

The Fast Lane: All on the same team?

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What if the disconnect between the marketing department and management is because the marketing staff is not working for the same clients as the rest of the firm?

How many times have you heard your senior managers say “we’re all on the same team,” or “we all work for the same company?” From one firm to the next, managers all seem to sing a similar “one-firm, one-team” song.

But how many times have you heard your senior managers say that marketing’s client is the internal technical person, regardless of the ultimate (external) client to whom the technical person is submitting the proposal? Does this sound like a “one-firm, one-team” song to you?

I talk with a lot of marketing staff in a lot of firms in a lot of cities. They all comment on the very apparent disconnect between marketing folks and the technical staff in the typical A/E/C firm. We generally explain it away by saying that the technical folks just don’t have an accurate and solid understanding of what marketing staff do or why it is important to them and the firm.

But what if that’s not really it at all? What if the disconnect actually is because the marketing staff is not working for the same clients as the rest of the firm?

Let me pose a situation that is not totally hypothetical:

Engineer Smith learns that the City of San Somewhere is about to release an RFP for the design and construction of two miles of major urban thoroughfare. He passes on this information to Principal Jones and Department Manager Brown. All three have good contacts at the city and have been frequent visitors to the city’s offices.

After the go/no-go analysis confirms that the project is a “go,” a marketing staff member is assigned and a pursuit team assembled. The principal’s client is the City of San Somewhere; the Project Manager’s client is San Somewhere; the pursuit team’s client is San Somewhere— except for the marketing person, who has been told over and over again that his or her client is the technical leader and the rest of the pursuit team.

The marketing person will have one of the largest and most time-consuming roles in the pursuit effort, and he or she will be the only one who has had little or no substantive contact with the city. In effect, the marketing person— despite the importance of his or her role— will be the only person who has almost no idea of what the city likes or dislikes relative to the content and layout of the qualifications statement, the proposal, or the presentation.

Now let me pose another situation:

As above, Engineer Smith learns about the City of San Somewhere's RFP, reports the information to the principal and department manager, performs a go/no-go analysis, and assigns a marketing person. Next, Engineer Smith devotes an afternoon to "wander" through the City's offices, taking every opportunity to speak with anyone who has any connection to the anticipated project. He makes sure to see the City's anticipated project manager and someone on their purchasing staff.

He brings with him the marketing person who, in addition to the technical information exchanged, asks questions and pays attention to what is said about content, format, organization, layout, and likes and dislikes regarding the proposal. These are things that generally don't pass the filters of the technical staff, but marketing staff know how important these things can be—in the final proposal, they can be the difference between solid technical work and a winning proposal.

Finding out the likes and dislikes of a client is critical to being able to create winning proposals for that client. Using these likes and dislikes is the responsibility of the group doing most of the preparation work. But if marketing is creating a proposal utilizing the likes and dislikes of Engineer Smith, *their* client, and the technical staff wants as little involvement in proposals as possible (which is generally the case), then who is applying any knowledge of the City of San Somewhere's likes and dislikes to the development of the proposal document?

Here's the real deal: If the marketing staff are allowed to play a role in this effort equal to that of the technical staff, and if they all work together for the same client—the *external* client—they can make a very strong contribution to the overall proposal effort, embracing both the technical *and* the production aspects. But they have to be given an opportunity to participate at all levels in order to make that contribution! Wouldn't it be nice if we were all playing on the same team—for a change?

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