Title Slide:

Marketing Your Practice:
21 Practical Tips, Tools and Techniques to Increase Your Bottom Line

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#1 – Remember that marketing is *everything*.

Marketing is everything you do to promote you and your practice or firm. It involves a wide range of activities and disciplines which include the selection of a business name, positioning yourself in the marketplace, your logo, business card and stationery, forms, brochures, capabilities presentation, website, public relations, direct marketing, your resume or bio, pricing, even your product. Most importantly for a consultant however, marketing is you -- your voice, manners, dress, grooming, education, neighborhood, and even the car you drive. Remember that marketing is everything.

#2 – Ensure your ID system is up to date.

Projecting a professional image can make or break a business. Everything you send out, whether on paper or electronically, will be judged by potential clients on its appearance. If you designed your ID system in 1990 and it looked great then, chances are it doesn't now. Whether you are deciding to undertake a comprehensive marketing program or you're just considering freshening-up your current effort, think about revamping your graphics at this time. Your printed image – business card, letterhead and brochure, or your electronic image – email signature, website and PowerPoint templates, all reflect your value and your worth in the mind of your customers and prospects.

#3 – Make the most of your website.

Always make sure your website is professional, energetic and progressive but make sure it's tailored to who and what you are. Medium and larger consulting practices should feature professional staff resources (through brief CVs, photos and specialty areas), research, past clients (but not the "phone book" approach) and links to unique industry resources. Sole practitioners should avoid trying to hide size and be wary of setting ambitious expectations such as a blog that rarely gets updated.

#4 – Craft and launch an effective Google AdWords campaign for your practice.

Google's AdWords advertising platform, which offers you both cost-per-click and cost-per-impression pricing for advertisements served on Google.com and their partner sites, can be a very effective tool for consultants. This is especially true if you're practicing in a clearly defined niche. The smaller the niche, the more powerful and cost-effective a Google AdWords campaign can be. In addition to being cost-effective, it is measurable and can be turned on and off with a click. To learn more, simply Google 'Google AdWords', and you'll find a link to the Google AdWords Learning Center and other information and tools to help you begin to develop an effective campaign.

Prospects use different words when they search for products online. By discovering the most frequently used to search for services such as yours, you can plug in the highest ranking ‘keywords’ to make the most of your Google AdWords campaign, your website meta tags, and website copy to increase your rankings among search engines. Wordtracker is the most popular site to help users identify the most relevant keywords. To learn more visit www.wordtracker.com.

#5 – Develop a ‘slam dunk’ RFP response package.

Rather than simply submitting a stack of bound Word documents, consider creating a response package that gets attention when it hits your prospect’s desk. Begin with professionally designed templates or letterhead that are attractive, colorful and unique. But go one step further and craft a 3-D package designed to carry your RFP. A box of wine, a leather case with the prospect’s monogram, a tube with a custom poster, anything that cuts through the clutter of respondents and makes your response memorable.

#6 – Develop a professional capabilities presentation.

What used to be the corporate brochure has evolved into a more flexible marketing tool kit with the advent of good quality colour laser printers and acceptance of downloadable materials. Content is still the underlying requirement though. A proper capabilities presentation should include several core (and generally more permanent) elements such as brief profiles of key people, what services you provide, past clients and testimonials. Presentations can (and should) be further customized for individual situations by including industry context (an awareness of key issues), potential solutions and additional references layered on the basic content.

#7 – Have a bio at the ready.

You need at least three versions at the ready: 1) a comprehensive bio outlining past clients and project experiences, education, as well as associations and other industry/community involvement; 2) a short-form bio of no more than two paragraphs used to introduce you as a speaker, article author or in a similar vein; and 3) a short, short form bio of probably no more than 3 sentences that concisely describes you and what you do. If you work in multiple sectors (e.g., lodging, gaming, attractions) you might want variations of (2) and (3) for customization purposes.

#8 – Get your profile out there.

A multitude of professional (LinkedIn, WIWIH, Plaxo) and social (Facebook, Classmates) networks exist that offer a cheap, widely read and efficient means of extending your reach. Some, like LinkedIn, offer specialized groups where like minded/focused members can join more interactive communities such as “Hotel Industry Professionals Worldwide” and “The Gaming People.” Caution should be used with social networking sites, taking care not to mix vocation and avocation.

#9 – Volunteer.

One of the best ways to meet potential clients and demonstrate your capabilities in a non sales setting is to participate on a board, committee and other activity that brings together key industry players. Excellent vehicles include convention and visitor bureaus, hospitality programmes at the college and university level, boards of trade/chambers of commerce and task forces at the local or regional level. You won’t get paid for your time but the interaction is invaluable….it’s also a great learning experience.

#10 – Develop a series of videos to post online.

Today there are many affordable, yet high quality, digital video cameras on the market – as well as easy to use editing software for your computer. This makes shooting your own videos relatively simple. Why not begin to direct and star in your very own video series and upload to websites such as You Tube. They can be 5-minute sessions on particularly timely subjects, your commentary from a major convention, or an edited video of a recent speech. Once the videos are uploaded, you can post a link to the video on your website, or email the link to clients or prospects.

#11 – Become a media darling.

How many times have you seen another consultant or industry pundit quoted in the news, print or broadcast, regarding a topic that is within your area of expertise? Did you wonder why they were included and you were left out of the conversation? Truth is, the media probably doesn't know about you, your expertise and availability to comment on relevant issues. Next time you read such an article, or see a pertinent story on television, take note of the author or reporter and contact them via email. Compliment them on the piece and politely introduce yourself as an industry expert with relevant information and experience. Include a brief bio and a low-res image of yourself. Inform them that if they are ever in need of a 'fresh voice' on the topic, that you would be proud and honored to become a valued resource for them in the future. You may be amazed by the response.

#12 – Develop your fan club and be in their face.

An effective contact database—or fan club—of clients, prospects, colleagues, and relevant vendors, among others, is more than a repository of name, address and telephone number. Effective databases contain information that demonstrates a more intimate knowledge of work (e.g., administrative assistant's name, colleagues, corporate structure), personal (e.g., family, birthday) and past work experience (e.g., anniversary of a project completion or milestone).

Develop a call schedule. Send hand written thank you, thinking of you, get well, birthday and appropriate holiday cards. Refresh the list. Some names may stay on forever. Others probably need to be dropped and new ones added as your consulting and personal relationships change.

#13 – Put some TLC into your voice mail message.

Ever called someone and got a voice mail message that says "Hi, it's Bob. Leave a message." Consultants are in the service business and a voice mail greeting that conveys attention to customer service is a necessary first step to ensure your clients understand your commitment. Keep your voice mail greeting up to date, provide contact options if you're not able to respond to messages for a period of time, and don't record your message on a busy street corner.

#14 – Start a file of marketing, presentation and speech ideas.

Be on the lookout for articles, graphics, pictures or anything else that might assist you in writing an article, preparing a speech or delivering a presentation. Slip them in a folder or electronic file and review it periodically. For those who've been consulting for a while, maintenance of these "idea files" is particularly useful in drawing comparisons between today's events and previous milestones (e.g., economic cycles). In addition to the various industry trade publications we all receive, some great web resources exist to populate such a file including slideshare.net, tourismroi.com and any number of sector-specific blogs.

#15 – Get published.

Write for the trades, or develop your own research, book or newsletter. Think about a topic or issue of interest to one or more of your clients and use this as a basis for what you're writing. Don't write without a purpose outcome in mind.

Is there public-domain information in your files that would bolster an article? Would the client you've just finished completing a project for also benefit from the exposure of the project in an industry publication. Industry associations, education institutions, lobby groups are all great vehicles for publishing and each party can lend the other credibility.

#16 – Speak.

There's almost no better way to get credentialized on a given topic, or to build you/your firm's presence, than through public speaking. A few considerations though: You need to be good at speaking not just have good content knowledge. Being a good speaker takes practice and requires honest self-assessment. You must know your topic(s) cold. In some cases this means prepared speeches (notes/theme) on one or more topics that can be fitted into available time slots. You need to think beyond traditional conference or convention opportunities to include more private (and often more beneficial) settings such as corporate board retreats, strategic planning sessions or customized information settings.

#17 – Be wary of unintended commoditization.

If your consulting product can be viewed as similar to most others in your field, you're selling a commodity. Buyers tend to differentiate commodities by price and price alone. As a result, you need to find the value add you offer and ensure this point(s) is reinforced during the sales effort and in product aftercare.

#18 – Get the most from your professional or industry organizational meetings.

List the relevant industry conferences and events in the coming year that you would like to attend and develop a plan of action for each. Your plan should prioritize events (and the people from your office best suited to attend), identify attendees you want to meet and identify what you hope to achieve by attending. For certain events, where large numbers of potential clients may attend, consideration might be given to hosting social functions or conducting parallel seminars or round tables before/after the main event. These events can also be used as a staff appreciation vehicle and as a means of introducing your staff to a cross section of your clientele.

#19 – Put your plan on paper.

As consultants, we are all busy. You need to put your plan on paper, along with timelines and responsibilities. Remember, you get what you measure. Write it down or you won't do what needs to be done.

#20 – Stay away from 'too'.

Too Little – Don't do marketing on a piece-meal basis. Be repetitive and make a single point powerfully over and over. Reach and frequency are important concepts within successful marketing initiatives.

Too Late – In marketing, there is no such thing as instant gratification. Marketing takes time to succeed. Remember the law of inertia. When you begin to push a car, the science that begins as your enemy eventually becomes your ally. The same is true in regards to marketing. Just don't change cars without a lot of thought and consideration.

Too Close – Don't be so caught up in your own practice that you can no longer be objective. Get out of your office and do some research and investigation regarding what your competitive set or 'the big firms' are doing, successfully and unsuccessfully, in regards to sales and marketing. You may discover some new ideas, tools or channels you hadn't considered before.

Too Busy – Invest in learning, thinking and planning. Be creative. You will be wildly successful as your competition is simply 'too busy' to solve their marketing problems, or to be truly creative.

#21 – Just say "no!"

A consultant is only as good as the worst consulting project undertaken. The best way to ensure that quality remains a "first, last and everything in between" objective is to not take on an assignment without the proper fee, time and above all qualifications needed for successful completion. In trying economic times saying "no" may appear more difficult. But the long-term benefits of a quality reputation are priceless.

<u>Final Slide:</u>

Questions and Answers