

Top 10 Marketing Mistakes Financial Services Professionals Make and How to Avoid Them By Clifton Warren

There must be a reason why some financial services professionals achieve better growth performance than others. Or, to put it another way, if you take two equally skilled financial services professionals, who have the same qualifications, why does one produce consistently superior results every year, while the other continues to struggle?

Producing consistent organic growth is a constant challenge for any financial services business. I understand that. Recently I worked with a client who had been trying desperately for years to improve the growth performance of his business. As he looked around, it appeared to him that everyone else was making it look so easy.

Apparently, lots of professionals were able to grow without any problems. Why couldn't he?

And just when things started to look up, he would be tripped up – either by client service issues or office matters. When he started to pay close attention to what others were doing, he soon learned that they were also making the same mistakes.

Whether you're a beginner or a veteran, I can almost guarantee you're making some of these mistakes, too. And if you aren't, then you're going to be making them soon – and once you do, you'll find out that business development is a time consuming, expensive, and even painful process. There's a way to avoid it, of course. You can learn now how to avoid these mistakes. Forget about trial and error. Forget about learning it all in the School of Hard Knocks. Instead, learn from the

mistakes many of my clients have already made, and save yourself a lot of time, and grief, and money,

Read on.

MISTAKE #1: NOT HAVING A UNIQUE SALES PROCESS

I've worked with many clients who are trying to develop consistent growth, and almost every one ends up making this mistake. That's mainly because having a unique process seems a bit counterintuitive. If you look at it from a logical standpoint you might think all you really need to do is visit your client once a year, at renewal time, and everything will be fine. Turns out, that's wrong. Instead, you should be looking for ways to distinguish your business from those of your competitors.

A unique process is your only real competitive advantage. It's how you help clients identify and solve their problems. A unique sales process is one that combines your wisdom, your capabilities and your experience, and allows your clients to improve their situation.

To develop your unique sales process, do the following:

- ✓ **Identify the reasons why your best clients value their relationship with you.** How? Just sit down with your top clients and ask them.
- ✓ **Think about your top clients – your very best clients.** Identify all their key problems that can't be solved with your standard products. These are the clients who are asking for your advice and guidance.
- ✓ **Master your information-gathering process.** You need to build and improve the way you obtain information from your clients.

When you have done these three things, you'll have your own unique process – one that will distinguish you from your competitors.

MISTAKE #2: WEAK VERBAL PACKAGING

I have often made this mistake in the past. Let me save you from doing the same thing. Verbal packaging is really how you talk about yourself, particularly when someone asks, *'What do you do?'*

Most people respond: *'I'm an insurance broker'*. However, by saying that you're doing yourself and a prospective client a disservice; that is not all that you do.

Strong verbal packaging serves to translate exactly what you do, so that your true value becomes recognizable to a prospective client.

There are four possible ways to talk about what you do:

- ✓ Your **label** – *'I'm an insurance broker'*
- ✓ Your **process** – *'We help clients find the cheapest rates'*
- ✓ Your **solution** (which is much better) – *'We help builders obtain the best coverage for their budget'*
- ✓ Clients' **problems** (the best option) – *'We work with manufacturers who are struggling to obtain maximum coverage within their budget'*

Prospective clients are much more interested in themselves and their concerns – not so much in you and yours.

Next time someone asks, *'What do you do?'*, instead of saying *'I'm an insurance broker'* focus instead on the client's problem and say: *'We work with (target market) who are struggling to (problem)'*.

You'll see much better results.

MISTAKE #3: POORLY WRITTEN PACKAGES

Most people don't even realise they're making this mistake until their proposals are rejected. You can avoid this by carefully packaging all of your written material.

Your packaging is really how you present yourself in writing – including the material on your website. **It's your written value proposition.**

Review and update all of your marketing materials to include the following:

- ✓ **Executive Summary**
- ✓ **Are Our Services for You? Why do You Need Them?**
- ✓ **List of Services**
- ✓ **List of Clients, Industries, or Markets**
- ✓ **Case Studies**

- ✓ **Testimonials**
- ✓ **Background Information, on you and your key personnel**
- ✓ **Call to Action**
- ✓ **Articles and Supplementary Material**

Review your website and make any necessary adjustments using the above checklist. Make sure that everything is client-focused and client-centered, and not 'you-focused'.

MISTAKE #4: UNCLEAR POSITIONING

If your past marketing efforts have not been as successful as you wished, or expected, it's probably due to poor or weak positioning.

Trying to be all things to all people no longer works – particularly in financial services. Clients look for specific expertise, and the more effectively you can demonstrate your expertise, and package it with your unique sales process, the more successful you will be at growing your business.

To develop your positioning, you need examine the demographics of your particular marketplace – looking at geography, size, employees and turnover. Also consider psychographics – their values and whether they match your philosophy.

Positioning is about zeroing in on your target market. It's about your ideal client profile, and the unique opportunities and problems you have the capabilities and expertise to address and solve.

Your positioning is the answer to the question: *'Who are your best clients?'*

MISTAKE #5: FEAR OF DELEGATION

This is a common mistake, but also a very dangerous one for your business. When you fail to delegate you are trying to handle everything yourself, and two people lose.

First, the clients lose because they will not get the great level of service as your assistants can give them.

Second, your team members lose because they are not being utilized to their fullest capabilities and potential.

Focus instead on building a high-performance team, making a clear distinction between sales and service responsibilities. You want to make sure your team is carefully trained to handle all the routine details and matters that your clients – even your top clients – bring to them. **The only time you should become involved with a client issue is when it specifically demands your attention.**

From my experience, I have found that when financial services producers are involved in day-to-day client work, things slow down. Delegate instead. It will free up your time and allow you to focus on the money-making activities of your business.

These include:

- ✓ **Obtaining the results, you need for your growth**
- ✓ **Managing relationships with your existing key clients**
- ✓ **Obtaining referrals**
- ✓ **Ensuring the 100% retention of your top clients**

Delegate everything else to your high-performance team.

MISTAKE #6: INEFFECTIVE PROMOTION

If you have ever struggled to get your name out there, or tried unsuccessfully to attract attention, it's usually the result of poor promotion, or perhaps the fear of promotion.

There are many ways to promote your business. Top professionals focus on just four things, and make sure they do them really well. So can you.

- 1. Networking.** Go wherever prospective ideal clients are hanging out, to meet and deliver your verbal packaging and value proposition.
- 2. Publishing.** Produce newsletters and articles for existing clients, to keep yourself on their radar. In business, absence does not make the heart grow fonder.
- 3. Speaking.** Get out into your local community. Speak at Chamber of Commerce and Rotary meetings, and local church groups. The approach is not about selling financial services, but talking about some of your clients' key issues and concerns – things you can handle with your expertise.
- 4. Direct outreach.** Use your positioning and your ideal client profile, and reach out to prospective clients with some of the key issues that might be of concern to them. Convey clearly how you might be able to help address them.

MISTAKE #7: NO ALLIANCES

If you are unhappy with the quality of your sales pipeline, and if you are finding marketing a chore, this might be because you have not formed alliances to provide referrals.

The easiest way to market and promote your business is through referrals and relationship marketing. The top professionals – those who produce consistent superior results – have developed relationships with nonclient referral sources.

These include:

- ✓ **Real Estate Brokers (residential and commercial)**
- ✓ **Lawyers**
- ✓ **Consultants**
- ✓ **Leasing Agents**
- ✓ **Accountants**
- ✓ **Risk Managers**
- ✓ **Property Managers**

Look around your own 'backyard' and make a list of the different firms in each of these categories. Try to build a list of ten, then meet with them, educate them, and explain what you do. Meet quarterly, to generate good solid leads and introductions.

MISTAKE #8: FAILING TO LEVERAGE EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS

If you're dissatisfied with the quality of referrals you're receiving from clients, it could be because you're not leveraging your existing relationships.

In a recent survey, some financial services clients were asked whether they referred business. A huge 60% said '*No one ever asked us to*'. Your clients are very happy to refer people to you. In fact, it is in their own self-interest to refer people to you, because when they do, you will build a stronger practice and be able to service them much more effectively.

This, by the way, is your most effective form of marketing. If you want to improve the quality of your referrals, you need to educate your clients.

Here's how:

- ✓ **Make sure you have packaged your services effectively.**
- ✓ **Improve your own packaging and positioning.** This is the best way to educate your clients, so get it right
- ✓ **Share your packaging with your clients.** Explain who you're looking for and the types of clients (demographic, psychographic) you want.
- ✓ **Remember, not all clients are created equal.**

If you can master leveraging, it might be the only marketing and promotion technique you'll ever need.

MISTAKE #9: NOT ACTIVELY MANAGING YOUR SALES PIPELINE

I've made this mistake many times. **Sometimes things have slipped through the cracks, or I've forgotten to track the progress of a prospective client.**

Here's how to avoid this mistake:

- ✓ **Identify** what a great future client looks like.
- ✓ **Lay out** all the steps of your unique process and assign a number to each stage in the process (1, 2, 3...).
- ✓ **Enter** the names of all prospect and prospective clients into your contacts management program or spreadsheet, and assign a number to each of them, based on where they are in the process.
- ✓ **Review** your sales pipeline and determine the actions required to move someone to the next stage.

Your sales pipeline is the future of your business. More importantly, when you have a good robust sales pipeline that is actively managed, you can provide viable feedback to your alliance partners who have provided you with leads. You can also contact your clients, not only to thank them, but to educate them further and reward them for helping you build your business.

MISTAKE #10: FAILURE TO PREPARE AND PRACTISE

I've saved the best for last. That's because the failure to practise and prepare is so very common. It's also the number one reason, in my opinion, why many financial services professionals leave money on the table and don't close business.

You can avoid this mistake by practising all of your client presentations. Whenever you are due to give a presentation for a client, practise in the office beforehand – with colleagues, friends or family members as your audience.

Ben Feldman, one of the greatest financial services salesmen ever to walk the earth, used to spend days and weeks perfecting his presentation before he even met with a prospective client. He knew this: **you only get one shot.**

Also, practise your verbal packaging. Be sure to do this before you attend a networking function, so when someone asks you, 'What do you do?', you will be ready with the right language that focuses on their problems and the possible solutions. It's not about you.

So there you have it. You are now aware of the top ten mistakes. Better still, give yourself a pat on the back, because now, even more importantly, you know how to avoid them.

If you practise and implement these methods, you'll be miles ahead of your competitors who are also trying to grow organically. Take this newfound knowledge and confidence, and start developing your unique process today. Then take the next step, and the next

Before long, you'll be at the top of your game.

CLIFTON WARREN

Clifton Warren works with the financial services leaders and professionals who are ready to take their business to a whole new level.

To learn more about Clifton's services, seminars and workshops visit www.cliftonwarren.com or clifton@cliftonwarren.com.

