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# IN HARMONY

Case study: When Jim Hamilton, president and CEO of Southern Civil Engineers Inc., decided to get serious about tailoring his marketing message to boost company sales, he revamped the way his company did business.

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**T**he secret to dancing is to get both feet moving in the right direction at the same time. Otherwise, you klutz around and lose your balance. It's the same with corporate marketing and sales efforts. The two should be working in harmony. Otherwise, there's a lot of wasted time and stumbling efforts, and sales might fall flat.

When Jim Hamilton, president and CEO of Southern Civil Engineers Inc., decided to get serious about tailoring his marketing message to boost company sales, he revamped the way his company did business.

The 20-year-old firm experienced a significant growth spurt in the 1990s. But Hamilton felt that there was a link missing. "We really wanted to define who we were [in order] to grow from a small practice into a larger-sized firm," he said. "We were doing a lot of things right, but needed to crystallize our message, vision and values."

## Learn from the past

Hamilton and his team reviewed 20 years of files, looking at projects that were highly positive experiences, noting similarities in what made those projects stand out. What stood out were projects in which the firm acted as a "true partner" with the client, working toward an outcome that was mutually desirable.

After months of periodic meetings and reviews, Southern Civil Engineers determined its preferred position was to work in partnership with clients that shared its preference for aesthetically pleasing and environmentally conscious projects. Armed with that



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Jim Hamilton  
Southern Civil Engineers Inc.

**Sales and marketing team:**  
Jim Hamilton, center,  
and from left, Laura Wright,  
Greg Maxey, Bob Vance and  
Robby Boggs.

BYRON E. SMALL

information, it defined segments of industries it could serve, and formed marketing and sales teams tailored around each industry.

One of the most productive parts of the process, Hamilton said, was collecting the thoughts and opinions of his previous clients. "If we wanted to be their true partners, we needed a thorough understanding of what they wanted and valued."

An outside third party conducted a customer analysis,

interviewing groups from each market segment.

They were asked not just about their experience with Southern Civil Engineers, but what qualities they required from an engineering firm.

Taking that information, Hamilton's firm was able to formulate a sales strategy that directly addresses the needs of each market segment. Individual teams are focused on a specific industry segment and are responsible for researching and tracking trends in that market.

The results have been noticeable, Hamilton said. Not only has the company message been refined, but the process earned Hamilton's firm new respect from previous clients.

"They were impressed that someone thought enough to ask what their needs were," he said.

### **From marketing to sales**

"Many companies confuse marketing goals with sales goals," said Diana Baycura, president of Sundance Consulting Group, an Atlanta-based strategic business-planning firm. "Numbers are sales goals, not marketing goals. You need to have a clear marketing message."

In fact, establishing a clear marketing message could be one of the most effective ways to increase sales.

"Making your marketing message reflect who you are is critical for success," said Frank Martin, an Atlanta-based marketing strategist. "It goes along with the 'Ready, Aim, Fire' mentality, as opposed to 'Fire, Ready, Aim.'"

Martin recommends business owners evaluate the quality of current sales leads coming in. If they're not up to par, your message is probably not clear and consistent.

Separate the marketing chaff from the wheat by evaluating your company closely and honestly, making note of strengths and weaknesses. Determine what you bring to the marketplace that's different or better than your competitors. This seemingly simple question leaves many entrepreneurs at a loss for answers. Rule out pat answers like "quality and service."

"Quality and service just get you to the table," Baycura said. "It ... doesn't make you better. Even businesses that don't have quality and service claim they do."

### **The ideal client**

Finding that "right for you" client also presents a challenge. The answer is research. Only by understanding the last twenty years' worth of client experiences could Southern



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Civil Engineers begin to understand what kind of client it should be going after. Look at your past clients to see what common characteristics the good ones shared. More than someone who just wants to spend money, it should be someone who fits well with your approach to business. The any-prospect-through-the-door approach to recruiting is a waste of valuable sales and marketing resources.

"I often preach the imperative of the perfect fit," Baycura said. "Any time you do business with a client that doesn't fit you, you lose. The hassle factor is often high. It erodes employee morale because no one is happy working with these clients. And it takes time away from other prospective clients who might be perfect for you."

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**Diana Baycura**  
Sundance Consulting Group

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