

Chapter

The Guerrilla's Marketing Road Map

When you try to be all things to all people, you end up being nothing.

—AL RIES¹

Every October, more than 1,500 competitors go to Kona, Hawaii, where they face off in the Ironman Triathlon. The contest features a 2.4-mile ocean swim, a grueling 112-mile bike ride, and a punishing 26.2-mile run. Mark Allen, who was dubbed the “World’s Fittest Man” by *Outside* magazine, has won the Ironman an amazing six times, the last at age 37.

Allen credits his extraordinary success to the rigorous, step-by-step training plan he follows. To develop that plan, he inventoried his talents and charted a course to perfect his skills for peak performance. He also identified his weaknesses and built them into strengths. He coordinated his training activities into a coherent program and entered practice triathlons to hone his skills.

Consultants should approach marketing in the same way that Mark Allen does training. To attract new business, consultants must continually, not just occasionally, market their services. To market themselves successfully, consultants must also plan, coordinate, and practice.

The core of a consultant’s marketing campaign is the one-page marketing plan discussed in Chapter 4. Your one-page plan is the vision for your practice that identifies your target clients, your value to

the market, and your marketing strategies. Now it's time to lay out the route you will follow to turn your vision into reality. We call it your Guerrilla Marketing Road Map. The Road Map takes your one-page marketing plan and adds two dimensions to make it real: sequence and timing.

■ WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD

Have you ever been convinced that you knew where you were going only to belatedly discover that you really had no clue? When you're lost, looking at a map—assuming you have one—can quickly get you back on route. Your Marketing Road Map shows you how to keep your consulting practice on the route to profitability.

Without the Road Map, marketing your consulting services can be erratic, unpredictable, and hard to manage. When client and project demands overwhelm you, marketing will fall to the bottom of the list. It's simply a matter of priorities.

Preparing your Road Map is a strategic, tactical, and creative venture. It begins with your ideas on how to present your practice to the market and attract clients, and sets a schedule for each marketing activity.

The creation of your Road Map can't be haphazard; it requires precision. You must commit to specific marketing activities and to the times you plan to use them. The more tightly you build your plan, the stronger your marketing campaign will be. You must plan each entry well before executing it. You also must coordinate it with all other activities that it may affect or influence. As you prepare the Road Map, include these four steps:

1. Identify the resources that you'll need to design and implement each marketing activity. If your Road Map calls for a bi-monthly zine and three industry speeches, account for the time, effort, and costs of those activities.
2. Forecast how the various marketing tactics you plan to use will create profit for your practice. What value, for example, do you estimate your practice will get if you attend a trade show and sponsor a booth? Estimate the number of inquiries, leads, and even projects that might result. Your forecast will be imprecise, but it will give you a rough idea of your plan's relative impact.
3. Determine the message you want to convey with your marketing tactics. Think backward from a sale of your services. What

might clients be looking for as they search for you? Where will they look, and what will they hope to find? Craft your message around what clients are looking for, not what you provide.

4. Develop a mechanism for measuring the effectiveness of each element of the Road Map. Consultants who fail to measure marketing effectiveness frequently waste money and effort.

Although your Road Map sets time frames, it is more than a schedule. It is also a vital creative exercise that will stretch your thinking and force you to examine the full implications of your marketing strategy. Explore all possibilities, brainstorm, and let your imagination run wild. Don't hold back. Be adventurous and unrealistic.

Then come back to earth, but bring with you some of the ideas you conjured up and find new and interesting ways to express them in your marketing materials. Most consultants' marketing is about as interesting as watching paint dry, so you should have little difficulty breaking the mold and catching the attention of those you'd like to work with.

■ A WINNING ROAD MAP

The ultimate litmus test for your Road Map is that you can execute it at low cost while earning high profits for your practice. That is the primary objective here. A magic formula for a profitable map doesn't exist, but winners share seven characteristics. Your Marketing Road Map:

1. *Helps you sell.* Its primary purpose is to help you acquire profitable, career-enhancing projects. You will enhance your visibility, and thus your brand, as you execute your Road Map, but its purpose is to generate leads, not to create the next great consulting brand in the market.
2. *Keeps you engaged.* Unless you market continuously and concerted, leads can vanish, forcing you to scramble when your ongoing projects run dry. When your Road Map is an integral part of your practice, you'll always know the status and schedule of your marketing efforts. A map pushes you to market proactively and makes your marketing needs much more difficult to ignore.
3. *Uses the power of focus.* Great Road Maps aim squarely at targeted clients. Potential clients must be exposed to your

marketing message multiple times before they even know your business exists, let alone call you for help. Guerrillas target potential clients with enough frequency and compelling content to grab their attention and get on their radar screens. If your message is on point, you will get through.

4. *Creates confidence.* Your Road Map isn't like a moon shot that launches once every six months. Use an assortment of marketing weapons in a continuous pattern to help prospects develop confidence in your business. Clients who frequently see your firm in a positive light will believe your firm is legitimate and can help them. Familiarity that is done well will not breed contempt—it will breed project opportunities.
5. *Keeps your marketing tactics in sync.* Deliver the full power of your message to the market through multiple tactics working in concert. Guerrillas simultaneously aim an array of weapons at their targets, and each weapon reinforces their core messages. Cross-promote relentlessly to bring as many impressions of your firm to your target markets as possible.
6. *Builds your brand.* Your primary objective is to use your marketing activities to generate project leads, but building your reputation in the market will also draw clients to your practice. Build your reputation brick by brick with outstanding client work and effective marketing. Your consistent identity in the market, compelling message, and assortment of marketing weapons will elevate your brand recognition several notches.
7. *Clarifies visual identity.* Create a strong and consistent visual identity and project it across every facet of your practice. It should express your style and declare that you are innovative, well organized, and professional. Develop a single identifier that is unique and distinctive, but is appropriate for the clients you hope to attract. Place that identifier on everything related to your practice so it will be quickly recognizable and remind others of you. For a minimum investment, even a small firm or individual practitioner can create a strong professional identity.

■ THE DEATH OF THE LOGO?

In 1976, Oxford University biologist Richard Dawkins coined the term meme (rhymes with cream), which he defined as a basic unit of

cultural transmission that passes from one mind to another and instantly communicates an entire idea.² For example, the skull-and-crossbones symbol on a bottle label is a meme that conveys the idea “dangerous to life, proceed with extreme caution.”

Other well-known memes are the hitchhiker's thumb, the white flag indicating surrender, the Red Cross, and the nuclear mushroom cloud. Memes, with their power to communicate a complete thought in a flash, have the potential to revolutionize marketing.

Memes are more effective than logos because they do more than just identify an entity. One of the most recognized logos in the world, the Nike swoosh, identifies the company for consumers. Other logos, such as Coca-Cola and Microsoft, do the same. But logos don't tell consumers what those companies actually do.

By contrast, a well-conceived meme can cut through the marketing clutter and instantly inform clients what your practice does. Creating a meme is less difficult than it may sound. The key is to boil down the essence of what you do for clients.

Review the specific benefits you offer clients, especially those benefits you provide that are unique. Then, think about how you can express your benefits visually or in a few words.

One consultant, who serves as an executive coach, uses a meme showing an individual wearing a baseball cap and the ubiquitous microphone headset worn by professional football coaches. One look at this meme, and you know the consultant is a coach.

Create a list of your target clients' characteristics and their needs, such as growing the business, reducing costs, or improving productivity. Create a wide range of visual images and determine which one or combination best communicates the message you want to convey. Then translate those needs into visual images that communicate a complete idea.

The concept of memes is new to marketing, and many shrug it off just as they did online marketing before it exploded onto the scene. But just wait. Guerrilla marketers already understand the power of memes, and you'll see more and more of them.

■ FINDING ON-RAMPS

The first rule for choosing the right marketing tactics is that there is more than one choice. The right message and sequence for launching marketing weapons will vary from practice to practice. Your constraints are your creativity and, of course, your budget.

Here's one piece of advice, though. As you decide how to construct your marketing Road Map, ignore what other consulting firms are doing. Start fresh. Otherwise, you'll find yourself squeezed into the "we have to be conservative" marketing strategies that are the norm for professional service firms.

Large firms that have more than one type of consulting practice will probably need a different Road Map for each practice. The specific tactics and timing may not be the same for your health care practice and your technology practice.

The content of your Road Map depends on the clients and industries you target as well as your budget, expertise, talents, and the stage of your career or firm. If you're just starting your career, you may not have many clients. So focus on external marketing activities like writing articles and giving speeches. Conversely, when you have many existing clients, focus more of your marketing investment on them than on attracting new clients.

Some marketing tactics may be especially suitable for your use. If you are a great writer, take advantage of that talent. On the other hand, if speaking in front of an audience ties your tongue into knots, leave that off the Road Map for now. Get some coaching on how to improve that skill. Once you are more comfortable with public speaking, you can add it to your Road Map.

Like Mark Allen, pinpoint your weaknesses and build them into strengths. Look for professional training or consider collaborating with other experts to help you when you need it.

Consider outsourcing certain marketing endeavors such as developing, writing, and producing newsletters and Web sites. Trade services or collaborate with other consultants. For example, if you're a human resources expert and a consultant in another firm is an authority on the motion picture industry, join forces to author an article on how to motivate stressed-out creative people.

Assess your marketing options and use Table 5.1 to help choose the right marketing weapons for your practice. The table shows the relative level of effort, market impact, and cost of the most commonly used marketing weapons.

■ ROAD MAP UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The following two examples demonstrate how to construct a marketing Road Map. Both cases use the fictional firms that were discussed in Chapter 4; they illustrate how a firm can approach the market in a winning and differentiated manner.

Table 5.1 Assessing Your Marketing Weapons

Marketing Weapon	Level of Effort	Market Impact	\$ Cost
Printed Brochures	Medium	Low	Medium-High
Case Studies	Low	Medium	Low
Surveys	Medium-High	High	Medium-High
Special Reports	Medium	High	Medium
Web Sites	Medium	High	Medium
Zines/Newsletters	Medium	High	Low
Speeches	Medium	High	Low
Sponsored Events/Trade Shows	Medium-High	Medium-High	Medium-High
Directory Listings	Low	Medium	Low
Articles	Low-Medium	High	Low
Direct Mail	Medium	Low-Medium	Medium-High
Books	High	High	High
Pro Bono Work	Low-Medium	High	Low
Publicity	Medium	High	Low-Medium
Relationships	High	High	Low

■ SPINNAKER CONSULTING

The Spinnaker Consulting firm serves the world's leading boat manufacturers and suppliers by helping clients accelerate their manufacturing operations, improve sales, and boost their profits.

Spinnaker's marketing agenda gives the firm substantial market exposure at low cost. It targets Spinnaker's existing and prospective clients throughout the year. Based on its basic marketing plan, Spinnaker might establish the Road Map shown in Table 5.2.

Spinnaker's plan is aggressive, but economical. The largest cash investments are the Profit Improvement Seminars and the regatta sponsorship.

■ FAIRPAY CONSULTANTS

FairPay Consultants uses many of the same techniques as Spinnaker Consulting, but adds a paid subscription publication and pro bono work to the marketing mix (see Table 5.3). FairPay's zine isn't published as frequently, but is still important in maintaining close contact with clients and prospects.

The Road Map is a summary and it doesn't list all the intermediate tasks you must accomplish. You'll have to break the work down in

Month	Marketing Activity
January	Conduct Profit Improvement Seminar Publish monthly zine
February	Publish trade journal article Publish monthly zine
March	Attend and speak at industry trade show Conduct direct mail follow-up for trade show contacts Publish monthly zine
April	Publish trade journal article Publish monthly zine
May	Advertise Profit Improvement Seminar Promote seminar on Web site Issue press release Send invitations to Profit Improvement Seminar Publish monthly zine
June	Conduct Profit Improvement Seminar Publish trade journal article Conduct seminar follow-up activities Publish monthly zine
July	Promote sponsorship of annual regatta Invite clients to networking event Publish monthly zine
August	Attend and promote practice at sponsored regatta Publish monthly zine
September	Host client networking event Publish monthly zine
October	Publish trade journal article Publish monthly zine
November	Send invitations to Profit Improvement Seminar
December	Advertise Profit Improvement Seminar Publish monthly zine

sequence. If you want a speaking gig in a certain month, you'll have to arrange it well in advance. Plan your zine content around upcoming events and your reports on past events. Use your Road Map to systematically assign resources and people to practice development activities.

Table 5.3 FairPay Consultants Marketing Road Map

Month	Marketing Activity
January	Publish Annual Guide to Executive Compensation Issue press release to announce publication of guide Update Yellow Pages and other directory listings
February	Send direct mail inviting clients to attend upcoming HR Conference Publish quarterly zine Promote upcoming HR Conference on Web site and in zine Issue press release on conference details
March	Publish Review of Compensation Trends (paid subscription) Publish industry article
April	Speak at HR Conference Follow up on conference attendee inquiries
May	Conduct pro bono project 1 Publish quarterly zine Send direct mail inviting clients to attend upcoming High-Tech Conference Promote upcoming High-Tech Conference on Web site and in zine Issue press release on conference details
June	Publish Review of Compensation Trends (paid subscription)
July	Speak at High-Tech Conference Follow up on conference attendee inquiries
August	Conduct pro bono project 2 Publish quarterly zine Send direct mail inviting clients to attend Financial Services Conference Promote upcoming Financial Services Conference on Web site and in zine Issue press release on conference details
September	Publish Review of Compensation Trends (paid subscription)
October	Speak at Financial Services Conference Follow up on conference attendee inquiries
November	Promote upcoming Annual Guide to Executive Compensation Publish quarterly zine
December	Send direct mail promoting Annual Guide to Executive Compensation Publish industry article

Another feature of marketing that is not explicitly spelled out in the Road Map is one of the guerrilla's weapons of choice—the telephone. Just as with other marketing tactics, the telephone is an integral part of your marketing program.

■ YOU MAKE THE CALL

Everyone knows that the telephone figures prominently in many aspects of marketing. But it is worth a slight detour to talk about the most effective uses of this tool.

Placing cold calls—unsolicited telephone calls to unknown people to try to drum up business—is uncomfortable for most of us. Consultants don't like to make cold calls, the person on the receiving end doesn't want to get them, and the response rate is low.

Yet some professionals swear by the technique. One tax accountant reports a good response rate for cold calls made to businesses close to tax time. You may find cold calls effective in limited situations. If you have sent a direct mailing to clients you don't know about an upcoming seminar, you might follow up with a call to find out if the recipient plans to attend. For the most part, though, cold calls are a waste of time.

By contrast, "warm" calls based on referrals or to follow up on contacts made at conferences, speeches, or other events are an easy, effective, and low-cost way to keep your firm's name fresh in prospects' minds. Also, you should regularly call those in your professional network and in your firm's client base to follow up on articles you have sent, discuss your most recent report, or invite them to events.

To avoid bugging clients and contacts, call infrequently, but have a consistent plan to keep in touch. Rehearse calls in advance and keep them short and to the point. Keep a log of your calls and document the issues you discuss. Don't try to sell on the telephone; use your calls to stay on the radar of clients, prospects, and colleagues.

■ REVISING YOUR ROAD MAP

Be willing to change your Road Map when necessary. If you intended to conduct three seminars but the first two bombed, cancel the remaining seminar or make adjustments to turn it around. Conversely, when something works, do more of the same. For example, if your

Web site generates significant subscribers to your zine and several leads, continue that program.

When tactics work, they build momentum. Your targeted clients begin to know you. If you fail to market continuously you risk losing that impetus and your visibility. You also risk losing everything you've invested in marketing—time, money, and energy—and will have to make those investments all over again. So, stick with the program.

Constantly measure the effectiveness of your marketing efforts. If you run a workshop, measure how many prospects subsequently contact you and the quality of those contacts. When you send direct mail, note how many responses you actually receive. Also measure the number of subscribers to your zine, hits on your Web site, and telephone inquiries.

Measurements should focus first on whether your efforts produced leads, not on whether they generated sales. The object is to measure leads. Prospects aren't going to hire you because they read your article, but it may convince them to contact you. From those contacts, you can go forward and try to land a project.

Frequently, you won't need measuring devices to know whether your efforts have paid off. If the consultants in your firm are consistently on the beach—that is, with no project work—you need to reassess. If they are busy with profitable work, you are on the right road.

Every two months, review *specific* marketing elements: your Web site, articles you write, the speeches you present, and seminars you run. Material quickly gets stale and out of date. Keep your marketing current because prospects will bypass the same old stuff and think less of you for using it.

If you continually update your marketing content, prospects will notice. At first they may visit your site or read your zine just for the information but, in time, they may contact you to help with their business.

Every six months, formally review your *entire* marketing Road Map. Examine it thoroughly and discard and replace whatever hasn't worked. Check whether you're actually completing the items listed in your plan because some items always fall through the cracks.

■ PUT YOUR MARKETING ON THE MAP

Sometimes simplest is best. The Marketing Road Map is a simple, yet powerful, idea that drives your marketing activities right where they

belong—to the center of your practice. You'll have a reliable guide to translate your vision for your practice into a profitable reality.

You'll no longer see marketing as a sidelight or something to insert between client projects. Your marketing program will be predictable, consistent, and continuous, which will keep your telephone ringing in good times and bad.