

age, in the year 2000, is probably between 7 and 9 percent, but then, what firm is average?

The most accurate method, goal-based budgeting, is a “bottom-up” method that assigns costs to each item in your marketing plan. Although more time consuming to set up initially, it is by far the most accurate and manageable budgeting methodology. With a detailed marketing plan, you will be able to estimate the funding required to complete any identified task. Once you have priced what you want to accomplish, you can test this number against available dollars. If you cannot afford the marketing program identified in your plan, you can cut specific items intelligently. Thus, planning continues throughout the budgeting process.

### **Implementing the Marketing Plan**

The final step of the marketing plan is implementation. Smart firms complete an “action plan,” which can be a simple matrix or calendar that covers three things. It defines specific tasks (“What is to be done?”). It assigns responsibility (“Who is to do it?”). It sets a time frame (“When will it be done?”).

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## **MEASURING RESULTS**

Too many firms go to all the trouble of creating a marketing plan, file it neatly away, and go about business as usual. Smart firms monitor the plan or, as so eloquently put by Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) past president Thomas Stokes Page, “determine the degree of plan disintegration.” A good marketing planning process requires a systematic method of evaluation. Did you do what you said you would do? Did you get the results you wanted?

There are a number of methods for monitoring and evaluating the entire marketing effort. Keep a sales report that tells you the amount of fees you sell each month. Track your marketing costs and compare them to your budget. Use your sales report to identify the new commissions brought in and compare those fees to what you spent on marketing in the same time period. These

exercises allow you to evaluate your return on investment. Create a “hit rate” report that tracks your success from proposal to interview, and from interview to commission. Use your firm’s financial statements to determine what percentage of your net revenues is being expended on marketing

So is all this planning and measurement really necessary? There are certainly many firms with no organized marketing plans or tracking systems. You *can* survive in a wholly reactive stance (for a while, anyway). But consider this. A marketing plan provides direction. It instills accountability. It builds teamwork. There is simply no more effective means of getting everyone moving in the same direction, and it allows measurement of progress from year to year.

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## MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Once you have developed a clear sense of your firm’s identity, crafted a strategic plan, and written a marketing plan, it is crucial to work on how your company’s image is conveyed to the world beyond your office doors. You must work to manage the representation of your firm through use of the media and effective public relations, activities that are often grouped under the umbrella of marketing communications.

### Your Audience

As a design professional, you have a number of audiences—your professional peers, associated members of the design industry, your community. No audience is more important than your current and prospective client base. In Part Four we will discuss client interaction from a business development standpoint. However, there are “softer” ways of influencing existing and potential clients, and that is through various media.

Your next most important audience is your network, and here too, media can be influential. Clients look to your network—which should include brokers, architects, engineers, contractors, program managers, and specialty consultants—for information about you. What your network sees, reads, hears, and conveys about you is critical in the marketplace.