to do (a task made easier after the self-definition exercises mentioned earlier) and finding where to get it. What do you focus on? It may be a new client type (such as Fortune 500 companies); a new project type (such as law offices); a new service type (such as facility management); or a new geography (such as the Southeast). What do you consider? You consider forces and trends that drive the market. You evaluate the size of the market, and its maturity. You investigate funding. There can be great need and no money. You look at the competition. You examine the cost to enter the market.

There are several ways to conduct market research. There are "direct" methods, which can be as simple as a literature search or a questionnaire. There are "indirect" methods, which can be via telephone or person to person. You don't have to talk to 300 people either. If you get consistent answers from a half-dozen knowledgeable people, you probably have the answers you need.

Setting Goals

The third component, goal setting, forms the basis of the marketing plan. Goals must be specific, realistic, measurable, and limited. "Do good design" is not specific–who decides what is "good" anyway? Goals must be realistic, meaning they must be attainable within reason. There is no faster way to get discouraged than by setting goals so grandiose that they cannot possibly be achieved. Your goals must be measurable–not "Make a profit," but "Make a 15 percent profit." Goals must be limited. Prioritize. Don't try to do everything at once. It's a short twelve months. Last, goals must be collective. Acceptance by the people responsible for implementation is absolutely critical.

Goals may touch on many things. You may target the amount of net fee to be generated. You may describe the types of clients you would prefer to secure. You may delineate types of projects you would like to add to your portfolio. You may define geographic areas for penetration. You may allude to your desired reputation or level of recognition. You may enumerate a desired size in staffing or position in a ranking.

The strategic section of a marketing plan details the means by which you reach your goals and objectives. In developing your strategies, you should take advantage of your strengths, offset your weaknesses, and respond to marketing opportunities. Strategies define action. They may address any number of things: your activities with past or current clients; contact campaigns; networking activities; participation in client organizations; involvement in community activities; and public relations activities, including advertising, announcements, articles, award submissions, direct-mail campaigns, special events, exhibits, news releases, speeches, and seminars.

Determining Tools/Resources

In the tools/resources portion of the marketing plan, you determine the resources and tools necessary to carry out your strategies. Your resources are your people. Look at your strategies and try to determine if the proper people are in place (at the principal, technical, and marketing levels) both to get the job and do the job. Your tools are your collateral materials. Look at the things you need to implement the strategies–such as project photography, brochures, direct-mail pieces, a web page overhaul, or even a database.

The Marketing Budget

The marketing budget prices your strategies. It tells you if you can afford the time and money allocation required to meet your firm's marketing goals. It ultimately tells you if your goals are realistic. The first time you prepare a budget, it seems a daunting task. Over time, as you get to know the marketing habits of your particular cast of characters, and the costs to accomplish certain tasks, it gets easier. First, you choose your approach. There are three basic methodologies for creating a marketing budget: the projection method, the percentage method, and the goal-based method.

The projection method, also referred to as the comparison method, relies on using prior year costs for development of the upcoming year's budget. You must determine what has been spent year-to-date on marketing labor and expenses and project the final year-end costs. The challenge is to decide if that line item will stay the same, increase, or decrease in the upcoming year. Add the line items, and you have your budget.

The percentage method, also called the top-down method, simply allocates a set percentage of the firm's total operating revenues to marketing. That percentage will generally range between 5 and 15 percent, although some firms report costs as low as 3 percent and as high as 18 percent. The accepted aver-