

Promote and Prosper

By John Ward, O.L.S.

Promotion of the Profession

Good public relations is essential if the interest of the public is to truly be protected.

Good public relations like good marketing ensures that the public is aware of the very real benefits that they can enjoy as a result of the procurement of the services of a professional surveyor. An informed public is better equipped to maximize these benefits by making informed decisions as to the type and extent of surveying services they require.

Consider for example the work dentistry has done promoting preventative dentistry. What about the advantages to a developer of integrated and "controlled" survey engineering systems?

An informed public is protected. They are protected from inadvertently selecting inappropriate or substandard services.

Professional Development

Trainers who work extensively with professionals often "mask" marketing skill development with names like business development skills, negotiating skills or communication skills. Whatever the label, marketing skills are an indispensable business tool for any service business.

Perhaps it is possible, in theory, to build a business without marketing but in practice the facts are that the top entrepreneurs invest 50% of their time in marketing.

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It is also a fact that most professionals who skillfully promote business relationships instead of projects are awarded bigger shares of the market.

Regardless, tough markets are forcing professional firms to follow examples set by other businesses and to participate in marketing activities. These activities can be detrimental to the company and the profession if the sales representatives are unskilled and inexperienced.

Unskillful selling is also bad for the already tarnished reputation of sales professionals. There are illustrations available daily on American television where lawyers set out to imitate professional sales people with their rendition of the "hard sell." Usually it is not the content but the crude unskilled presentation technique that offends the viewer.

In the past, exposure to these offensive commercials has led many of us to swear off marketing. The activity is deemed to be humiliating and representative of conduct unbecoming a professional, an activity best left for those suffering from a chronic lack of both self esteem and integrity.

Yet many of the marketing skills, techniques and activities duplicate those of good communication and negotiation. Studies indicate that clients value interpersonal (communication/marketing) skills over technical competence. This leaves the untrained professional with principles intact but client relations at risk.

Furthermore, the untrained professional is at a disadvantage when negotiating with people trained in sales and communication techniques.

Finally, the client is at risk since they are expected to select professionals and professional services without a clear appreciation of either the service or the associated client benefits.

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Sales research and practical examples confirm that prosperous businesses with steady work flow are sustained as much by marketing as by economy, competence and consistency of service.

Why then do most of us fail to acquire these business development skills and apply them?

Personally, I didn't learn about these marketing skills because I just didn't want to! I had enough dusty life skills in my cranial cupboards. Enough disappointments. The thought of selling myself, my company or my profession terrified me -- it was that simple!

If, like me, in attempting to market, you have your share of what marketing people call "challenges and opportunities in disguise" (i.e. failure, frustration, humiliation) then perhaps you need:

- * some advice
- * some skill
- * some support

If so, why not talk to your Public Relations Committee representatives at the next Association of Ontario Land Surveyors' convention? Maybe together we can find a comfortable way to promote and prosper. 

The Public Relations Committee is:
Drew Annable John Barber
Charles Chamberlain Ron Emo
John Ward

John Ward is an O.L.S. and owner of Small Business Safety, a management training company specializing in customized programs for small businesses.