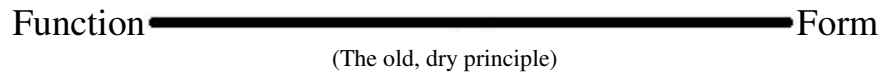


## Marketing your Business- Form vs. Function

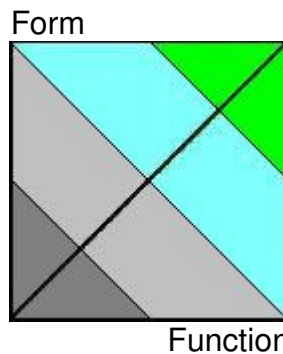
By Scott Campbell / Impact Marketing

You might have a hard time believing this...just as I do writing it, but I recently found myself in a conversation with a friend at his office about the concept of “form versus function”...you know, the old engineering standard. For those not schooled directly in the engineering arts (like myself), the concept says that there are two ends of the spectrum...one end for functionality, the other end for aesthetics or “looks”. The debate centers around which point of the spectrum is optimal.



I think both sides are important when developing a marketing program of any kind. My opinion is that you don't have to give up one for the other...that they can be inclusive of each other. After all, why *can't* you have fancy graphics as well as a strong message?

This frankly has been an area of discussion in marketing for a long time. There is a school within the marketing industry just around concepts...where headlines and copy are the things that drive business. These folks are all about direct results. There is another school made up mostly of graphic artists and illustrators who are more into what marketing campaigns look like and how they're presented. These folks are more concerned about building a brand and indirect (as well as direct) results.



(Slightly more involved graphic, but still pretty dry)

The whole discussion may be a bit dry to you, but I do feel as though it's important. And I think it goes beyond these basic thoughts. At a high-level perspective, function consists of the metrics behind growing...the goals, the tactics, the tracking and measurements; while the form consists of the aesthetics...the branding, the messaging, the relationship-building activities.

The first is quantifiable, the second largely qualitative. So marketing, much like the logical sciences, is both science and art working together toward an objective. Breaking down the steps into 'function then form' helps us to understand further—

### Planning

You want a marketing plan that is in concert with the direction of the organization. Frankly, I've found that most small businesses waive the idea of actually planning their growth...expecting it to grow solely on relationships they've developed over the years.

The relationships are great...and should be nourished. But owners know all too well the pitfalls of failing to plan. And they also realize that we've entered the era of proactive marketing. This consists of setting goals, identifying a target market, developing a niche, tracking competition, and course-correction where needed. This is function at its finest.

### **Marketing Kit**

Proactive firms know that the basis of any ongoing marketing effort lies in its communications foundation, or "marketing kit". This kit is what some companies have been paying to the expensive advertising agencies for years.

Effective marketing materials and ad concepts today are information-driven. That is, the business is presented around a single theme in a number of ways that reach the spectrum of prospects most effectively. Consumers, both business and personal, are savvier today...so the messages need to display heart, passion and experience. The marketing kit is where function and form meet.

### **Advertising**

There are a myriad of advertising tactics available today, which would fall under 'form'. But which one to choose? Are consumers turning more to the internet for products and services? How about more traditional print tactics? Are prospects even affected lately by advertising?

The studies show that they continue to be...assuming that the effort is combined with tactics that have been successful in this industry. Which leads to...

### **Referral Marketing**

Ah yes, referral, or 'word-of-mouth' marketing. The oldest marketing tactic is still the most effective. And that's certainly true in the small business world. Without influential contacts, we all know that the business is in trouble.

Well, how about taking referral marketing to the 'next level'? What many fail to realize is that this tactic can be transformed from a reactive (waiting for the phone to ring) to a proactive (identifying and targeting strategic partners) one.

The question to ask is how do we develop stronger and broader-reaching relationships? And how do we organize our clients and strategic partners to talk about us? If you don't have a plan for this, you need to create one, because increasing referrals is one of the most effective ways of increasing the visibility of the business.

### **Public Relations**

Another strong tactic if proactively pursued. Again, most wait for the journalist's call...you know, the one that almost never happens. Waiting is a mistake.

Your new project *is* news worthy. You *are* affecting your community. An article in the local newspaper, a TV interview, or a positive blog creates credibility that just can't be bought.

## **Tracking**

What is working? It's shocking how many businesses fail to get feedback on their marketing efforts. And it's a shame that those who do don't act on it. The usefulness in finding what works, is simply to do more of the same. If a marketing effort is not working, then can it be fixed? Sure. But if you can't see that it's not working, how would you know?

Tracking helps you find the activity that works for you. The combination is out there waiting for you. Seek it out.

Brilliant marketing is an example of simple design planning and execution...a union of form and function. Embrace this principle for marketing the business as you do for the services you provide and you'll witness good business.