MARKETING CLEVER

The Market Development Plan

A practical approach to growing your professional services firm

Most firms have more opportunities for growth than they realise. The challenge is deciding which are worth pursuing, getting the right people involved and maintaining momentum alongside the demands of running a busy practice.

This plan brings together questions covering people, clients and markets. Use it for an entire firm, a particular sector or an individual service line.

Allow two hours. The aim is to leave with a clearer sense of where you want to grow, who will take responsibility and what needs to happen next.

YEAR	MARKET OR SERVICE	LEAD	DATE AGREED

Start with the evidence

What work have we done most of over the past three years, and for which kinds of clients? Look at the records rather than relying on memory. Then ask which of those strengths you want to build on.

1. Direction of travel 30 MINUTES

1. Looking at our track record, what work do we want more of, and why?

2. Where will we concentrate our effort? Will we lead with an industry sector or a particular service?

Choose one primary focus, with the other supporting it.

2. People 30 MINUTES

3. Who genuinely wants to help develop this opportunity, and what time can they realistically commit?

4. What support will they need? Name the people involved.

Consider partner leadership, internal marketing and business development expertise, outside support where useful, and the client-facing work that partners themselves need to do.

3. Clients 30 MINUTES

5. Which existing clients are likely to need broader advice over the next twelve months?

What may be changing in their businesses, which colleagues could help and who will start the conversation?

6. Which clients can help us understand and reach this market?

Consider conversations about their priorities, introductions, testimonials or case studies where appropriate, and the networks and events they value.

4. Markets 30 MINUTES

7. How will we keep close to the issues that matter in this market?

Start by listening to clients and people who work in it every day.

8. Which two activities will we commit to over the next year? Put dates and names against both.

For example, useful writing, speaking, participation in established networks or hosting a focused event.

Agree what success looks like

Choose one commercial objective, such as more instructions from a chosen sector, a stronger pipeline for a service or more referrals between departments.

Track a small number of useful signals: relevant enquiries, introductions, opportunities created, additional services used by existing clients and, ultimately, work won. Reputation measures such as speaking invitations and specialist referrals can also help.

Review progress quarterly. Early reviews should establish whether the agreed activity is happening. Commercial results may take longer.

Leave with three priorities

PRIORITY AND FIRST ACTION	OWNER	BY WHEN	PROGRESS MEASURE

Before leaving the room, agree four review dates of 90 minutes each.

REVIEW 1 _____ REVIEW 2 _____ REVIEW 3 _____ REVIEW 4 _____

Record what you are choosing not to pursue this year. A short plan with clear ownership is more likely to survive a busy year than a long list of good intentions.

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What makes the difference

In my experience the plan is rarely the difficult part. Keeping it going is. Two things help. The first is treating the weekly time as a standing commitment in the diary rather than an intention. The second is having somebody alongside it who has done this before, whether that is someone within the firm or brought in from outside. The months when the work would otherwise quietly stop are the ones that decide whether any of it builds.