



## Smart Steps to Practice Development

Practice growth from year to year is one measure of a firm's success. How can practitioners enhance their practice development efforts? That's a question that many CPAs ask themselves, and there's certainly more than one answer. Referrals from clients or other professionals are usually a firm's strongest marketing source, but there are many other options, ranging from involvement in community organizations to advertising campaigns. To make the most of whatever option you choose, here are some tips from practitioner William Pirolli of Pirolli, Deller & Conaty, PC, in Warwick, Rhode Island.

1. *Identify the best opportunities.* "In our firm, we've realized that the most practice referrals and growth come from attorneys," Pirolli says. Engagements from this referral source include new business incorporations, estate planning and business valuations, and a variety of other consulting engagements. Among other steps used to expand its referral network, the firm looks inward. "Every client probably has an attorney," he says. "We find out who they are, take them to lunch and tell them about our firm and what kinds of engagements we're seeking. We get a great deal of work that way."
2. *Leverage your client base.* Beyond looking at the most promising referral sources, Pirolli's firm has also analyzed engagements to better understand client relationships. It has noted that one relationship may result in several assignments if the firm does not only the personal and corporate filing but also returns for several family members. Through its analysis, the firm found that 75% of its annual billings came from 46 client relationships. "Those are the people you should be focusing on and leveraging for more business," Pirolli notes. Performing this type of analysis can help practitioners better target their energies and marketing efforts to the clients most likely to need more services or provide new referrals.
3. *Position the firm properly.* Once a firm has identified the top clients and referral sources, it can focus its effort on the right audience. "We don't get calls to do low-end returns because that's not how we market ourselves," Pirolli states. Instead of taking a scattershot approach, a firm that has analyzed clients and referrals can hone in on the best market segments to target.
4. *Accentuate the positive.* Practitioners make a mistake when they talk with clients or referral sources about being swamped with work, Pirolli says. "Don't give the impression that you don't have time to take on new engagements," he advises. For example, "start out by thinking of tax season as an opportunity rather than a burden. It is the time of year when everyone is focused on their finances and their existing professional relationships. It is the best time of year to secure new clients and expand existing business."

### Free AICPA Marketing Resources

In case you haven't already taken advantage of them, I want to remind practitioners of the many **free** marketing resources available from the AICPA. For instance, there is a wealth of information on practice development and other topics at the online PCPS Firm Practice Center ([www.aicpa.org/pcps](http://www.aicpa.org/pcps)) under the "Resources" tab. Some of the material is premium content normally reserved for PCPS members only, but for a limited time, it is free to everyone. In addition, the **free** CPA Marketing Tool Kit includes numerous practice development resources, including the CPA logo, as well as print advertisements, speeches and brochures that practitioners can use in their marketing efforts. There are also selling tips, marketing guidance and links to related information. The CPA Marketing Tool Kit can be found at [www.aicpa.org/cpamarketing](http://www.aicpa.org/cpamarketing).

