Emerging Manager Monthly, September 2007

StreetSavvy Marketersm
Wednesday, September 5, 2007

Race to the Finish

Here's a question, I'm often asked: *Are there certain times of the year that are especially good or particularly bad for a marketing push?* Conventional wisdom would have you believe that some months are so slow—say July or August—because everyone's away, or wishes they were that you might as well close up shop and head for the beach. That's not been my experience. Smart marketers always have their head in the game. They're always looking for a competitive edge and if they find themselves with down-time, they're using it to develop, fine-tune or evaluate what's working and what's not.

If you really want to harness the push-pull of the marketplace, though, development of a marketing calendar can be very effective, depending on the scope of your business and the range of your products and investment strategies. The idea here is one of not just working hard, but working smart.

A marketing calendar can be used to match dates or periods in the business or investment cycle that lend themselves to pitching specific investment products to specific segments of your target markets, including, the consultant community or institutional or individual investors.

For example, although institutional clients typically review their portfolios regularly to see how they stack up in terms of absolute and relative performance, asset allocation, balance, performance attribution, and the like, it's not unusual for portfolios to get the closest scrutiny in the fourth quarter as clients look back on the year and ahead to the next.

With that in mind, the savvy emerging money manager is going to put extra emphasis on positioning his or her best performing strategies with the consultant community in mid- to late summer.

Individual investors might not be as rigorous or consistent as institutional clients in reviewing their portfolios, but surveys show they take a particularly close look at investments in late March and early April as they start pulling their tax papers together. Do you have a tax-advantaged fund? The first quarter would probably be a good time to talk it up.

Another good business practice is to pair your marketing calendar with the editorial calendars of publications that focus on your market niche. If you're an institutional investor, that means publications like **Plan Sponsor**, P**ensions & Investments** and **Institutional Investor**, among others. For the hedge fund manager, go-to publications include—but are not limited to—**Alpha**, **Absolute Return**, **HedgeWorld** and

Alternative Investment News, and that's just on this side of the Atlantic. Mutual fund managers should put **Money Magazine** and **Kiplinger's Personal Finance** at the top of their hit list.

And don't forget publications like **The Wall Street Journal**, **Barron's** and others that straddle the institutional/individual investor fence. These also provide regular coverage or columns focusing on a broad array of investment strategies.

The good news is that it has never been easier to get access to editorial calendars, which spell out—often a year in advance—topics that the publications plan to write about. Basically, all you have to do is to click onto the magazine's Web site and look for an icon that says "Media Kit" or "Advertising." Typically, that's where you'll find the page listing the editorial calendar. [A warning: Publications occasionally stray from their stated editorial plan, so double check on dates.]

Timing is important here. If a publication says it plans to feature a story about large-cap growth funds in December, it's a safe bet that the article will be written by the end of October, if not sooner. To be effective, you need to think ahead of the game by offering content or sources for the article as much as three months in advance of its publication date.

What does this mean for you – this minute, this month? If there is any time to push extra hard to market your message, it's in the fourth quarter. It is during this unique window of time that you can offer insight into the year's highlights and provide commentary on what lies ahead.

Many publications are already looking for experts to plug into their 2007 year-end wrap-up and 2008 forecast pieces – and it's a terrific positioning opportunity that a lot of marketers miss.

Another advantage of appearing in year-end pieces is that it puts you in the public eye just as consultants, pension plans and others are looking back on the year and repositioning their portfolios. If somebody is going to fall by the wayside, this could be your opportunity to slip in.

How important is performance? Some people will tell you that it's everything and that consultants only look at performance through databases and filters, and the guy that demonstrates the best performance, gets in. They'd be wrong.

While performance is a critical factor, it's not the only thing consultants and advisors base their recommendations on. Pension plan consultants, private office and trust consultants, and financial advisors for that matter, are also looking for the "right" kinds of investment firms, i.e., the right fit for their clients.

That means going beyond performance and stats and taking a close look at the prospective investment firm's brand and reputation and how they are regarded from a peer and client perspective.

So what's the best way to get noticed? By building a solid reputation in the industry, becoming known for what you do best, and clearly differentiating your firm from your competition. In other words, positive publicity and reputation management.

If you're an undiscovered manager, and you're not big enough yet to make it into the database, how else will anyone know you exist? So get to work now. It's not too late.

Bill Blase is the president of New York City-based W.T. Blase & Associates, one of the nation’s leading corporate and market positioning firms, and StreetSpeak, Inc., an executive presentation and news interview training firm for financial executives. Bill can be reached at billblase@wtblase.com.