

An Original Study from
HINGE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

2015

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES MARKETING PRIORITIES

HINGE®

2015 Professional Services Marketing Priorities

Copyright © 2014

Published by Hinge Research Institute

1851 Alexander Bell Drive, Suite 350, Reston, Virginia 20191

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Design by Hinge.

Visit our website at www.hingemarketing.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	Introduction
4	Sample And Methodology
6	Chapter 1: Business Challenges
8	Chapter 2: Marketing Initiatives
10	Chapter 3: Approach To Addressing Marketing Initiatives
11	Chapter 4: Marketing Initiatives Addressed By Outside Resources
12	Chapter 5: Industry Breakdowns
18	Conclusion
19	About Hinge
20	Additional Resources

INTRODUCTION

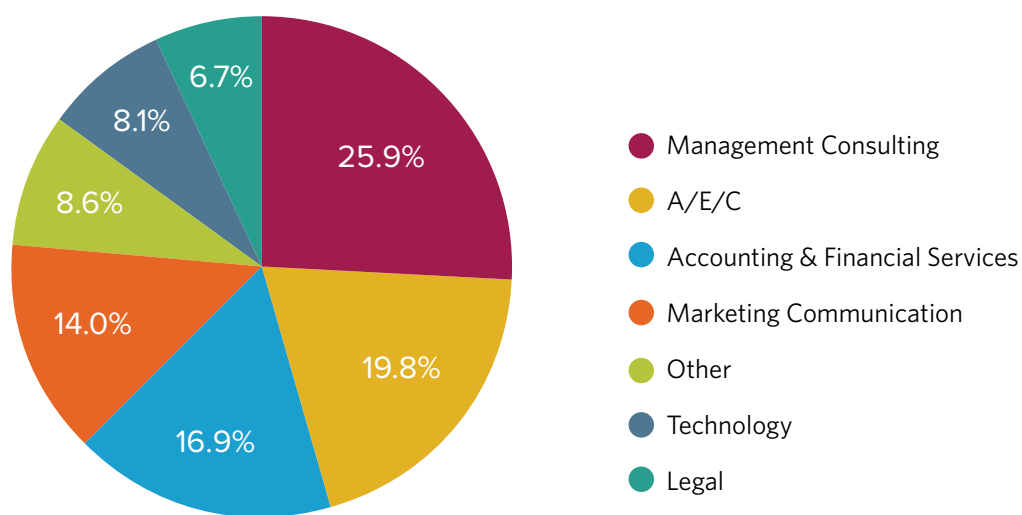
As firms develop professional services marketing budgets for 2015, they seek to address a wide array of challenges through an ever-expanding set of tools and techniques. Which challenges do firms perceive to be most urgent, and how will they prioritize their efforts?

The Hinge Research Institute conducted an industry-spanning survey to find the answers. In this report, we will examine firms' current business challenges, marketing initiatives, and approaches to implementing marketing solutions. We will consider the results both in the wider context of the professional services field, and with respect to the specific industries covered by our survey.

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

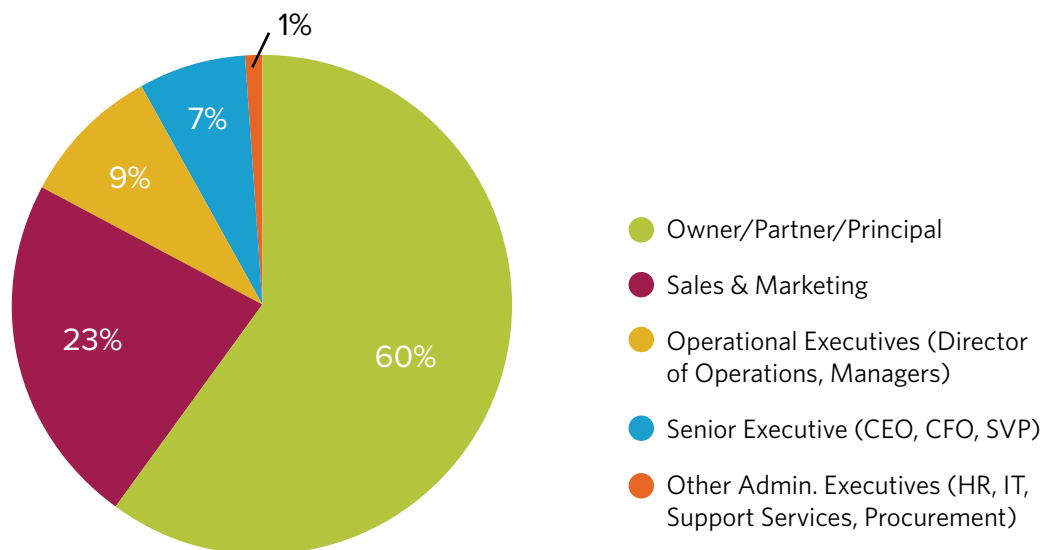
Our research gathered responses from 530 professional services firms in the accounting and finance, technology, marketing and communications, architecture, engineering, and construction, legal, and management consulting industries.

Figure 1. Sample Composition by Industry



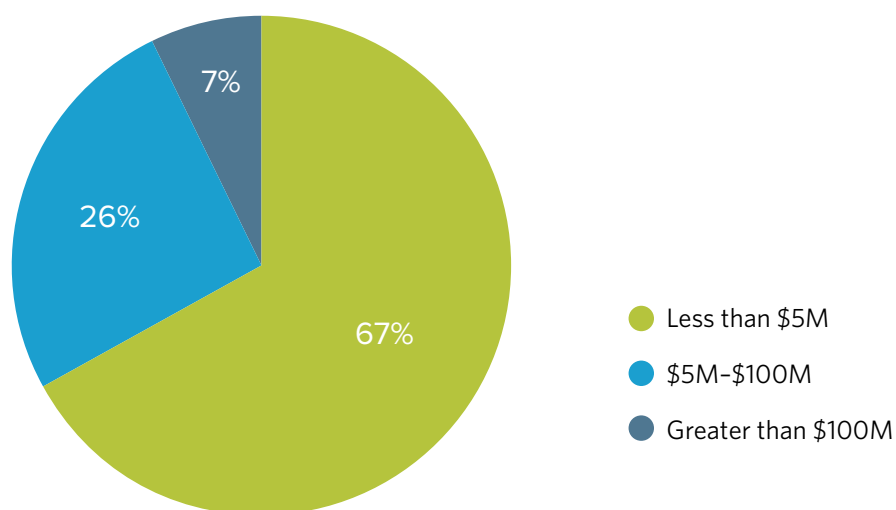
Respondents answered through an online survey. Below, we have broken down the professional roles of individual respondents.

Figure 2. Sample Composition by Role of Respondents



The most common roles were Owners/Partners/Principals, comprising 60% of survey respondents. Sales and Marketing professionals made up 23% of respondents, followed by Operational Executives (9%) and Senior Executives (7%). A clear majority of responding individuals were decision-makers within their firms.

Figure 3. Sample Composition by Firm Annual Revenue

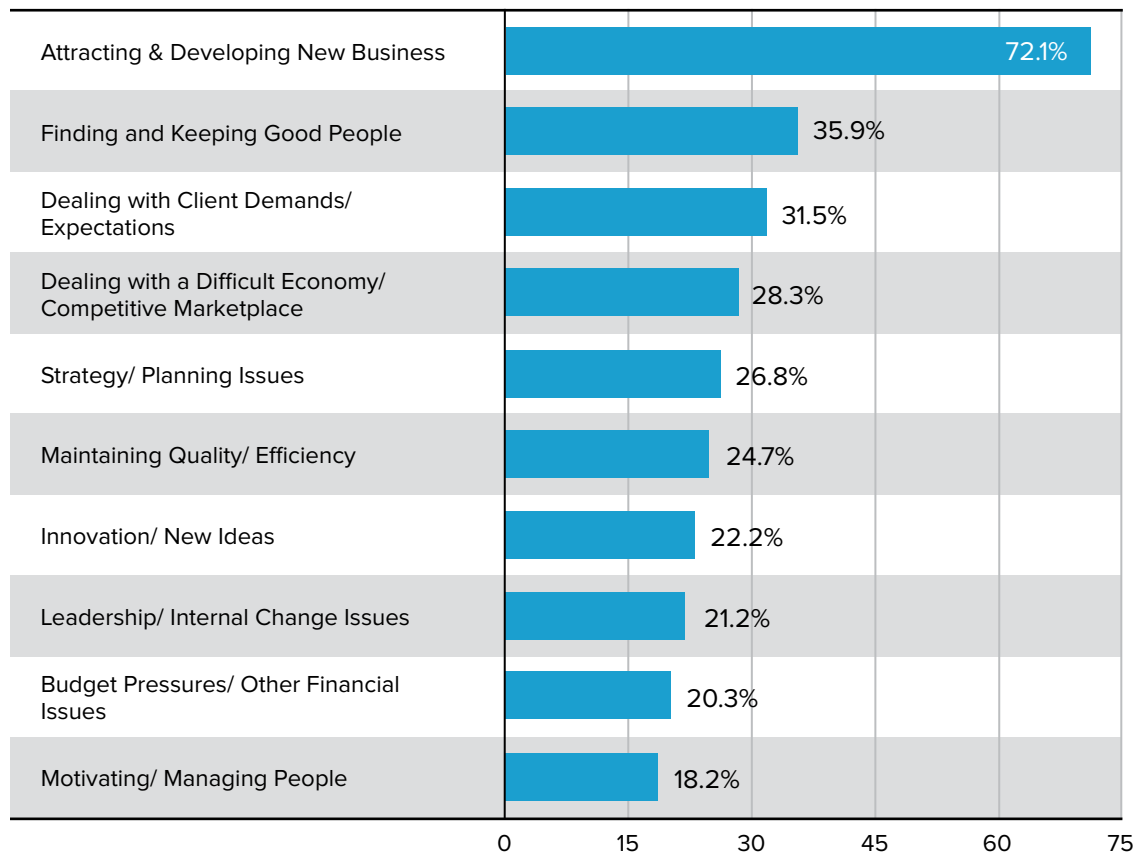


The majority of responding firms (67%) brought in annual revenue of less than \$5 million. 26% of respondents had revenues of between \$5 and \$100 million a year, and 7% saw over \$100 million.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

First, we asked firms which business challenges they faced today. Responses indicate a professional services landscape riddled with numerous and significant obstacles — but one issue stood out above the rest.

Figure 4. Business Challenges Facing Professional Services Firms Today



72.1% of professional services firms identify attracting and developing new business as the number one challenge facing them today. This response is more than twice as common as the next most frequently cited challenges, such as finding and keeping good employees and dealing with client demands.

Though the difficulty of generating new business is the clear stand-out issue, respondents identified an average of 3.5 different challenges facing their businesses, with each of the top ten challenges receiving significant concern. For professional services firms today, finding new business is a particularly urgent challenge amidst a range of other pressing business issues.

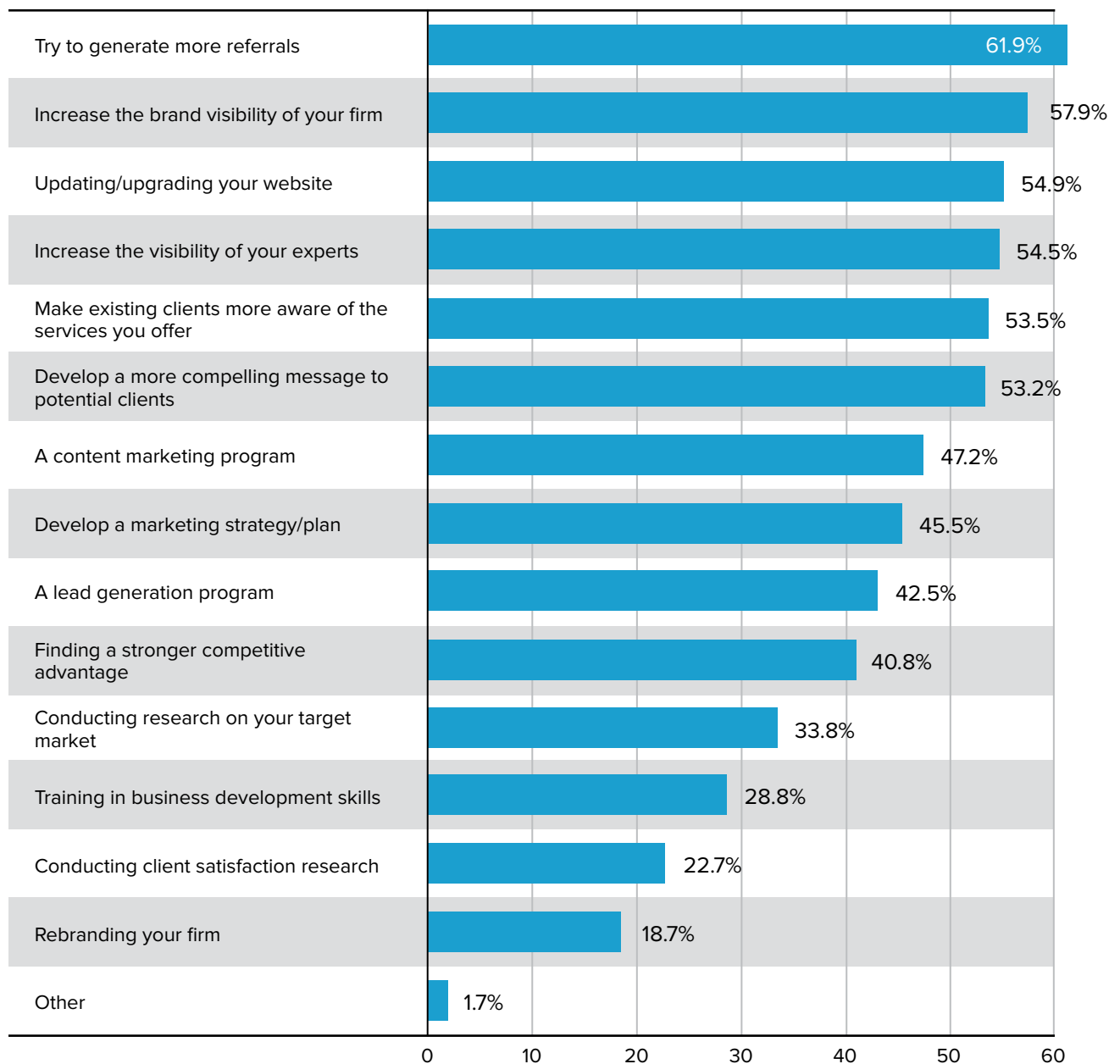
72%
of firms are challenged by
finding new business.



MARKETING INITIATIVES

Next, we asked respondents which professional services marketing initiatives they were likely to focus on in the next year. The results revealed that firms intend to utilize a wide variety of techniques in 2015.

Figure 5. Professional Services' Planned Marketing Initiatives in 2015



In the next year, professional services firms are likely to focus on an average of 5.7 different marketing initiatives. The most common emphasis (61.9%) is generating more referrals, followed closely by increasing brand visibility (57.9%), updating or upgrading their firms' websites (54.9%), and increasing the visibility of their firms' experts (54.5%).

This clustering of high-priority emphases reflects an environment in which firms are attempting to tackle disparate challenges through multiple channels and techniques – many of which are interdependent or mutually reinforcing. An upgraded website, for example, may help raise the visibility of a firm's experts through prominent placement of their blog posts as well as clarify the services that the firm offers.



Firms plan to focus on

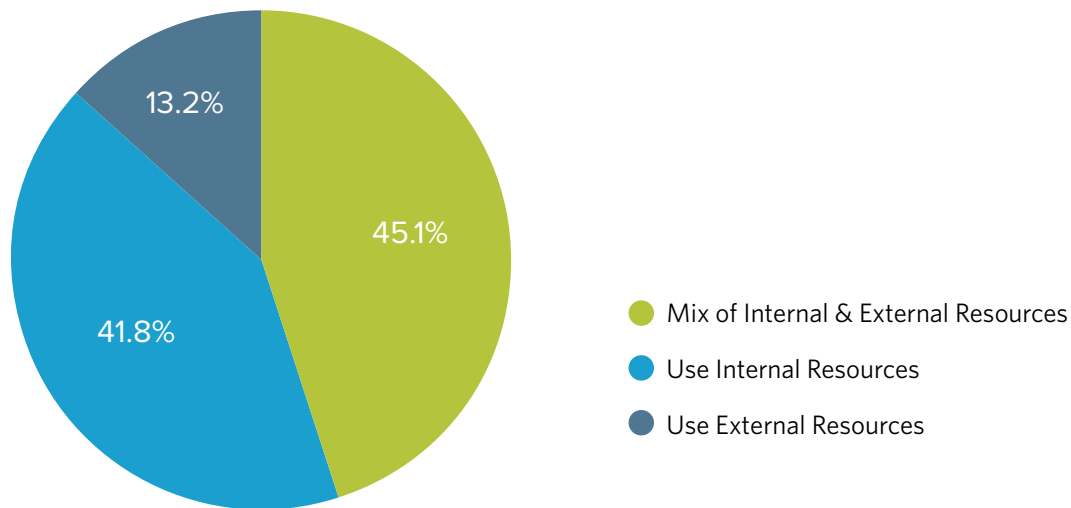
5.7

different marketing initiatives next year.

APPROACH TO ADDRESSING MARKETING INITIATIVES

We asked respondents which approaches they would consider adopting in order to implement their planned initiatives for the next year: external resources, internal resources, or a mix of the two.

Figure 6. Professional Services Marketing Approaches for 2015

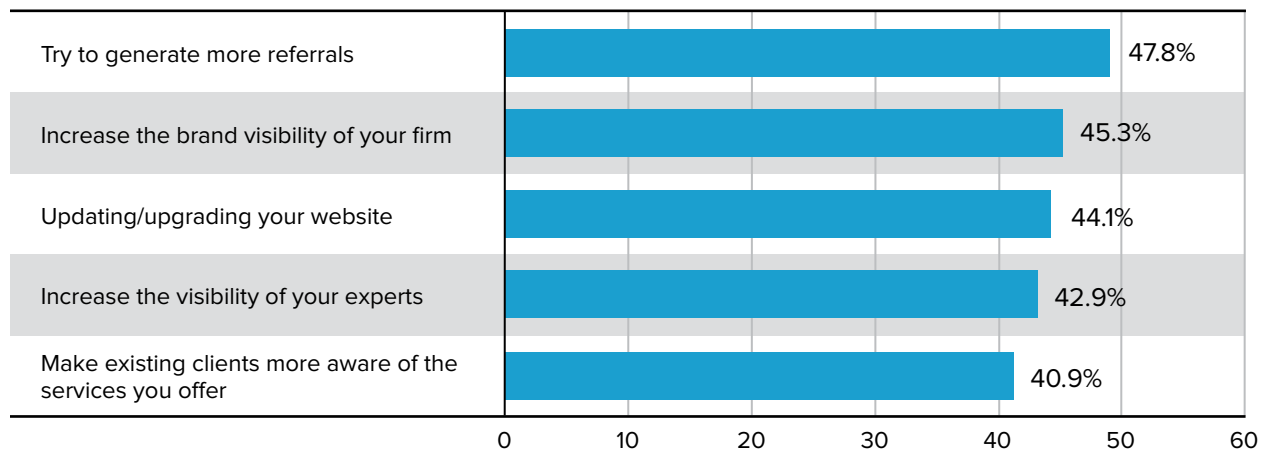


Over 45% of professional services firms say they would consider using both internal and external resources to address their marketing initiatives in 2015. 41.8% of respondents will consider relying on internal resources, while 13.2% consider depending only on external marketing resources. The vast majority of firms intend to be involved to at least some degree in their marketing initiatives.

MARKETING INITIATIVES ADDRESSED BY OUTSIDE RESOURCES

Below, we have broken down the top marketing initiatives identified by respondents who were most likely to use outside resources such as marketing agencies or freelancers. Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they would prioritize these top initiatives.

Figure 7. Planned Marketing Initiatives Firms Would Address with Outside Resources



Here, we see a recapitulation of the priorities identified in Figure 5. These are initiatives that firms may seek external assistance in implementing, due either to a lack of resources or some uncertainty in how to proceed.

INDUSTRY BREAKDOWNS

In this section, we have broken down the top five business challenges facing each vertical covered by the survey, as well as the top five marketing initiatives that firms in those verticals intend to undertake in 2015.

Accounting and Finance

In accounting and finance, both leadership and technology issues are more prominent than in the professional services as a whole — though the primary issue remains the development of new business.

Figure 8. Top Business Challenges for Accounting and Finance Firms

Accounting and Finance Top 5 Business Challenges

Attracting & Developing New Business	70.5%
Finding/ Keeping Good People	51.1%
Leadership/ Internal Change Issues	33.0%
Technology Issues	30.7%
Dealing with Client Demands/ Expectations	29.6%

Figure 9. Top Marketing Initiatives for Accounting and Finance Firms

Accounting and Finance Top 5 Marketing Initiatives

Try to Generate More Referrals	50.0%
Increase the Visibility of Your Experts	42.5%
Make Existing Clients More Aware of the Services You Offer	40.0%
Increase the Brand Visibility of Your Firm	37.5%
A Content Marketing Program	37.5%

Accounting and finance firms rank content marketing programs relatively highly on their list of planned initiatives, compared to other verticals, and place a particular emphasis on the development of their experts.



Architecture/Engineering/Construction

The business challenges of the A/E/C space track closely to those across the professional services, with quality and efficiency issues ranking relatively highly.

Figure 10. Top Business Challenges for A/E/C Firms



Figure 11. Top Marketing Initiatives for A/E/C Firms



A/E/C firms are placing a special emphasis on building awareness of their services. This reflects an industry-wide need to clarify and specify the full range of firms' service offerings. A/E/C firms are also particularly focused on identifying stronger competitive advantages and standing out from the rest of the marketplace.

Marketing/Communications

Marketing and communications firms seek to attract and develop new business at an even higher rate than many other verticals. They are also notably focused on both cost and quality control.

Figure 12. Top Business Challenges for Marketing/Communications Firms

Marketing/Communications Top 5 Business Challenges

Attracting & Developing New Business	80.6%
Dealing with Client Demands/ Expectations	44.4%
Maintaining Quality/ Efficiency	23.6%
Strategy/ Planning Issues	23.6%
Keeping Project Costs in Control	23.6%

Figure 13. Top Marketing Initiatives for Marketing/Communications Firms

Marketing/Communications Top 5 Marketing Initiatives

Try to Generate More Referrals	44.8%
Increase the Brand Visibility of Your Firm	41.8%
A Lead Generation Program	38.8%
Make Existing Clients More Aware of the Services You Offer	38.8%
Develop a More Compelling Message to Potential Clients	35.8%

Lead generation programs, greater specification of services, and the development of more compelling messages are all especially high priorities for marketing and communications firms. Here, we see initiatives such as lead generation programs that clearly and directly align with marketing firms' primary challenge of developing new business.

Management Consulting

Management consulting firms seek to attract and develop new business at a significantly higher rate than most other verticals. They also identify innovation as a particularly high-ranking concern.

Figure 14. Top Business Challenges for Management Consulting Firms



Figure 15. Top Marketing Initiatives for Management Consulting Firms



Management consulting firms' prioritized initiatives align closely with those of the professional services as a whole, except that these firms place a particular emphasis on developing more compelling messaging to target potential clients.

Technology

Like firms in every vertical, technology firms are looking for ways to attract new business. But they simultaneously place a strong emphasis on finding and keeping effective employees and generating new, innovative ideas. Innovation ranks higher as a business challenge than in any other industry covered by the survey.

Figure 16. Top Business Challenges for Technology Firms

Technology Top 5 Business Challenges	
Attracting & Developing New Business	63.8%
Finding/ Keeping Good People	42.6%
Innovation/ New Ideas	29.8%
Dealing With a Difficult Economy/ Competitive Marketplace	27.7%
Dealing With Client Demands/ Expectations	27.7%

Figure 17. Top Marketing Initiatives for Technology Firms

Technology Top 5 Marketing Initiatives	
Develop a More Compelling Message to Potential Clients	35.9%
Updating/ Upgrading Your Website	33.3%
Try to Generate More Referrals	30.8%
Develop a Marketing Strategy/ Plan	30.8%
Increase the Brand Visibility of Your Firm	28.2%

For technology firms, developing more compelling messaging is a top priority. When executed successfully, this initiative may both articulate the value of innovative services and help to attract new business. Technology firms also focus strongly on updating their websites.

CONCLUSION

Across industries, professional services firms face a variety of challenges in the New Year — and these challenges are headlined by a widespread need to develop new business. The majority of firms seek to address these challenges with a mix of internal and external resources, and they plan to implement numerous initiatives in order to do so.

While these initiatives differ somewhat from industry to industry, there are clear themes running through the planned marketing strategies of our full body of respondents. Most firms seek to generate more referrals and increase their brand visibility in the New Year. By expanding and improving their online presences, cultivating the visibility of their experts, clarifying their service offerings, improving their messaging, and taking other steps, firms will seek to achieve a competitive advantage and continue to grow.





About the Hinge Research Institute

The **Hinge Research Institute** is a division of Hinge dedicated to studying high-growth professional services firms and their clients. We collect data and analyze marketplace trends to discover why some firms grow much faster than average while spending less on marketing. Our mission is to share this knowledge so that every professional services firm can prosper.

We invite you to explore our full library of research reports, books, and other publications at:
www.hingemarketing.com/library

For more information about the Hinge Research Institute, please contact:

Research Director

Lee W. Frederiksen, Ph.D.
lfrederiksen@hingemarketing.com
703.391.8870

How Hinge Can Help You

Hinge is a leading branding and marketing firm for the professional services. Our original research on high-growth firms and professional services buyers helps clients grow faster and be more profitable.

We provide a complete suite of services, including research and strategy, brand development, comprehensive online marketing programs, award-winning creative, content marketing, and lead-generating websites. We work with firms around the world with a special focus on architecture, engineering, construction, accounting, technology, management consulting, and legal services.

Like to keep it simple? Many of our clients choose to enjoy the cost benefit and ease of engaging with one of our multiple programs:

- Online Marketing Programs
- Branding Program
- High Performance Websites
- Visible Expert™ Program

To find out how Hinge can help your professional services firm experience faster growth, contact us!

Hinge

1851 Alexander Bell Drive, Suite 350
Reston, VA 20191
703.391.8870
info@hingemarketing.com

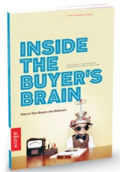
Additional Resources

Books:



The Visible ExpertSM: How to create industry stars. And why every professional services firm should care.

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the-visible-expert



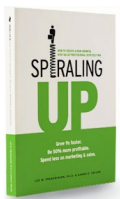
Inside the Buyer's Brain

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/book-inside-the-buyers-brain



Online Marketing for Professional Services

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/online_marketing_for_professional_services



Spiraling Up: How to Create a High Growth, High Value Professional Services Firm

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spiraling_up_create_a_high_growth_high_value_professional_services_firm



Ask About Our Programs

Visible ExpertSM Program

Designed to help individuals cultivate an authoritative online presence in their area of expertise, the Visible ExpertSM Program delivers the tools and strategy required to build personal reputation and visibility in the marketplace. Based on extensive research, the Visible ExpertSM Program helps experts become recognized industry leaders.

Visible FirmSM Program

Designed to deliver more referrals, higher profits, and faster growth, the Visible FirmSM Program will build a powerful marketing platform to engage your audiences and build your visibility. Based on the most extensive research into high-growth firms ever conducted, the Visible FirmSM Program will ground your marketing in science and leverage your firm's expertise to draw in the right audiences.

High Performance Website Program

The High Performance Website Program makes your website into a lead-generating machine — bundling a beautiful new site with a suite of powerful of online tools. Designed from the ground up to attract the right visitors from search engines, a high performance site uses educational content, smart offers, and custom features to engage and convert qualified leads.

Branding Program

Our Branding Program is designed to carry your firm's reputation confidently into the marketplace by giving you a suite of powerful branding tools. Based on extensive research and analysis, our branding strategies increase your firm's credibility and visibility in your industry. The services will also differentiate your firm and provide clear, compelling messages for each of your target audiences.

For more information, call 703.391.8870 or email us at info@hingemarketing.com.