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CPA

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COMMUNICATION CORP.



SPECIAL JOINT REPORT: **Marketing and Communications**

Marketing and Communications

A Clearline Consulting and Six Words Communication Special Joint Report

Introduction

Effective branding, marketing and communications are essential for accounting firms, no matter the size. Everything you communicate creates a unique voice that differentiates your firm from others and builds a foundation for trust with your clients.

In the second part of our two-part Special Joint Report with Six Words Communications Corp., we will explore two important elements of marketing communications:

- Online presence
- Client engagement

After reading this report you will:

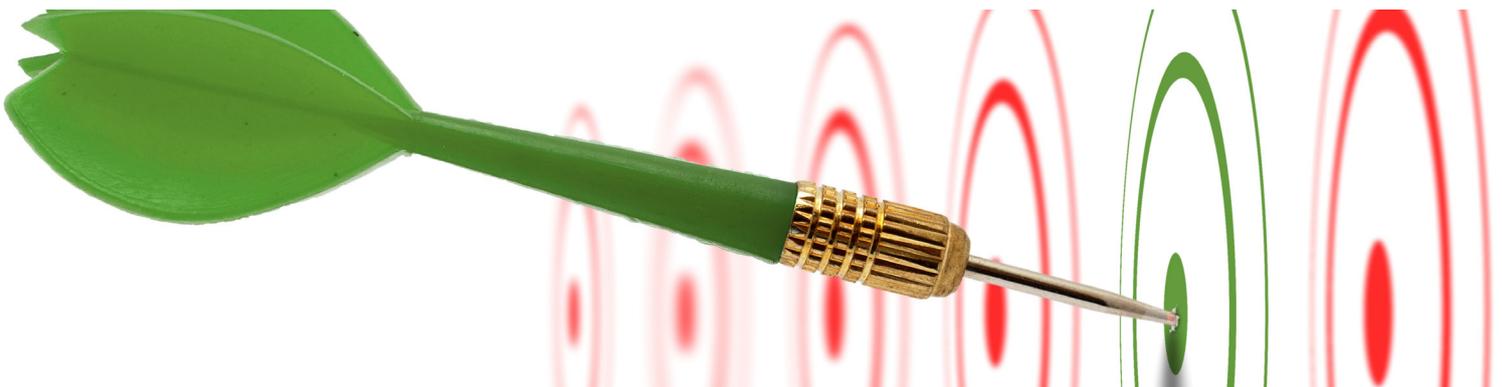
- Understand the importance of developing an online presence and strategically thinking about client engagement.
- Learn about ideas and strategies for improving your firm's communications and marketing efforts.

Why are communications and marketing important?

Branding, communications and marketing encompass the ways you connect to and engage with potential employees, service partners and clients. It's not only how you present your firm, but how your firm is perceived. To learn more about branding, see our Special Report on Branding.

By implementing an effective communications and marketing plan, you can:

- Increase brand awareness
- Attract new clients and employees to your firm
- Increase the probability of retaining clients, providing new services and increasing referrals
- Solidify current business relationships by reinforcing your value
- Educate your clients to help them improve their business and financial reporting processes



Online Presence

Your online presence is all the places your brand or firm exists online. The ease with which potential and current clients and employees can find your firm online can give you a distinct edge over any competitor. More so, the quality of your presence online can determine whether or not someone will choose to work with you.

To learn more about employer branding and how you can use your brand to attract top talent, see our Branding Special Report.

Key Elements of An Online Presence

Website

- A well-branded, user-friendly, responsive website with engaging content is crucial to attracting and retaining clients and employees. When executed well, a website can be a discovery or “first point of contact” tool that helps people locate your firm. Then, if kept relevant and fresh, a website can be a reassurance/reinforcement tool that reminds people why they should continue to work with you.
- *Tip:* Despite the fact that most of us live in a digital world, there are too many poor websites out there. Make sure yours doesn't fall short. Answer these questions to find out where you stand:
 1. Is your website mobile friendly?
 2. Does your website look modern? Is there new content on a regular basis?
 3. Is it easy for people to find the information they need?
 4. Is it easy for people to contact you?
 5. Does your website look like all the others? There are several templates that are frequently used by accounting firms. While often cost-effective, they do not necessarily help to distinguish you from the crowd.



Social Media

- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and many other social media platforms can be helpful tools for bringing your brand to life online, connecting with clients and employees and building strong relationships. Social media can help you communicate with your target audiences in real time. It can also help your company gain exposure through online mentions, referrals, reviews and conversations. Consider creating social media profiles on the platforms that are most appropriate to your business.
- *Tip:* Think about which social media platform you're most likely to engage with your target audiences on, based on your company brand. For many professional services firms, LinkedIn is a place to start building a social media presence because of its natural professional tone.
- *Tip:* Brand any social media platform you set up with your logo, images and colours that are in-line with your visual identity. Then, post regularly (in your brand voice, of course,) by sharing informative updates, relevant news articles and blogs. Be sure to monitor your social media platforms and respond to all interactions in a timely, and appropriate fashion.
- *Tip:* As public practitioners, you are likely always busy and have seemingly endless to-do lists. Create a schedule for social media posts or they may not happen.



Top 5 Things to Share on Social Media

1. **Original Content** – blogs or articles written by your team members that share insights and demonstrate expertise and credibility
2. **Timely News** – “must-see” news stories that demonstrate that you have your finger on the pulse and are looking out for your clients
3. **Company Events** – highlight what your firm is up to
4. **Team Photos** – give a glimpse of what it's like to work at your firm
5. **Team Bios** – showcase who makes up your team

Digital Marketing

- Digital marketing includes online marketing tactics such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO), content marketing, e-marketing (which we'll explore more below) and using other online platforms like Yelp or Yellowpages.ca to promote your business.
 - SEO helps make sure your site ranks high when people look for accounting services via a search engine like Google.
 - Content marketing means acting as a resource or thought leader for your clients by creating and sharing useful content online (think blogs, e-books, webinars, etc.).
- *Tip:* Spend some time researching where other accounting firms exist online and how they rank on popular search engines. How does your firm compare to their online presence?



CPA Advertising Rules

Advertising is governed by Rule 217.1 which states that CPA firms shall not make representations that are known, or should be known, to be false or misleading. Furthermore, any advertisement which brings unfavorable reflections on the competence or integrity of the profession or otherwise brings disrepute on the profession is prohibited.

Your advertising material may not implicate that your firm is larger than it is. Furthermore, be cautious of using terms such as “specialist.” CPA firms and the individuals within the firm that identify themselves as a specialist must be prepared to substantiate these claims. Simply holding a CPA designation does enable practitioners to identify themselves as a specialist in a subject matter such as taxation, auditing, business valuations, etc. Evidence to suggest that an individual is a specialist would include specific educational achievements, credentials or designations as well as significant experience in applying the subject matter.

CPA Solicitation Rules

The solicitation of potential clients, including those known to be clients of other CPA firms is not prohibited. However, Rule 217.2 states that CPA firms shall not solicit clients in a manner that is persistent, coercive or harassing. The distribution of brochures, letters, technical information or other information to prospective clients and others is not prohibited so long as it complies with the rules. Communication with a prospective client must cease when the prospect so requests either directly to the registrant or through CPABC.



Client Engagement

What is Client Engagement?

Client engagement is how you interact with and connect to your prospective and current clients. Client engagement touch points can include phone calls, emails, in person meetings, newsletters, email marketing and much more. They can be as formal as quarterly status reports and as informal as text messages or birthday and thank you cards. At Six Words, we like to think client engagement encompasses all interactions between a business and its clients. It is important because it reflects both how you view and treat the people around you.

Key Marketing Elements of Client Engagement

Newsletters

- Newsletters are a great client engagement tool. They can contain a compilation of promotional and non-promotional content. While in the past, these have often been hard copy documents, you'll likely want to consider an e-newsletter for your firm. Newsletters can help you share important or timely news and updates, as well as position you as an invaluable resource to your clients by providing engaging, informative content.
- *Tip:* Using an email newsletter software, such as Mailchimp or Constant Contact can help you create branded newsletter templates, manage contact lists and send and track emails.

Other Email Marketing

- Any email sent from your business to a potential client should be considered an engagement opportunity. An inexpensive tactic, sending thoughtful emails and email marketing pieces can help you stay in touch with clients, build relationships and spread the word about services, products, events, or updates.
- *Tip:* Start by growing an email list, then send regular, branded emails. These can include offers, tips, important dates, and other valuable content, such as a relevant article. There is a danger of spamming your audience here, so be careful about what is sent out. Always ask yourself if what you're sending has value for the recipient.

Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation

Email marketing is an important and useful tool but beware there are strict rules in Canada's anti-spam legislation that govern electronic communication. There are three main things to think about when sending messages:

1. **Did your recipient give consent?** Do you have a record of consent? Do you have an existing business or non-business relationship?
2. **What is the type of message?** Is it sent to an electronic address? Is it commercial or promotional? You need to ensure that no part of the message is false or misleading.
3. **What should you include in your message?** Identify your name and business and contact information. Include details on how the recipient can unsubscribe.

There is much more to the anti-spam legislation which you should be aware of. For more information visit www.fightspam.gc.ca.



Engagement Letters and Other Communications

An important part of any engagement is the engagement letter and other engagement specific communications such as a management letter or client service letter. While there are rules at play here, both professional standards and legal considerations, it's important to view this letter as an opportunity to effectively engage with clients. Don't be afraid to get creative and make the most of this requirement.

- *Tip:* Is your engagement letter easy to understand? Does it reflect your brand positioning and company culture? Does it showcase how you are different from other firms and what value you bring to your client? Review and revise your current template to make sure it's both easy to understand and engagement. Not sure you've hit the mark? Ask a trusted client to give you feedback and consult with a lawyer to ensure you are protecting yourself from claims.
- *Tip:* Make the time to walk people through your engagement letter in person. This high-touch experience can help demonstrate trust and care to your clients. It can also protect you from claims if your clients did not understand the terms of the engagement letter.
- *Tip:* Include appropriate marketing material in your communications such as other services you can provide to the client.

A Note On Client Loyalty

As you likely already know, loyal clients, or those who work with you on an ongoing basis, can be extremely valuable assets to your business. Some statistics suggest it is [500% cheaper](#) to keep existing clients happy than to acquire new ones. This is just one incentive to maintaining a healthy relationship with current clients through client engagement. To find more insightful statistics on this subject, [click here](#).

Tip: By implementing a marketing and communications strategy that includes client retention and loyalty tactics, as well as providing top notch client service, you're well on your way to ensuring repeat business.

Showcasing All Service Offerings

As you think about the client engagement strategies that are right for your firm, be sure to capitalize on opportunities to make your clients aware of the other products and services you provide. Consider the additional service opportunities when moving from a compilation to a review or an audit, not just the additional work effort. Consider highlighting your bookkeeping, tax planning or other advisory services like business consulting. Research shows it's much easier to increase billings from existing clients than it is to secure new clients. By showcasing all of your service offerings and thinking strategically, you can quickly turn a \$3,000 client into a \$10,000 client.



How Clearline Consulting and Six Words Can Help

There are a number of things you can do to improve the communication and marketing efforts of your accounting firm. Here are some places to start and ways we can help:

- Conduct a review of your website and other marketing materials both online and print-based. Do they do your firm justice? Are they in compliance with the CPA Code of Professional Conduct requirements?
- Establish or refresh an active social media presence. This can be as high-touch or low-touch as you want.
- Assess your current client engagement activities. Are you effectively engaging with your clients at every opportunity?
- Assess your employer brand. Are you effectively marketing yourself to prospective employees?
- Develop a content strategy and editorial calendar to help you plan what, when and how you will communicate with your audiences. This can include a schedule for e-newsletters, blog posts, events and social media posts.

Summary

Making time to think strategically about your branding, marketing and communications efforts can help set your firm up for success. In a competitive market, an effective brand and marketing communications strategy can mean the difference between a potential client or employee choosing your firm, or someone else's.



About Us

Clearline Consulting

Clearline Consulting provides practitioners and their staff with the tools, training and advice they need to succeed and build thriving accounting firms. From compliance, file monitoring and audit planning to professional development courses, staff training and customized consulting solutions, our team exists to serve the needs of small to mid-sized public practice firms. Our collaborative, integrated approach means clients have access to and support from knowledgeable people who are in front of the ever-changing standards environment.

Bridget Noonan, CPA, CA – Director



Bridget is a director at Clearline Consulting and also a CPA professional development instructor and consultant to CPABC and CPA Canada. She has over 15 years of experience in public practice with a mid-size firm in Vancouver and as a professional standards advisor with CPABC. Bridget applies her experience to empowering CPA firms and practitioners with technical competencies, professional development, regulatory compliance, and practice management matters.

Tom Gillespie, CPA, CA – Director



Tom has over ten years of dedicated accounting and assurance experience having worked with several public practice firms and as the associate director of practice review with CPABC. Tom provides file monitoring, training, audit/assurance planning and on-going consulting services to CPA firms and practitioners, easing their workload and facilitating their success. In addition to his role at Clearline Consulting, Tom instructs professional development courses with CPABC and also serves as a consultant and advisor to CPABC and CPA Canada.

Six Words Communication Corp.

Six Words Communication Corp. is a communications and content marketing firm serving businesses and not-for-profits across Canada. Everything we do at Six Words strives to capture the power of thoughtful, crisp communication. By being direct, clear and creative, we're able to help companies cut through the noise to connect with their audiences and reach their goals. From change management communication, to content strategies, to social media marketing – we apply our communication philosophy and approach to all areas of our work.

Corinne Impey, Founder, Director of Creative & Communications



Founder of Six Words Communication Corp., Corinne is a versatile, action-oriented communication specialist. She has worked with accounting firms, large corporations and non-profits to solve communication challenges, build brands and drive business results. Corinne holds a journalism degree from Carleton University and a Masters of Professional Communication degree from Ryerson University. In 2015, Corinne received a Gold Quill Excellence Award from the International Association of Business Communicators for her work in change communication.