



A Triathlete's Guide to Market Perseverance

Marketing in the A/E/C industries is an endurance sport. In fact, the way we approach our marketing and business development strategies is very similar to the way triathletes prepare for some of the most demanding events in the world. Over the past several years, my experience as an amateur triathlete has shown me that there is a lot to be leveraged from the endurance sports community when developing our marketing approach. Here's how to keep ahead of the pack.

Goal Setting and Fitness Evaluation

While preparing for my 2016 triathlon season, I was reminded of the important role goal setting plays in a successful year, both on the course and within the office. Much like a go/no-go proposal process, the selection of races for a triathlete includes evaluating current fitness levels and a host of external factors, such as work schedules and existing commitments. These are balanced against a set training plan that allows athletes to peak at the appropriate times.

To ensure longevity in today's business environment, A/E/C firms need to properly assess the current competitive status of their firm, the financial health of target clientele, and available resources for new pursuits. A strong strategic plan will keep focus on the ability to perform at peak levels.

A Balanced Diet

In a 2016 issue of *Triathlete* magazine, Marni Sumbal, R.D., states "Successful endurance is not determined solely by how fast you can go but by how long you can delay fatigue." Triathletes not only need a long-term maintenance plan for their diet, but also a plan for in-race nutrition to reduce the risk of "bonking" during competition. Similarly, A/E/C firms need to determine what they can realistically digest when developing long-term pursuit strategies. Putting too much on the plate can risk purging significant amounts of marketing dollars. To be competitive, you have to be willing to say no.

Consistency Is Key

Consistency is key in training. I never thought I would wake at 4:30 a.m. on a



regular basis to turn laps in the pool, ride for miles on a bike, or venture into the dark for a run. Much like client outreach, difficult commitments are needed to ensure goals are achieved. Taking the time to be consistent with your approach and evaluate critical issues sets the stage for success.

Choose a Trustworthy Training/Teaming Partner

The importance of a good network and strong teaming partners cannot be overstated. My business development perspective is primarily derived from a subconsultant role, where the traditional thought process of many firms is to team with as many firms as possible to increase your win percentage. I would challenge that mindset and encourage subconsultant firms to identify strategic alliances with a small number of primes (dare I say exclusive?) with a common goal. There is great opportunity in embracing a triathlete approach to building a close network to lean on when assistance is needed, to push when the time is right, and to provide avenues for open communication on new approaches and pursuits.



Know Your Course—and Your Competition

If you watched the women's triathlon event at the Summer Olympics in Rio this past summer, you saw the results of a well-planned strategy played out right in front of your eyes. Gwen Jorgensen was the favorite to win the first-ever gold medal in the triathlon for the United States. Jorgensen is an extremely fast runner, and everyone knew if she kept pace on the swim and the lead bike group, she would pull away on the run. Although she had several early opportunities to take the lead, Jorgensen stuck to her plan and eventually made a late surge on the run to capture the gold.

Deciding when to pace yourself (and when to apply pressure) is a valuable conversation for A/E/C firms to have when developing a marketing or business development plan. This requires a strong understanding of the target clientele to maintain visibility and position yourself ahead of the competition at key points, leading up to the initiation of a new project or RFP. The consequences of

failing to plan ahead can often lead to poorly timed efforts that dwindle in the final stages of the pursuit.

Importance of Data and Analytics

Much like the sport of triathlon, there is no shortage of technology to collect and analyze data in the A/E/C industries. However, the most important action is not the collection of the data, but the implementation of an effective system to measure and analyze the results of marketing and business development efforts. I recently interviewed Rev3 Adventure owner (and former civil engineer) Mark Harris. He recounted the early days of his company that started with a passion for ultra adventure races that challenged participants on courses covering up to 500 miles over the span of six days. After reviewing attendance results and financial data, he soon realized that he needed to subdivide his client base into specific markets. Rev3 had a nearly perfect retention rate with long-distance races, but hosting middle-distance races, such as 10k runs, provided much larger numbers of registrants and higher margins (even

with a lower retention rate). Rev3 now offers a broad range of race distances and types, which has proven to be a very successful model. While Harris' passion started him on a path to present a unique solution to one niche market segment, his business analytics altered his approach. Challenging the norm with data and analytics for professional services firms can provide similar results.

No One Goes Directly from Couch to Ironman

Just as it's nearly impossible to go from lying on the couch to racing an Ironman without proper preparation, it's a significant challenge to successfully pursue new clients without a strategic plan and a disciplined approach. While the results of a triathlon strategy are not realized overnight, the measurable steps of consistent planning and training can lead to big rewards. ■