

A Capstone Conversation With Scott Moore



Executive Vice President
Rainmaker Companies



CAPSTONE MARKETING

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Hello, this is [Jean Caragher](#), President of [Capstone Marketing](#). It is my pleasure to be talking today with my friend, [Scott Moore](#), Executive Vice President of the [Rainmaker Companies](#) and the most recent inductee into the [Association for Accounting Marketing Hall of Fame](#).

An active member of AAM since 2001, Scott has served as the Association's President, was named among the Top 100 Most Influential People in Accounting by *Accounting Today* and was recognized as the Accounting Marketer of the Year in 2009. Prior to joining the Rainmaker Companies, Scott served as Chief Marketing Officer for a top 20 U.S. accounting firm where he led marketing and business development initiatives that helped drive 12-fold revenue growth over 14 years. Scott, congratulations on the Hall of Fame and welcome to the Capstone Conversation.

Scott: Thank you, Jean. So good to be with you today.

Jean: We were chatting about the accounting industry and how much things have changed in the profession, while other things have remained quite the same. Given that, what do you think is the greatest challenge in marketing CPA firms?

Scott: Unlike product marketing companies where you can determine what the brand attributes are, go to market with that message, and it's a pretty clear-cut thing, in professional services and accounting specifically, really finding what that differentiating point is, is difficult. A brand, as you know, is only as good as the way that it's lived out by the people in the firm. The marketer has not only the challenge of determining the brand message and the brand positioning, but getting all of the behaviors and the culture aligned with that, keeping it on the same page and then doing it in a way that can create some differentiation from the sea of other firms that are really attempting to do the same thing.

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Jean: I would agree with you completely because the brand truly is what the firm is, and it needs to be genuine to the people and not something that they're hoping to be, or would like to be, someday.

Scott: Having a brand that is not lived out in the eyes of the client can do more damage than good.



Jean: I get a similar response many times through these Capstone Conversations about the importance of differentiation and how difficult it can be to do that because firms are offering many of the same services and they're following the same guidelines. I think a lot of it is how that's done and the personalities of the people within each firm.

Scott: Absolutely.

Jean: So, given that you've been a member of AAM since 2001, what are the biggest changes you've noticed in accounting marketing over the past five years?

Scott: Well, Jean, you and I have been through this together and, of course, we've seen a lot of waves and themes of things that are important. Some of them are riding along with the economy when it's strong or when there's a recession. Certainly, Sarbanes-Oxley was something that rocked the industry, but I would say that in the last five years and maybe going back a little farther than that, it's the rise of technology as a component of marketing. These days marketers are sounding a lot more like CIOs, or as much like CIOs as they are CMOs, in a way. You look at all of the tools, and the resources and the platforms, and there are just countless technology platforms that we have to be familiar with. We have to get them connected and integrated and we have to be able to determine what to do with the data that we're receiving and work with it strategically. I think it's the combination of marketing and technology, and the demand on the skillset of the marketer, that is the biggest change we've seen.

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Jean: I think we see that as well, as marketing departments are built out that specialists in different areas of technology are hired because of the importance and the demand for us to really use the data.

Scott: Exactly.

Jean: Given that, look ahead to the next five years. What's your prediction? What do you think is going to change?

Scott: I mentioned the trends that we've seen, and it has long been pushed and promoted that accountants need to be like advisors. There have been authors, like [David Maister](#), who, going back many years, have been promoting that and pushing the idea of the trusted advisor. It seems like, in recent years, that need for CPAs to move in that direction has reached a peak, or maybe it's still going up. That's the biggest change that we really see. Some of that is driven, just like we were talking about earlier, by technology and how technology is changing things, artificial intelligence and different alternatives to getting traditional work done, and there's outsourcing alternatives.



Things of that nature are really changing the landscape in terms of what a CPA needs to be able to do and represent with the client in order to be successful.

That said, from a marketing standpoint, I think the target audiences will change. They'll broaden. Firms will not just be targeting the traditional CFO, controller-type relationships. We're seeing firms targeting CIOs, CMOs, HR professionals, a variety of other roles in organizations because the services and the solutions that firms are bringing are much broader and much more holistic. The marketer has to be in lockstep with that, and bringing that broader perspective to the marketing initiatives to get that broader kind of business.

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Jean: In your experience, do you feel that accounting firm leaders are taking the shift to advisory seriously?

Scott: We're seeing a lot of really good signs. We're seeing some firms that are doing an amazing job of it. They're training and building frameworks and really being intentional about moving in that direction. At the very least, I think forward-looking, growth-oriented firms and managing partners are at least acknowledging the need and understanding the need. Not everybody is really sure how to do that, but I think people are really taking it seriously. There's now more of a tangible need for it than ever before.

Jean: Do you think the need for CPAs to be advisors is prompting more mergers because some firms can't figure that out, or don't have the resources to make that happen, within the size firm they are?

Scott: I think that is a very good reason for many mergers. Obviously, there are a number of factors that go into why a firm might merge. There's certainly succession, geographic expansion, and a number of other reasons. But, more and more, we are seeing that to compete in the marketplace and where it's headed today, where firms need to be able to bring more of a holistic solution set and be that advisor. Firms either need to acquire it, onboard it or partner in some way, maybe through an association relationship or some informal relationship with a boutique firm, but they've got to be able to bring other services and solutions in. Mergers certainly are a great way to do it if everything fits.

Jean: It's going to be interesting to see how all of this plays out over the next few years, isn't it?



Scott: Exactly. Yeah, for sure.

Jean: Scott, what factors or skills enable accounting marketers to be successful? I know over the years you've built a tremendous network. Are there commonalities that you see among these successful marketers?

Scott: Interestingly, this is connected to the point we just discussed, and that is the need to be more of an advisor. I think marketers can take the page out of the same playbook. The ones that can be most successful are not just great technically at marketing and great creatively at marketing, but they're the ones who just like a good advisor, a CPA advisor would act with a client, you've got to be genuinely curious about the client's business. For the marketer, that means the firm's business and what are the drivers for growth and to be able to facilitate those kinds of discussions from the managing partner, and other stakeholders, other partners in the business. Then, bring your creativity, bring your ideas, bring your technical skillset, your strategic thinking to bear and line that up with what's important to growing the business. In summary, facilitation skills and being able to coach people internally, and help them see how your great ideas are connected directly to the kinds of results and drivers for growth that the firm is focused on.

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Jean: Absolutely. It's not ideas because the firm down the street did it or this might be fun for us to execute. There needs to be the business reason behind it.

Scott: Right, exactly.

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

Scott: I must refer back to what I just described. I think because I have genuinely been interested in the business of the firm that I'm working with, and having conversations that are not as a functional service provider, or someone just managing a function, I try to have conversations that really get at the strategic issues and then bring solutions. You focus on the issue; you focus on the drivers and then you bring ideas to them. It's really the same concept that I was just describing. I have had a combination of, I like to think, that I love to be creative with problem-solving from a marketing standpoint, but there's also an analytical side to me. Those that know me, know that I can get into the details around spreadsheets and stuff like that. That has served me well in working with accountants because, if you can connect ideas to data, the conceptual with the analytical, if you can tie those things together, I think that works pretty well in this industry.



Jean: And accountants love a good spreadsheet, right?

Scott: They absolutely do.

Jean: All kidding aside, providing them with the evidence for why you are pitching or suggesting what you are helps you be successful in that pitch because you're giving them hard evidence of why it's a good idea.

Scott: Hard evidence. Really good. Yeah.

Jean: Over the years we have seen many marketers rise to chief marketing officer, or principal or partner level, which is a wonderful thing to see because there is a lot of talent in our industry. From your standpoint, how do you think marketers can gain more power or influence within their firms?

Scott: We talked earlier about trusted advisor. I even mentioned David Maister, the consultant who I believe initiated the idea of a trusted advisor, and introduced the trust equation. I think marketers can gain power by building trust. If you look at what that trust equation says, it says that you've got to first build credibility with your technical skillset. So that's a given. You've got to be good at the essentials, the principles of marketing. That gives you your credibility. Then reliability, of course, you've got to be timely and responsive and all of that. But the pieces that are typically difficult for accountants, and so relating that over to the marketer, is there's the intimacy piece of the equation where you've got to build great relationships with people inside the firm.

Don't view yourself as a marketer, don't view yourself just as a functional resource. You're part of the team helping to get the firm where it's going and you've got to have the skillset that you're bringing uniquely to the table. At the same time, you're building relationships where you're really starting to understand what are those personal drivers with the key stakeholders in the firm. Then, you put all of that over this idea that your self-interest, your interest in your own ideas, your own agenda has to be lower. You've got to get that down. Meaning you need to turn interest toward understanding what the partners of the firm are interested in. A lot of times, and you know we've heard this for years being involved in AAM, a lot of marketers struggle with being, let's just say respected, or they don't get me, they don't get my ideas. I'm bringing all of these ideas but I'm not getting the buy-in, right?

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So, that's an example. It can be an example of self-interest where you say, "My ideas are great. Why is no one really buying into those and listening to those?" It may be a



genuine struggle, but if we take this tip of putting that aside and really trying to turn our interest to what truly is important to those people that are at the table, okay? What's important, what are the drivers? Then, coming at it from that angle, now that we understand that, let me try to connect my idea to why this is going to make a difference in their interest, not in my interest. All of that contributes to building trust. And trust, that one element, that one word, that is the key to getting power in the firm.

Jean: You have explained that so perfectly, because I agree. Although we're doing a lot better these days about longevity of marketing professionals in firms and, back when I started, I think it was about nine months, which was horrifying when you think about it. Marketers have more longevity, so I think a lot of them are figuring it out, but I think especially for those that may be starting out or haven't been with their firms all that long, they may be having that struggle. What you just explained about looking at it from the partner's point of view, and their interests and goals versus what the marketer may want to accomplish, that's such an important point. That was great.

And folks, I know Scott's mentioned David Maister a couple of times, and I do as well. I believe his website is still live. It's D-A-V-I-D M-A-I-S-T-E-R.com. I hope it's still live because he does have a lot of complementary resources and every one of his books is fantastic. So, if you haven't had exposure to David Maister yet, I'd strongly encourage you to do that.

I think I may know that the answer to this next question because you just gave us such a great response. Do you have any other pieces of advice for accounting markers?

Scott: I think we've really summed it up in just consider yourself an advisor. Think of yourself in it as an advisor, and the firm and the various practices within the firm, they are your clients. Sometimes for marketers, I find it can be fun to think of your internal function as an agency of sorts. If you think of it that way and you might even go so far as to establish contracts with...and this may work better for larger firms where you've got distinct practices within the firm, but in terms of setting expectations, and I think that is a quick, important point is that a lot of times the struggles that marketers have come from misalignment of expectations. And you might have a managing partner who you directly report to who you completely get each other and you're in sync with everything that you're trying to accomplish. But, in accounting firms, very often you've got a number of partners who have obviously strong opinions about what the marketer should be doing and that may not be in alignment with the managing partner. So, you can establish expectations for what the value of your role is I think helps quite a bit.

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That goes back to the idea of thinking of yourself as an agency. A marketing agency that's serving a client will have an agreement in place that says we will provide these services, maybe bullet point services and you'll have this agreement. You can always come back to that to say, "Well, what you're asking for is not really part of this agreement, so let's renegotiate this a little bit. And, if this is what we were doing was not the value that you were looking for, let's renegotiate it." Have some basis for setting expectations and keeping them in alignment. If you find yourself in a situation where multiple partners have different expectations, then ask the managing partner to help you in getting all of that level set.

Jean: Obviously, you don't need to name them, but do you know internal marketers who operate along an agreement-type relationship like that?

Scott: Yes, I've seen that and it can work very, very well.

Jean: Last question. What is your best piece of advice for managing partners?

Scott: I understand this to be in the context of working with a marketer. Let's flip that last point over and say that the managing partner in this scenario, number one, this assumes that you have a very capable marketer who fits this description, is able to meet the needs of the firm. That's a given. It's back to that whole idea of trust. The managing partner can be incredibly key in helping to set expectations so that the strategic drivers, the strategic initiatives that connect to those drivers, what is the firm trying to accomplish and this is what the marketing function is going to do connected to that and also protecting the marketing function from getting bogged by things that are not connected or relevant. We see that all the time where those misaligned expectations end up just suffocating a marketer with things that aren't really helping the firm move forward towards the goals. The managing partner is in a very unique position to be able to help the marketer deflect those things because it's very tough in some situations for the marketer to say no.

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Jean: Marketers say "yes" a lot. They want to please people.

Scott: Exactly. I think just being an advocate for the marketer, helping to align expectations. I think that's really it.

Jean: I think that's so important because we all know a lot of marketers who are really busy. Marketers, generally, don't tend to have a lot of spare time on their hands. But the question is, are they spending their time on those most important initiatives and is what



they're working on aligned with the firm's strategy and everything else that you've shared with us today?

Scott: Wonderful.

Jean: We've been talking today with Scott Moore, Executive Vice President of the Rainmaker Companies and the most recent inductee into the AAM Hall of Fame. Scott, congratulations again and thanks for your time today.

Scott: Thank you so much. I really enjoyed it.

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