
Four Basic Steps in Marketing

by Barry Koren, AIA, PhD



I met a marketing

director of a large architectural/engineering firm who described himself as a hunter. Prospective clients were the prey and his job was to bag them. Other marketers see themselves as farmers who plant seeds by making contact with prospective clients, and then nurture those relationships and harvest new projects. An architect I met explains marketing to his staff by telling them it is like working a goldmine, where you use intelligence to determine where to mine and then dig until you reap projects as your reward.

I There are all kinds of marketing metaphors, and I'll use one of them--marketing as matchmaking--to illustrate four basic steps in the marketing process.

Matchmaking and arranged marriages are ancient traditions that are still practiced in many cultures.

If, through some unlikely series of events, my niece Ann and I agreed that I will set up a match for her, I might ask her-- "Whom would you like to meet?" I'd ask her

preferences, for instance, about that person's age, location, career focus, and areas of interest such as travel or sports.

This basic question, whom would you like to meet, is the same as **Marketing Step #1--Select Your Markets.** In other words, whom would you like to have as a client? What market do you really want to serve?

Are your existing and past clients likely sources of the future work that you really want? Can you be of service in other markets?

I'd also need to know crucial information about Ann. I might say: "Tell me about yourself." I'd want to know her occupation, income, education, and areas of interest.

Ann says she wants her partner to have characteristics a, b, and c, and describes herself as having characteristics x, y, and z. I go into my database to see whether there's a match (with an x-y-z looking for an a-b-c). This mathematics-like part of the process is as logical as the solution to an engineering problem. But you need to have extra matches because you'd want to get a match in which the interpersonal chemistry also works.

This brings us to **Marketing Step #2, Test the Market:** Find out whether you've got a workable match. Is there a match between you and the type of firms that you would like to have as clients?

If Henry is one of these prospective clients, find out as much as you can about his

situation by asking questions. "Do you expect to need engineering services in the future?" Listen carefully and probe so that you can get a fuller understanding. "Could you say some more about that?... Oh, why is that?" Check out your interpretations. "Does that mean that you may be looking for services in 6 to 12 months?" If it seems appropriate, check out Henry's reaction to your firm: "If you happened to need those services now, how would you react to a firm such as ours?" Ask Henry about his colleagues in other organizations. And then ask yourself some important questions. "Is this the market's that really for me? Would I enjoy working with Henry?" Find out this and more before you plunge in.

For Ann, if a couple of meetings with musicians have gone well, I'd ask her interest in focusing on this area and, if she said yes, encourage her to develop a network of contacts in the music world.

For engineering services, when your meetings with Henry have gone well and you're ready to plunge into his market, we come to

Marketing Step #3: Develop a Network of Contacts.

You can make contact at association meetings and luncheons that Henry and his colleagues attend, by placing ads or public relations stories in trade publications they read, by sending them mail, or by calling them.

If calling is the route that you take, there's nothing mysterious about it, even if you're going to be making cold calls. Calling is simply an effective way of gathering important market information.

You begin the process by gathering information. Get a list of organizations such as Henry's that you would like to have as clients. When you contact each of those organizations, find out who has the power to hire you to do the work that you really want to do.

The call itself might begin this way: "Hi, my name is _____. I'm calling to briefly introduce myself and inquire about how we might be considered if you need engineering services in the future." Then comes the important part--listening carefully and responding accordingly.

This brings us to one of the most important parts of the process--follow-up. In Ann's case, I'd

encourage her to continually be involved in the music world and maintain and develop relationships with the people she meets there.

For engineering services, this follow-up step is the one that produces meetings and projects.

It is **Marketing Step #4:**

Follow-up. In this matchmaking view of the marketing process, marketing is a long-term process of building up relationships with people whom you want as future clients. The keys are listening carefully to that person, understanding their situation and needs, building up trust, and being alert to opportunities in which your services will benefit them.

And now I have a question for you. Is there room for improvement in your firm's services? Are there any actions you can take now? By commenting, please let all of us know your reactions, or if you have any stories, news, or marketing tips that you want to share.

You can reach me in any of the following ways:

- Phone: (708) 445-0000
- E-mail: barrykoren@homesandvillages.com
- Mail: Barry Koren, HomesandVillages, 312 N. Grove Ave., Oak Park, IL 60302.

