

practiceresources

The missing ingredient in growth

Does your firm need to hire a marketing director?

BY JEAN MARIE CARAGHER

Firms of all sizes are placing a greater emphasis on obtaining new clients. Research by the Association for Accounting Marketing and Hinge Research Institute revealed that high-growth firms employ more marketers — one marketer for every 34 people, versus 45 people for other firms.



This demonstrates that marketers can contribute to your firm's growth. Yet firm size isn't the only criteria when considering hiring your firm's first marketing professional.

THE DECISION TO HIRE

"A CPA firm should consider hiring a marketing professional sooner than they otherwise might think," said James Roorda, CPA, managing partner of Roorda, Piquet & Bessee Inc. which has six partners, 25 total employees, and one office. RP&B's marketing efforts were inconsistent, restarting several times a year, and the partners recognized that they should be growing more than 10 percent a year.

Enter Karen Rashid, who joined RP&B four years ago as its first marketing manager. She coordinates all marketing efforts, tracking, measuring and monitoring everything, and providing resources for prospect meetings. "The key issue is that we never ever let anything fall through the cracks," said Roorda. "It

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has resulted in our growth moving from an average of 10 percent to 16 to 18 percent, which ... more than compensated for her position."

Gilliam Coble & Moser LLP, a five-partner firm with 35 total employees and two offices, hired its first marketing professional in June 2012. "We discussed [hiring a marketer] among the leadership team from time to time for several years," said partner Scott Williams, CPA. "Finally, we placed [the topic] on our retreat agenda for serious debate."

GCM's leadership team concluded that creating a marketing culture was vital. "It was apparent some members were on board and others not," said Williams. "We deliberately sought a consultant to ready ourselves. Over 18 months of working with the consultant, habits formed and a culture developed. Marketing is now part of our DNA."

At Albright Crumbacker Moul & Itell LLC, a six-partner firm with 32 total employees and two offices, the revenue line was flat. "Partners are too busy with client work," explained managing partner John Itell, CPA, "so there was no time to devote to marketing efforts."

THE NEEDED SKILLS

The skills required of your marketer depend upon their role. Do your goals revolve around your Web site and social media? Hire a digital

marketer. Do you organize a lot of seminars and events? Hire an event planner. Implementing an inbound marketing strategy? Hire a writer. Involved in many networking organizations? Hire an extroverted marketer who can represent your firm at these events.

Before hiring Rashid, Roorda met with a firm in the next county that had a marketing professional on board. He met with a key partner and the marketer to get a sense of what a marketing pro could do for RP&B. "We were looking for somebody who had CPA firm familiarity," he said, "somebody who had a creative bent and good social media skills."

Williams contacted members of his firm's association, PKF North America, to learn more about the role of marketing pros. They decided to look for someone with fundamental marketing skills, Web and social media know-how. "We wanted someone organized, committed to building a network of professional relationships, with integrity and learning attitude," he said. "These qualities are similar to what we seek in other professionals."

After joining ACMI in January 2015 as a processor, Branigan Rak's role turned to marketing in April 2015. "We were looking for a college graduate with a positive personality, a doer," said Itell. "We wanted someone who executes plans well and in a timely manner, young, but mature ... a catalyst."

THE IMPACT OF A MARKETER

Rashid keeps the RP&B team accountable. "We have a standing time on each of our calendars where Karen stands in our doorway and says, 'It's time to make calls,'" Roorda said. "We pull up our customer relationship information and [determine] the last interaction with particular prospects. Is it time to contact them again? If we're not getting any success by making phone calls, what's our next best means of contacting them?"

Rashid also drives the firm's pipeline. Meetings are held every three weeks, with the

team going through the pipeline to talk about where they're succeeding — or not.

"The most valuable contribution our marketing coordinator makes is keeping us visible throughout the marketplace with a positive brand image," said GCM's Williams.

With Rak on the job just a few months, ACMI is still in the exploratory phase of seeing what works best for their firm. "She has been efficient at getting the ball rolling and moving us in the right direction," said Itell.

ADVICE FOR MANAGING PARTNERS

Having hired their first full-time marketers what advice do they have for fellow MPs?

"Rent before you buy," advised Williams. "Engaging with a marketing consultant conditioned us culturally for the next step."

"Convince the 'doubting Thomas' of the firm that utilizing someone solely for marketing efforts is the best thing for the firm's success," said Itell.

One thing Roorda learned was the value of attending an Association for Accounting Marketing conference. "That was something we should have done ahead of time," he said. "It would have solidified the absolute benefit of having a marketing person on board. It also would have answered a host of questions: What size firm do I need to be? How much should I be paying? What should the person be doing? All those questions can be answered in an AAM conference in spades."

FINAL WORD

My advice is to hire your firm's first full-time marketer when your partners are prepared to help them be successful. This includes 110 percent support from the MP. Rarely will an entire partner group be excited about hiring a marketer. The role for those with the greatest objection is to stay out of the way and let the rest of the team participate and succeed.

Set expectations early. Do your homework and survey your partner group about the skills they would find most valuable in a marketer. Use the results to create a job description that will drive the recruiting process. Refer to the job description when your marketer becomes overwhelmed and needs to prioritize.

Provide your marketer with a budget and other resources to encourage success. This could include membership in AAM; a marketing plan; a client/prospect database; a functional, responsive Web site; market research; and the ability to hire specialty consultants, e.g., writers, designers, inbound, search engine optimization, and trainers. AT