

4-STEP FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING A BETTER BUSINESS: STRATEGIC MARKETING 3.0®



For most firms, execution is not the limiting factor for marketing and business development. It's a lack of effective focus.

The 4-step Strategic Marketing 3.0® framework provides a proven path for shortening the sales cycle, growing revenue, and boosting profitability. The framework's principles evolved over 15+ years of client work. Simple, fundamental, and understandable by professionals who often dread business development, each step focuses on gathering and applying deep customer insights. The first three steps create a Strategic Marketing Plan. The last extends benefits firm wide.

Deep insights from your best clients fuel the process, so success comes from new insights and focus rather than learning additional skills.

***My favorite client compliment comes when I'm told,
"Finally, after all these years I understand marketing."***

Law, consulting, and other professional services firms see the most dramatic gains. In a spin on "the rich get richer," firms already recognized as experts in their field add to their competitive advantage by generating leverage—better results from the same effort—with better use of referral partners to find more of their best clients and improve conversion rates.

Focus Creates Results that Matter

The Strategic Marketing 3.0 framework builds a better business in three ways:

1. **Shorten the Sales Cycle.** That's a pretty bold claim for marketing. However, when you focus on where you win and know why, you become more efficient at developing and nurturing leads and closing sales.
2. **Grow Revenue.** Shorter sales cycles plus a focus on better clients will improve your top line. Your business can grow along with these better clients. Great clients provide the cornerstone of a robust business able to weather market fluctuations.
3. **Boost Profitability.** More projects won at a lower cost of sales is the definition of profit. Many clients find they can increase pricing to capture additional value.

Why Focus Matters

The foundation of the Strategic Marketing 3.0 framework is a focus on why your best clients select your firm. Your firm does lots of things well, but few of your core tasks are true differentiators: drafting contracts, preparing environmental reports, or managing assets. On paper, it's often hard to tell your firm from competitors. Yet, your firm delivers these similar tasks in ways that create loyalty in existing clients and

causes new clients to select your firm. More often than not, it's the *How* rather than the *What* that ultimately causes your best clients to select your firm.

My favorite compliment comes when clients tell me, "Finally, after all these years I understand marketing." This is testimony to my no-marketing-speak or techno-babble approach. I assume every recommended action must be justified to highly-skilled professionals who are established in their area of practice.

A Practical Framework You Can Understand

The Strategic Marketing 3.0 framework is built around deep insights into your best clients. It's a deductive rather than a creative process. I identify each of the four steps with a persona that highlights the theme for that component.

1. STUDENT



GAIN KNOWLEDGE & INSIGHTS

It's critical you know the real reasons people buy from your firm. A Student mindset is inquisitive and asks, *Why?* And then asks, *Why is that?* "We have great people" or "More expertise" simply isn't enough anymore. Clients expect competence—or even excellence. On paper, professional firms appear quite similar. Yet, despite this generalized similarity and lots of choices, to your best clients you're the best choice. The only way you can know exactly why is to ask them. The answer might surprise you. As a third-party, your clients will tell me things they won't tell you.

It's easy to fall into the trap of describing why you would select your firm, or why clients ought to select your firm. What matters is why your clients actually select your firm.

At every firm I've worked with I've uncovered actions they perform out of habit or obligation which, unbeknownst to the firm's principals, creates significant value from the client's perspective. In a surprising number of cases, I determine these habitual actions—"We do that because it's the right thing to do"—to be critical to why their best clients select them. What seems to be merely another rock is actually a gold nugget.

2. SCHOLAR



FOCUS ON THE CORE VALUE

There's real power in learning to see your value the way your clients do. It's easy to forget clients have an entire business to manage. The overall impact of what you do ripples well beyond the tasks you perform. If clients saw your value as limited to the tasks itemized on their invoice, you would be a commodity.

The Scholarly mindset creates focus by connecting the dots. In conveying core concepts, too much information can be as problematic as too little. Concisely, accurately, and credibly describing what your firm does, who it serves and why you are a better choice is harder than it seems. It's easy to be "Different," but the challenge is to position your firm as a "Better Choice." I can assure you clients don't care how you're different. They want the best choice. The goal is to make it easy for the clients you want most to select your firm.

It's easy to fall into the trap of describing why you would select your firm, or why clients ought to select your firm. What matters is why your best clients actually select your firm. Focusing is a deductive exercise, so be wary of marketing consultants and branding agencies that tell you what you want to hear.

To select your firm, clients only need to understand a subset of your overall capabilities—not everything you can or will deliver. If you don't know why they select you, you can't know where to focus. You end up trying to excel at more activities rather than focusing on fewer and doing them better.

With just the Student and Scholar steps, firms often see an immediate boost in sales conversion rates. Many feel confident enough to raise prices. Steps 3 and 4 build on these gains, using referral partners to create business development leverage, and extending the new insights and focus to other parts of your firm.

EXAMPLE: Aligning with Client Values

The developer of a backend software solution for managing home health agencies was getting a cool reception from potential clients despite delivering enormous efficiencies in billing and scheduling.

I showed the CEO that clients can see value differently. The business owners—who were typically nurses—frequently battled against the relentless efforts of healthcare systems to cut costs, often at the expense of patient care. Potential clients assumed the software solution's gains came the same way, generating efficiencies at the expense of patient care. Where the vendor saw a slam-dunk, my interviews revealed potential clients saw an alarming red flag.

My research and guidance bought seller and buyer into alignment. We re-positioned the solution to highlight how operational efficiencies free more resources for patient care. The product became a hit.

3. GUIDE



SHARE WISDOM TO CREATE LEVERAGE

A Guide mindset uses wisdom to create leverage. It tilts the playing field to your advantage with powerful referrals. Clients who actively refer business to you are worth monumentally more than those rating you a “10” on a survey. Prospects coming via strong recommendations convert faster and close at higher rates. They also tend to be the clients you like best: the ones who appreciate you the most, generate more profit, and want to see your firm be successful.

Most companies not only underutilize their best clients, they make it affirmatively difficult for these powerful and willing advocates to help you. In reality, people recommend you for their benefit, not yours. Wise Guides understand it's your job to make it in the referral partner's self-interest to recommend only your firm (where appropriate). For their self-interest to be clear, they must know where you hit home runs, and what those look like.

EXAMPLE: Leverage with Referrals

A law firm felt frustration their excellent work didn't translate into lots of qualified referrals.

My interviews of their clients drew a stark contrast between the dull recitations I heard from the shareholders listing the myriad tasks they can perform and the stories of broad impact I heard from their best clients.

By shifting the firm's focus from tasks to impact, I gave them the tools to boost referral quality and quantity. By demonstrating they think like their clients, referral partners now position themselves as business advisors rather than mere experts defined by a narrow area of the law.

4. PROPHET**CREATE A MOVEMENT: ENGAGE YOUR ENTIRE FIRM**

The Prophet mindset isn't constrained by functional roles. Using the same language with clients and employees creates common focus regardless of audience. The Prophet wants every employee at your firm to know why your best clients select your firm because it imparts greater relevance to the work they do.

When employees know the real reasons why customers select your firm, they're more productive, innovative, and loyal. Delivery and support roles benefit just as much as marketing and business development.

EXAMPLE: Engage to Attract Top Talent

A highly-regarded professional services firm struggled to retain top talent. Growth and opportunity was limited by senior partners who maintained a tight grip on key client decision makers. Because the senior partners couldn't quantify exactly why they won projects, they doubted less senior members of the firm could properly manage these relationships.

I encouraged the firm to apply the Strategic Marketing 3.0 principles beyond marketing and business development.

De-mystifying why the firm wins their best clients combined with focused positioning allowed senior partners to confidently relax their grip on key relationships. This works so well the firm now actively encourages up-and-comers to take an active role in even the firm's most critical client relationships. The greater exposure to key client leaders creates career-building opportunities not available at rival firms.

A New Yet Familiar Approach

While these concepts may sound familiar, getting results is the difference between knowing what to do, and actually putting the knowledge into practice.

My in-depth client interviews become a powerful change agent by highlighting how your clients see your firm's impact and value. These interviews focus on your firm's best clients—the ones you'd clone if you could. Thus, the surprises are happy ones: highlighting things you "just do" and hardly think about, but make a real difference to your clients.

Not Just Better Marketing, a Better Business

The time you spend managing day-to-day concerns is time you aren't thinking about the future and performing the leadership role only you can fill. While change is coming, today it's unusual for business leaders to look to marketing and business development to better manage their business and increase employee engagement firm wide.

The benefits of the 4-step Strategic Marketing 3.0 framework extend well beyond the traditional role of marketing. Integrating deep customer insights across your entire organization attracts the best clients—and the best employees. What results is better marketing and business development, and a firm that plans, executes, and manages in ways you never thought possible.

A robust marketing strategy drives a level of focus many firms lack. A clear and consistent focus on why your best clients select your firm creates powerful synergies across your firm and between employee roles. This focus is critical to applying your full set of resources on essential activities and eliminating distractions.

Better Marketing Begets a Better Business

For a law firm, my interviews with clients and referral partners caused a major re-thinking of marketing and business development. Legal expertise now underpins a process of strategic guidance for their clients rather than a tactical menu of legal deliverables. Relationships can go deeper, and are more explicitly valued.

For a commercial contractor, my Strategic Marketing 3.0 process caused the executive team to abandon plans to expand down market. Instead of undermining their value proposition and business model with commodity work, they re-focused on where they do their best work. Today, they submit fewer proposals, but win nearly everything they go after.

For an engineering consultancy, my giving voice to their best clients demonstrated the impact of repositioning from a technical expert to a business advisor. This shift allowed the firm to build high-value client relationships beyond the reach of competitors. I didn't change the work they do, but now they win new clients as the clearly better choice while reinforcing the firm's unique culture as a fun place to work.

Growth isn't always the goal. For many established professional services firms, they seek my guidance for boosting profitability by working with higher quality clients.

Benefits aren't limited to marketing. The Strategic Marketing Plan I create is used by some clients during new employee orientation to instill a common understanding of core values, market position, and how to identify strategic projects and activities.

Accomplish More than You Expect

Companies implement the Strategic Marketing 3.0 framework to improve marketing and business development, but find they get much more. A focused marketing strategy built around why your best clients select your firm goes beyond a traditional view of marketing to shorten the sales cycle, grow revenue, and boost profitability. Further, when employees connect with the heart of your business, they feel better engaged and clients see your firm as even more critical to their success.

The Strategic Marketing 3.0 framework starts deeper than conventional marketing processes, and extends further across your business. The concepts and applied knowledge easily extend beyond marketing to transform thinking and action firm-wide.

Good prophets create broad results by first thinking like students, scholars, and guides. The Strategic Marketing 3.0 approach provides a process framework for sequencing and balancing these roles to drive shorter sales cycles, higher revenue, and increased profitability.



Student

Gain knowledge & insight



Scholar

Focus on core value



Guide

Share wisdom to create leverage



Prophet

Engage the entire firm

Get Started Now

If I can help you or someone you know think through these issues, don't hesitate to invite me into the discussion. The first conversation always comes without cost or obligation.

LaFetraConsulting.com/start

About Bruce La Fetra

Bruce La Fetra provides strategic marketing guidance and insights so professional services firms can grow revenue, pricing, and profits by understanding the real job (value) clients hire them to do. Key insights come from learning why their best clients select them, allowing Bruce to unlock the firm's "secret sauce" and develop a Strategic Marketing Plan focused on winning more of those best clients. The Strategic Marketing 3.0® framework converts marketing from a task professionals dread to a mindset they value and embrace. Contact Bruce at **Bruce@LaFetraConsulting.com** or **(408) 749-1028**.