

20 Ways to Float Your Firm to the Top: Will a 'Rising Tide' Raise Your Boat?

By Michael W. McLaughlin

Signs are everywhere that the market for consulting services is picking up steam. Consultants in virtually every field are noticing a stronger market. Researchers have found that operational performance of consulting firms is better than it's been in more than three years.

That's the good news.

The unfortunate irony is that, as the market heats up, some highly competent consultants will struggle to win client work against less qualified competitors for one reason: their marketing programs are self-defeating.

You won't find a better time to take a fresh look at your marketing strategy. Chances are you'll recognize opportunities that will bring more clients—and more profit—to your practice.

Have a look at the **20 Guerrilla Consulting Principles** below, and use them to tune up your marketing strategy. You may already be following some of them, while others may generate new ideas.

20 Guerrilla Consulting Principles

1. Marketing is embedded into **every aspect** of the practice, from the big things—like how you deliver services—to the details like the look of your emails and envelopes.
2. Your **backlog** of business covers at least 50% of your forecasted profit for the next year.
3. You have a **marketing position** that everyone in the practice understands and can describe in a few brief sentences.
4. **Clients** understand your marketing position.
5. Your clients and prospects know what makes you dramatically **different** from your competitors.
6. All members of your practice know exactly how they **contribute** to the success of both your business and its marketing strategy.
7. You have a **marketing activity calendar**, and you follow it.
8. **Client-specific** tactics are at the center of your marketing strategy.
9. Existing clients and their **referrals** are your richest source of new business.

10. You routinely **ask** for referrals.
11. You have **patience** with your marketing program, recognizing that some strategies take hold more quickly than others.
12. You **measure the effectiveness** of your marketing, making mid-course corrections as needed.
13. Your marketing strategy relies on an array of **integrated** tactics, **applied consistently** over time, rather than a start-and-stop approach.
14. You rigorously **qualify** every opportunity before agreeing to create a proposal or begin client work.
15. You place a high value on **clients** and on account management skills.
16. Your consultants **execute** projects flawlessly.
17. Your consultants provide a **positive experience** for your clients, no matter how tough the project.
18. Your **marketing materials** make a substantive contribution to your business development efforts.
19. You **make time** every day for marketing the business.
20. You win your fair share of **profitable** work.

As you consider the effectiveness of your marketing, think about the advice of Peter Drucker: "The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous."

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Michael W. McLaughlin is the coauthor, with Jay Conrad Levinson, of *Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants*. Michael is a principal with Deloitte Consulting LLP, and the editor of *Management Consulting News* and *The Guerrilla Consultant*. Find out more at www.guerrillaconsulting.com and www.managementconsultingnews.com.