

## **Building Your Mediation Practice: December 2008 Marketing Strategy: Drilling Down**

By Diana Mercer

You've got a great marketing plan and lots of terrific ideas yet you're still not making any money.

What's wrong? Isn't hard work and great customer service enough? Isn't networking like crazy sufficient? Why doesn't the money follow all this hard work?

I consider myself to be the World's Foremost Expert in What *Doesn't* Work when Marketing an ADR Practice. It's a title I'm hoping to relinquish, and I think I'm getting closer to the solution. A major part of that solution will be *drilling down*.

Consider the farmer looking for water on his property. He digs a 6 foot hole, doesn't find water, and so he digs another 6 foot hole a few feet away. Not finding water, he digs again. And again. Pretty soon, his property is full of 6 foot holes. Frustrated, he sells the property for a song because it has no well. The next farmer picks one of the holes and digs down 30 feet, finds water, puts in a pump and a tank and then rents a back hoe to fill in those pesky holes dotting the property.

By always trying to move onto the next big thing we're like the first farmer, digging a little bit and then moving on, without really concentrating our efforts on any one thing.

The stack of business cards never entered into your database, that promising person you met at a networking function who you never followed up with, the web site you haven't updated in 8 months, the half-written articles and the LinkedIn profile where you never uploaded your headshot are all of your 6 foot deep holes.

So by drilling down I mean digging deeper into the details of each of your marketing ideas and plans. Rather than trying to think up the next big thing, focus on what you're currently doing and doing well, and those activities which already bring results or which look promising. Find 2 or 3 things to focus on. You can go back to the other 98 things later using the same process.

Isolate each of these activities and write down the steps which make each successful and worthwhile. Write out the steps so that anyone could do them. Get really detailed.

There are 2 reasons for doing this: The first is that you need to be sure that you have all of the steps down in order and that you are actually following through on each to the end rather than stopping halfway. No more 6 foot holes! You also want to be able to change some of the steps if you figure out a more profitable or efficient way of completing the task.

The second reason is that you may be doing all of these steps now, by yourself, but one day you will have a marketing assistant who will do many of them, so you need to have them written down. The more structure you have to the tasks the easier it is to assign them to someone else, and the more you can break them down into simple steps that are easy to measure the less you'll pay for your marketing assistant labor. While you may need to personally write articles, for example, you could hire a law student to post them on the internet. You may need to design your brochure, but that same law student could do the mailing.

The next step is to figure out how you'll measure the results of each activity. Quantify everything until you can decide which details are helpful and which are not. Make tracking sheets so that you have records of each activity and so that you're sure you've thoroughly done each one. A typical tracking sheet at Peace Talks includes the expected result, the amount of time spent doing a task, the cost of doing the task, and whether at first glance it seems like it would make sense to do the task again, and, if so, when, and whether there's anything you would change about the task next time.

If you use attending the Local Bar Association Holiday Party as an example, your tracking sheet will include your goals for going to the party, which might be to connect with 3 lawyers you've provided services for in the last year but with whom you haven't had a chance to follow up. You'll spend 3 hours travelling to and from the event and attending. The event cost is \$50. After the event you'll make a note about what went well and what fell short of expectations, and you'll decide whether this is an event you should go to again.

Let's say that you decide it was worth the time and money, but realize that another lawyer in your building who has referred business to you was also there. Next year, you could suggest carpooling with her so that you get a chance to make your travel time productive. You may also find that because it's a mixer, you really have the chance to talk with more than 3 people, so next year's goals for the event include reconnecting with 3 people but also meeting 6 new people. And, you've decided you'll ask those first 3 people to make introductions to people in the room they think you should know. That makes it a warm introduction and it gives your contact a reason to circulate and brag on you, making her look well-connected and in-the-know.

If you'd left all of these details simply in your head, you probably wouldn't do anything differently next year, and you'd miss all the great opportunities you identified after this year's event.

By quantifying the activity in terms of goals and expected outcomes along with opportunity cost (the time you spent) and out-of-pocket cost, you'll soon decide if, compared to other marketing activities you're keeping track of in the same way, whether this activity is cost-effective and worthwhile. So when you get next year's

invitation, you'll know in an instant if you think you ought to attend that event or spend your time and money somewhere else.

Elegant in its simplicity, or blinding flash of the obvious? I'll let you decide. If you think I'm onto something, join me and Natalie Armstrong of Golden Media, marketing specialists to the ADR profession, at the ABA Dispute Resolution Conference in New York City in April 2009 for our workshop on creating your marketing plan. You'll leave with a plan you can implement on Monday.

Much credit is due to my marketing coach, Alicia Marie Fruin, of Profit Consulting, [www.profitconsultingco.com](http://www.profitconsultingco.com), who introduced me to the concept of drilling down in her \$89 tele-workshop. And yes, I go to these things so you don't have to, but according to my drilling down tracking sheet, that was the best \$89 and 4 hours on the phone I've ever spent.

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