



Even the smallest accounting firms can put the power of branding to work.

## Marketing on a Shoestring

### Marketing petit budget

Même les plus petits cabinets peuvent mettre à profit le pouvoir de la marque.

by / par Mark Wardell

*I'M THE MANAGING PARTNER of a small accounting firm and need advice. How can we effectively market our firm without spending a lot of money?*

As an independent firm, your key to successful marketing begins with a clear understanding of your brand. Whether you have one location or 100, you should create a professional and consistent brand appearance. And you can do this on even the smallest of budgets.

Your success as an accountant is not simply about your skills, it's the perception of your capabilities that will attract new clients and keep existing ones. Branding is about how you represent yourself to your clients, and your reputation is the embodiment of how your clients experience doing business with you. So it is extremely important that your brand be a true reflection of your reputation. This includes everything from the way your firm looks to the way your people behave.

Following is a four-step formula for doing this without breaking the bank.

#### 1. Develop a strategic communications plan

If you appear professional and consistent, clients will assume the same of your work. So it's important to develop your logo, stationery, brochures, website, signage, and office layout in an integrated manner.

A great example is Reid Hurst Nagy in Vancouver. Partner Bruce Hurst says his

success comes from taking the time to understand the branding that resonates best with his clients. "It doesn't matter how small your firm is, it's important to establish a corporate identity and carry it through all communications initiatives."

#### 2. Be consistent on all fronts

Consistency in branding will ensure people recognize you and trust what to expect from your firm. You need to create guidelines that all members of your firm can easily follow. If you have more than one location, hold regional meetings to ensure all staff are aware of branding requirements, buy in to corporate standards, and follow standard practices.

Your clients are not just paying for accounting services; they are participating in an experience with your people. And they will continue to seek out your services so long as the quality of that experience remains predictable.

This goes for your name and logo, too. Obviously the founding partners may leave or retire, but the name of your firm needs to be maintained if you want people to know who you are over the long term.

#### 3. Create a public persona

Attaching a public face to the reputation of your firm is an excellent way to leverage publicity opportunities.

Publicity has been the key factor in the growth of North Vancouver's Loren & Company. Senior partner Gabrielle Loren says she gets in front of the public as much as possible. "If your goal is to grow your firm you need to network like crazy." Loren's active involvement in her CGA association and community events has established her as a leader. As a result, she frequently receives media calls leading to business referrals.

#### 4. Add a personal touch

A great reputation goes hand in hand with a strong personal touch. "You already have a database, so why not send personal cards and demonstrate your passion for the people you serve," says Loren.

By focusing on your strengths, the benefits of branding are well within your grasp as a smaller accounting firm. And once you establish your brand, your reputation will begin to precede you. ■

*JE SUIS ASSOCIÉ DIRECTEUR d'un petit cabinet comptable et j'ai besoin de conseils sur la façon de présenter efficacement mon cabinet sans trop dépenser?*

Les cabinets indépendants ont avantage à bien comprendre leur image de marque. Qu'un cabinet soit composé d'un ou de 100 bureaux son image de marque devrait être professionnelle, distinctive et uniforme.