

Create Systematic Competitive Advantage or Perish

Current market place gloom creates opportunities for the professional services firm if you are set up to compete, have courage and patience.

Based on a presentation made by Craig McCallum General Manager Marketing & Corporate Services, Mettle Group, at the Marketing the Professional Services Firm Conference, March 2008 Sydney, entitled "Effectively Selling the Services your Organisation Offers"

Today as marketing practitioners, we find ourselves operating in what has been described as a 'turbulent economical market'. Headings like *"When brokers are missing lunch, you know it's starting to hurt"*, or *"Nervous markets wait on US Fed, CPI"*¹ indicate that the market is generally nervous. This situation requires marketing practitioners in all industries to be alert and focused. By *focused* I mean, talking the language of our clients and target markets and responding to their nervousness with opportunities that will assist with calming their nerves. Recently the BRW Client Choice Awards 2008, Australia's best Professional Service Firms, were announced². Two-(2) Client Choice Award winners stressed the need to be able to talk the talk in the language of the client's industry. "The impact on the clients is clear. Time and again the same comments on the finalists came up: "They know our business very well"; "Excellent industry and client knowledge"; "Understanding of industry"; "Strong sense of knowledge of the subject area"; "...able to adapt to the twists and turns of our business". Glen Hunt, BRW ends with "There is clearly a model here for professional service firms to understand their clients' sectors." How right he is.

Ram Charan author of 'Leaders at All Levels: Deepening Your Talent Pool to Solve the Succession Crises' and 'What the Customer Wants You to Know', identifies in FORTUNE Magazine³ how smart executives can use the downturn to make their companies better, stronger and faster. The first step is to keep building. "When the

top line looks shaky and the bottom line worse, the temptation is to go after discretionary spending." He advised not to consider product development, innovation and brand building as optional necessities. "Sacrificing your future for a slightly more comfortable present is not worth it. If you keep building, you can come back strong." This advice is pertinent not only to the FORTUNE 500, but to every professional services firm and their clients.

We know from experience, when the economy is hurting, that hurt can affect marketing. Traditionally our budgets are one of the first budgets to be stalled or slashed in a cost saving environment. Therefore, we need to be as of yesterday actively looking outward, digging deeper and embedding innovation around the issues our market intelligence is telling us and calling in the affects of our awareness campaigns and establishing our unique competitive advantage. For the competitive advantage to work however, you need to have already established an effective MISE Strategy in order to 'call in the favours'. If you have not established a marketing intelligence and strategic execution strategy, this article is critical for you as I discuss the eight-(8) steps to establishing buy in and implementing a MISE Strategy in your firm.

"When the economy slows down, the pace of decision-making has to speed up, because you can't put off the tough choices anymore. The companies that are readiest to act on solid information are primed to shoot ahead of the business cycle."⁴

Firstly however let us deal with a troublesome argument around the term 'selling' in the context of professional services.

"Selling is not the right strategy for long term success in a professional services environment"

Professional services are fundamentally about relationships supported by the intellect and experience that comes through your people and your intellectual property.

¹ The Australian Financial Review, 17 March 2008

² BRW 13-18 March 2008

³ FORTUNE February 18, 2008 'Ram's Rules, pg36

⁴ FORTUNE February 18, 2008 'Ram's Rules, pg36

BRW Client Choice Awards 2008, Best professional services firm over \$200m winner Allens Arthur Robinson, Managing Partner Michael Rose says "A lot of people would think about there being a service that we provide and they think about how we provide this service in the context of a relationship. [They see] that service and relationship as two different things. But we think the service is the relationship. The value is in the professional relationship. It's not sale and purchase; it's an ongoing intellectual engagement." Need I say anymore on this....I have to. If we look at key word associations around the term *sell* we note such words as 'persuade' or phrases such as 'convince somebody to accept something' and be approved of or 'gain acceptance'.

Various business developers and marketers will tell you it is their job to create a need through for example, a quantitative convincing approach of hiring more people to make more convincing calls to close business. Usually these people are challenged with overly optimistic sales forecasts based on the number of people seen and the likelihood that they would sell or close business simply because someone managed to get into the prospects office and convince them of their specialty or expertise.

Professional services offer a professional service and this requires an astutely strategic approach to creating a unique form of awareness of the firm's knowledge, experience, people, intellectual property and services.

To achieve competitive advantage, professional services must look outwardly to the market place and deep dive into selected targets to create awareness of their respective expertise and be accessible to prospects by merging the needs of the prospects with the awareness of the firm's potential to fulfil that need.

Professional service marketing comes down to a strategic methodical market driven approach and the execution of astute awareness and brand touch point campaigns with the end objective of

stimulating people to contact you when the time is right for them.

Mr. Rose Managing Partner, Allens Arthur Robinson says "Clients clearly appreciate that the value of service is a function of effective long-term relationship management, and add that good relations help lawyers build an understanding of their business, so they can provide commercially sound advice that is relevant to their business."

It could be argued that I am merely playing with words when comparing sell vs. awareness or convincing vs. stimulating. Let's look then at words and descriptive phrases of the word awareness. 'Having a knowledge of and understanding'; 'Ever mindful'; 'Aware of knowing'; 'Alert and fully informed'; 'Increasing his general knowingness'; 'His sudden consciousness of something around him'⁵.

"The astutely strategic approach to creating a unique form of cognisant awareness requires in the first instance, a purposeful shift in the mindset of marketers from focusing on the 'sell approach' to focusing on 'developing an awareness of'".

There is a significant delineation in the two approaches and once this shift in mindsets and approach is achieved, your market drivers will be aligned to creating the drive for prospects or clients to call you as the firm that can relieve their itch.

As an example of why professional services must focus on establishing informed awareness campaigns, let us look at how clients traditionally select professional services.

Word of mouth

Peer to peer recommendation from one buyer to another

Reputation

Prospect has heard of your work through a third party, publicity or as a result of a casual conversation.

⁵ Think map Visual Thesaurus.com

I recall reading in Marketplace Masters⁶, “Think of reputation in professional services to that of reputation in the music industry, that is, some of the biggest entertainment stars are the biggest disasters living on reputation only and sometimes the biggest unknowns are the powerful surprises living on talent and little else.” Establishing awareness of talent in favour of ‘he was a good salesman image’ is therefore critical for reputation based selection.

Professional Affiliations

I.e. commercially published lists in publications, i.e. BOSS, BRW & Professional Association publications.

Typically prospects/clients will request information from all firms listed in certain areas of need qualifying the search with criteria including location, types/levels of experience, methodologies and approaches.

Ensure you are on or in all relative lists, referral sites and publications that your target market is most likely to read or view.

Client internal data

In many cases clients/prospects maintain a file of consultant capabilities that they review when the ‘itch’ occurs for them.

Mettle Group receives many inquiries from organisations that request information about our services and keep on file. We in return, maintain a data-base of all organisations we have provided details of Mettle too, and provide updates to them on activities such as Principal appointments, appropriate conference presentations, publications, events and of course product/service changes. This periodic touch point enables the prospect/client to update their files on your firm and continues an ongoing awareness of your services

Selective Advertising

In select services environments selective targeted advertising can be beneficial, however I am not a great believer in this medium for Consulting Services.

Marketing & advertising practitioners may successfully debate that advertising creates

cognitive brand presence and in certain unique circumstances where there are repetitive appearances in common publications for example.

We are testing this as a matter of fact. Mettle writes a column in a monthly publication and we have a full page advertisement within the edition, in a different area of the publication to the column. At the moment we have had more response to the column than we have to the advertisement. You could put this down to the effectiveness of the copy or positioning of the advertisement, however we ensure that the advertisement copy is focused on a topical issue and there is a measurable call to action supported by right hand full page positioning.

My advice would be to consider this medium extremely carefully and methodically measure response and ROI on any advertising you decide to do to make informative decisions for further advertising campaigns.

Personal Contact

Primarily achieved through networking or through a third party introduction or at some other random event.

The number of ‘leads’ I have met at airports or in aircrafts for example are numerous. In reality however no matter how cordial this meeting or at what level, they virtually never hire services based on just that meeting. Another popular avenue is consultants speaking at conferences. This is great, providing you are not promoting your services to your peers. To quote Alan Weiss, author of ‘Million Dollar Consulting’ “this is like selling stamps to a Post Office.”

“I am not suggesting that you don’t network – on the contrary, network at every opportunity however refine your networking skills and hone in on a select few sharp questions to discern real buyers.”

This will enable you to add the prospect to your awareness campaign database for ongoing touch points. I have yet to see professional services offerings sold on the spot at a networking event. It is my advice

⁶ Marketplace Masters, How Professional Service Firms Compete to Win, Suzanne C. Lowe

therefore that you don't attempt to convince on the spot but rather engage and listen.

In all of these situations, ultimately there will, somewhere in the transaction, be a single decision maker who decides on engaging your services at the required time. Statistics available indicate several of the Six-(6) selection criteria's need to be covered off for your prospects to have awareness of your firm and for your firm to be engaged.

For the awareness campaign to provide you with the foundation of competitive advantage, it is critical that you create market gravity within your target market. Researchers in the marketing space refer to this as market place mastery or brand portfolio strategy. At Mettle we refer to it as our MISE - **Market Intelligence & Strategic Execution Strategy**, as it leans not only to having insight into our market but also the flexibility to respond to an ever changing market. Just look at where we have been in the last few weeks in Australia, with yet another interest rate rise and another predicted on the horizon, resulting in an incredibly turbulent economy. As marketing practitioners we need to be aware of these situations and have the flexibility in our MISE to respond to the market trends, shifts and challenges.

Establish Market Gravity within your MISE

The end objective of your MISE is to incite the buyer to call you, rather than you calling them. The mindset of the sell and the persuade needs to shift to merging the prospects need with the awareness of your firms potential to fill that need, rather than fighting to create a need and hope you are there at the time the back starts to itch.

Traditional quantitative justification methods or persuasion – that is constantly recruiting people into the firm to undertake traditional transactional business development - has the potential in the professional services space to create an eventual surrender exchange – the client submits to the onslaught. Perhaps a bit rough...but hold back and look at the contrast. The qualitative 'peeling the layers of the onion' approach in addressing a variety of the six-

(6) traditional methods of how a client selects a firm will start to create gravity around the awareness of your firm. This can be achieved by focusing on a series of market gravity touch points.

Figure 1 outlines a number of touch points your firm can focus on to increase the awareness of your firm's brand, services and people.

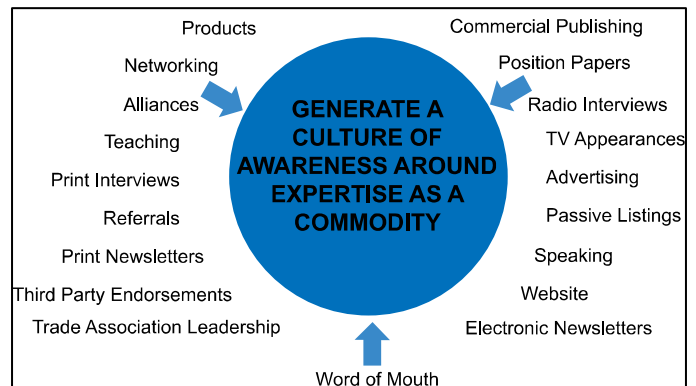


Figure 1: Awareness & Market Gravity Touch points⁷

Market Gravity Touch Points include:

Speaking:

One of the best sources to showcase your firm's expertise, knowledge and methodologies, as long as you are in front of buyers or at least recommenders

Website and Blogs:

An exceptionally flexible media kit – if done well. Load it with current and regularly updated articles, techniques and value add material for people to entice them to make contact with you and recommend to others – remember don't sell – create awareness and stimulation. I encourage you to look at our website www.mettle.com.au which has generated industry wide recognition

Blogs are a great informal way to communicate with a wide audience. As marketers it is useful to expand our interaction with audiences that are outside our target market, purely for the reason of exposure to ways alternative industries market to their target markets. I personally have a close affiliation with a Director in the

⁷ Slightly revised model from Million Dollar Consulting, Alan Weiss

Retail Industry who I swap notes with regularly, with both of us trying out each others strategies to great affect. As marketers it is easy to slowly boil ourselves in the heating pond and not jumping out every now and then to see what is happening outside of our own parameters.

Understandably there are legal and risk issues that need to be addressed when looking into a blog. These must be covered off before leaping into this medium; however I firmly believe, at this stage of the blog trend, it is a great time to get involved with them

Word of mouth:

A clever strap or tag line that reflects or relates to what you do, sticks in people's minds when you are talking to them or when they interact with your brand. The tag line must revert back to the meaning of the name or the brand i.e. *Mettle...find yours* is to find and live your core inner strength

Newsletters:

Electronic versions are relatively easy to do...and it is my suggestion that you also send out selective hard copies, as they tend to stick around a lot longer and can be filed for easy re-reading.

Note I said 'selective' hard copies. By this I mean a handwritten cover note from your managing partner, principal or consultant mentioning an article that would be of interest to a select few contacts works well as you are pointing to something that you know is of interest to them. How do you know, because of your market intelligence and relationship techniques.

Products:

People like to receive different styles of products that entice and stimulate them around your brand and expertise. I am not talking so much stress balls with your logo on – albeit in the right circumstances these can work, rather I am referring to practical information sharing podcasts, DVD's, blogs and printed articles. Make sure however that they are relevant to the recipient, don't just send them to your entire data-base.

C-suite professional service marketing is about the individual and it must be targeted

and unique content to them. i.e. "Creating competitive advantage, through your culture, in an economical downturn"...the target – CEO, CFO and HR Directors. Mettle released a podcast recently on '*Transitioning HR to Corporate Strategist*' in response to the Human Capital Management (HCM) reporting practices that provided an insight into how HCM results influence the share value of a company and how HR can shift from transactional to corporate strategist. The response we have had to this as been positive because it is current, relevant and front of mind for this target.

"The efforts that you make in creating gravity around your brand needs to be supported by your market intelligence. It can not be achieved in isolation."

Traditionally, albeit there are signs of this changing, professional service firms do not allow themselves sufficient time and resources to gain an understanding of the entire marketplace context in which they compete. By this I mean:-

- learning more about your clients;
- operationally stretching the firm to attain new competitive advantages;
- measuring the results of your strategic initiatives and making the required adjustments; and
- actively aligning your 'go to market strategies' with your culture.

This means looking at your market from the perspective of three main categories:

Competitors

- Direct and indirect

Prospects:

- Challenges
- Economical situations
- Movements/Trends

Clients:

- Current challenge/project through to future challenges/projects
- Growth through to behavioural and cultural changes

A word of warning about your client's potential to become your next competitor.

This is dependent on the type of offering you take to your clients for example, workplace training, strategic advice, even architectural or recruitment. Client's knowledge of your service and their needs for the service literally change as they consume more and more of your service. The changes in your client's behaviour and needs are therefore significant to your long-term strategic offering.

“5-8 years ago, companies didn't understand the Internet, so they outsourced it. Now those things are better understood and have been brought back in house...”

Market Intelligence is critical not only to gain clients, but also to keep them. There are three-(3) building blocks to your market intelligence infrastructure. The blocks, outlined in **Figure 2**, are a result of various representations of market intelligence building blocks available in the market place which have been adapted to suit the market intelligence strategy execution framework currently used at Mettle Group.

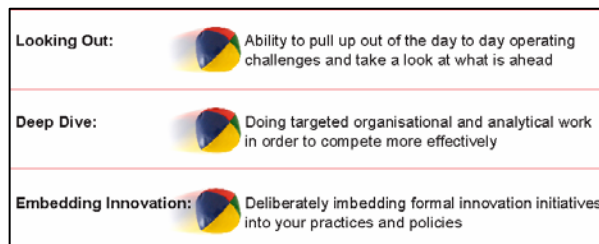


Figure 2: Market Intelligence Building Blocks

Looking Out:

Essentially means using research on clients, competitors and markets to look outside of professional or internal organisational confines to detect market shifts and opportunities.

Evidence indicates that many firms are sensitive to near-term opportunities and dangers and, as a result, respond too quickly without due consideration to take advantage of something that looks promising or to take evasive action to avoid reputation damage, for example. What happens in these circumstances is that over time they hit a pothole, or complete de-rail, which had they researched their clients,

competitors and markets, they could have avoided.

By due consideration I mean having a reliable sounding board against which to evaluate new opportunities or threats as well as having a reliable body of research about the market on which to base judgement. It also incorporates having an early look at client, competitor and market place shifts.

In the absence of disciplined looking out strategies, you may very well have short term victories, but over time they do not tend to build up a foundation on which victories can last over the long term and provide true value add, competitive advantage or market positioning.

Deep Dive:

Is to capture, organise and mine valuable client data to the point that one can discern past and potential client and market place patterns by going beyond image-based positioning and branding campaigns to become truly different from competitors.

Ultimately, it involves aligning your competitive strategies with your culture. For example, managing your culture to achieve strategic, market focused goals. It is ensuring internal management structures are designed and implemented to support your competitive strategy, account planning and formal post implementation measurement of marketing, informed awareness and business development initiatives. It means using account planning and measurement to increase your firm's ability to fine-tune its business focus and its marketing, business development and service delivery strategies.

“Today's effective competitors will deep dive to gain a pre emptive marketplace advantage.”

Embedding Innovation:

It is my belief and is part of Mettle Groups' MISE Strategy, that innovation must be institutionalised as a critical element in every professional firm's strategy. I am a strong believer of this so much so that Mettle has a designated Director who is responsible for identifying and implementing innovation into our practices. Essentially this means

recognising services or offerings that are rapidly becoming commodities and then programmatically steering internal efforts to build new services.

Secondly it is your firm's use of technology, to enable a current service to be enhanced or a new service to be conceived. Knowledge of this need is based on the results of your market intelligence – what is it your clients are asking for or don't know they need yet?

Thirdly it involves institutionalising competencies into how your firm uses incentives and or rewards to stimulate consultants and staff to innovate, in alignment with the firm's strategy.

In 1787 the Founding Fathers of the USA wrote the entire Constitution in a matter of weeks. That's not a bad model for a company under pressure. Leading professional service firms need to bring together their people from operations, services, marketing, and sales and have them debate their predictions and expectations for the next two-(2) financial or calendar years, at a minimum, and inquire 'what if demand goes down?', 'if prices of key inputs go up?', 'if the economy shifts?' and devise coordinated plans to meet the answers and solutions to these questions. When the market changes so must your strategy. "Research has show that when people have thought through their reactions to high-stress scenarios, they are much more likely to survive it."⁸

Implementing your MISE Strategy:

The questions we asked ourselves three-(3) years ago when we started the focused informed awareness initiative and MISE Strategy journey were

- I. Are we looking out, digging deeper?
- II. Are we innovative in our products?
- III. What are our competitors doing in these areas?

A MISE Strategy is not a short-term results initiative – it takes time to build the informed awareness that stimulates clients to come to

you...but evidence from Mettle's success and other professional service firm's indicates, if you stick to it, it will work.

To quote Suzanne Lowe⁹, "we as practitioners genuinely fear that which comes from biting off more then we can chew – picture a python that has just swallowed its dinner whole – that snake is not going to move for weeks!"

Implementing a MISE Strategy requires systematic implementation and constant reviewing. On the surface, this may look big and potentially menacing however like any shift in strategy it comes down to the leadership taking the initiative by the horns.

As an example, Mettle Group's leadership adopted the platform three-(3) years ago to focus on improving our measurement of marketing and awareness programs by implementing the MISE Strategy across the organisation. This initiative was very defined and therefore achievable. The initial step of support by the firm's leadership, created a ripple effect that incited other components of the MISE Strategy to be adopted throughout the firm. The steps are described in **Figure 3**.

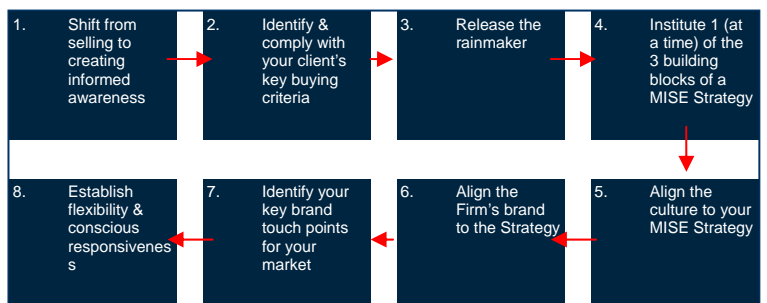


Figure 3: Steps of your MISE Strategy

Importantly, when the market driven infrastructure is built in to the 'ways of doing things around here' even by focusing on just One-(1) of the Three-(3) building blocks initially, the remainder follow more naturally because your peoples behaviour, mindsets and the firms symbols, systems and leadership are all aligned to the strategy shift. Small changes in this space can equal great gains.

⁸ Ram Charan, FORTUNE February 2008

⁹ Market Place Masters, How Professional Service Firms Compete to Win

“For this shift to work, you must release the rainmaker philosophy”

A significant part of the shift in the MISE Strategy is releasing, or at the very least, sharing the client portfolio's and pipelines of the rainmaker...or those one or two 'higher than thou' performing sales people that 'generate' all the sales and 'hold all the clients' into the organisation. Let me share an example, which is a combination of one shared in 'Marketplace Masters' and a personal experience, where a now very successful professional services firm made this significant shift.

Day one of a newly hired marketing director involved asking the leadership team for a list of the firm's top 100 clients. He is astounded to learn that such a list does not exist, even though the firm brings in hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue each year. It takes him six frustrating weeks of explaining and even pleading with separate profit centres and practice leaders to build the list.

“The sad reality is this scenario exists in too many professional services firms today due to an insidious gate keeping culture in which selling business is built on a fragmented, hierarchical model of seniority and tenure. In addition access to clients and client information is guarded and firm-wide account planning is only given lip service.”

The scenario given has since improved ten-fold today. The shift was brought about by instigating a significant shift in the cultural fabric of the firm by aligning the culture and the strategy of creating a competitive advantage. This was achieved through the adoption of a systematic relationship management process, strategic account planning and a rigorous MISE Strategy. Above all, it took the leadership, once convinced of the need to shift their ways of working, to have the courage to embrace the commitment required to instigate this cultural shift.

Interestingly data that was shared with the leadership to cause the shift in their thinking included internal data mining on their current client base. The data showed a 50% decline in revenue over a 5 year period for

their top tier clients. Due to the fragmented and hierarchal approach to client ownership and development, this information was unknown to the leadership.

This firm's approach to account planning, relationship management and its marketing strategy was the result of a shift from reliance on rain makers, principals or seniority based 'selling'. They are so competitively savvy today that the firm has created a market focused infrastructure that is built upon processes that are so unique to the firm that they are exceedingly difficult rivals to copy. The infrastructure also gives this firm the distinct advantage of having an early-alert system about shifts in their client's needs and frameworks for the firm's response.

Relying on what is still a heavily traditional way of working in professional services; the rainmaker selling model is an unacceptable competitive choice. This model is in fact limiting to the firm's potential to compete effectively; it can only grow as much as those few rainmaking individuals can make it grow. The entire framework of the firm is reliant on one or two key individuals. A tremendous risk to not only the livelihood of the firm, but to that of the people who work for the firm and clients who have grown reliant on the firm's services.

What the Marketing Director in the scenario undertook was to change the model by turning everyone in the firm into client developers and importantly, brand ambassadors. It was acknowledged that client developers were also the skilled individuals who held the intellectual property and the knowledge that the clients wanted. This needed to be connected to the brand of the firm.

The firm's revenue base became less dependent on any one individual by following a systematically defined program of relationship orientated business development. A "follow relationships" mantra was intrinsically imbedded into the culture of the firm. They vigorously and meticulously enacted a distinctive set of relationship management processes that included qualifying leads, building relationships based on firm awareness

campaigns with individuals as well as companies. They stayed close to an individual from project to project, company to company. This encompassed systematic planning, following up approaches and discerning a pattern about the services each company and contact needed. They stimulated the recognition of that need and incited the client's willingness to be helped.

This is the example of the journey Mettle started to undertake in 2005, and is representative of the shift that LEK Consulting in the USA successfully undertook. LEK Consulting now employs over 850 professionals in 19 offices across Europe, North America and Asia Pacific and is one of the most successful management consulting firms in the USA.

A MISE Strategy is not effective in isolation...it needs to be aligned to your Brand

Once you have established the support of the firm's leadership in shifting the firm's approach to sales & marketing through adopting a systematic MISE Strategy that incorporates informed awareness campaigns and a relationship marketing driven approach, you need to start working on representing this firm wide expertise through the firm's brand

The brand now must represent the firm, as the firm is no longer one, two or a group of rain makers or principles – it is a unique and marketable 'expertise' brand.

"Firms are instigating what they refer to as multiple touch points on any engagement. The partner or principal consultant deals directly with the CEO, senior counsel or CFO, while managers, associates and client services staff each interact with a corresponding person in the client organisation. It's the company that provides the service, not just an individual."¹⁰

The brand of Mettle is representative of experts in the culture, leadership and organisation design space. In other



sectors of the market it is recognised as 'my culture and leadership partner'. It is not intentionally aligned to any one individual or principal. It is therefore essential to be aware of how you go about creating touch points around your brand.

For the touch points to be effective, it is important that your brand incorporate¹¹:

- Relevance
- Differentiation
- Energy
- Leverage
- Clarity

Figure 4, courtesy of 'The Brand Gap'¹², depicts a number of essential brand touch points your marketing and branding strategy should incorporate.

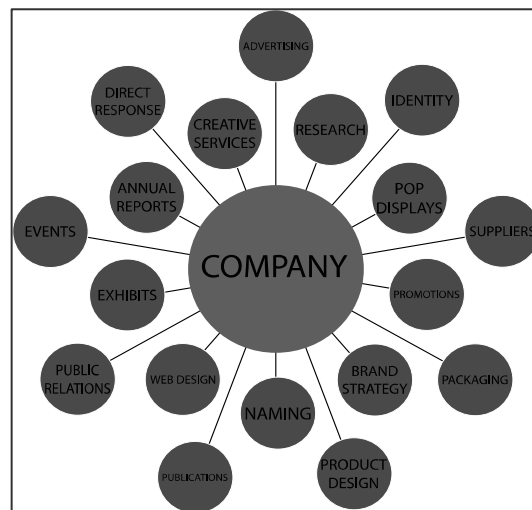


Figure 4: Brand Touch Points

The steps we have taken so far to implement the MISE Strategy are outlined in Figure 5.

You have:

1. Shifted from selling, to inciting informed awareness
2. Identified & are complying with your clients key buying criteria

¹⁰ (BRW Client Choice Awards 2008, Teams at Work, Kate Burgess, pg 46, March 13-19 2008)

¹¹ Brand Portfolio Strategy, David A. Aaker
¹² The Brand Gap, Marty Neumeier

3. Released or distributed the portfolio's of the rainmaker (or equivalent) throughout the firm
4. Instituted 1 of the 3 building blocks of a MISE Strategy – as a start
5. Aligned the firms culture to your MISE Strategy
6. Aligned the Firm's brand to the Strategy...and you have
7. Identified your key brand touch points for your market

The final critical step is to establish within your MISE Strategy, flexibility and the ability to consciously respond to market needs

The golden rule here is to remember that marketing is a science of conscious decisions not just reactions. By the term flexibility I mean gaining a thorough understanding of your market through your intelligence and mining your intelligence data. Don't simply react to an urge or hunch.

Mining data involves establishing trends and creating forecasts and testing and comparing your data with non-competes to create confidence in your data. Engage with your target market, and embed innovation into your culture & product reviews.

By the term conscious responsiveness I mean *consciously* responding to market changes. To *consciously* do something is to respond with '*knowing*' and having '*awareness*'.

In the market intelligence and responsiveness context, this is having an *awareness* of the implications of any shift in strategy to the Firm, to the brand and to the product. Once you are confident of this '*knowingness*' – then respond confidently.

Mettle consciously responded 12 months ago to actively partnering with senior HR Practitioners in the leadership & culture space. Our intelligence data highlighted that companies were losing confidence in HR's ability to provide tangible strategic direction on Human Capital Management (HCM) issues. We were able to foresee that the role of HR needed to become the Corporate Strategist on HCM issues.

This issue is gaining considerable traction through the influence HCM Reporting has on share prices – providing tangibility to culture and leadership initiatives.

In order to have flexibility and to be able to consciously respond, the MISE Strategy should never touch the book shelves. It should actually never be put into a ring binder as it is a moving beast aligned to a core mantra. Recall LEK Consulting's mantra – 'follow relationships'. Everything they did within their MISE Strategy was focused on following relationships through every touch point.

Therefore, your focus of creating informed awareness and responsiveness is to generate conversations that will eventually lead to cognitive advocacy among key influencers and decision makers. You achieve this through the steps similar to the above and others that we have mentioned earlier.

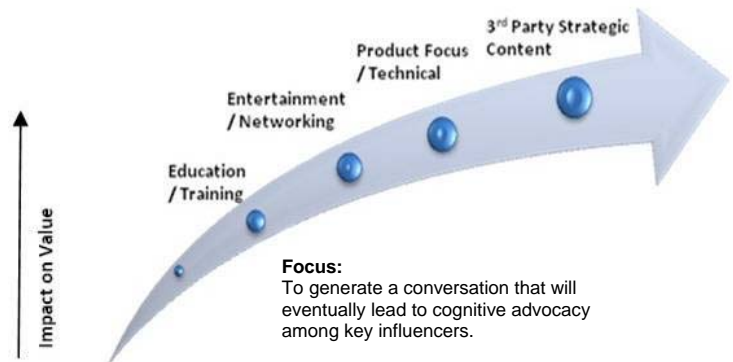


Figure 6: Cognitive Advocacy Influencer Steps¹³

¹³ A. Hasselwander & L. Rawsthorne, PhD - Market Bridge

In Mettle Group's case, they include as outlined in **Figure 6**:

- education
- entertainment/networking
- product focus information and
- most importantly 3rd party content – that is your content on other mediums other than you created through your MISE Strategy or Brand touch points – i.e. word of mouth, endorsements, press, magazines etc.

Maintaining knowledge across these Five (5), or similar, awareness avenues will ensure you are able to respond to the needs of the market place because each of these initiatives allows you to gather intelligence.

To put it simply, flexibility and responsiveness is being in the right place at the right time...that is being in front of the buyer with a back scratcher when the buyer has an itch...not necessarily physically present, but present in spirit.

As a final thought, which scenario are you going to aim for in implementing your MISE Strategy? A or B?

Option A:

“ We need to fix up our wastewater collection system, because they are always breaking down and are causing us unnecessary expense. Let's put out a request for proposal to 15 environmental engineering firms and pick the lowest price provider? ”

Option B:

“ We need to manage our assets better; our costs are outstripping our revenues. How can we get the biggest bang for the buck in terms of where we put our future investment and energy? We see where one of our advisors, Mettle, a company that understands what we do, has dedicated itself to guiding companies like ours to improve their performance. Lets engage them! ”

“A slump can also be an opportunity if you use the sense of urgency to improve strategy, management, and discipline.

In that sense, happy and unhappy times are alike: The companies that take charge and out compete will win.” Ram Charan

About the Author:

Craig McCallum directs the national and international marketing and corporate service activities for Mettle Group. He is responsible for the development and execution of product and marketing strategies including the integrated marketing communications strategy, global brand strategy, online marketing strategy and business development systems to support the company in achieving its business goals and desired financial results. Craig also directs the Corporate Services division which is responsible for global consulting project logistics and Group operations. Craig is a member of the Mettle Group Executive Management Team.



Craig brings to Mettle 15 year's practical and strategic experience in marketing, events management, business, operational and facilities management. He has a demonstrated commitment to designing and managing successful marketing strategies, campaigns and public relations activities, establishing efficient cost effective client service delivery processes and developing effective streamlined business, logistics and operational systems.

Craig is frequently invited to present on Professional Service Marketing topics at industry Conferences and Seminars and is a contributor to various Marketing & HR publications.

Craig is a member of [LinkedIn](#) profile and hosts a [marketing blog](#) at <http://marketingmyfirm.blogspot.com>