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## The Pitfalls Of Bareback Marketing

Published: *The Recorder*

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**E**ven if you've never ridden a horse bareback, you can imagine it is rougher than riding a horse with a saddle. It's much the same when professionals do their marketing bareback, which makes it so much more difficult than it needs to be and severely limits the benefits.

What is bareback marketing? Bareback marketing is when you focus on business development/sales to the exclusion of marketing, or vice versa. It's when you focus on only one area of marketing as opposed to embracing other elements of the "marketing mix." Or when you make the investment of time, effort, and dollars to get results in one area of marketing and stop there, instead of repurposing or leveraging the results so that you can extend your reach and visibility.

There are those who claim that bareback is the highest form of riding and creates the best balance between horse and rider. However, it takes trial and error to develop the skill to go saddleless and find the right riding position. And in any case, bareback riding creates a lot of friction. Ouch! Also,

experts say that both you and the horse fatigue more quickly when riding bareback. Why ride that way when you can have the comfort of a saddle to help you ride farther and more comfortably?

Developing business happens on a continuum of marketing and business development/sales. On the marketing end of the spectrum, you create and maintain visibility for your firm while building and reinforcing credibility. Once you've generated the lead — the opportunity to be in front of someone who is interested in your services — you have transitioned into selling. Professionals may not define the dividing line from marketing to sales at the same point, but all agree that to effectively develop business, a firm needs both marketing and



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business development. To pursue either one alone is bareback marketing.

Here is one example: The managing partner of a firm has been the primary business developer. Over decades, the firm has been built through his sales efforts, one prospect and referral source at time. He exhorts other partners to get out there and sell, with minimal results. You can feel the tremendous effort the partner has made pushing this boulder uphill by himself. The firm does no marketing to speak of and does not try to build awareness of the firm and its credibility — which makes its strategy bareback marketing.

This firm's partners were discussing how a large number of breakfasts, lunches, and

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**The Pitfalls Of Bareback Marketing (continued)**

other meetings have resulted in so few leads. Without a marketing program to support the business development process, this firm is losing significant value from its exertion. The partners are doing the heavy lifting of developing relationships with no way to consistently remind their contacts of their existence and expertise. Without a marketing infrastructure to keep the firm in front of these contacts, its investment quickly dissipates.

In this illustration, there is much untapped opportunity. Because the firm does not consistently communicate with its client, prospect, and referral base, its contacts exist in silos. We appreciate that the firm pings prospects with an email or phone call, but what about all the other people met through networking and business travel who won't remember what the firm does despite the terrific lunch you had three months ago? Business development is extremely important, but done on its own, much of your investment is lost.

Marketing done without business development is also a form of bareback marketing. With marketing, which includes public relations, you are maintaining visibility and top-of-mind awareness, as well as reinforcing credibility. To maximize results, this should be coupled with a business development initiative. The purpose of marketing is to create leads. If no one can adequately follow up on those leads, or more importantly, close them by converting them into clients, you have lost a great deal of your capital.

Another form of bareback marketing occurs when a firm invests in a public relations program and does not leverage or repurpose the results. Results of public relations can include being recognized as an expert by being quoted in an article, having an article published, or obtaining a speaking

engagement. If you make the investment of time to achieve the initial result — time which is diverted from your paid professional work — you want to get a strong return.

For example, we have worked with firms who wanted us to position their attorneys as experts by getting them quoted in business media. Once they were quoted, we were instructed not to do anything else with it, such as draft a write-up for their website or distribute through social media. This means that unless potential clients just happened to read that particular article in that publication, website, or blog, they would not be aware of this professional's being quoted as an expert.

Think of all the energy wasted by allowing the quote's power to dissipate. Consider how those attorneys could be demonstrating their credibility over the long-term by having a growing list of outlets they have appeared in as experts. Wouldn't the message be that they are set apart from the ocean of lawyers out there? Letting the return on your investment slip through your hands is akin to bareback marketing.

Another illustration of bareback marketing is when firms or professionals will not take the time to create or hone their database of contacts — at a minimum, their email list — and use it to consistently communicate with their markets.

We recently spoke with a firm that has a track record of success, yet business has trended down. In spite of expressing concern about generating more leads, these professionals repeatedly told us they do not have time to review their database. Again, this is marketing without a saddle: tremendous friction of effort with no means to oil the machine and extend the firm's reach so that it can share its story. While LinkedIn and Facebook are a means to get the word out, social media sites leave many gaps. If a firm

wants to keep its name top-of-mind, a current email database is indispensable

Just as a saddle helps distribute the rider's weight on a horse, the added ease means the horse can go farther with less stress. Isn't this what you want for your marketing? Of course! You want the energy that you put into marketing and public relations to carry you as far — and as easily — as possible. ■