

Professional Services Management Journal *presents:*

## STASLOVSKI ON... Differentiators That Don't Work

February 4, 2005, No. 239 Very Personal Advice for Design Firm Principals

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*"GUERRILLAS SEIZE ON THE CONSULTING INDUSTRY'S LACK OF MARKETING DIFFERENTIATION TO PRODUCE PRECISE, COGENT STATEMENTS OF THEIR SPECIALIZED EXPERTISE — THAT'S WHAT MAKES THE TELEPHONE RING."*

—Jay Conrad Levinson and Michael W. McLaughlin

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When you set up a marketing plan for your firm, it is important that you focus on how to distinguish yourself from the competition. Unfortunately, much of the marketing material I review looks virtually identical, and does little to grab the client's attention.

There's a great new book out that tackles this subject called "Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants," by Jay Conrad Levinson and Michael W. McLaughlin. In the book, Levinson and McLaughlin offer the following list of differentiators that simply don't work with clients:

1. **Quality service.** Every client expects consultants to provide "quality" service. Every competitor will make this claim, thereby neutralizing its impact.
2. **Best price.** Most clients do not hire the cheapest consultants to handle their toughest problems. A study on the impact of varying pricing methods showed that almost 50 percent of the professional service firms trying this strategy reaped no measurable increase in sales.
3. **Methods, tools, and approaches.** If you hire a carpenter, you expect that tradesperson to show up with all the tools needed to complete the job quickly and efficiently. Clients expect the same from consultants. A study on effective differentiation strategies of professional service firms showed that 40 percent of firms that boasted new techniques and tools to deliver services ended up with dismal marketing results.
4. **Service responsiveness.** It is a waste of your breath to promise clients quick responses to questions or on-time and on-budget project performance. Client who pay high consulting fees expect quick service, and they will pressure you to provide it.
5. **Credentials.** Many firms stress the academic pedigree of their team to show why they are special. However, most clients couldn't care less where your team was educated; they want to know what your team has done that relates to their project.

6. **Importance of the client.** Some consultants stress how important clients are to the firm's business and promise them special attention. Clients will often shrug off this offer as hype unless they have a special status with your firm that confers benefits to them not extended to others.
7. **Testimonials.** Don't provide clients with testimonials. Instead, show them your complete client list and invite them to call whomever they wish. Clients will contact the firms they know and put more stock in the opinions of their trusted network members than praise from unknown clients.
8. **FUD.** Consultants often try to convince clients that there is an urgent need for a specific service by instilling fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD) in their minds. Clients routinely see through this ploy and will stop listening if you try it.

Stay tuned for more tactics on how to distinguish yourself from other firms. If you're interested in "Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants," go to [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com) for more information.

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