




# Create Your Own Marketing Plan: A Guide for Accounting and Tax Professionals



In order to grow your business, you need to have a marketing plan. Unfortunately, the word “marketing” causes many accountants to cringe. From a skill standpoint, it feels about as far away from accounting as you can get.

That’s where we come in. This guide provides you with a roadmap to market your accounting business. You’ll learn how to fast-track your growth, optimize your marketing investment, and avoid the mistakes newcomers typically make.



## We’ve created nine sections to help you better understand the basics of accounting marketing:

### 1 Positioning, or what makes you unique

This section will help you define the services you offer your clients.

### 2 Targeting, or how to develop client profile

In this section, you’ll establish the “persona” of the types of clients you’d like to work with most.

### 3 Messaging, or your value proposition

Here you’ll learn how to create a message that grabs the attention of your prospects, speaks to their needs, and sets you apart from the crowd.

### 4 Referral marketing

Here you’ll discover some effective (and inexpensive) ways to get new clients. You’ll also learn how to optimize referrals to keep your marketing budget in check.

### 5 Marketing mix and prioritization

Since you can’t do *everything* yourself, this section will help you select the best marketing options for your budget range.

### 6 Content marketing

This section describes what you need to do both online and offline to make it clear to prospects who you are and what you’re offering.

### 7 Digital advertising

In this section, you’ll be provided with a brief overview of why online advertising is an effective way to attract clients who are ready to buy.

### 8 Planning and executing

This section will start getting you thinking about your to-do list, so you can get your phone ringing with prospects.

### 9 Final touches and following up

Here you’ll learn a few final tips to stay connected with clients and prospects.

# 1

## Positioning, or what makes you unique



The first step in creating a marketing plan is to determine what specific services and benefits you offer that make your accounting business unique.

### Services

Accounting firms offer a wide range of services. Being specific about your skills will make it clear to potential clients what sets you apart. For example, a client may need tax work, but that could mean federal, state, payroll, sales tax, and more.

### Location

Can you serve clients remotely throughout the country, or only in your neck of the woods? Think about your service area and how far you'd be willing to travel if a client needs you onsite.

### Price

Do you want to be perceived as a low-cost option, a high-end boutique offering specialty services, or somewhere in between?

### Your Team

A high-quality team can really distinguish your practice. Think about the specific factors that make your staff special, including:

- Credentials such as education, certifications, and professional memberships
- Experience, including years served and specialty experience
- Technology skills
- Communications and other soft skills
- Quality of customer service
- Likability

### Delivery

Decide if you want work with clients virtually, face-to-face, or both.

### Industries

Are there particular industries you'd prefer to work in? If so, you may be able to develop niche specialties for your practice.

### SWOT Framework

A SWOT analysis is a process to identify internal strengths and weaknesses of your business model, staff, office, equipment, suppliers and vendors, and current customers. You might run a SWOT analysis to determine how prepared your firm is for a certain goal (for example, moving to the cloud). Once you've reviewed the results, you'll be able to better judge the risks and rewards of different growth paths for your firm.

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Now that you've considered each category, put all of the pieces together to get a complete view of what your accounting business has to offer and what sets it apart.

# 2

## Targeting, or how to develop client profile



A common mistake accountants make is trying to market to everyone. This creates messaging that's overly generic, which is no way to make a prospect feel special.

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***With more than 28 million small businesses in the U.S., there are plenty of prospects to go around. You don't have to market to everyone.***

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A better method is to tailor your message to a narrower group of prospects: your ideal client. To figure out who your ideal client is, start by asking yourself a few key questions:

1. Is your ideal client an individual or business?
2. Does your ideal client come from a particular industry? For example, if you have a lot of construction clients, you may want to concentrate on that niche.
3. What size business does your ideal client have? Keep in mind that millions of businesses have no payroll and more than 90 percent generate less than one million dollars annually. Businesses that generate more than \$20 million in annual revenue will probably have their own controllers.
4. What are the demographics of your ideal client?
5. What is the title of the person you want to work with? CEO? CFO? Bookkeeper?

Now it's time to identify why your clients need you, the pain point you're solving. Here are a few examples:

- Their taxes are too complex.
- They're missing payroll deadlines and getting fined.
- They've outgrown their current bookkeeping solution.
- They recently received a letter from the IRS.
- They're short on time.

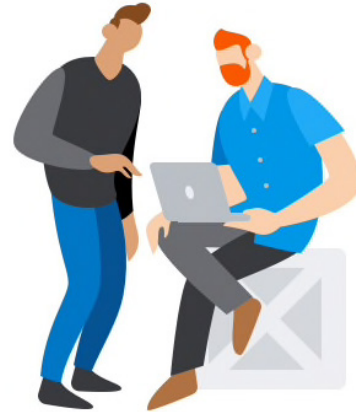
Get even more detailed by thinking about your ideal client's location, hobbies, memberships, professional or educational associations, and other qualities you care about. Go after clients you want to work with, not just anyone.

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Combine this information to get a persona of your ideal client. A business is defined as much by the prospects it turns down as the clients it keeps. Having this persona handy will help you grow the kind of practice you're proud of.

# 3

## Messaging, or your value proposition



In the competitive accounting landscape, your messaging has to succinctly grab prospective clients' attention and stick in their minds. To help you develop a clear, memorable value proposition, fill in the formula below:

**I help [ideal client] with [services], which provides [benefits].**

While you don't have to follow that exact wording, the formula illustrates the parts of a successful value proposition: defining your ideal client, what you'll do for them, and how they'll benefit.

For example, you might say you help **self-employed clients** with **balancing their books**, which gives them **peace of mind that they'll avoid trouble with the IRS**.

If you're having trouble, try putting yourself in your prospect's shoes. How do you want clients to feel after you've worked with them? Relieved? Organized? Prepared?

Here are a few more examples to spark your ideas:

*"We help insurance firms with cleaning up their QuickBooks files for their CPAs, which relieves stress."*

*"I help successful small business owners with streamlining their accounting books and training their bookkeeping staff on QuickBooks, which saves them time and money."*

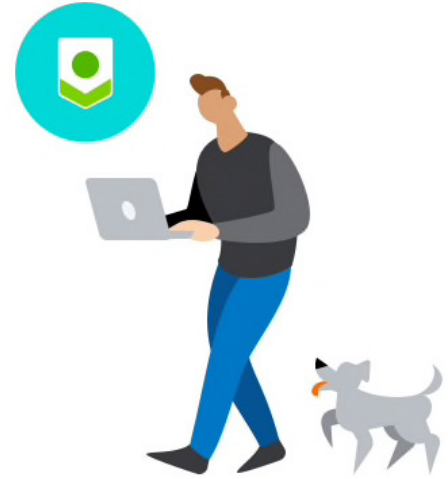
*"I help small businesses with customizing or implementing QuickBooks, which makes them more organized at work."*

Once you've developed a strong value proposition, consider adding to your messaging with social proof and a call to action. Here's an example:

*"I help successful small business owners with streamlining their accounting books, which saves them time and money. I recently completed a project for a graphics design firm that saved them \$20,000. If you're interested in a free tips booklet, give me your business card and write TIPS on the back of it. I'd be happy to send it to you."*

# 4

## Referral marketing



One of the most effective ways for accountants to get new clients is through referrals. Referrals come through word of mouth, which makes them incredibly cost-effective. With proper planning, referral marketing can be a layup for your business. Prospects come pre-sold and are easier to convert than with other marketing channels.

Here are a few methods to help get those referrals pouring in.

### Tell the world that you ♥ referrals

Your clients may not know you want referrals unless you tell them. Consider adding a line to the Consider adding a line like “We ♥ Referrals!” to your email signature, invoices, and other correspondence.

Consider printing referral cards and including them in your tax organizers, financial reports, or other materials that you send to your clients. You could even offer them a discount on their next bill for filling out one of the cards. Your gratitude will go a long way, and possibly generate additional referrals.

### Get to know your sources

Do you already have a reliable group of sources? Research how much revenue you’ve earned from each one and reward them accordingly.

Maybe it’s a gift certificate or a lunch invitation. At the very least, you’ll want to send them a handwritten thank-you note. Thanking your referrers helps ensure they keep sending new clients your way.

### Post testimonials and encourage online reviews

Online reviews are the digital equivalent of referrals. Consider devoting a page on your website to reviews. Also encourage clients to leave reviews for you on Google Places, Yelp, Facebook, and your ProAdvisor listing.

### Referrals can come from many sources:

- Existing or former clients
- Personal friends, business associates, or former co-workers
- College or alumni groups
- Other accounting professionals
- Associations, networking groups, leads organizations, mastermind groups, or other business groups where you have developed relationships
- Other professionals or vendors that serve the same type of client that you do (e.g. banks, IT vendors, PEOs or HR professionals, and attorneys)
- Online reviews left on Facebook, Google for Business listing, Yelp, Bing, and other social, search, and directory sites

# 5

## Marketing mix and prioritization



Once you've optimized your referrals and maximized your upsells to existing clients, it's time to get to work on the rest of your marketing strategy. Start by focusing on a few key numbers.

First, ask yourself how much additional revenue you want to bring in, and how many clients you'll need to generate it. To do this, calculate the average revenue per client and divide your overall revenue goal by that figure. Next, kickstart as many marketing initiatives as you need to hit that revenue goal. Here are some ideas:

- SEO stands for "search engine optimization." When you use SEO best practices, you can improve your website's search rankings and bring in free, organic traffic.
- Join a local networking group or professional association and start to build your business relationships.
- Create an attention-grabbing, tips-packed content piece such as "How to Save Taxes

with an HSA," and post it on your website in exchange for an email address.

- Run online ads to attract people who are ready to buy.
- Set up your social media accounts and start creating posts that your prospects can read.

With so many options, it's wise to analyze where your marketing budget dollars can make the biggest impact. Here are a few steps to help:

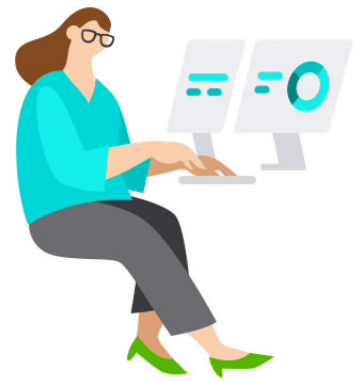
- Look back to see where past clients came from, and if the method used to attract them is still viable.
- Measure what works against what doesn't. If you're getting no business from a particular networking group, drop it and try running ads instead.

- Meet your prospects in the right places. For example, if your ideal clients are over-40 entrepreneurs, you're unlikely to find them on Snapchat. If you're looking for general contractors, an Association of General Contractors meeting is a better bet than a Chamber of Commerce event.
- Consider seasonality. For instance, if you offer tax services, spend heaviest during times when clients are looking for your help (November to April).

# 6

## Content marketing

You've determined your positioning, established your ideal client, and developed your attention-grabbing message. Now it's time to create a set of materials you can use to show prospects who you are and why your practice is the best bet for their business. This is called content marketing.



### Here's a list of things you'll need to get started.

- A headshot** that conveys your professionalism to prospective clients.
- A great bio.** Tell people what you love about your work and why you want to help them. (PRO TIP: It should be professionally written.)
- Your contact information:**
  - A memorable email address.
  - A phone number with a polished voicemail message. (Customized messages tend to get more responses.)
  - An office address. If you work at home, get a post office box that you can use as an official business address to avoid looking unprofessional.
- Your value proposition.** (We covered this in Messaging.)
- A logo** or at least a text graphic that shows your company name in an interesting font and color.

### Once you've gathered the essentials, you can get to work on these core materials.

- Business cards** are still a great way to make a positive first impression. You'll also need them if you plan on networking at local events or attending conferences.
- Your **website** conveys the most information about your practice. It should be professionally designed and include a list of your services, staff bios, a contact page, and a client testimonial section. Adding a blog is a great way to ensure return visits.
- Social media accounts** Consider creating a page for your business in Facebook and LinkedIn. Feeling extra social? You can use your domain name to create a Twitter account.
- Your **email signature** is that block of text that is appended to the end of an email message. Use it to include your contact information, an appointment setting link, a line that says "We ♥ Referrals," and anything else that builds credibility. Many people have their QuickBooks Certification badges embedded in their email signatures.
- Online directory listings** Get set up in Google for Business, Bing, and Yelp. Encourage clients to leave reviews for you in these places, as well as on your Facebook page. Also update your ProAdvisor profile if you're certified. You'll get leads from your listing!

A thoughtfully presented set of content materials will give you an online appearance you can be proud of and help your business stand out. It takes some work, but it's well worth the effort.



# 7

## Digital advertising



We can all probably agree that when prospects look for an accountant, they typically search online using their phone or computer. They may enter keyword phrases such as “bookkeeping services” or “I got a letter from the IRS” and scan the results for a web page that fits their needs.

Getting your website to appear in their search results is key. One way to accomplish this goal is to run online ads on popular digital marketing channels such as Google, Facebook, and Bing.

Instead of paying a flat fee, you’ll be charged by “impression” or “click”. Impressions are counted when your ad is displayed on a search results page, regardless of whether it’s clicked. Clicks are counted when a user clicks on your ad. When you create these ads, you’ll assign them certain keyword phrases like the

ones mentioned above (i.e. “bookkeeping services”). How high or low on the page your ad appears depends on how much you paid for the keyword that was entered. Make sure your bid is high enough to ensure your ad appears toward the top.

Here are some other ways you can enhance your ad’s appeal:

- Write your ad with your ideal client in mind. Connect the services you offer with the services they need.
- Create a landing page—a web page where people arrive after clicking on your ad—that delivers what the prospect is looking for. Give it a compelling call to action that encourages prospects to contact you, complete a form, or set up an appointment.
- Be sure that the keywords and keyword phrases you’ve selected are relevant to the services you offer.

Beyond Google, Facebook, and Bing, explore other online directories to expand your digital presence. Some of these are free, while others such as Thumbtack and the online version of the Yellow Pages charge a monthly fee or commission.

Compare and contrast results. You can’t list your practice everywhere, so focus your resources on the digital channels that work best.

# 8

## Planning and executing

Now that you've developed your message, targeted your ideal clients, and decided on marketing initiatives to pursue, get to work implementing your plan. Start by breaking down your tasks into two categories: "One-time" and "Recurring."



### Here are some examples of One-time tasks

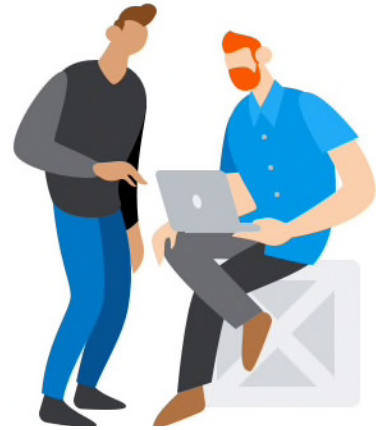
- Locate a photographer for your headshot.
- Find a web design firm.
- Update and optimize your email signature.
- Hire a professional writer for your bio and marketing materials.
- Join professional associations that fit your services.

### Here are some examples of Recurring tasks:

- Meet with your top referral sources at least once quarterly to thank them and catch up. This might be a lunch or coffee meeting or at the least a phone or video call.
- Schedule and write four months of social media posts for December through April. Do the same for May to September.
- Update your web materials, making sure your contact information, services pages, and bio are all current.
- Check your website's Google rankings periodically and hire an SEO expert if you need to.
- Review your overall marketing plan to make sure it still fully supports your positioning, ideal client, and value proposition. If changes need to be made, make them.

# 9

## Final touches and following up



If you've read this far, you already know more about marketing than most accountants and bookkeepers. You're well on your way to attracting new clients and taking your business to new heights.

The last two steps on your agenda are meant to help you stay organized and nurture long-term relationships as your marketing efforts progress.

- Implement a Client Touch Plan, a schedule for how and when you'll keep in touch with current clients throughout the year. For example, with high-profit clients, you may want to send a bi-weekly newsletter,

take them to lunch or an event twice a year, and call them four to six times a year.

- Develop a follow-up system for staying in touch with prospects who are not yet clients. This may consist of a mix of phone calls, emails, social media messages, and periodic newsletters. Remember, all prospects aren't the same. Stay aggressive with those who've inquired about your services, but be gentle with those new to your email list. Track all your contact, or "touches", in a to stay organized.

Ready, set, *grow!*

## About the author

Sandi Leyva, CPA, CMA, MBA, is founder of Accountant's Accelerator, author of 30 books and recipient of seven accounting industry thought leader awards. Check out her [free resources](#) for accountants and bookkeepers.

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