



Recipe for Building Successful Relationships with Professional Services Companies

By Paul Regensburg



Professional services businesses include, but are not limited to lawyers, accountants, management consultants, financial services, marketing, PR, design, architecture, engineering and construction.

Having worked with many firms across this spectrum, I find they share some specific characteristics that color our approach in working with them. Understanding what makes Professional Services firms different from businesses that sell products is key to building and sustaining mutually satisfying relationships.

TRUSTED PARTNERS

Professional Services firms are often literally selling themselves. Their success depends on building a personal bond of trust with their client. They must become deeply involved in their client's business in order to provide meaningful counsel or support. Professional Services firms often work in teams and routinely bounce ideas off of one another in a group situation.

With this understanding of the importance of relationships in a Professional Services company, we know that developing a bond and rapport are critical for building trust. We also know that the decision process for reviewing our work is sometimes a consensus building exercise requiring us to show both flexibility and leadership.

COMFORTABLE LEADERSHIP

Professional Services firms are used to being "the experts" that lead their clients toward solutions. Their clients rely on their objectivity, intellect and professional experience to guide them in the right direction. Because Professional Services firms are usually in the position of being the consultant, with all of the respect and expertise that implies, they often have strong opinions about the design, writing, web and marketing services we provide. Because of our strong facilitation skills, we have found success managing the many strong opinions of a Professional Services client.

BRAND MATTERS

Professional Services firms don't have products upon which to build a brand. When thinking about Professional Services brands, "rational" and "emotional" are the two sides of the same coin.

On the rational side, their brands generally reflect traits or ideas their organizations admire. Accenture's "Performance" brand is a good example of a Professional Services company building a brand around a concept.

"Persona" defines the flip side of the coin. What is the character of the firm? What is the culture like? Is it a buttoned up, somewhat conservative feel, suggesting black and white photography of business subjects, or is it a more casual environment that might seek more conceptual imagery, perhaps even illustration?

We work closely with our Professional Services clients to tease out ideas, themes, taglines, color palettes, font choices and style of imagery. When we achieve the right balance, we then build brands that work cohesively across the electronic and print worlds.

THINK DIFFERENTIATION

In the end, our job is to differentiate our clients using all the tools, experience and intuition we possess. Our understanding of how Professional Services companies think increases our value to them and makes the process smooth and enjoyable!

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