

## CALL TO ATTENTION

A good public relations plan, including effective use of the media, is a smart way for unknown agencies to make a name for themselves.

**H**ow can a small, relatively unknown agency effectively make a name for itself as a capable and recognized player in acquiring new business?

When it comes to getting your agency's name out and earning recognition as a new-business player, there are many ways to go, including direct marketing, networking, direct selling and advertising. But let's focus on the one method that seems to be the hardest for small and unknown agencies to master—public and corporate relations.

It's a common error to assume that new-business success requires public recognition. But in winning new clients, becoming a capable player is a lot more important than becoming a recognized one. Many companies



**BY HELENE  
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grow profitably in relative obscurity, while others suffer from publicity's double-edged sword. To build your agency's name, you must make three decisions: who do you want to reach; how do you want to be perceived; and which tools will be most effective?

First, construct a detailed prospect profile for your agency, just as you would for products you advertise. Go beyond categories and billings to demographics and psychographics. Determine the characteristics of the decision-makers you can attract. This is an important step, but it's one that most agencies shirk. Then, use your prospect profile to make your communications strategy and positioning meaningful and believable to your target. Finally, consider the tools at your disposal—press coverage, speaking engagements, awards shows, cause and event marketing—and choose the most appropriate ones.

Let's start with the press. Obviously, you want to be featured in the publications seen by potential clients (the prospect profile should help you pinpoint what and how potential clients read). While clients do turn to trade publications like ADWEEK, most aren't as interested in announcements of new employees, clients or divisions as you are. Good press relations or a known specialization might get you quoted in the kinds of articles clients care about—stories on their category, on major media or marketing issues or on legislative activity.

Clients also read the national, local and trade press. It's nigh impossible to get covered by national business newspapers and magazines, but every city and every category of product or service has at least one publication or newsletter. Advertisers read these cover to

cover, which makes them your best shot at getting your name out. Remember that all publications require news and timely information that is relevant to their readers. The key to getting coverage is to consider the publications' interests before your own.

For example, skip the congratulatory case histories. Instead, write an article about a recent success or failure that elicited real learning that can be applied elsewhere. Or write an op-ed piece that addresses an industry issue of critical concern. You can also conduct a survey, uncover a new consumer concern, or study the needs of retailers.

The same rules apply for other pr tools. Offer your best speaker or your top expert to talk at a national or local meeting of a targeted category's association. Pick a cause you already believe in and get your agency involved; it's a great way to meet industry leaders. Sponsor an event your prospects will want to attend—such as a pro-am golf tournament to benefit charity, with your clients, prospects and staff as the amateurs. Awards shows are another place to generate press, provided your creative is good enough and you don't mind the cost.

Be creative, be relevant and be targeted. If you do all that, your agency can become a recognized player where it counts: in the minds of potential clients.

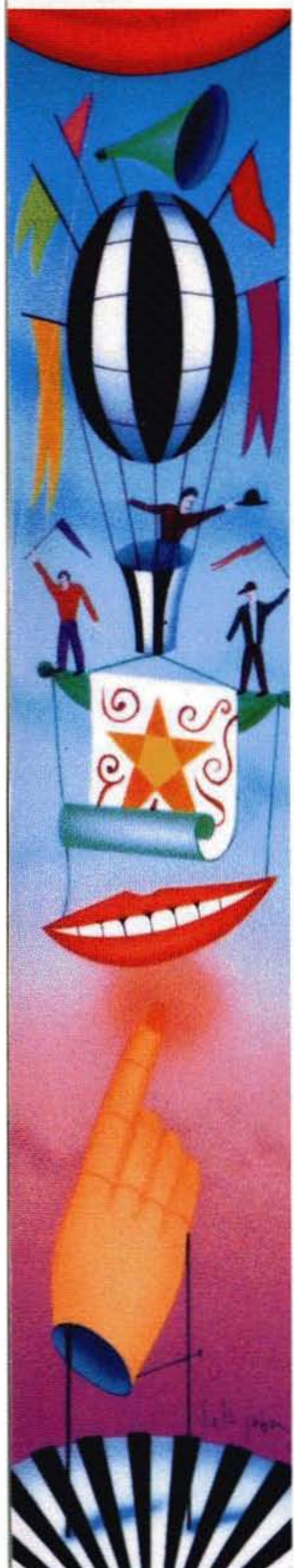
*How do you get the agency's key managers to rehearse, short of armed coercion?*

Clip out the following paragraph and include it in your next rehearsal "invitation."

If you don't rehearse new-business presentations, you might as well not pitch. Lack of rehearsal is painfully obvious to clients. It results in a visible lack of teamwork (such as presenters contradicting each other) and produces presentations that run too long. Few of us can afford the luxury of looking unprepared, uncoordinated or out of sync with our co-workers. Rehearsal allows you to fill in the holes, enliven the boring bits, clean up the logic flow, turn stilted techno-ese into memorable sound bites and focus on the client instead of your next line. Rehearsal removes an important barrier to winning business: the foot in your mouth.

Ignore the preceding only if your agency has won every account it pitched in the last year without rehearsal.

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## ONE OF THE ABOVE

Smaller agencies have three basic types of business-development experts to choose from. The challenge is to pick the one that suits their needs.

**W**e're not a big agency, but we're planning to hire a new-business person. What qualities should we look for and how should we define this person's role?

Before your agency decides who to hire and what that person's function will be, it should determine why it needs new-business help. This means pinpointing the role that most needs to be filled in your organization, and then choosing an individual best suited for the task.

To help in this process, think of new-business as an affair conducted both inside and outside the agency. Then divide the players into three basic types: Facilitators, Strategists and Personalities.

Facilitators and Strategists tend to work inside the agency, serving back office functions. The Facilitator has a supporting role, while the Strategist acts as manager of the new-business team. The Personality works outside the agency and operates as the shop's public persona.

The Facilitator is the most common new-business role at smaller agencies. This is someone in junior-to-middle management responsible for organization, administration and support functions of new business.

In the pursuit phase, the Facilitator oversees ongoing prospect mailings, reminds senior executives which prospects they need to call (and nudges them until they do), writes initial company and category analyses and responds to questionnaires or requests for agency backgrounders.

The person filling this role may also spot opportunities and bring them to the attention of senior management. In the presentation phase, he supports the research, administrative and presentation needs of the pitch team.

A Facilitator must be a highly organized, detail-oriented self-starter with a better-than-average understanding of the advertising business and a stronger than average ego. This is an often thankless, underpaid job with a high burnout rate. If the skills of your management team can fulfill the rest of your agency's new-business needs, then you can hire just a Facilitator.

Medium-sized and smaller, aggressive agencies often employ someone to play the Strategist position exclusively. Others find they have current employees

fulfilling this function in addition to their regular jobs. The position requires a senior-level executive, expert in new-business development, who can design and implement your agency's entire new-business program. This includes setting objectives and creating prospect, pursuit and presentation strategies.

During pursuit, the Strategist determines how best to employ personnel and resources. This person writes solicitation letters for others in top management to sign, and builds and maintains relations with search consultants, the press and a network of contacts. He also oversees the pitch team's efforts, from presentation strategy to rehearsal, but rarely attends the meetings. Of course, the Strategist would be in charge of the Facilitator.

A Strategist should be experienced in client services, presentations, agency or departmental management and, ideally, business development. He should also have new-business philosophies that are similar to your agency's, along with proven abilities in strategic planning and network building. This is an expensive position to fill, with compensation packages usually consisting of equity, stock opportunities or commissions based on results.

The Personality is more than a senior-level executive. The person in this role should be a known entity within your community, with a reputation based on experience, category expertise or creative abilities.

The Personality is active in lead-generation efforts, solicitations, public relations, advertising community events and networking. During presentation, the Personality attends all meetings and sets the tone for most of them, since he is often an important part of the draw. He also handles the follow-up contact and the closings.

It is rare among small or medium-sized agencies to find an employee in this role. Commonly, it is played by the agency principals. Sometimes, the Strategist can share or even assume the Personality's responsibilities.

No individual can fulfill all of these responsibilities, and no one should be expected to. That's why your agency should conduct an objective audit of its new-business strengths and weaknesses to decide upon the best plan of action.

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### NEW BUSINESS



### ADVISOR

### HELENE KALMANSON

## COLD SHOULDER

Major advertisers have a lot to say about the practice of cold calling—and none of it is good.

**A**s part of our agency's efforts to develop new business, we often place unsolicited calls to prospective clients. Are there any ways to make our cold-calling program more effective?

Cold calling is like playing the pitch penny game at the carnival. You know the odds are stacked against you, but you take a turn anyway and hope your coin lands in the right spot. And while a strategy based on sheer luck may be fine for the midway, it has no place in a new-business program.

Many agencies defend cold calling by insisting that frequent phone contact will make them appear aggressive and seriously interested to prospective clients. Guess what? Most clients don't care how

hard an agency tries. They're more concerned with their own needs and judge agencies accordingly.

Cold calling is no way to win clients and influence billings. But don't just take my word for it. To find out how clients really feel about the practice, I assembled a panel of top decision-makers from a variety of major advertisers.

Each panel member works for a company that has chosen a new agency during the last three years. Each was involved in the search, and some headed the effort. Their positions range from advertising manager to company president, and they deal with ad budgets of at least \$10 million per year.

The panelists seem to share a universal dislike of cold calling. To them, it's an interruption by a stranger in an already overcrowded schedule, and the whole routine is annoying.

Overwhelmingly, the panelists consider cold calls ineffectual for both parties. Most say they don't even return the calls directly. Instead, they pass the chore off to secretaries or lower-level executives.

"Cold calling isn't productive for me or for the agency calling," says the marketing director of a major packaged-goods advertiser. "There's too much at stake and too many uncertainties to see them based on a phone call. I feel strongly that I'd rather rely on individuals I already know or on the experiences [with agencies] that others I trust in my company have had."

The president of an international resort that recently changed agencies adds, "I still receive one to

two solicitations from agencies each month, both phone calls and letters. The cold calls are referred to my ad director. Cold calls are not effective unless we have a specific need to fill at the time."

Most panelists say they have rarely met with agencies that called first, and almost all prefer preliminary contact by mail. Of the few unsolicited agencies that have been awarded meetings, the panelists add, all mailed well-designed materials keyed to a particular concern before calling.

"In the last 10 years, I've met with maybe two or three agencies [based on cold calls]," says the packaged-goods exec. "I gave one a short-term freelance creative project. However, I've learned that a wonderful self-promotion piece is no guarantee of a cultural fit."

Most panelists say they meet with an agency when it fits their criteria at the same time an unfulfilled advertising need arises. The initial list of agencies for each panelist's most recent search was based on four factors: billings size, depth of resources, lack of competitive conflicts and creative ability. Incumbents and suggestions from consultants or co-workers were also considered.

"Cold calls are a waste of time," says a top marketing executive for an over-the-counter drug firm. "The likelihood of our need matching the timing of their call is highly unlikely. If a need [for a new agency] arose, we would conduct a search in an orderly fashion and against a list of specific criteria. I have never met with an agency that cold called me."

One reason cold calls are so unproductive is the significance most companies attribute to the choice of a new agency. Among advertisers, a phone call is perceived as a cavalier method for courting such an important business partner.

"Agencies are selling a long-term relationship, not a one-shot product or service," says an executive with a consumer electronics company. "That requires a more well thought-out, highly developed system for selling. I've never met with an agency [based on a cold call]."

Ultimately, the relationship between the client and the agency is all about respect. For the advertiser. For the agency. And for the partnership. So before you waste any more time, replace your cold-calling tactics with a program designed to foster healthy pairings and build productive relationships.

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