

Bill Matassoni

Partner, The Boston Consulting Group

Successful Image

In professional services, brand image has to go beyond the latest industry or functional innovations. Good firms don't have products; they have clients and consultants and relationships. A brand image is ultimately successful if it gets you on the short list of firms to be considered for a consulting assignment. It's much more about who you are than what you know. That is a

into competitive position and opportunity is hard to find and hard to realize. And we may not follow the same process we did last time we looked at something similar to your situation, because no two situations are alike. Worse, we may change our course midstream. Not only are the brands essentially different for these two types of players, but the way the brand gets delivered is also quite different.

One of the most significant challenges in achieving successful brand image and brand recognition in consulting is making personal and personnel changes.

Bill Matassoni
Partner
The Boston Consulting Group

biased view because of my experience at McKinsey and Boston Consulting Group. But it seems to me that a common mistake among professional service firms is that they worry too much about their product or practice brands and not enough about their corporate brand.

The Role of Branding

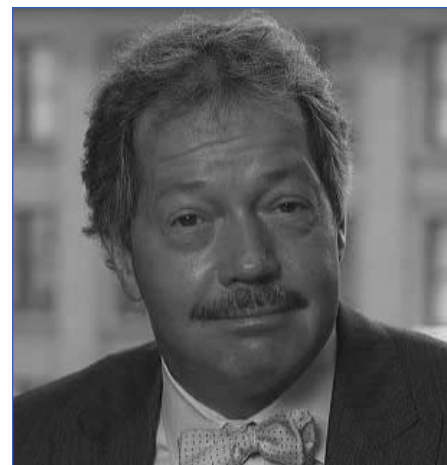
The role of branding depends on what segment of consulting you are in. Consider this matrix. On the x-axis is perfection versus insight. On the y-axis is process versus chaos.

Lots of consultants offer process and perfection. "We know how to do this. We have done it before. You just have to follow our process, and you will get the results you desire." Others, like Boston Consulting Group, say we don't guarantee anything. Real insight

Accenture is in one quadrant and strategy consultants in the other. Accenture has pumped a lot of money into advertising, most notably the ads that feature Tiger Woods. I admire what they've done. Somehow, that brand corroborates the corporate perfection they're offering. On the other hand, the role of the brand in the upper right (insight/chaos) quadrant is something different. It doesn't reassure — it encourages and dares people. You probably can't do that through advertising. It has to be personal — through and around client work.

Best Practices

Whatever segment of consulting or professional services you are in, there are some fundamental changes taking place that will have a significant impact on best practices in marketing. We are all certainly



Bill Matassoni

Partner
The Boston Consulting Group

"A brand image is ultimately successful if it gets you on the short list of firms to be considered for a consulting assignment. It's much more about who you are than what you know."

- Responsible for marketing and brand management
 - Former partner with Mitchell Madison Group and McKinsey & Company
 - B.A., Harvard
 - M.B.A., Harvard Business School
- Mr. Matassoni can be emailed at bill.matassoni@execblueprints.com

going to have to listen better. We are all going to have to start with client needs, not products or pet ideas. We are all going to have to see and track the specific relationships we have and systematically plan to grow them. We are all going to have to demonstrate impact and provide detailed references.

And, as mentioned above, given the revolution occurring in information technology and the consequent ability of markets to distinguish between good and not-so-good firms, we are all going to have to make sure our capabilities and the processes that create them are as good as we say they are.

Challenges

One of the most significant challenges in achieving successful brand image and brand recognition in consulting is making personal and personnel changes. Depending on the situation, sometimes people have to give up control of relationships. Sometimes, new partners are brought in. Delivering the brand does not mean keeping the same partners on the team year after year.

Everyone always jokes about the fact that it's a good thing consultants are consultants, because they can't manage. To some extent, that's true. Consultants are only human, and they're change-averse just like everyone else. They may position themselves as being dispassionately objective, but when it comes to their own behavior and relationships, they'll dig their feet in.

Expert Advice

Whatever segment of consulting or professional services you are in, there are some fundamental changes taking place that will have a significant impact on best practices in marketing. We are all certainly going to have to listen better. We are all going to have to start with client needs, not products or pet ideas. We are all going to have to see and track the specific relationships we have and systematically plan to grow them. We are all going to have to demonstrate impact and provide detailed references.

I have a partner who said that if you want to change, you must change twice. You have to change reality and then change perception. Imagine the couple that is habitually late, he says. They can't get to a dinner party on time, they can't get to a restaurant on time, and they can't get to a meeting on time. They can change reality for a short time by scheduling less on their calendar and moving their clocks ahead, but in two weeks they'll be

back to being late again because they haven't changed their perception of what it means to be late and how rude it is.

The biggest challenge in achieving successful brand image is to change your self-perception while staying true to your values of being a professional. Do what's right for your clients by developing your people and waiting for the revenue to result rather than making revenue the immediate target. ■

Consulting Segment Determines Role of Branding

