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SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, CORPORATE-STYLE

Marketing Tips for
Small Firms

Profile: Dave DeLap

Rev Up the
OSCPA's Web Site



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Christopher R. Kristian is executive vice president and managing director of The Westport Group. A specialist in the analysis and planning of supplemental executive benefits, he is one of the developers of the firm's Executive Income Assurance™, the firm's proprietary disability income plan. In *Meeting the Challenge of Creating a Level Executive Benefits Playing Field—Worldwide*, page 16, Mr. Kristian answers common questions regarding how to provide equal benefits to international executives. He holds two degrees from Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont. Christopher may be contacted at 781-380-1017 or ckristian@westportgp.com.



Gene J. Marks, CPA, is president of The Marks Group PC, a technology consulting firm based in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. Mr. Marks suggests ways for your firm to use accounting software more productively in his article, *Make Accounting Systems More Profitable*, on page 28. He can be reached at gene@marksgroup.net.

Barry Friedman brings more than 35 years of experience in accounting and technology marketing to BizActions. Previously, he was the founder and CEO of GovCon, where he developed an online electronic commerce community that brought together thousands of IT contractors and hundreds of government entities. Prior to that, he was the CEO of Friedman and Fuller, an accounting and business consulting firm, which was sold to American Express. In his article, *Web Site Strategy Development—A Key Decision*, page 30, Mr. Friedman discusses creating a core strategy before setting up or upgrading a Web site. He earned an MBA in Business Administration from Loyola College.



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Web Site Strategy Development *A Key Decision*

By Barry Friedman

When an accounting firm is ready to build its first Web site or upgrade an existing site, the first analysis should be the strategic purpose of the Web site. Without developing the core strategy, the process will be very difficult and probably not benefit the firm in the long run.

The primary strategic question is: What's the purpose(s) of having a Web site? This will drive many other features of your site. Let's examine some choices:

Basic Information—The main purpose of this type of Web site is the basic dissemination of information about the firm and its partners. It's generally a low cost templated site.

Business Development—This is a robust site; its main objective is the devel-

opment of leads and the nurturing of prospects who have been met by partners.

Client Portal—This type of Web site is focused on conducting business with clients in a secure environment.

Multi-Purpose—This Web site is a combination of Business Development and Client Portal sites.

The Multi-Purpose Web site should be the objective for any progressive firm. When I was practicing many years ago, the process was very predictable and the rules well known. You had a fancy expensive print brochure with inserts for different services. When you met prospects, you reviewed your brochure and left the prospect multiple copies. It was your testimonial that your firm was professional, progressive, and successful. We

spent thousands of dollars on a brochure that had a very short shelf life. There were always changes taking place that made the brochure obsolete. The kiss of death was to mention a particular staff person in the brochure. You could bet your last dollar they would leave the firm within months of printing the marketing piece.

Today, the system is quite different. If a firm is looking for an accountant, perhaps through a Google search, the first thing they do is check out your Web site. If you visit a prospect, they will review your site before they make a decision—guaranteed. Wouldn't you do the same? So, if your firm is going to be judged by its Web site, can you really afford to have a sub-standard site? Does it make sense not to invest in your firm by building a site that will make you and your staff proud and project a professional image to prospects as well as future hires?

I'm sure you get the point. Your strategic positioning is the most important decision you will make. It drives the action plans to implement the strategy. So, if your firm strategy is to develop a Web site to generate new business, what are some factors to be considered? First, let's understand that the Web is really a direct marketing channel. It's just another way you can reach many potential clients, provided you know how to do it. Fundamentally, it's a segment of direct marketing done through the Web rather than print media such as postcards, print newsletters, newspaper ads, or yellow page advertising.

There are three major challenges to overcome in order to become successful in online marketing for an accounting firm after you develop a Web site.

Traffic—You can develop the greatest Web site among all your peers, but if you lack traffic to your site, there are no busi-

ness development opportunities.

Conversion—This is about what to do with the traffic that comes to your site. How do you nurture this traffic? How do you obtain their name, e-mail address, and other information (i.e., you have converted them from an unknown entity to someone you now have in your database).

Trust—You need to communicate effectively with these warm leads so they will trust you and do business with you.

Let's examine some of the major concepts that drive traffic to your Web site:

- Google Adwords
- Web site Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Affiliate Programs
- E-mail Newsletters
- Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)

Blogging

In future columns we will be exploring the three major challenges as indicated above and how accounting firms can manage them to drive leads. Welcome to the new age of how to grow your practice online.

It's an exciting new world. Buckle up and most importantly, be willing to explore and change. ☺

Author's profile appears on page 5.

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