks, Jean. I appreciate it, and, wow, what an introduction!

Jean: In your 12 years experience in the accounting profession, what do you think is the greatest challenge in marketing CPA firms?

Eric: At the highest level, probably the continued push to innovate our firms. That might be the introduction of new services or product offerings. I firmly believe that firms have to innovate in order to be relevant. They can't be stagnant. It's our responsibility, as marketers, to get our firms out of that commodity realm, which a lot of firms fall into, and guide growth into other areas that bring value to clients beyond traditional compliance-type services.



That's always hard to do because there's a question, as a marketer, of being proactive versus reactive. We get pulled in a thousand different directions, and often we don't have time to be proactive. In order to innovate, if we're going to lead that whole effort, we have to be proactive. We get bombarded with messages every day. Internally, we attend lots of meetings, we have hundreds of emails we have to answer and voicemails and it can be hard to carve that time to be proactive and strategic.

Jean: How do you handle that? How do you carve out that time?

Eric: That's a tough question. I do try to build it into my day. I have, for example, Thursdays. I block off my calendar and that is my day to do my strategic thinking. I try to avoid appointments and meetings on those days, if at all possible, but I build that into my calendar as a recurring thing. That's one thing that I do that maybe some of your listeners could consider. It's just literally putting it into your calendar and carving that time aside.

Jean: Because if you don't put it down in your calendar, it's not going to happen. As you said, we always have a million things to do. It's finding the time to prioritize and make sure that you're working on the highest priority items.

Eric: If you don't set time aside for it, it'll never get done because you can always be doing something else. You know what I mean? The voicemails won't stop, the emails won't stop coming in but you do have to suspend those things and focus. That's not only for the benefit of us, as marketing practitioners, but for the firm, too, because it forces us to look out into the future, see what's coming around the curve, and plan. That's very important for success.

Jean: Absolutely. In my [Capstone Conversation with Lexi McWiggins](#) last year, she was the Rookie of the Year, she told me that every Monday morning is her time for continuing education. Whether it was a webinar or research or whatever it was, Monday morning was her time to do that. That sounds like your Thursdays.

Eric: Definitely, maybe there's a trend there, for those marketers that can be successful or that have been. They probably have habits that promote that kind of behavior of putting some time aside for themselves, or for learning or education, or maybe for painting or a certain kind of skill.

Jean: Eric, what do you think is the biggest change you've noticed in accounting marketing over the past five years?

Eric: One of the things might be the major focus of importance on content marketing, using the web and different digital tools to syndicate content. That could be either marketing automation or syndicating content through social media channels or the running or launching of a blog at your firm. That whole machine gets ramped up and



marketers have to sustain that for the long haul. I see a lot of firms doing that, getting their practitioners, their client service folks to contribute content toward their blog, or maybe they're doing webinars, or they're writing articles. That kind of focus, it's everywhere in the industry, and you've seen a whole new category of consultants that have focused on this. Five to eight years ago you didn't see that, but now there are boutique firms that are just focusing on helping firms develop content marketing strategies.

Jean: Do you see any change for that in the future, or do you just see that content inbound strategy expanding?

Eric: I see it expanding and I think, for the most part, firms are really working channels, channels for distribution of their content, but I think it's going to become more omnipresent. We're going to have to find ways to integrate content across platforms because that's the expectation of people and customers and clients. If they start a conversation in one channel, it's kind of accepted that if they go to another channel they can continue that conversation. Or, if they call an 800 number, they can continue the conversation there or on the website via a form or maybe through a social media channel or on your blog.

It used to be where firms would customize content for the channel. I think it's becoming more integrated now because people have real-time access to these channels. Think about it. When you call your cable company, you might call an 800 number, you might do a live chat on their website and you hope that, on the other end, they have a record of your account, of your past history, of your products that you've purchased, of your customer service issues. The same is going to be true with accounting. No matter what channel our customers use, they're going to have the expectation that we have a recorded history of their activities with us, or of their conversation, or maybe something like that. That's going to be very hard for us to wrap our hands around.

Jean: Because no matter what channel they're using, they're expecting somebody to be able to help them or answer their question or direct them to the right person, or whatever their need is.

Eric: Exactly. That's why I think a lot of these new platforms will integrate with other internal platforms. They integrate with social media, they integrate with your marketing database, or your CRM, or Outlook, or something like that. There are efforts being made with technology to solve this issue, but it's still young for the accounting profession.

Jean: Can you give us an example of one of these, what you're calling a newer platform?

Eric: Some of them have been around for a while, but I think they keep getting enhanced as the years go on. It could be Marketo, it could be HubSpot, it could be a CRM offering or something like that but that has other kind of functionality bolted onto



it for content marketing. Some of the platforms have been around, but they're becoming enhanced, able to integrate with other things.

Jean: If one of these vendors would answer the question of integrating with a firm's time and billing, which has been an issue for as long as I've been in this profession, and we both know that that has been a long time! I don't know why they don't focus more on it.

Eric: I think most platforms tend to be easier to use in industries where there are call centers set up. Let's say there's a heavy traffic flow of people calling an 800 number or they have customer service issues, and you have somebody on the other end who you're talking to, where they're documenting your service issues. Not so much on the professional services side of things, though, because our customer service people are accountants. We're not necessarily documenting history of the relationship in some multi-integrated platform that's going to enable you to syndicate content, that's going to track their social media activity, that's going to integrate with time and billing and all of that. It's still a work in process.

Jean: It absolutely is. It's exciting and challenging at the same time because there are all these options and so much technology to consider, that the way we market is so different, as you said, even just from five years ago. Exciting times.

Eric: As marketers, we have this issue now where we have siloed information with different platforms. What you might have in your CRM might be different from what you have with your social analytics platform, which might be different than what you have in your marketing automation platform, which might be different than what you have in your time and billing, and it can go on and on and on. I think there's a good opportunity for a platform to be developed that can integrate multiple platforms or channels at once.

Jean: Any other predictions for accounting marketing?

Eric: Specialization, in terms of our duties and skillsets in marketing, especially in the area of web and digital. It's changing so fast that it's really hard to have one person to be able to stay on top of that. You're going to see a lot of outsourcing in that area, quite frankly, where a firm might just engage a digital agency to do a lot of this on their behalf, or the firms that do have the resources to bring that capability in-house, you're going to see continued specialization.

I can give you an example. On our team at BeachFleischman, we have a WordPress developer and he is adept at not only building and maintaining websites, but also building microsites. We're going to get into the area of apps and other web applications; that's something we don't need to outsource because we have that ability and skillset in-house. That makes sense for a firm like ours because we have a heavy digital



presence. It's part of our marketing philosophy, heavy on the digital side of things, so it does make sense to bring that capability in-house. We use content marketing on a regular basis as a tool to generate leads, so it didn't really make sense for us to outsource that but rather to bring that in-house because it's something that we're doing day after day after day.

Jean: That adds to the conversation for firms when they're considering hiring marketers or building a marketing team, the different skills they do need to consider, based upon what they want to implement in their marketing plan or their marketing strategy. Now we have all these digital types, social media types, that need to be considered based on what the firm wants to do.

Eric: Exactly, so that's one prediction that we're already seeing. I think the other might be firms taking a serious look at their business model and continuing to move away from hourly billing. That's going to have an enormous impact on marketers and whatever business models are developed, whether it's value pricing or any kind of pricing in advance. That's going to be used as a differentiator for firms. I see that whole trend as continuing, and if you read any of the national trades, you can see that.

Jean: That goes back to a point that you were making before about the commodities and helping the firm tell a different story based on what they're doing. It's not you're billing an hour to do an audit, it's that you're contributing more to a business or to a client.

Eric: Exactly. We're knowledge professionals, knowledge workers, and an hourly kind of model doesn't really play into that, does it? It commoditizes what we do. The truth is that clients perceive value in different ways, and we need to be prepared to react to that. A lot of firms are refusing to face that reality and will continue down the path of hourly billing. We're looking at different things, even at our firm, different models for pricing. I know a lot of firms, especially smaller ones, have already embraced this. The smaller shops where there might be five or ten or fifteen people, where they're able to do this fairly easily, compared to larger firms, that have moved in that direction. It's like moving an ocean liner. It's going to take a long time.

Jean: Isn't that connected to the idea of being business advisers, and being able to look at the whole picture of a client, and being able to provide that advice or the services to deal with that challenge or that issue, and not of the mindset that, okay, I have 24 hours to conduct this compliance-related project and then I'm done?

Eric: Right. I think the kind of model really focuses on efficiency, where if you're going to be an adviser, you're interested in innovation, and innovation is not efficient. You can see there's a conflict there. Firms need to take a look at that to figure out ways to price where that proactive advice and consultation is included in your offering and not discouraged.



Jean: Eric, what factors or skills do you think enable accounting marketers to be successful?

Eric: I always think this revolves around the human aspects around what we do, so communication skills, credibility, the ability to sell ideas and motivate and influence others. That's the number one thing. It's about 75% of what we do. You could have the most technically brilliant marketer, but if they don't have those people skills their career's going to be short-lived in our industry. I really do think it's about building those relationships one-on-one and then using the trust that you've built to motivate and influence others to look at a different point of view or way of doing things. That cannot be done unless you have those relationships.

Jean: Because we work in an industry where a lot of people are used to doing things the way they've always done them, and we need to open them up to other opportunities or ways of looking at things.

Eric: Exactly. Marketers need to be able to put themselves in the shoes of the accountants and understand the different kind of stresses or issues that they're facing, what motivates them. You have to be able to look at their point of view when you are selling an idea or trying to influence a group of folks to maybe conduct an activity, you have to understand the pressures that they're under. Otherwise, you might be accused of having a tin ear. Understanding their day-to-day and what they have to go through is also something that I recommend for marketers.

Jean: Understanding how a firm works, how they make money, deadlines.

Eric: Hey, before you ask a group of folks to do something, you might want to make sure it's not the week before the 15th deadline, or understanding that aspect of what we do.

Jean: Which of your personal skills has contributed most to your success?

Eric: I think I have a strong sense of intuition and, in some ways, have a strong gut sense of what's going to work and what's not going to and the ability to influence others. I have had some good success being able to propose an idea or an approach and get people internally to buy off on it. That may involve getting them involved in the process or soliciting their ideas. That's been a big contributor to my success. On the technical skill side of things, at least in the philosophy that I believe in and that I've gotten my teams to work on, is the ability to monetize our initiatives, especially as it relates to the web and digital, being able to monetize our web marketing efforts. That would include content marketing, social media and SEO, being able to harness the power of that for a business purpose. There are multiple business purposes for that, but primarily for generating opportunity for the firm.



Jean: Then, that helps the firm's partners understand what marketing does and that you're just not an expense but you're helping them generate revenue and leads for new business.

Eric: There's this boundless opportunity on the web to do that and to expand your geographic footprint and your brand presence through the web using some of these different platforms. I've had some luck. I've worked with some real talented internal teams to be able to harness the power of that, and monetize it, and prove it, and document it, and that helps others at the firm, too, to develop their careers. It's been a win-win for everybody.

Jean: How can marketers gain more power within their firms?

Eric: I think developing initiatives that work is always helpful. Being able to document how that marketing initiative that your team or you have created had an impact in some way. I also think initiatives that clients love are always a good thing, initiatives that bring value to clients or that result in substantial ROI for the firm. You can tell by running certain marketing initiatives, sometimes you hit it out of the park, and those are the times when clients are really raving about something you've done, some initiative where they're involved. Those are the things that that, internally, can bring you credibility. There's nothing more powerful than a client saying something to a partner at a firm, "Hey, I really like what you guys have done here," or "We participated in this program, and, boy, we're going to do it again next year, and we love it." They love hearing that stuff, and that brings you credibility within your firm.

Jean: That question was generated from a conversation I had with a managing partner who I've known for many, many years. I've added that to the list for this year's interviews because it was his thought that marketers have not gained enough power within their firms. I'm going to spend some time exploring that, but you're right. Being able to demonstrate what you're contributing does lead to that power or influence within a firm.

Eric: I also think getting involved in other operational areas of the firm beyond marketing, but marketing can have an influence on other things that firms do, like recruiting, for example, or training or education. I try to be involved in other areas of the firm because number one, I think I can contribute toward those areas, but number two, I think marketing has a place in some of these other areas. I've told this to other marketers, but we shouldn't surrender the four Ps of marketing. I think marketers have a duty to get involved in things like pricing, or distribution channels, placement of our services in geographies, so M&A opportunities, or merging with other firms, or getting into new markets, or opening up new offices. Sometimes, marketing teams surrender that responsibility to the firm's operational side of things or the partners. I do think we have a seat at the table and can contribute toward that in some way. That's important, as well.



Jean: Eric, what's the best piece of advice you have for accounting marketers?

Eric: It comes back to the relationship thing and building the trust and credibility. You have to be able to do that. Building relationships one-on-one within your firm and focusing on that. Without it, I think their careers will be short-lived, if they haven't invested the time to show folks internally that they care about them, about their careers. It's so important to be able to build those relationships. That's always been my advice, get to know the people that you work with and understand where they're coming from.

Jean: Then, what's your best piece of advice for managing partners?

Eric: I always think tone from the top is important when it comes to managing partners. They need to inspire through leadership. They also want to do that very, very well and recognizing where the industry is going and how fundamentally different the profession's going to look in five, ten, twenty years preparation for that has to happen now. The focus for managing partners needs to be on the future. That's so important.

It's good for the profession, it's good for the firm, especially as that relates to succession and other challenges that we face in the industry. Succession is such a huge challenge right now. If a managing partner is not looking forward, not looking out five, ten, fifteen years, firms are going to be in a lot of trouble. The firms that are successful, the managing partners such as mine, Bruce Beach, is very forward looking when it comes to these kinds of things.

Jean: You're absolutely right. We not only read about it, but we talk with people within firms who are struggling with succession and what they're going to do five or ten years from now. It's a critical point. Leadership needs to have vision and start the implementation for their own firm, so that they do survive. Many firms I talk to, even with this merger mania, some of them do want to merge, but every firm wants to be the dominant firm. Nobody wants to be the firm that gets acquired and loses the leadership function. They all want to be the dominant firm. Not every firm can be the dominant firm! It's going to be the ones that are planning and thinking ahead that are going to wind up in charge, if you will, and leading a bigger, smarter firm.

Eric: I couldn't agree more. You're right on.

Jean: We've been talking today with Eric Majchrzak, Shareholder and Chief Marketing Officer for BeachFleishman PC and the 2015 Marketer of the Year. Eric, congratulations again. Thanks for your time today.

Eric: Thank you, Jean.



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