

Organization: A Manifesto for Maximum Results

It happens before you know it: the weekly rush of proposals and presentations. Advertising production and insertion schedules to keep up with. More trade shows than you can effectively take full advantage of. You suddenly find yourself reacting to the crisis du jour, putting out more fires, and trying to keep your head above the proverbial water. As more than one marketing manager has complained, "We're too busy to think strategically."

Sound familiar? If you think you can't afford to think strategically, think again. You can't afford not to.

And that's exactly where I found myself after joining Bartlett & West Engineers a little over three years ago as their first full-time director of marketing. At the time, the firm was approaching 50 years old, headquartered in Topeka, KS, with seven offices in five states. The multi-discipline engineering firm had grown aggressively after the original owners were bought out in the late '80s. The then-current strategic plan mandated the recruitment of the company's first-ever, full-time directors of information systems, finance, human resources, and marketing as prerequisites for the company's next growth spurt. The situation called for aggressive differentiation in our markets, with bold new looks for our advertising, tradeshow booths, brochures, and other collateral. Things at Bartlett & West were taking on a decidedly different look—not only from what they had done in the past but from much of the industry at large. That fact made some people uncomfortable.

That's how we found ourselves a year later as a fledgling marketing division that, while enjoying the full support of top management, nevertheless experienced skepticism and resistance from a significant number of project managers. It was time for us to stop, take stock, and make some strategic decisions that would enhance our value to the firm in the year to come.

We planned an intensive, all-day, off-site planning session to guide our efforts over the next year. Just us. Just marketing. The agenda consisted of a series of structured, group problem-solving activities, from analysis and definition to idea generation and selection. The outcome was a document we have tried to live by. We call it our

"Marketing Manifesto." It is a rallying cry for change. Here it is.

Marketing Manifesto

"Unless you're the lead dog, the view never changes."

"We are determined to be lead dog."

"The Marketing Division at Bartlett & West Engineers must constantly strive to have the most effective advertising, trade show program, public relations effort, direct mail, customer events, presentations, proposals, web site, community involvement, corporate citizenship, and all other points of customer contact. If we do not feel we

can *own* a communication category, we should choose not to compete in it."

"We want to benchmark and measure the effectiveness of all we do."

"We will research our customers, our competitors, and our markets."

"We will measure and maximize the return on investment for each marketing dollar."

"We will do this to make our markets fertile for the establishment and growth of profitable relationships."

"We will also do this to attract the best talent to our firm, in order to ensure the healthy future of Bartlett & West Engineers."

Key to the successful implementation of our Marketing Manifesto were specific initiatives we all embraced called "10 Moves That Matter." We kept copies of these at hand in our offices, with details as to how each of us could contribute to (and live) each move.

"Can't afford to think strategically? You can't afford not to."

10 Moves That Matter

Initiatives by Marketing to boost our effectiveness in the coming year.

- 1. All Aboard**—Everyone in marketing is aligned on all initiatives and projects. Though each of us has specific responsibilities, it is important for each of us to know what the others are working on.
- 2. Tie It to the Big Picture**—If it doesn't support the strategic plan, don't do it. Period. This allows us to focus our efforts where the firm wants them focused, and to maximum benefit.
- 3. Always Wow 'Em**—If you want our stuff to look like the competition's, you should go work for the competition. Differentiation is key. No *me-too* materials.
- 4. Measure Everything**—Benchmark and measure efforts to determine return on investment. This will boost our credibility with top management and project managers alike.
- 5. Be the Pros from Dover**—Know more about marketing than anyone in the firm. Anyone. Demonstrate that we know as much about marketing as they know about engineering. That means knowing what works and what doesn't, and being able to back it up.
- 6. Believe Us**—Marketing staff needs to boost credibility by displaying understanding of customers, business, and competition. Attend sources of industry information,

like SMPS and ACEC meetings. Talk to clients. Conduct focus groups. *Know* the business.

- 7. Communicate, and Communicate Again**—It's 90 percent of customer service. Communicate.
- 8. Spread the Idea Virus**—Good ideas are contagious. Reward the 20 percent who are actively thinking out of the box with recognition. There's a bell curve of early adopters, the silent majority and the vociferous dissenters. Move the curve.
- 9. Top of Mind**—Redouble our efforts to instill a marketing culture at Bartlett & West Engineers. Reinforce marketing messages in all internal publications. Celebrate wins. Raise awareness. Spread the religion.
- 10. Live the Brand**—Apply a brand management style to Bartlett & West marketing efforts. No matter how small or in-house the application, always support the brand. If we don't keep the brand, how can we expect others to?

Postscript

Our efforts were worth it. Bartlett & West continues to grow aggressively. We now have nine offices in six states, and revenues and profits continue to rise. Our marketing materials continue to win a variety of local, regional, and national awards, from organizations like the Ad Federation and International Association of Business Communicators, culminating in second-place honors for our corporate brochure package in the 2001 SMPS Marketing Communications Awards Program. And our relationships with project managers continue to deepen as we show them how we can help their business development efforts.

How can you get started? First of all, commit the time and resources to do it right. Go offsite, away from distractions. Turn off cell phones. Provide some creative stimuli, anything from crayons and paper-covered tables to silly putty and slinkies. Caffeine and sugar can be your friends, too. Structure the day's activities. Brainstorming is only one limited form of idea generation. If in doubt, check out a resource like *The Universal Traveler: A Soft-Systems Guide to Creativity, Problem-Solving and Process of Reaching Goals* by Don Koberg, or hire a professional facilitator. Think big, as in big, hairy, audacious goals (BHAGs). Know that you can make a big difference in your firm's fortunes, then go for it. ■

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