The Bloom Group

Research Report
May 2006

The Effectiveness of Professional Services Websites
A Research Study on Websites as Lead Generators

Background

From December 2005 through March 2006, The Bloom Group conducted a study on professional services websites. Our goal was to determine the effectiveness of professional services websites (largely, those of consulting, law, IT services and accounting firms) in providing useful information to potential clients – information that would encourage them to contact the firm (i.e., to generate leads). Our study was done in two parts:

- Our evaluations of the websites of 80 of the largest professional services firms on several criteria:

  - Whether they allowed potential clients to rapidly understand what expertise the firm provides
  - How well they enabled Web viewers to determine whether the firm had expertise on their specific issues
  - The degree to which the sites helped to establish the professional services firm's expertise.

- An online survey of 37 professional services firms of a range of sizes, about two-thirds of which were $50 million or less in annual revenue. For this survey, the typical respondent was a senior marketing person in the firm.

From this data on the websites of professional services firms large and small, we drew some conclusions about the current state of professional services websites. Of course, it is by no means representative of the professional services industry as a whole. Further, given that websites are ever-changing entities, this research should be considered a snapshot at a moment in time.

Nonetheless, we do believe the findings provide important insights to professional services firms: chiefly, if the sites we polled and viewed are indicative, that professional services firms must make considerable changes to their websites to make them strong lead-generating marketing tools.

Study Highlights

- **Website content to impress potential clients is less than impressive**. Our online survey found that while professional services firms rate prospective clients as their most important audience for the websites, they believe that the *quality* of the information for this audience about the problems they solve, their approaches to solving them, and examples of their client work is only satisfactory. Some 62% of the survey respondents said the most important audience for their website was prospective clients (vs. 24% for existing clients and 11% for potential employees). However, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=very poor, 3=satisfactory, 5=very good), they gave their web content on the problems they solve a 3.6, their approaches/methods a 3.4, and client case studies a 2.9.

- **The website today is not a good lead generator – but professional services firms want them to be in the near future**. Professional services firms rate their websites' marketing capabilities – especially their ability to generate leads for new business – as only mediocre (only 3.1 on our scale of 1 to 5). Yet they believe their websites will be far more effective lead generators over the next five years, with 46% seeing their website in five years as more effective at generating leads than other marketing activities and 49% believing the website will be as effective as other marketing activities. Today, only 24% believe their website is their most effective marketing tool at generating business leads.

- **The professional services firms with the most resources are not necessarily the ones with the best websites** – i.e., the websites that are organized in a way that is most useful for prospective clients to understand what expertise they provide and the depth of that expertise. In our evaluations of 80 websites across four professional services sectors (consulting, IT services, law and accounting), the largest firms in each sector did not necessarily get our highest ratings. In consulting, the leaders were Watson Wyatt, CRAI and Gallup Consulting; in IT services, EDS, Oracle and Atos Origin; in law, Wilmer Hale, White & Case, and Paul Weiss Rifkind; and accounting, Eide Bailly, Deloitte & Touche and J.H. Cohn.

- **The home pages of most professional services websites, on average, are mediocre at describing what business problems they addressed, according to our evaluations of 80 sites**. Law and accounting firm sites were poor at this, while consulting and IT services sites were far better (although still mediocre). Overall, the sites do an inadequate job explaining to potential clients what basic problems or sets of problems their firms solve. As a result, we believe their websites are a long way from being what we refer to as "prospect friendly."

- **Law firms were far better than other professional services firms at putting web viewers directly in touch with the experts in their firms**. They far more often provided contact information on specific professionals than did consulting, IT service and accounting firms. And law firms were much more likely to provide biographies of their professionals than the other three sectors. We gave law firm websites a 4.5 grade on our scale for this website capability vs. 1.4 for consulting firms, 1.1 for accounting firms and 0.4 for IT services companies. Apparently, law firms place far more importance in promoting their employees and their specific expertise than do consulting, accounting or IT services firms.

- **Few of the professional services firms make it easy for web viewers to sign up for seminars and other marketing events, or to subscribe to firm email publications**. All four sectors scored poorly on providing users with the ability to sign up online for seminars or webinars (1.3 on a scale of 0 to 5). They also scored poorly (1.7) on the enabling viewers to sign up for email newsletters.

- **IT services firms were much more likely to provide information on their client work than other professional services sectors**. They scored 4.4 on this attribute (scale of 0 to 5), compared with 1.3 for law firms and 1.6 for accounting firms. Consulting firms scored 3.0 on average.

I. Evaluations of 80 Large Professional Services Websites

In December 2005 through March 2006, The Bloom Group viewed and evaluated the websites of 80 of the largest professional services firms in four sectors: consulting, IT services, accounting and law. We based our evaluations on the degree to which their websites:

a) Organized their content in ways that were most useful to their target audiences, especially to potential clients of their firms. By this we mean whether they organized their website content – from the home page on through the site – in ways that made it easy for potential clients to quickly determine whether the professional services firm could address their particular issue; the amount and quality of expertise and client work it could demonstrate on the Web in its areas of focus; and the ability of prospects to learn more about the firm's services and the specific people in the firm with the expertise they sought.

b) The amount of content they provided to show their depth of expertise in their practice areas (e.g., client case studies, articles, newsletters, conference material, presentations, professionals' bios, etc.)

A. Accessibility of Website for Key Target Audiences

Whether the site had identifiable sections on the home page for prospects, existing clients, press, investors, potential employees, etc.:

Sections	Avg. Score	Consulting Firms	IT Services Firms	Law Firms	Accounting Firms
Recruits	4.9	4.9	4.4	5.0	5.0
Press	2.8	2.1	4.2	1.6	4.0
Prospects	1.6	2.8	4.1	0.4	0.7
Existing clients	1.5	1.1	0.9	2.3	1.3
Investors (if applicable)	1.0	3.6	4.2	0.0	0.3
Scale of 0 to 5					

Whether the site had identifiable sections on home page for key aspects of firm's business (practices, publications, offices, events, etc.)

Sections	Avg. Score	Consulting Firms	IT Services Firms	Law Firms	Accounting Firms
Service offerings	4.5	4.1	3.7	4.9	4.8
About the firm	4.4	5.0	4.4	3.7	4.6
Firm overview	4.3	4.3	4.8	4.1	4.3
Office locations	4.2	4.4	3.8	4.4	4.1
Publications	3.7	3.5	1.0	4.2	4.5
Industry sections	2.9	2.5	4.0	1.2	4.5
Upcoming events	2.6	1.9	2.2	3.0	3.1
Process/approaches	2.2	1.7	1.4	1.7	3.4
History of the firm	2.1	1.9	0.9	2.8	2.2
Client case studies	1.6	2.3	1.9	1.4	1.2
Functional sections	1.0	2.6	1.2	0	0.5
Scale of 0 to 5					

B. Degree to Which the Websites Addressed Potential Client's Buying Process

Ease of determining what core business problems the firm specializes in solving

Sections	Avg. Score	Consulting Firms	IT Services Firms	Law Firms	Accounting Firms
Services to solve them	4.4	3.4	3.8	5.0	5.0
Business problems firm addresses	1.5	3.3	3.7	0	0.6
Uniqueness of services	0.9	1.1	1.3	0.6	1.0
Scale of 0 to 5					

Site interactivity (ease of finding the following on the home page)

Sections	Avg. Score	Consulting Firms	IT Services Firms	Law Firms	Accounting Firms
Contact the firm (general)	4.7	4.6	5.0	4.8	4.8
Search engine	4.4	4.3	3.3	4.3	5.0
Contact the firm (specific person)	2.4	2.0	0.3	4.8	1.3
Email newsletter signup	1.7	1.9	0.3	0.9	2.9
Seminar/Webinar signup	1.3	0.8	0.3	1.1	2.3
Site personalization	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.3	0.3
Podcasts	0.2	0.5	0	0.2	0
RSS feeds	0.3	0.3	0	0.4	0
Link to firm or individual blogs	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Scale of 0 to 5					

C. Type of Website Content Within Practice Pages and Anywhere on the Site

Content Type	Avg. Score	Consulting Firms	IT Services Firms	Law Firms	Accounting Firms
Within a practice					
Articles	2.4	2.8	2.4	2.3	2.1
Client case studies	1.9	2.3	2.7	1.5	0.9
Professional biographies	1.5	1.2	0.3	4.0	0.3
Research reports	1.2	2.1	1.8	0.0	0.7
Information on future conference presentations	0.5	0.3	1.8	0.0	0.0
Email newsletter archives	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.8
Current email newsletter copy	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
Past conference presentations	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.8	0.0
Books	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.3
Anywhere on site					
Articles	4.1	3.9	3.3	4.3	4.8
Press quotes	2.9	1.9	2.3	3.8	3.7
Client case study (written)	2.6	3.0	4.4	1.3	1.6
Information on upcoming conference presentations	2.2	1.2	3.0	1.6	3.0
Consultant biographies	1.9	1.4	0.4	4.5	1.1
Email newsletter archives	1.8	1.6	1.2	1.4	2.9
Current email newsletter copy	1.7	1.2	1.2	1.3	2.9
Research reports	1.7	3.2	1.8	0.7	1.2
Past conference presentations	1.5	0.5	1.5	2.8	1.2
Books	0.9	1.3	0.3	1.3	0.8
Client case studies (videos of clients talking)	0.2	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.3
Scale of 0 to 5					

D. Rankings of the Top Websites of 80 Professional Services Firms in Terms of "Prospect-Friendliness"

These ratings were based on The Bloom Group's evaluation of 80 of the largest professional services firms, and specifically our evaluations of a) the content their websites provided for their key target audiences and b) the degree to which their content was organized (and the extent of the content) in a way that facilitated the buying process of potential clients.

Effectiveness of Websites of 80 Large Professional Services Firms Degree of "Prospect Friendliness"							
Rank	Consulting Firms		IT Services Firms		Law Firms		Accounting Firms	
1	Watson Wyatt	200	EDS	170	Wilmer Hale	164	Eide Bailly	195
2	CRAI	188	Oracle Services	167	White & Case	159	Deloitte & Touche	165
3	Gallup Consulting	160	Atos Origin	157	Paul Weiss Rifkind	153	J.H. Cohn	150
4	Boston Consulting	143	CIBER	155	Arnold & Porter	153	Virchow Krause	148
5	McKinsey & Co.	132	Unisys	153	Shearman &Sterling	143	BKD	144
6	IBM Bus. Consulting	115	SAP Services	144	Weil Gotshal	143	Berdon	125
7	Gartner Consulting	115	Infosys	129	O'Melveny & Myers	142	McGladrey & Pullen	122
8	Accenture	110	Hitachi Consulting	124	Kirkland & Ellis	138	Ernst & Young	118
9	Bain	109	Answerthink	121	Skadden Arps	137	Richard A. Eisner	118
10	Segal Consulting	109	HP Services	121	Cleary Gottleib	131	Clifton Gunderson	116
11	Booz Allen	99	Siebel Systems	120	Sullivan & Cromwell	126	Larson Allen	116
12	Huron Consulting	99	CSC	110	Simpson Thacher	122	KPMG	110
13	Hewitt Associates	98	First Consulting	106	Debevoise&Plimpton	112	Crow Chizek	106
14	AON	89	Fujitsu Consulting	96	GibsonDunnCrutcher	110	Moss Adams	103
15	AT Kearney	88	CGI	95	Covington & Burling	107	Grant Thornton	100
16	Milliman	80	Covansys	92	Sidley Austin	105	PWC	98
17	Towers Perrin	77	Keane	82	David Polk Wardwell	98	Reznick Group	98
18	Digitas	76	Navigant	61	Williams & Connolly	74	Cherry Bekaert	94
19	Monitor Group	45	T-Systems	55	Cravath Swaine	69	Plante & Moran	93
20	Roland Berger	45	Aquent	51	Wachtell Lipton	41	BDO Seidman	84
Based on 0 to 5 ratings on 65 criteria; maximum number of points each firm could achieve was 325							

The scores above are the sum of our evaluations about their content for key audiences and our evaluations on how much of the buying process was addressed. All in all, we rated the websites on 65 criteria. The maximum score anyone could have achieved was 325.

A. Content provided by website for key target audiences:

- Whether there were identifiable sections on the home page for different audiences (prospects, existing clients, the press, investors, recruits, etc.)
- Whether there identifiable sections on the home page for key aspects of the professional services firm (firm overview, industry and business function sections, service offerings, client work, events/seminars, publications, office locations, etc.)

B. Extent of the potential client buying process that the website addressed

- How easy was it to determine on the home page what overall business problems the firm addressed?
- Within a service line/practice area, did it contain content demonstrating the firm's expertise in the area (e.g., articles, books, email newsletters, research reports, quotes in the press, conference presentations, writeups of client case studies, etc.)?

- Anywhere on the site, did the firm have content demonstrating its expertise (e.g., articles, books, email newsletters, research reports, quotes in the press, conference presentations, write-ups of client case studies, etc.)?
- Within a service line/practice area, did the site provide information on upcoming marketing events/seminars that the firm was holding on topics in that practice area?
- Anywhere on the site, was there information on upcoming marketing events/seminars that the firm was holding?
- Ease of reaching a specific person who could provide more information on the firm's services.

E. Popularity of Professional Services Websites

The data below aggregates Web traffic data from the 80 professional services firms whose websites we evaluated (20 in each of four sectors). We calculated these four numbers by taking average numbers of pages viewed per user at each website in a sector. The daily traffic was averaged over a three-month period. Then we took the median page view number for that sector (meaning the average of the two middle numbers of the 20 numbers).

Viewers of law firm and consulting websites view more pages than viewers of IT services and accounting websites. That means they spend more time exploring and reading the content of the site. While the numerical difference looks small, visitors to law firm websites spend 32% more time on those sites than do visitors to accounting websites.
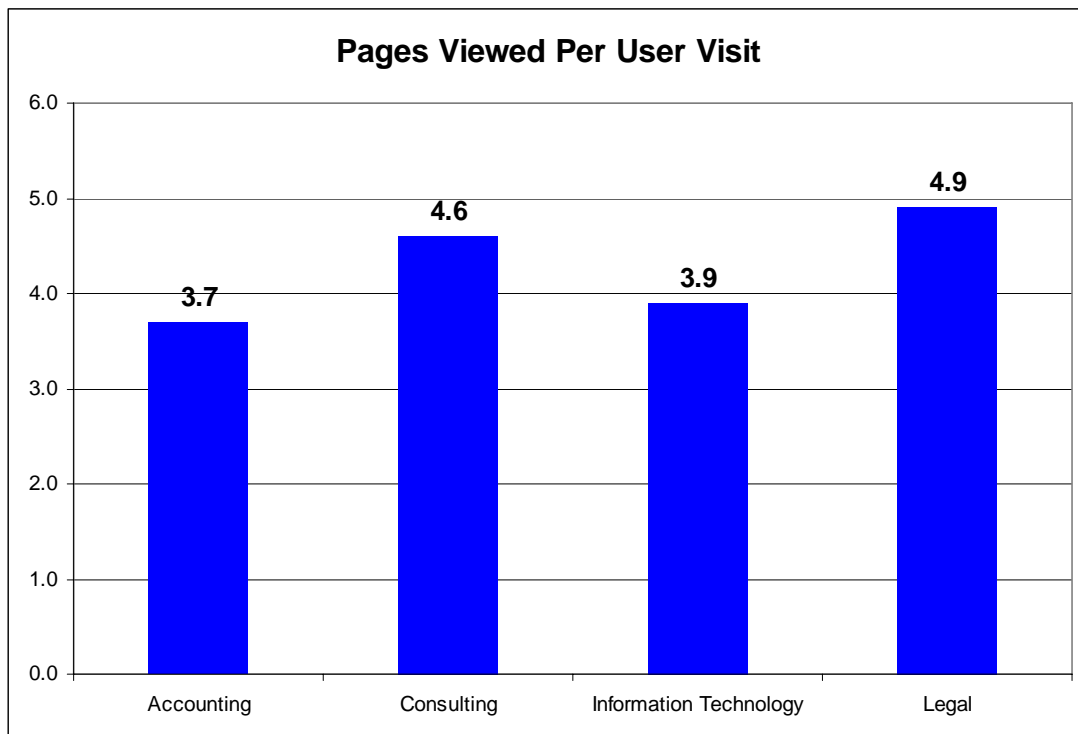

The numbers below gauge the differences among our four professional services sectors in terms of how many Web viewers they generate. The audience numbers come from Alexa's web traffic data for each website that we evaluated. Because certain sectors have larger firms (in revenue) than other sectors –

and thus, the potential to have a great number of clients and more money to spend on their websites – we wanted to compare each sector's website popularity on more of an even playing field.

Thus, we came up with a calculation that adjusted the number of Web users for a firm based on its revenue size: average audience reach per dollar of firm revenue.

The figures below reveal that consulting websites generate far more traffic than those of the other three sectors. Law firms generate the least traffic and accounting firms the second-least traffic.

Average Audience Reach Per Dollar of Firm Revenue

Sector	Value
Accounting	14.9
Consulting	41.6
Information Technology	25.5
Legal	4.7
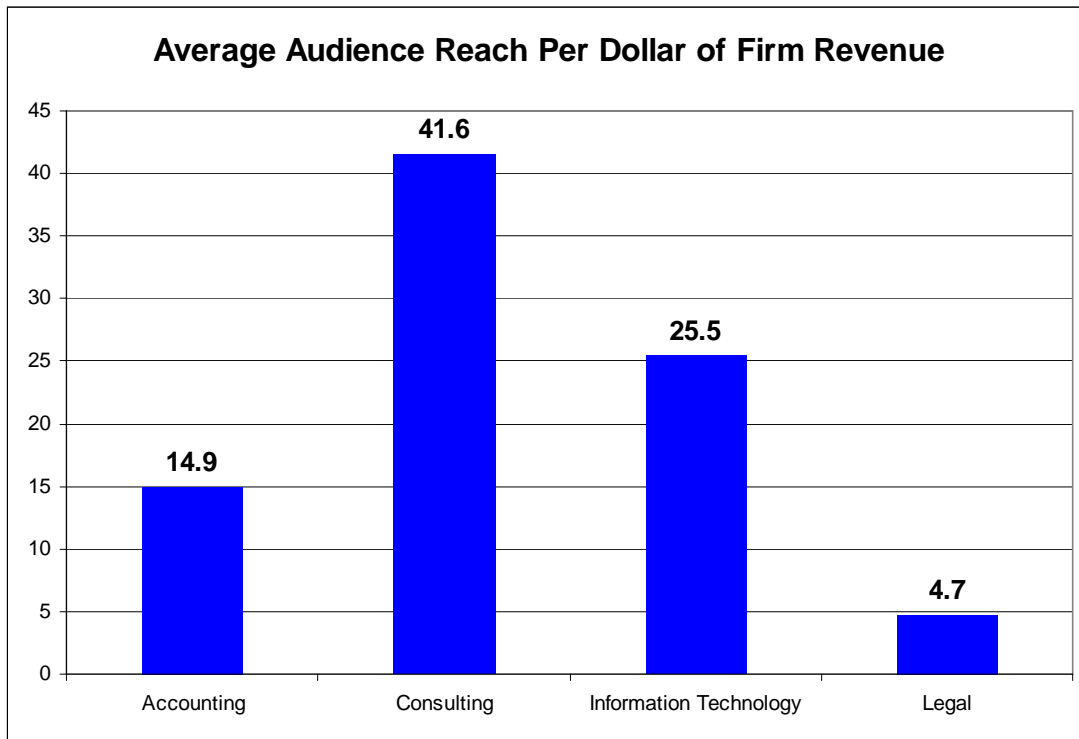
II. Online Survey Findings

We conducted an online survey of marketing people at 37 U.S. professional services firms in January 2006. The survey, conducted through the survey service SurveyMonkey.com, asked 9 questions (including two demographic questions: type of professional services firm and annual revenue), both rating responses on a scale and multiple choice. The following are the results of the survey.

1. Survey Respondents: Type of Firms

Type	Percentage
Consulting	73%
IT Services	11%
Training	8%
Law	5%
Research	3%

2. Survey Respondents: Size of Firms

Size	Percentage
$0 to $50 million	65%
$50 million to $100 million	5%
$100 million to $250 million	5%
$250 million to $500 million	8%
$500 million to $1 billion	0%
More than $1 billion	16%

3. Annual Spending on Website

Annual Spending ($USD)	Percentage
Less than $20,000	49%
$20,000 to $50,000	30%
$50,000 to $100,000	8%
$100,000 to $250,000	3%
More than $250,000	11%

4. Key Target Audiences for Website
("How important is it for your website to serve the following groups?")

Audience	Overall Rating of Importance	Scale of Importance				
		Most 5	4	Middle 3	2	Least 1
1. Prospective clients	4.49	62%	30%	3%	5%	0%
2. Existing clients	3.70	24%	41%	22%	8%	5%
3. Potential employees	2.78	11%	11%	41%	22%	16%
4. The press/media	2.38	0%	16%	27%	35%	22%
5. Investors/-industry analysts	1.65	3%	3%	8%	30%	57%
Scale of 1-5						

5. Most Important Information for Website to Provide
("How important is it for your website to present the following information?")

Type of Information	Overall Rating of Importance	Scale of Importance					
		Most 5	4	Middle 3	2	Least 1	N/A
1. Contact information	4.68	78%	11%	11%	0%	0%	0%
2. General types of client problems we address	4.62	70%	24%	3%	3%	0%	0%
3. Industry practices/expertise	4.54	68%	22%	8%	3%	0%	0%
4. Functional practices/expertise	4.53	65%	22%	8%	3%	0%	3%
5. Our "thought leadership" publications	4.34	51%	30%	8%	5%	0%	5%
6. Client case studies	4.08	50%	25%	11%	11%	3%	0%
7. General firm info (history, size, etc.)	3.89	22%	59%	11%	3%	5%	0%
8. Biographies of firm professionals	3.81	27%	46%	11%	14%	3%	0%
9. Methodology/-approaches	3.77	26%	40%	23%	9%	3%	0%
10. Events/-seminars	3.35	19%	25%	14%	22%	6%	14%
Scale of 1-5							

6. Quality of Website Information
("How would you rate the quality of the information that your website presents in the following categories?")

Type of Information	Overall Rating of Quality	Scale of Quality					
		Very Good 5	4	Satisfactory 3	2	Very Poor 1	N/A
1. Contact information	4.47	64%	19%	17%	0%	0%	0%
2. General firm info (history, size, etc.)	4.08	41%	30%	27%	3%	0%	0%
3. Functional practices/expertise	3.89	41%	22%	24%	14%	3%	0%
4. Industry practices/expertise	3.68	32%	22%	30%	14%	3%	0%
5. Our "thought leadership" articles	3.65	32%	24%	14%	14%	8%	3%
6. General types of client problems we address	3.61	27%	24%	27%	19%	0%	3%
7. Events/seminars	3.60	20%	17%	23%	9%	3%	29%
8. Biographies of firm professionals	3.56	25%	25%	31%	6%	8%	6%
9. Methodology/-approaches	3.38	22%	19%	41%	14%	5%	0%
10. Client case studies	2.91	17%	11%	25%	25%	14%	8%
Scale of 1-5							

7. Website's Marketing Capabilities
("How well does your website do the following?")

Specific Capability	Overall Rating of Capability	Scale of Performance					
		Very Well 5	4	Satisfactory 3	2	Not Well 1	N/A
1. Describe the types of business problems you solve	3.57	30%	27%	22%	14%	8%	0%
2. Help prospects find firm professionals who can help with their specific problem	3.32	22%	27%	19%	27%	5%	0%
3. Provide support and info for existing clients	3.20	14%	24%	30%	22%	5%	5%
3. Provide info to media and investors	3.20	11%	24%	38%	16%	5%	5%
4. Show why your services are unique and superior	3.14	11%	32%	22%	30%	5%	0%
5. Generate client leads for your service lines	3.08	16%	22%	24%	24%	11%	3%
Scale of 1-5							

8. Extent to Which Website Is Used to Generate Client Leads
("Which of the following things do you use your website for?")

Website Purpose	Percentage
Based on traffic data, gauge interest levels in your services and innovations	69%
Generate and book attendance at events	45%
Connect potential clients directly with firm experts (not via a general "contact us" link)	35%

9. Effectiveness of Website in Generating Client Leads vs. Other Marketing Activities ("How effectively does your website generate leads compared to the following marketing activities?")

Other Marketing Activities	Website's Effectiveness vs. Other Marketing Activities in Generating Leads			
	% Saying Website is More Effective Than…	% Saying Website is Equal in Effectiveness	% Saying Website is Less Effective Than…	N/A
Printed publications	43%	30%	24%	3%
Marketing events	16%	24%	49%	11%
Telemarketing	24%	16%	24%	35%
PR outreach	22%	22%	46%	11%

10.   Website's Effectiveness as a Client Lead Generator Over Time

("Compared to other marketing activities, how has the relative effectiveness of your website as a lead generator changed over time?")

Time Period	% Saying Website was More Effective Than Other Marketing Activities	% Saying Website was Equally Effective as Other Marketing Activities	% Saying Website was Less Effective Than Other Marketing Activities
Website 5 years ago	14%	22%	65%
Website today	24%	62%	14%
Website 5 years from now	46%	49%	5%

III. Conclusions

The study shows that many professional services firms today view their websites as important marketing and sales tools – tools whose importance is only increasing. As more and more executives turn to the Internet to find professional services firms, these firms' websites become integral to driving demand for their services. Increasingly, the search for a professional services firm is beginning on the Internet and ending after a sales call – not the opposite.

Our research also shows that there is considerable work to be done in improving the way they organize their websites, clarify their expertise, and supply content that increases the chances that potential clients see these firms as true experts in their fields. Professional services marketers, practice leaders and CEOs would be well-advised to start talking with clients and prospects about what *they* want to accomplish when looking for expertise on the Internet – and designing their websites to make that easy and informative.

The Bloom Group specializes in the marketing of professional services firms by helping to determine clients' best growth opportunities, creating integrated sales and marketing plans, developing robust intellectual capital, and executing critical marketing programs that build awareness and client relations.

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