

How Buyers Buy

ARCHITECTURE/ENGINEERING/
CONSTRUCTION SERVICES



hinge®

www.hingemarketing.com

How Buyers Buy: Architecture/Engineering/Construction Services
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Introduction

This study grew out of our long standing commitment to understanding how to help professional services firms grow faster and become more profitable. We learned early in our research that a better understanding of your target clients was associated with higher growth and greater profitability.¹

With this study we are digging deeper.

- It's a much larger study, with many more Buyers and deeper insights
- We also look at the Sellers, to learn how they see things differently than Buyers
- Additionally, we look at the results for each professional services industry, since buying patterns differ by industry
- Finally, we have partnered with RAIN Group, who specialize in sales, to share their new research on Buyers and add their perspective

This report focuses on Architecture/Engineering/Construction (A/E/C) firms and their clients. The timing couldn't be better.

A/E/C Services firms are going through some major transitions and upheavals. From an increase in global competition, to public and private partnerships, to the disappearance of small and midsize firms, and the emergence of online marketing as a major force shaping the marketplace, change seems to be everywhere.

¹ *Spiraling Up: How to Create a High Growth, High Value Professional Services Firm*. Hinge Research Institute, 2010. <<http://www.hingemarketing.com/spiralingup>>.



The timing
couldn't be
better.

How are all of these changes impacting A/E/C firms? What is the best path to new business? What will drive your firm's growth and reputation? Those are just a few of the questions you are about to have answered.

Lee Frederiksen, Ph.D.
Managing Partner, Hinge

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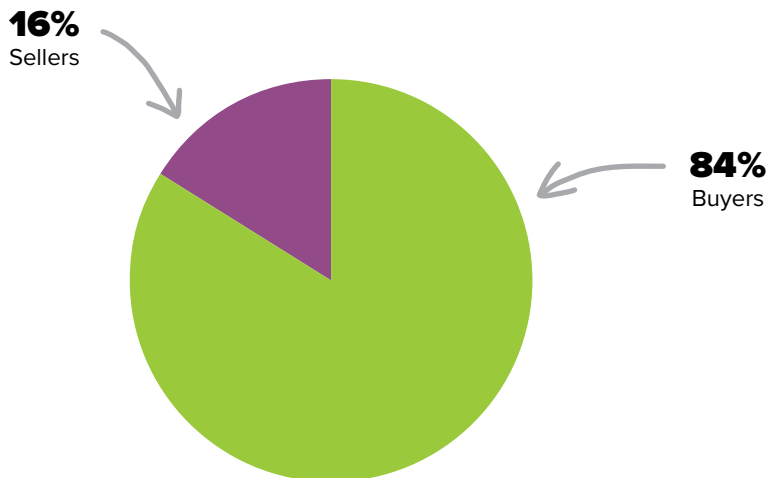
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Methodology

The Sample

The study involved interviews with purchasers of A/E/C services (Buyers) and interviews or surveys of the firms that they selected (Sellers). A total of 522 Buyers and Sellers were included. The breakdown between Buyers and Sellers is shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. Architecture/Engineering/Construction Services Sample Composition



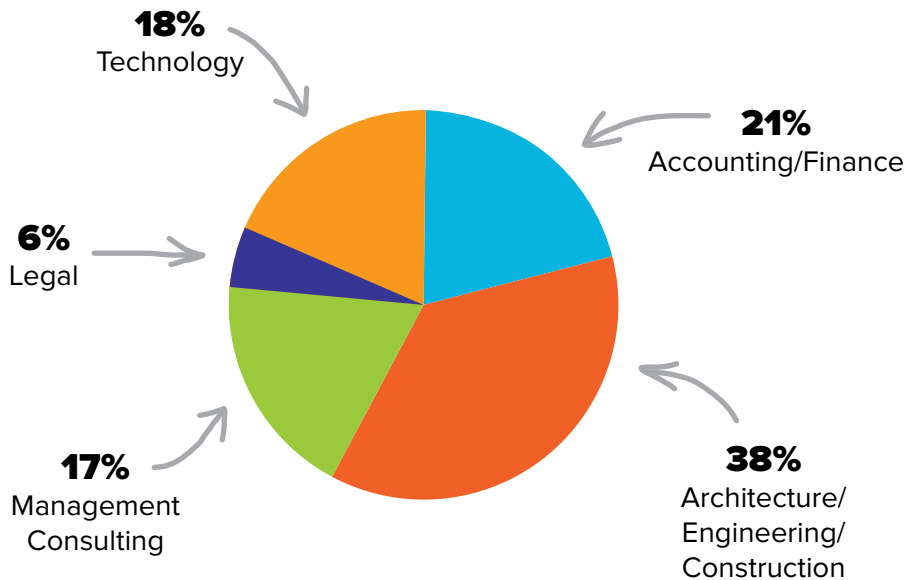
This sample was part of a larger study involving four other professional services industry groups. The overall study included 822 Buyers and 533 Sellers.

522

Buyers and
Sellers were
included.

The industry group composition is shown in Figure 2.

Fig. 2. Overall Study Industries Composition



Interview Topics and Scoring

The interviews covered a wide range of topics relevant to the marketing process, including finding alternatives and selecting a firm, the working relationship, expanding opportunities, and growing the professional services brand.

Questions were of two types. The first type is open ended where respondents answered in their own words. Responses were sorted into categories and are displayed as the percentage of respondents giving that answer. Since multiple responses were allowed, the cumulative total of responses typically exceeds 100%.

The second question format is a 0–10 rating scale. Responses are sorted into three behaviorally meaningful categories. A 9–10 rating signifies a strong endorsement of the behavior or emotion being rated. Ratings of 7–8 are persuadable and may be influenced in either direction. A 0–6 rating signifies a rejection of the behavior or emotion.

The interviews covered a wide range of topics relevant to the marketing process.



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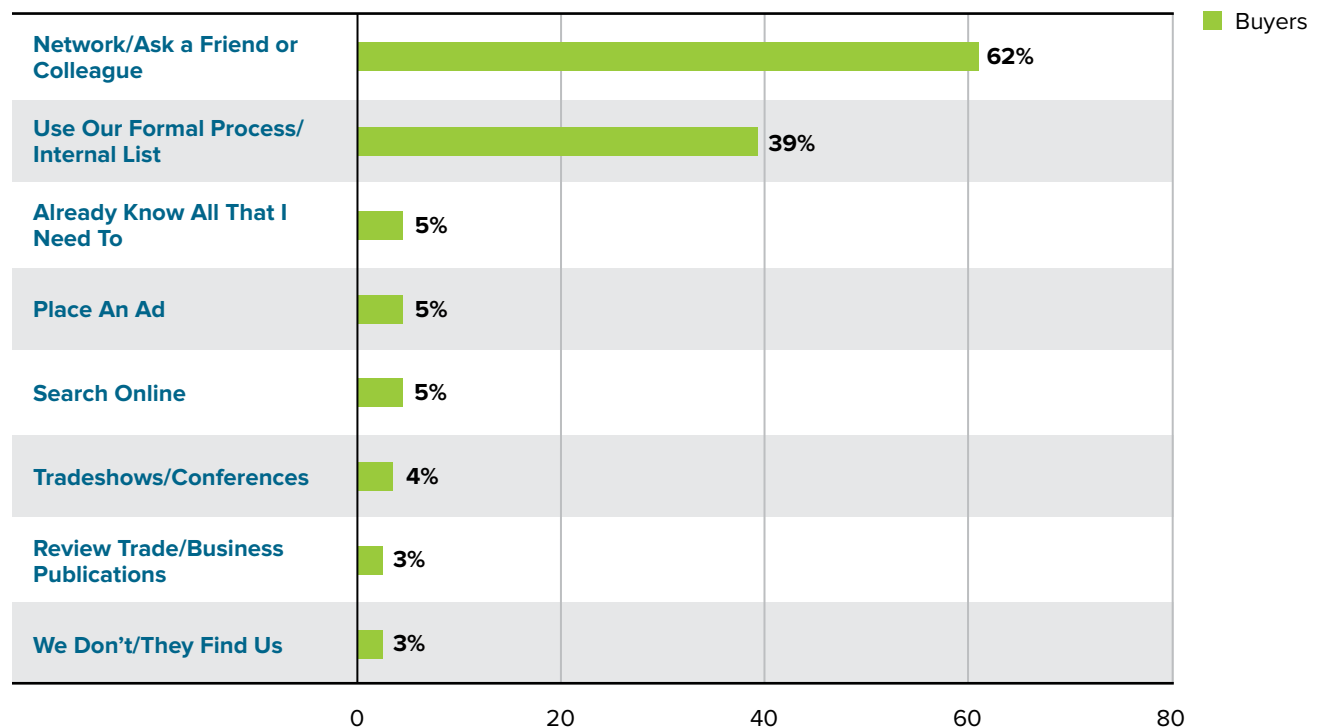
Finding Alternatives

The process of finding a new A/E/C Services provider starts with looking for alternatives. You must first get on the list.

Building the List

A Buyer's search for alternatives follows a pattern shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3. Finding Alternative Providers



62% of Buyers turn first to friends or colleagues. Who does this kind of work? How well known is the firm? How good is their reputation? This clearly demonstrates the need for a good reputation and high visibility, in other words, a strong brand.

39% want potential providers to follow an established procedure. About 5% of Buyers feel that they already know all the alternatives that they need to consider or rely on resources that approach them (another 3%).

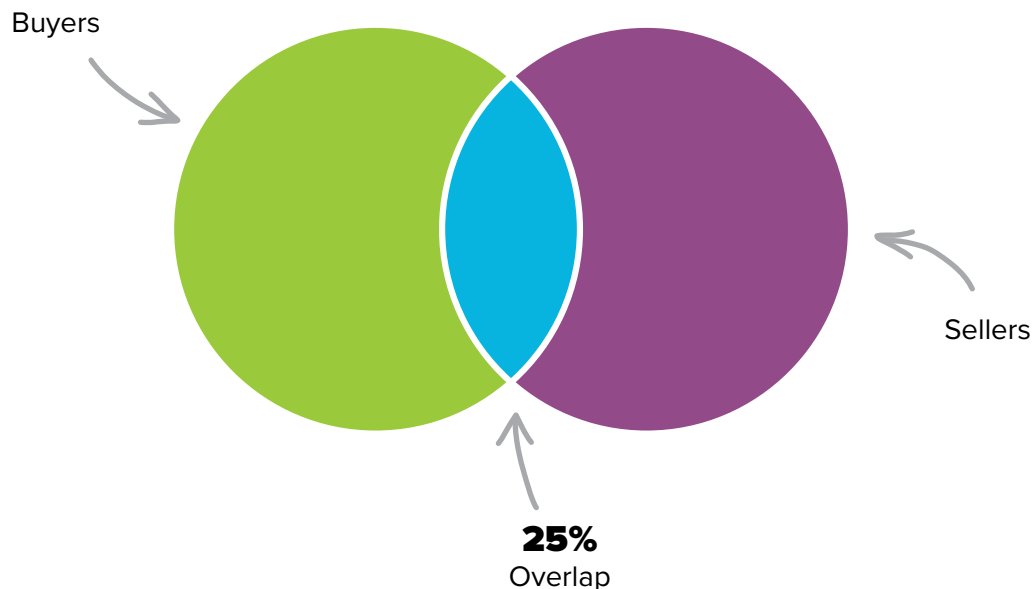
Surprisingly, the next most popular response is to go online. Currently, about 5% of Buyers use online search. This is a trend that many firms may not be aware of. In fact, online search already equals or exceeds the importance of other more traditional forms of finding providers.



The Competition

How well do you know who your real competition is? For most firms the answer is “Not so well”. Figure 4 shows what happened when we asked Buyers and Sellers (full study sample) to identify competitors of their incumbent firm.

Fig. 4. Buyer vs. Seller Identified Competitors



75%

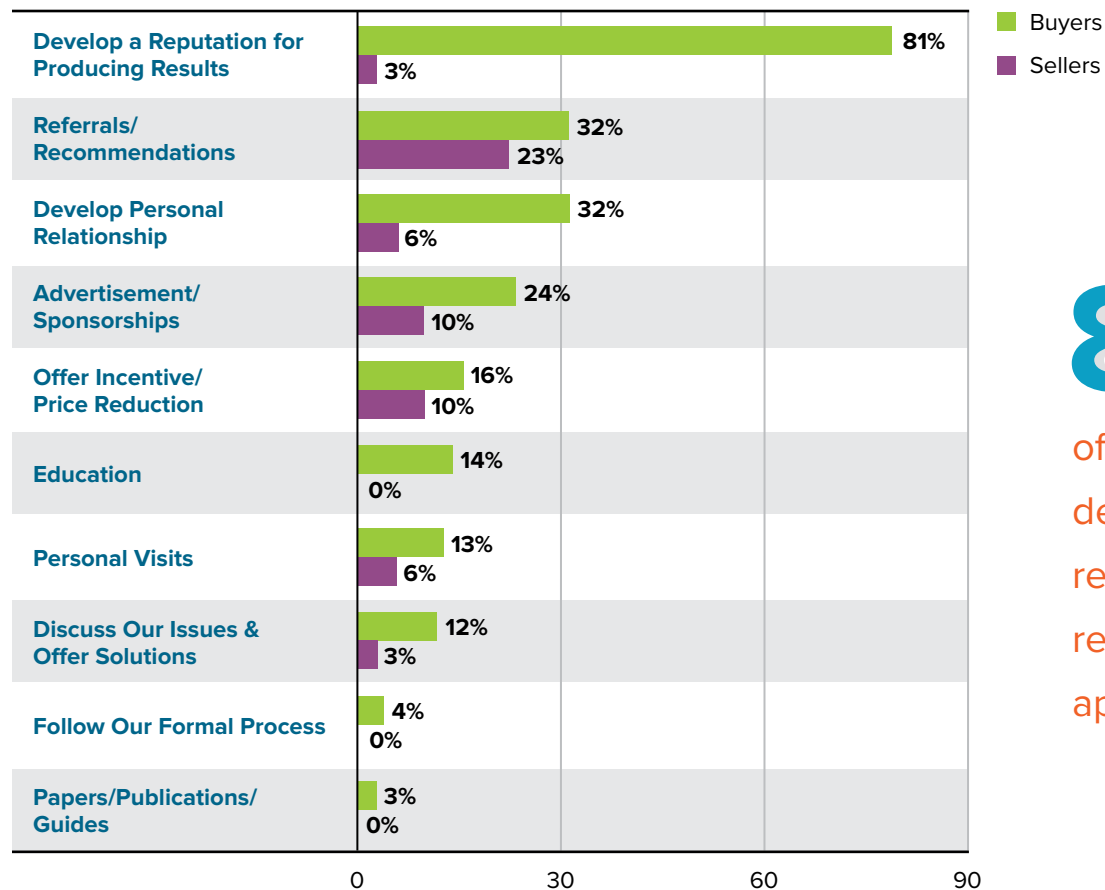
of the competitors that the Buyers identified were not even considered to be competitors by the Sellers.

The Buyer and Seller competitor lists overlapped by only 25%. Put another way, 75% of the competitors that Buyers identified were not even on the Seller's list and vice versa. So how do you increase your chances of making the list?

Best Marketing Approaches

What is the best way to reach the A/E/C Buyer? We asked both groups what they thought would work best. The results are shown in Figure 5.

Fig. 5. Best Way to Market to Buyers



81%
of Buyers see
developing a
reputation for
results as the best
approach.

In most situations Buyers and Sellers see the value of an approach quite differently. For example, 81% of Buyers see developing a reputation for results as the best approach. Only 3% of Sellers saw it as important. A similar, although less pronounced, pattern was repeated across many marketing approaches.

Sellers also have a blind spot when it comes to the value of offering educational content. 14% of Buyers want education. Sellers are missing this opportunity. Referrals and recommendations have a smaller perception gap. Yet even here, Sellers underestimate their value. Sellers seem to be missing the value of marketing.

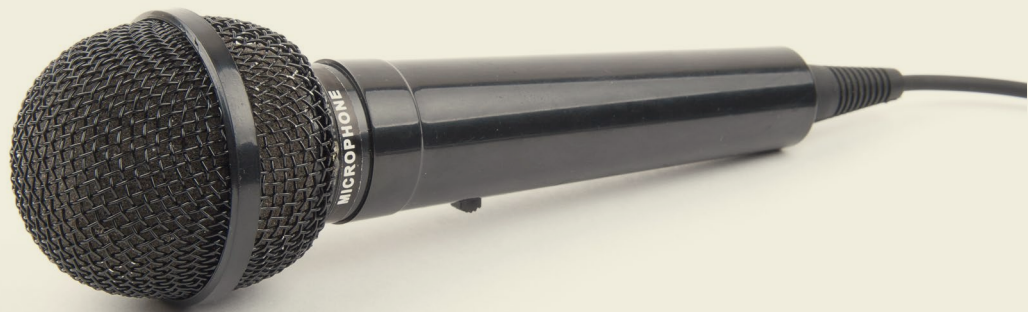
ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

All Good Things (Like Clients) Do Not Come to Those Who Wait...

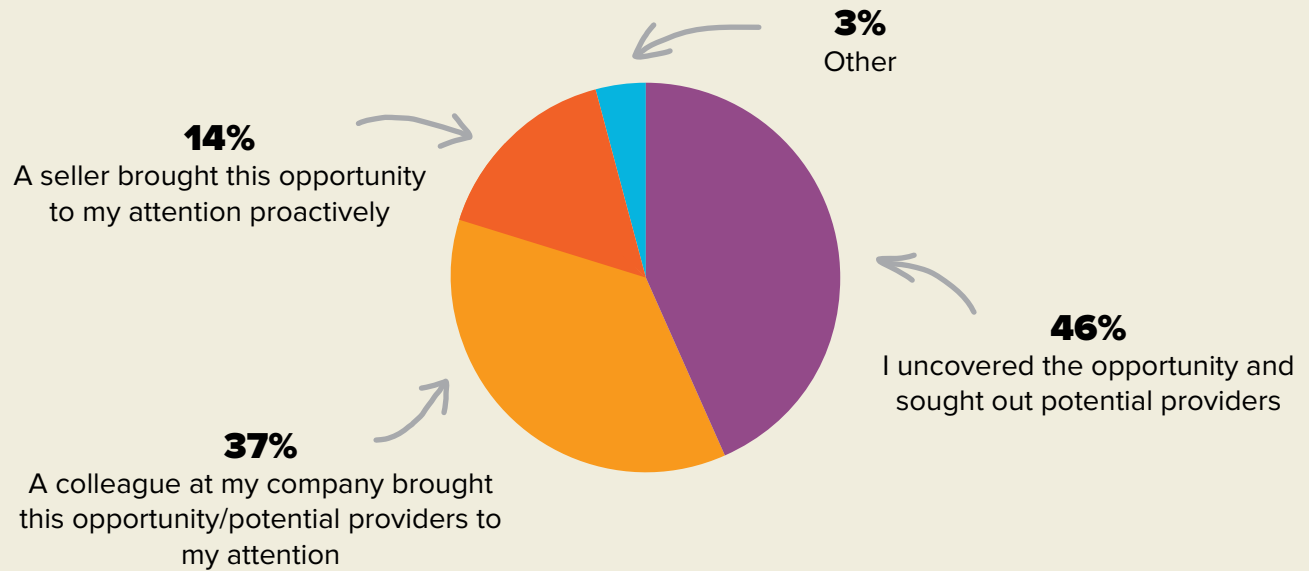
In all too many Professional Services firms, marketing and building awareness are usually put on the back burner. Why? Because the noticeable returns from marketing take so long that most Professional Services companies do not have the patience or fortitude to stick with consistent marketing over the long term.



In RAIN Group's 2013 research into the buying side of Professional Services firms, we asked 705 buyers a series of questions about Professional Services assignments in which they had engaged in the last year. When asked who brought the opportunity to their attention, 83% stated that they had either uncovered the opportunity themselves and then sought out a provider, or a colleague in their company had brought the opportunity and the provider to their attention. Only 14% of the time did buyers remember the provider bringing the opportunity proactively to the buyer.



How did this purchase opportunity come to your attention?



Of course, while this may be an indictment of providers' unwillingness to get out and prospect, it is also an indication that if you want buyers to pick up the phone and call you, you had better let them know you exist in the first place through many of the marketing approaches sited throughout this report.

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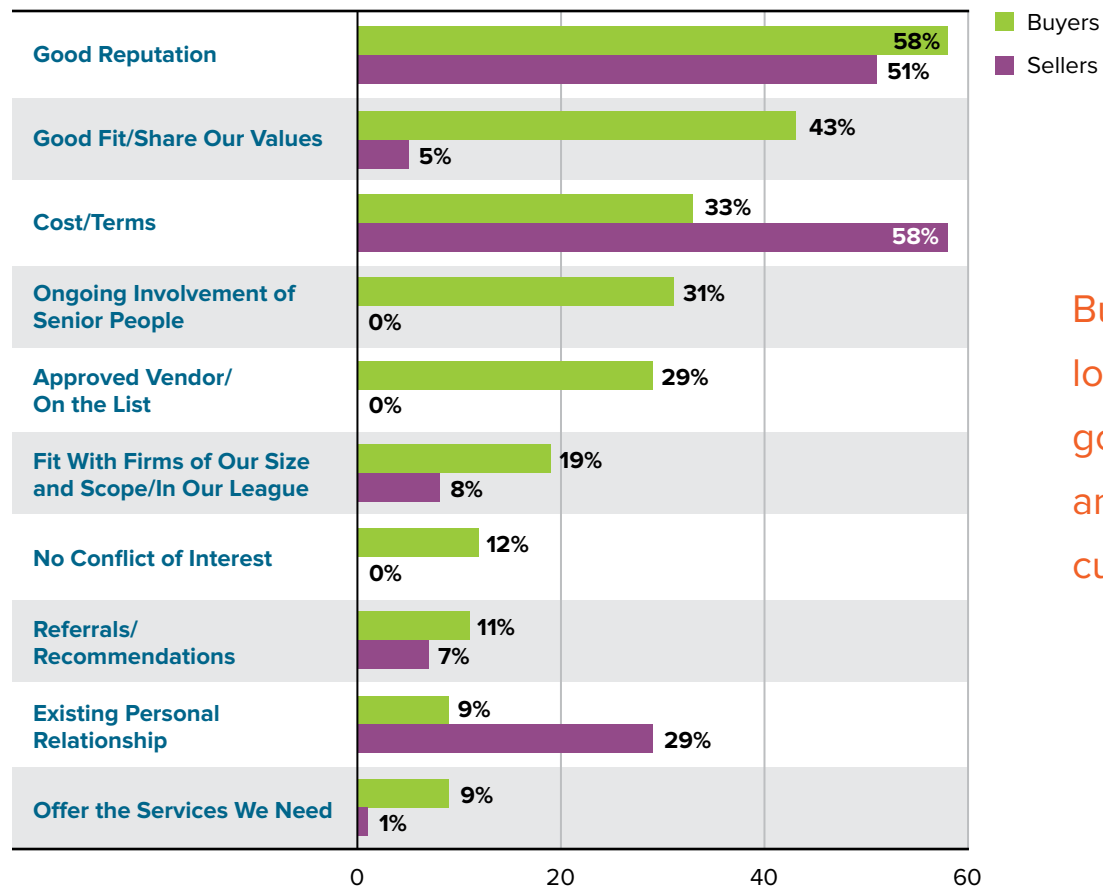
Selecting a Firm

How do Buyers choose which firm they will work with? How accurate are Sellers' perceptions of the selection criteria? These are the questions we tackle next.

Selection Criteria

The top ten Buyer selection criteria are shown in Figure 6.

Fig. 6. Top 10 Buyer Selection Criteria



Buyers are looking first for a good reputation and a good cultural fit.

A/E/C Services Buyers are looking first for a good reputation and a good cultural fit. Sellers grossly overestimate the importance of cost as a primary selection criterion. They underestimate the role that a good cultural fit and the ongoing involvement of senior people play.

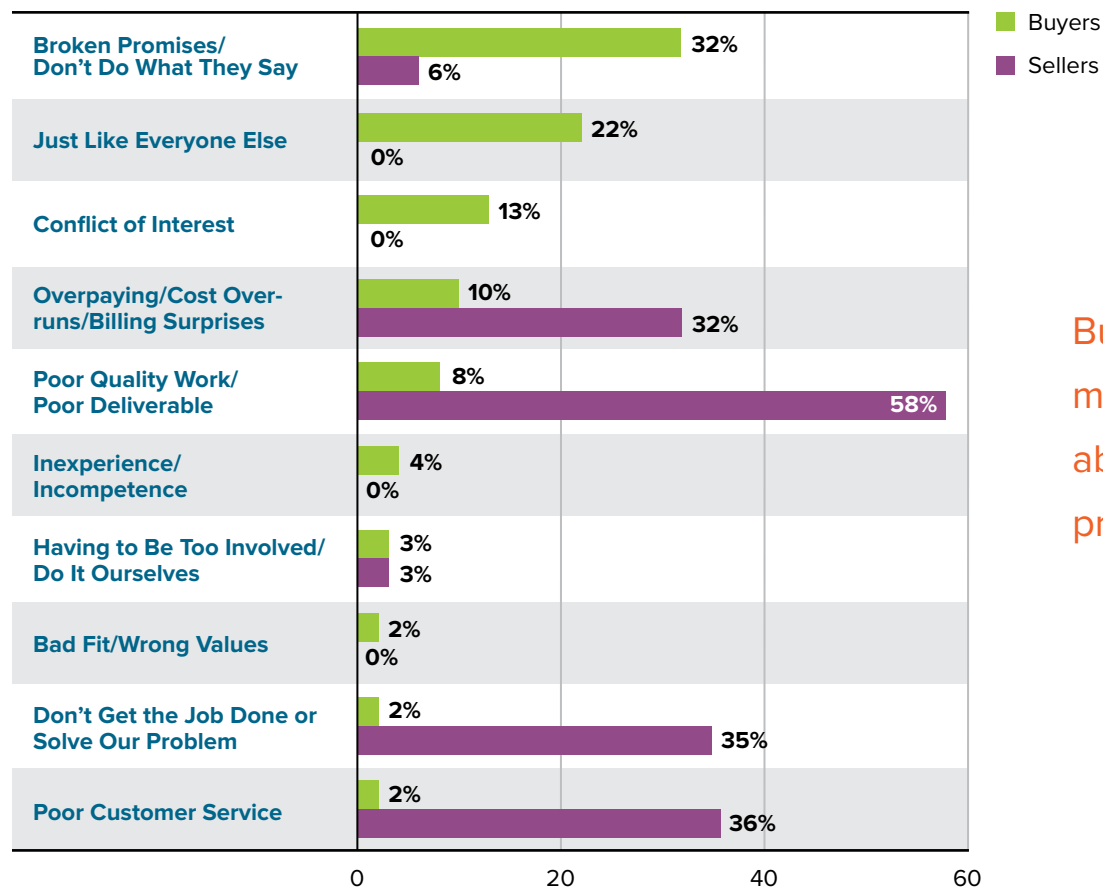
There are other important criteria, such as following the process, no conflict of interest and being “in the right league” that seem to be overlooked by Sellers.

Sellers grossly overestimate the importance of cost as a primary selection criterion.

What Buyers Want to Avoid

The previous question focuses on what Buyers are looking for in an A/E/C firm. In Figure 7 we turn the question around and look at what they are trying to avoid.

Fig. 7. What Buyers Want to Avoid



Buyers are most concerned about broken promises.

Buyers are most concerned about broken promises. Being “just like everyone else” is the second most frequent concern. These top three concerns are not well recognized by Sellers.

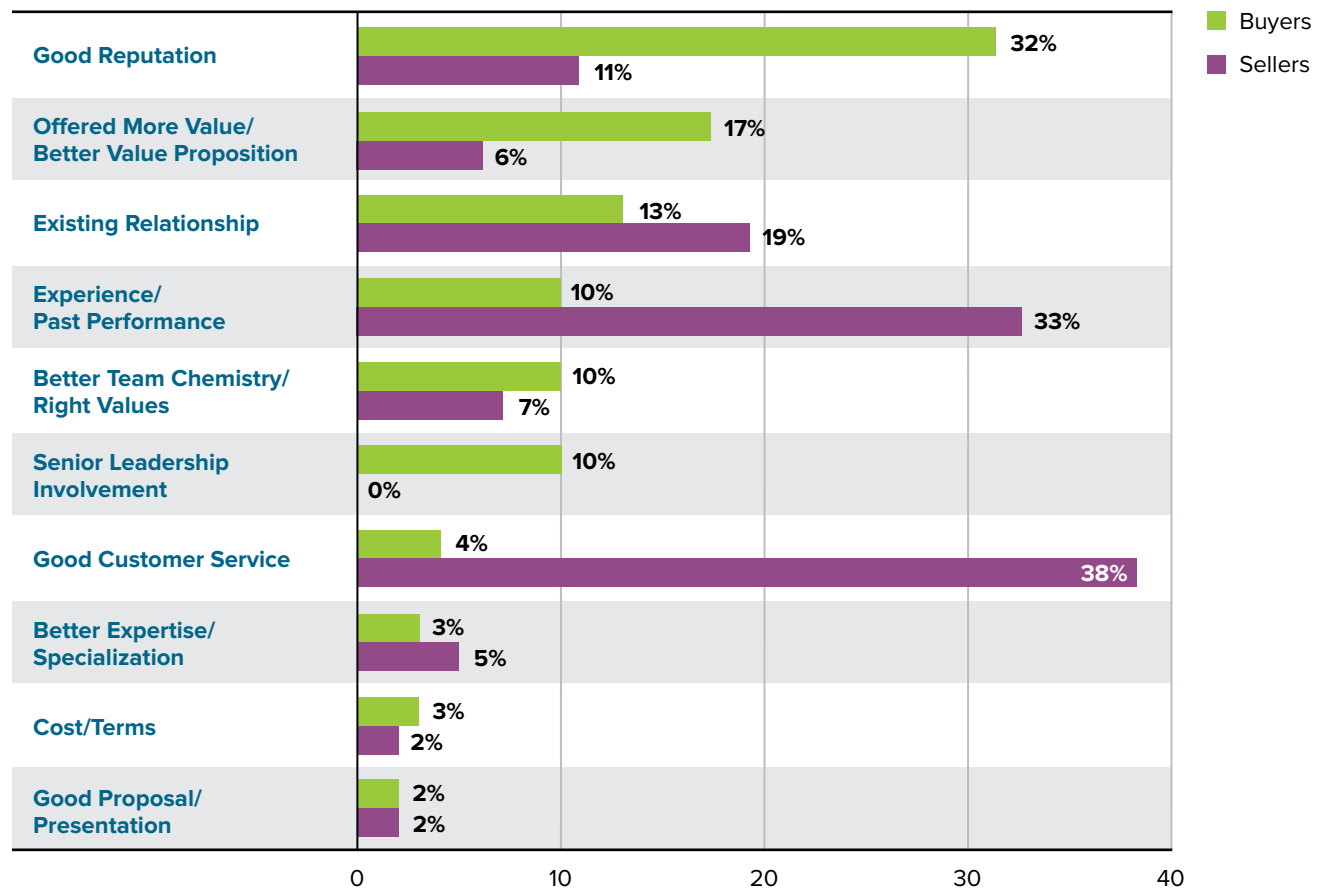
Sellers massively exaggerate Buyers’ concern about quality of deliverables, cost and customer service. They also overplay the importance of failing to solve the problem. They seem to be thinking about issues in very different ways.

A better reputation or better value propositions are the top deciding factors.

What Tips the Scale?

We know what Buyers are looking for and what they are trying to avoid. But when it gets down to the final selection, what is the deciding factor? Those results are shown in Figure 8.

Fig. 8. What Tips the Scale?



For Buyers of A/E/C Services the answer is clear. A better reputation or better value propositions are the top deciding factors. An existing relationship comes in a close third. Think of it as the incumbent's advantage.

The next most likely deciding factor is experience or past performance. But Sellers are overestimating the role of past performance by a wide margin.

Another important insight is around the perception of what drives the final selection. Sellers are focused on customer service. Buyers are not.

Sellers are
focused on
customer service.
Buyers are not.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

I Just Awarded that Assignment...

We recently conducted customer research for a client on how often their past clients wish to be contacted by their professional service providers. Like most service providers, our client's hypothesis was that his past clients would simply call when they have more work. Like many providers, his assumption was that contacting past clients too often would be an intrusion, an imposition, and, worst of all, unprofessional.



As a result, he was following the once a year (or less) approach to “staying in touch.”

Our research findings, in keeping with what we have witnessed time and time again, were:

Almost no service providers contact
their current and past clients too often.
In fact, this is difficult to do.



A typical conversation with past clients of ours would go something like this:

- I am calling for Smith & Jones. Bill Smith did some work for you in the past and I am looking to find out the best ways for him to keep in touch with you in order to stay top of mind.
- How is Bill? I remember the work he did for us. Oh gee, it's been over a year now. How time flies. His approach was so unlike anything we usually get. He was thoughtful, asked great questions, and actually changed what we were looking for. In the end, his suggestions made a huge difference for us.
- Bill is doing great.
- Good to hear that. You know, I had forgotten about how good his work was. Too bad you didn't call last week. I just awarded a major assignment that was right up Bill's alley. I am so busy right now. I have trouble remembering things from last week, let alone last year. The assignment came up and I called who I met with most recently. They were in two weeks ago. Too bad for both of us, Bill probably would have been a great choice. Tell him to give me a call soon.

Don't be afraid to pick up the phone or go visit your clients once in a while. They really want you to.

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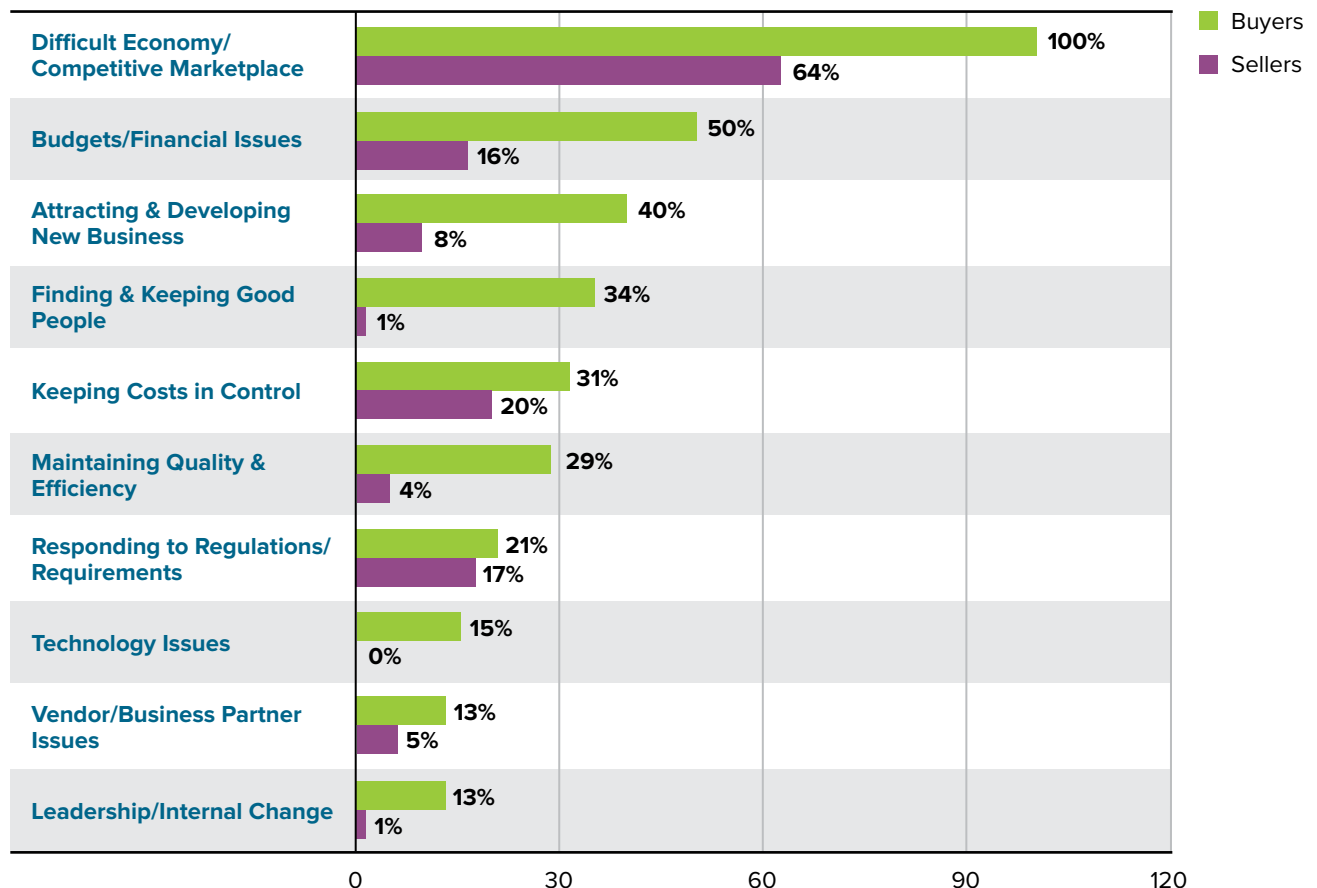
Working With a Firm

You've won the new client. Now it's time to forge a good working relationship. How can you ensure that they will remain a client well into the future? Let's start by examining your relevance to Buyers' key priorities.

Key Challenges and Priorities

We asked the A/E/C Services Buyers to identify their key organizational challenges and priorities. The top ten results are shown in Figure 9.

Fig. 9. Buyers' Key Challenges/Priorities

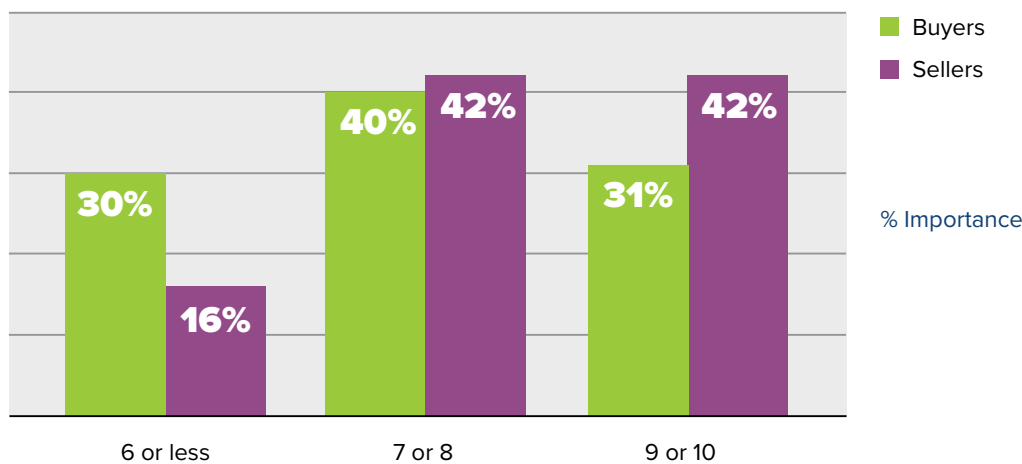


It should not surprise anyone that dealing with a difficult economy and competitive environment topped the list of challenges. Budget and financial issues came in second.

To a large degree, Sellers were quite inaccurate in their perceptions of Buyers' priorities. The biggest gap came from underestimating the importance of finding and keeping good people and the financial and new business issues.

How important are A/E/C firms to addressing Buyer's key challenges? Figure 10 shows Buyers' and Sellers' ratings.

Fig. 10. Importance of Sellers' Service to Addressing Buyers' Challenges



31% of Buyers rated Sellers' services as very important to addressing their challenges. Sadly, 30% saw them as not being very relevant.

The good news is that 40% are still in the persuadable range (7 or 8) where the case for increased importance might be successfully made through Sellers' efforts.

Sellers tend to see their services as more important than their Buyers do. Perhaps this arises from a failure to make the case that their services are relevant to Buyers' true priorities.

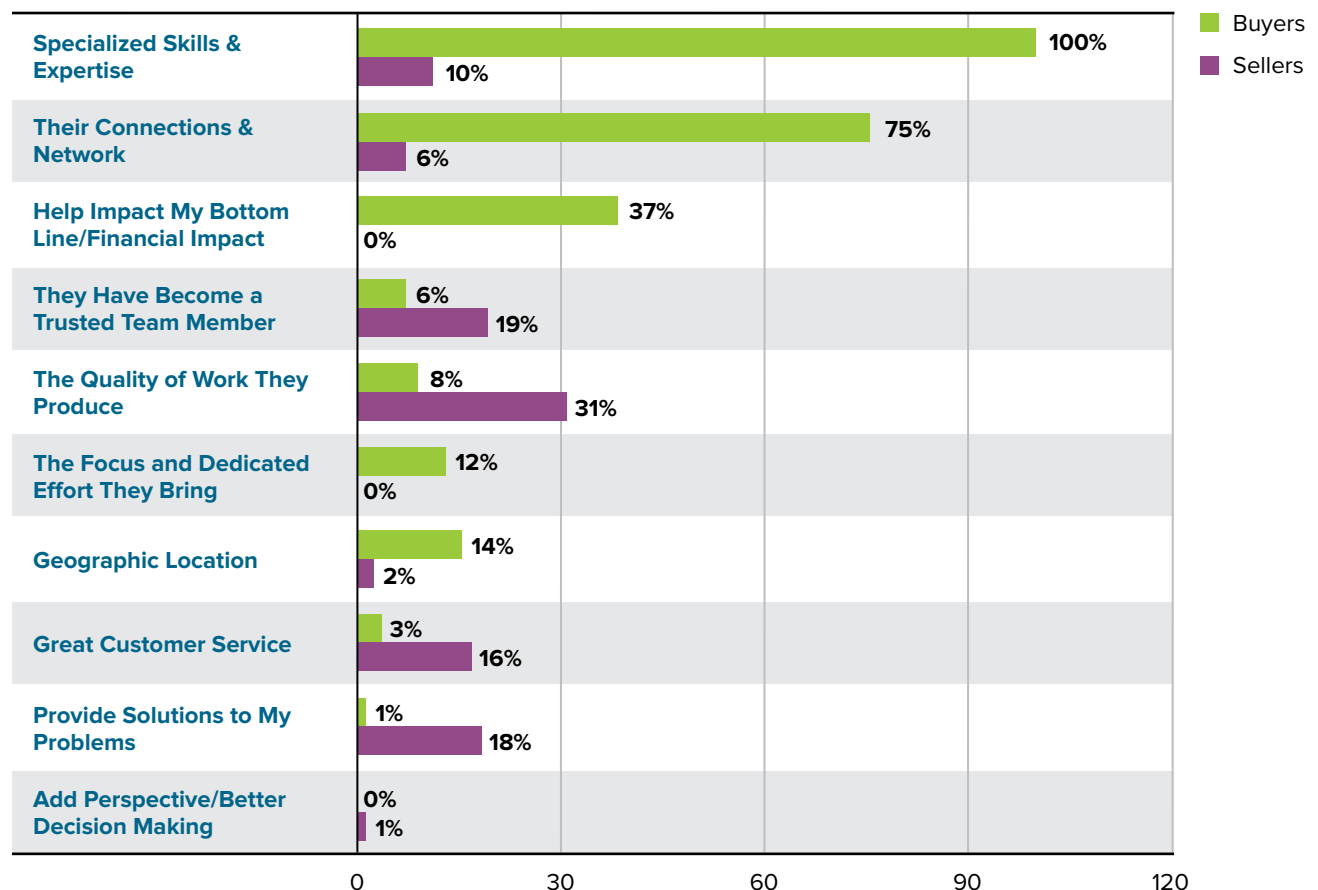
Sellers were quite inaccurate in their perceptions of Buyers' priorities.

31% of Buyers rated Sellers' services as very important to addressing their challenges.

Real Value or Benefit to Buyer

What do Buyers see as the real benefit or value that they receive from Sellers?
The responses to this question are shown in Figure 11.

Fig. 11. Real Value or Benefit to Buyers



The addition of specialized skills and expertise is the most frequent benefit to Buyers. They are also adding value with their connections and network as well as helping impact the bottom line. Sellers are largely missing these benefits.

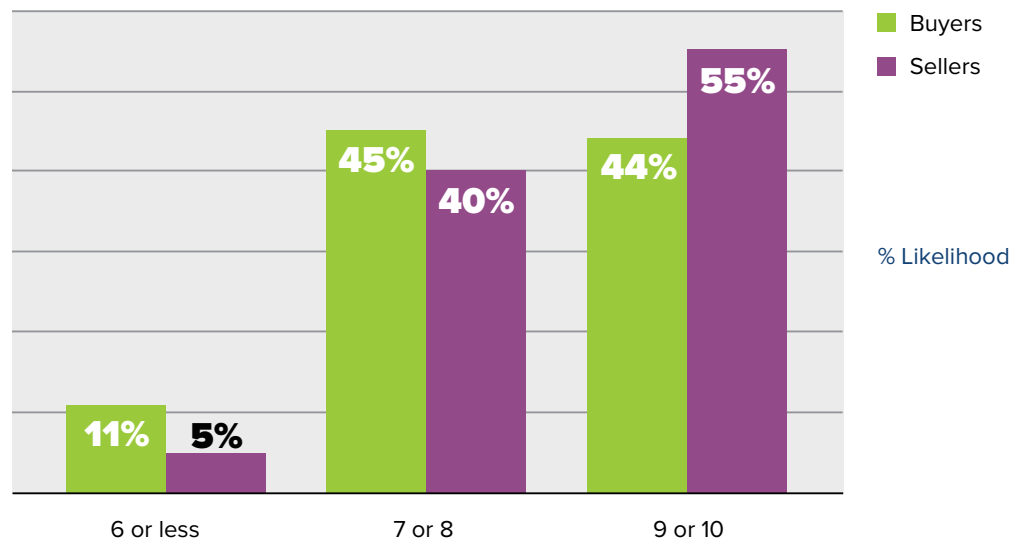
There are several areas where Sellers overestimate their perceived value. These include the value of work product quality, the extent to which they provide solutions to problems or are seen as a trusted member of the team. They also overestimate the value of great customer service.

The addition of specialized skills and expertise is the most frequent benefit to Buyers.

Do Sellers Do What They Say They Will?

To what extent do Sellers do what they say they will? Are they following through on their promises? Figure 12 presents the results.

Fig. 12. Do Sellers Do What They Say They Will?



44%

of Buyers
strongly believe
Sellers do what
they promise.

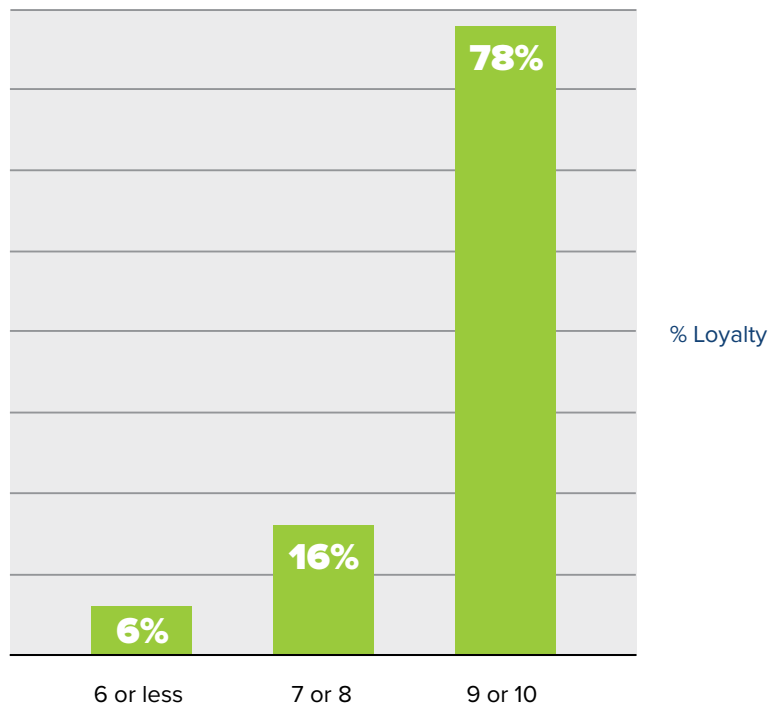
From Buyers' perspective the answer seems to be a pretty resounding "sometimes". A disappointing 44% of Buyers strongly believe Sellers do what they promise. Another 45% are on the fence. Fully 11% disagree.

But there is a perception gap. Sellers rate themselves as delivering better than their clients do.

Buyer Loyalty

Figure 13 shows how this all translates into Buyer Loyalty.

Fig. 13. Buyer Loyalty Rating Over 2–3 Years



22%

of Buyers
were either
on the fence
or expecting a
change.

Buyers were asked to rate the probability that they would still be using the firm in 2–3 years.

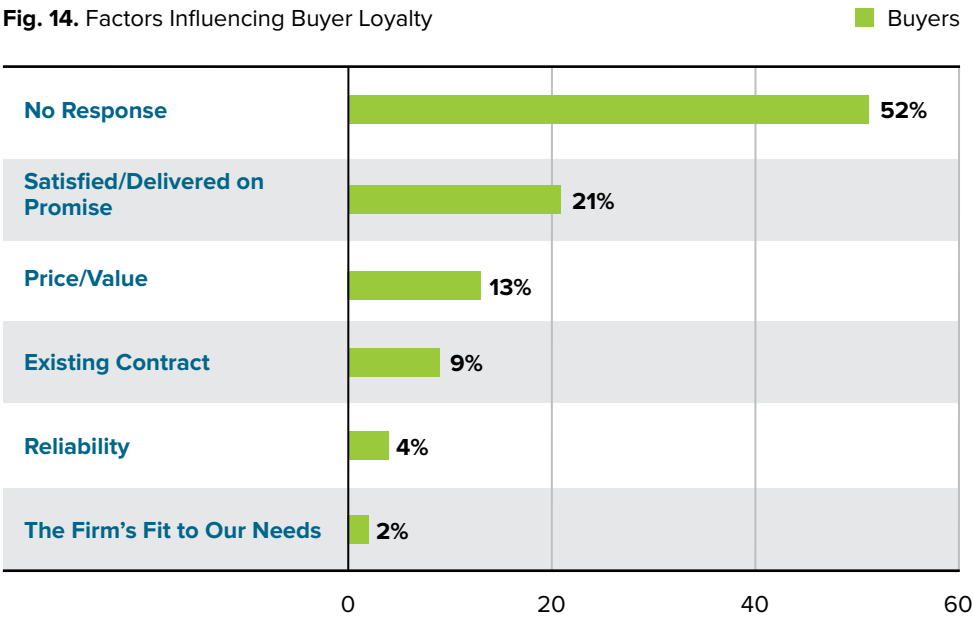
In this sample 78% of Buyers thought that there was a very high probability (9 or 10) that they would still be with the same firm in 2–3 years. 6% are expecting a change. The remaining 16% are persuadable either way.

From a business development perspective there are opportunities. 22% of Buyers were either on the fence or expecting a change.

Factors Influencing Loyalty

We then asked Buyers to identify those factors influencing their rating. The results are shown in Figure 14.

Fig. 14. Factors Influencing Buyer Loyalty



Delivering on your promises is the single best predictor of client loyalty.

Over half of the respondents did not offer a reason for their rating.

Delivering on your promise (21%) is the most significant loyalty driver identified. Interestingly, price/value accounts for about 13% of the expected loyalty. Delivering on your promises is the single best predictor of client loyalty.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Clients Are Waiting. It's Your Move.

Service providers often lament the difficulty of unseating an incumbent service provider. The switching data continues to suggest that business is out there for the taking. As advisors to professional services firms, we wholeheartedly agree as we continue to observe significant openness on behalf of buyers to entertain discussions on switching to new service providers.

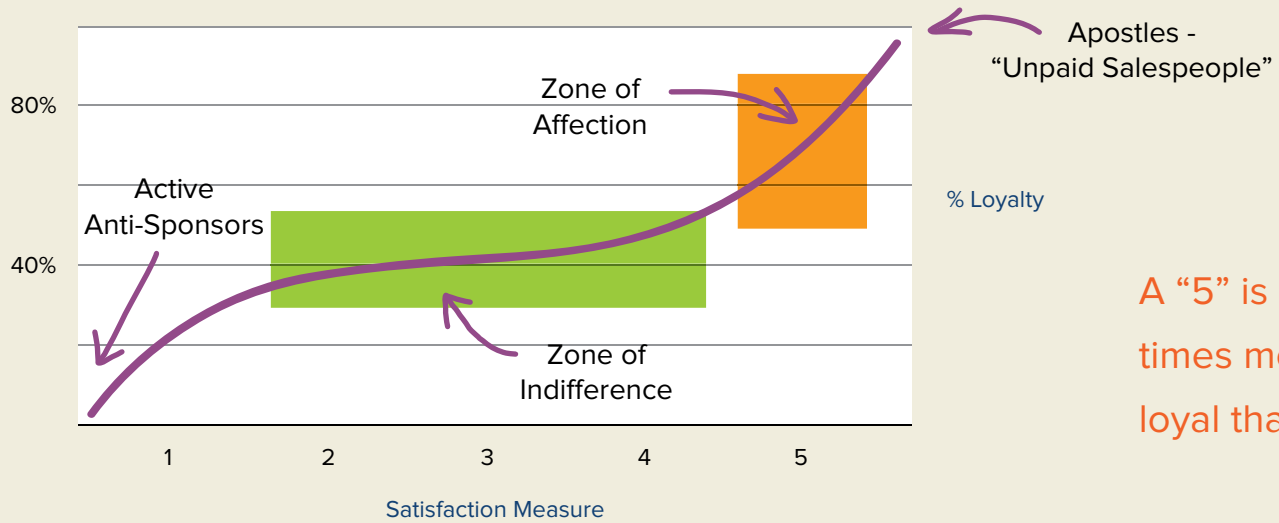


However, most of these decision makers are not going to be persuaded easily to switch providers. While potential clients may be willing—even itching—to switch, in our experience, service providers are often unwilling or unable to do what they must do to initially engage new prospects and then win their business. For the service provider willing to make the effort, the business is out there for the taking.

On the flip side, A/E/C Services firms must monitor their own clients as to how excited they are about the value provided. As we have seen over the years through our research into client satisfaction and client loyalty, merely keeping the customer satisfied does not ensure loyalty.



A Very Satisfied Client is Very Loyal



A very satisfied client is very loyal, but if you don't "wow" your client, you can be the one wondering how you were unseated as the incumbent.

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Expanding the Relationship

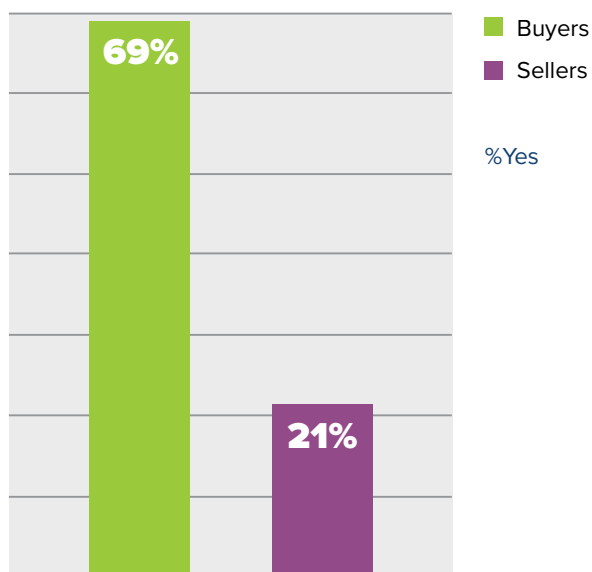
How do you go about expanding the client relationship beyond the scope of services you are currently providing? Some business developers think of this as cross-selling.

Of course, the roots of a strategy are already apparent in the previous analysis of **Buyer Loyalty**. And likely areas for additional services are to be found in the consideration of **Buyers' Key Challenges and Priorities** discussed earlier. But let's look at the process of turning Buyers' needs into new business.

Buyer Awareness of Seller Services

If your clients are happy with the services you are providing, won't they naturally turn to you when they have a need that you can help them with? Figure 15 begins to answer that question.

Fig. 15. Are Buyers Aware of the Services Sellers Offer?



Assume that
your Buyers will
not know how
you can help
them.

A big part of the challenge is obvious from the results. Almost one third of Buyers admit that they do not know all the services Sellers provide. That's the best case. Sellers believe that 79% of Buyers are unaware of how they can help them. Assume that your Buyers think they know what you do ... but they probably don't.

Buyer Interest in New Services

Are your Buyers interested in additional services from your firm? In this sample, 90% of Buyers said that they were interested in additional services from Sellers (See Figure 16).

Fig. 16. Buyers Interested in New Services from Sellers



It's interesting to note that Sellers tend to underestimate the interest of existing clients.

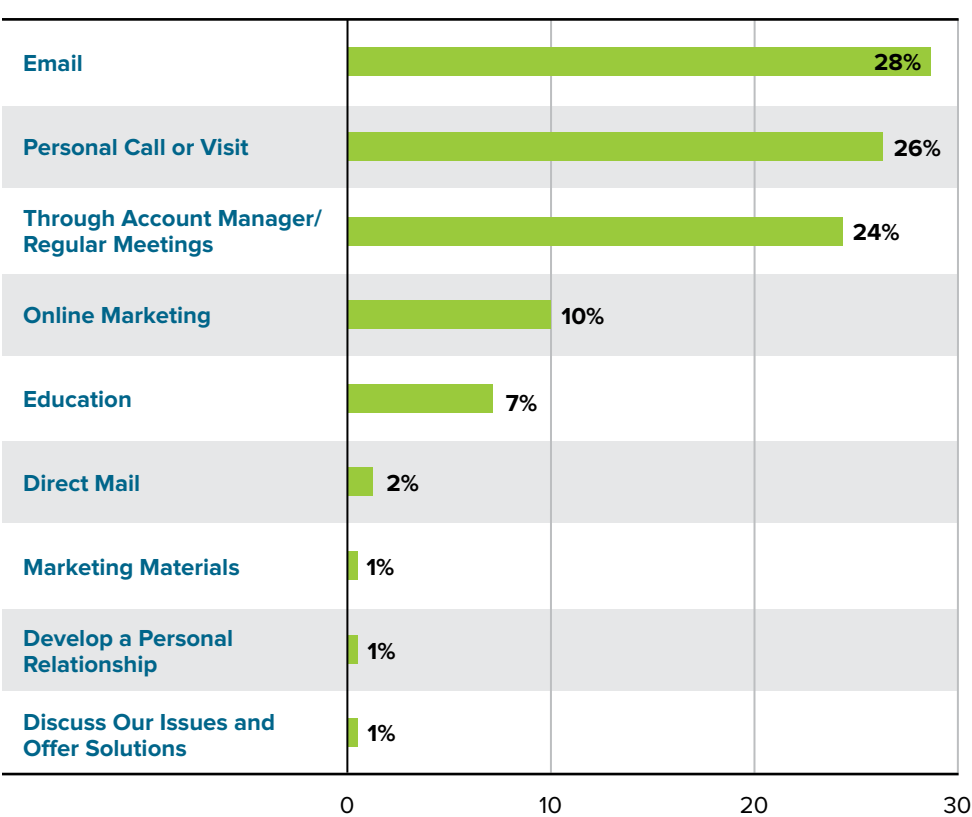
90%

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How to Offer New Services

If you assume (as Figure 15 shows) that Buyers do not know how you can help them with their needs, the burden then shifts to you, the Seller. Buyers’ recommendations about how to approach this task are shown in Figure 17.

Fig. 17. Best Way to Offer New Services to Buyers



The working relationship with Buyers is the foundation for expanding services.

The working relationship with Buyers is the foundation for expanding services. The method of communication is split between email, personal call or visit, or through regular meetings with the account manager.

Some existing clients (totaling about 20%) opt for a less personal approach. About 10% of Buyers want to be informed through online marketing and another 7% want an educational or straight informational approach.

While these findings offer a clear path with existing Buyers, how do you move to new Buyers? That’s where referrals become important.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Building Relationships One Executive at a Time

“It’s impossible to get serious face time with senior executives.”

“Even getting 15 minutes with a senior executive can take 15 months.”



We hear things like this all the time from providers who want to get more time with decision makers, but haven’t yet cracked the code.

Let’s start by setting a few things straight:

1. It’s not impossible to get serious face time with senior executives.
2. Getting serious face time with senior executives doesn’t need to take forever.
3. The code is crackable.

It’s a common misconception that senior executives don’t have time. Based on extensive research in the area, we are prepared to reveal a startling fact: Decision makers have 24 hours in each day, and a statistically significant number of them manage these days in bundles of seven called a week.

Shocking! But true: 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What may actually be interesting is how they spend this time. They don’t meet only with internal colleagues, they don’t meet only in 15-minute blocks, and they don’t disappear into the nights and weekends to spend extended time only with their families.

Many executives pour their time into meetings and relationships. In our research, executives often cite that their relationships with people across companies and industries – colleagues, partners, and “vendors” alike – are essential to their success.

They have long meetings with people outside their organizations. They have breakfast meetings, lunch meetings, and dinner meetings. They ski, fish, take in games, and go to the ballet. They maintain relationships over time.

They are, indeed, doing all of these things and more. The question is this: Why aren't they doing them with you?

Through a decade of research, we've learned that the best relationship developers get extended time with senior executives when they do the following:

- 1. Establish a peer dynamic:** Under no circumstances should you come across as inferior to a senior executive. It does mean you must have confidence in the value you can offer from a business perspective, and confidence in yourself personally that the C-suite is where you should be.
- 2. Resonate on the business side:** Often people don't understand what's going to be important to senior executives.

The higher up you get, the more you'll find people who are looking for business growth, innovation, and competitive advantage. Executives seek ideas that will be “the next big thing” for their business and their agenda. Bring these ideas to the table and you'll be on your way.

- 3. Resonate personally, emotionally:** Never forget that senior executives are people, just like you. They have emotions and personal interests. CEOs have kids, like sports, want to be seen as successful, are passionate about politics, and want to retire, drink fruity drinks with umbrellas, and read CIA thrillers.



4. **Don't give up:** Initially, it might take a while to get discussions with senior executives. Don't give up. Those who make it to the top are dogged about getting there.
5. **Craft a meticulous personal brand:** Getting quality, extended time with senior executives is all about being invited to the inner circle. Make no mistake, you will be judged as to whether or not you deserve to be there. Create a reputation as a known expert in your area.

Ultimately, if you want time and relationships with executives, you have to make sure they see you in their league. It's up to you to do what you can to get there and stay there.

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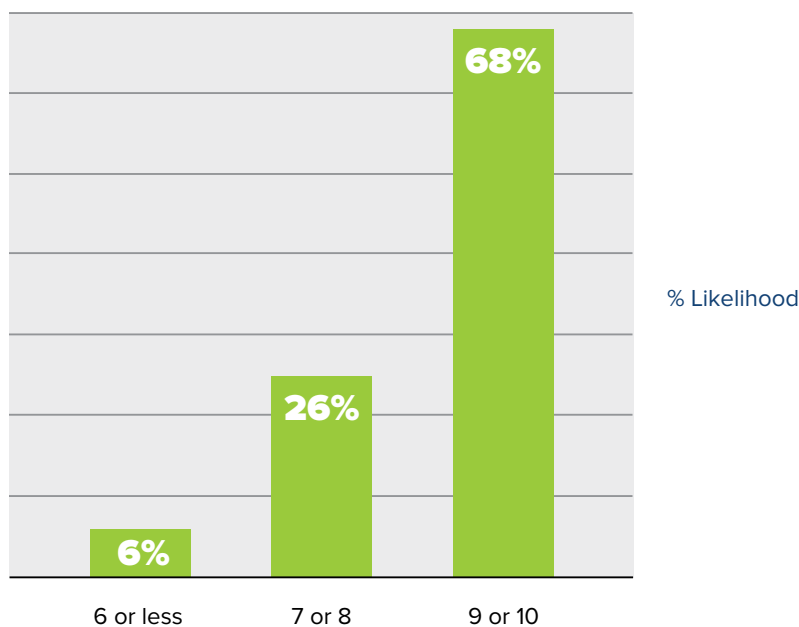
Getting Referrals

How can you benefit from referrals from your existing clients? Let's first examine the potential for referrals.

Referral Potential

Figure 18 shows the Buyers' rating of the probability that they would recommend Sellers to friends or colleagues.

Fig. 18. Probability Buyer Would Recommend Seller



Overall 68% of Buyers are very likely to recommend Sellers (9 or 10). Only 6% are unlikely to recommend. The remaining 26% are on the fence (7 or 8) and could go either way.

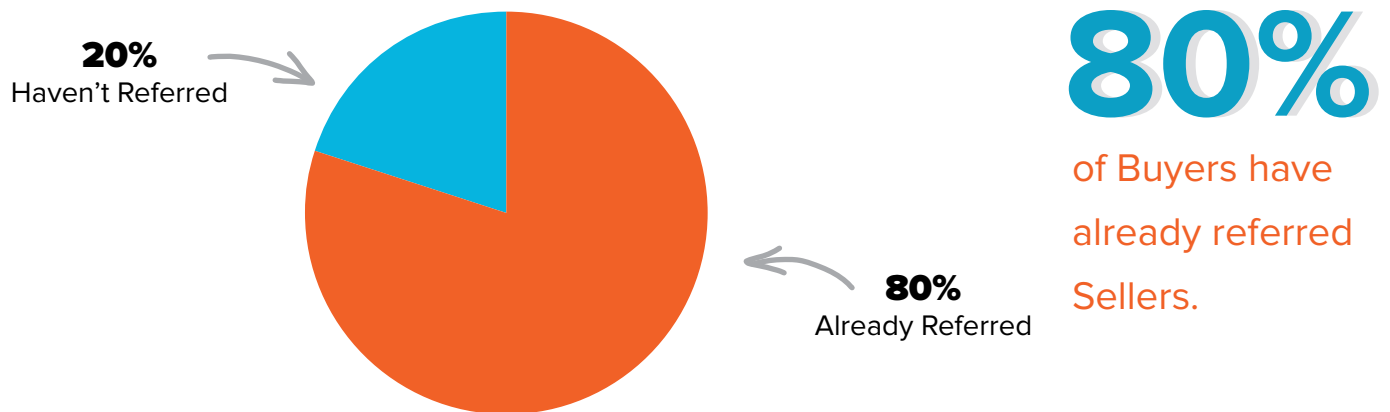
68%

of Buyers are
very likely to
recommend
Sellers.

Referral Behavior

Buyers' actual referral behavior corresponds quite well with referral potential. 80% of Buyers have already referred Sellers.

Fig. 19. Buyers' Actual Referrals

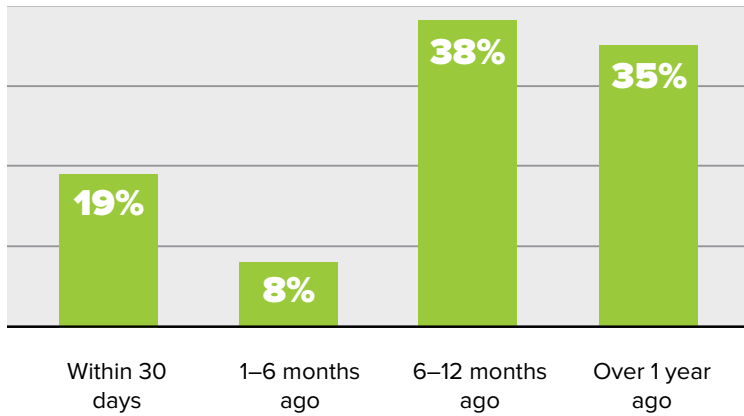


This tracks closely with the proportion of Buyers who rated themselves as very likely to recommend the Seller plus about half of those on the fence (see Figure 18).



About 27% of referrals occurred within the last 6 months.

Fig. 20. Buyers' Most Recent Referral

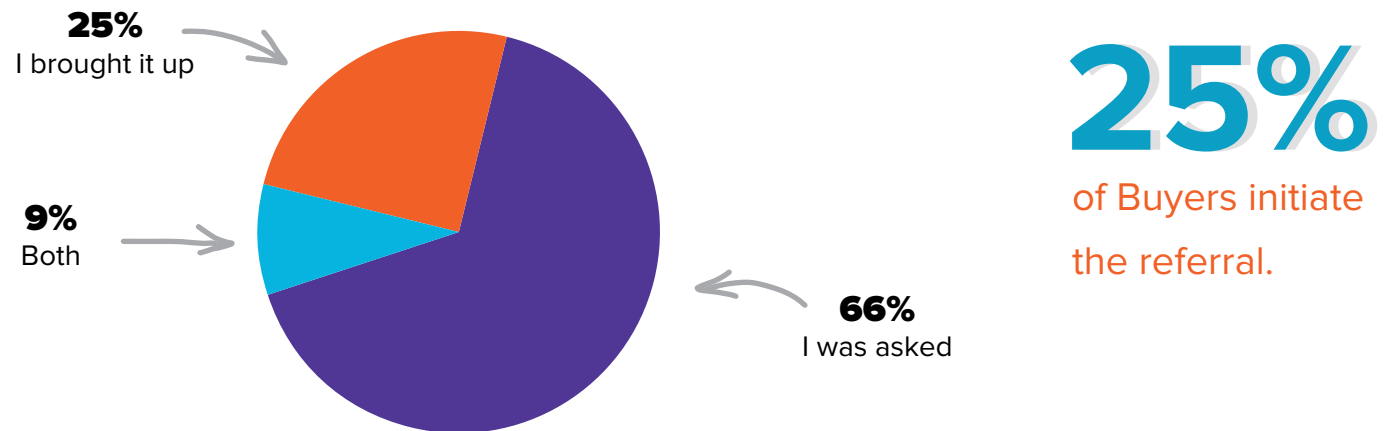


27%
of referrals
occurred within
the last 6
months.

Over one third of referrals occurred over a year ago (see Figure 20).

When asked to explain the circumstances around referrals, most Buyers (66%) waited until they were asked by someone before making the referral.

Fig. 21. Circumstances Around Referrals

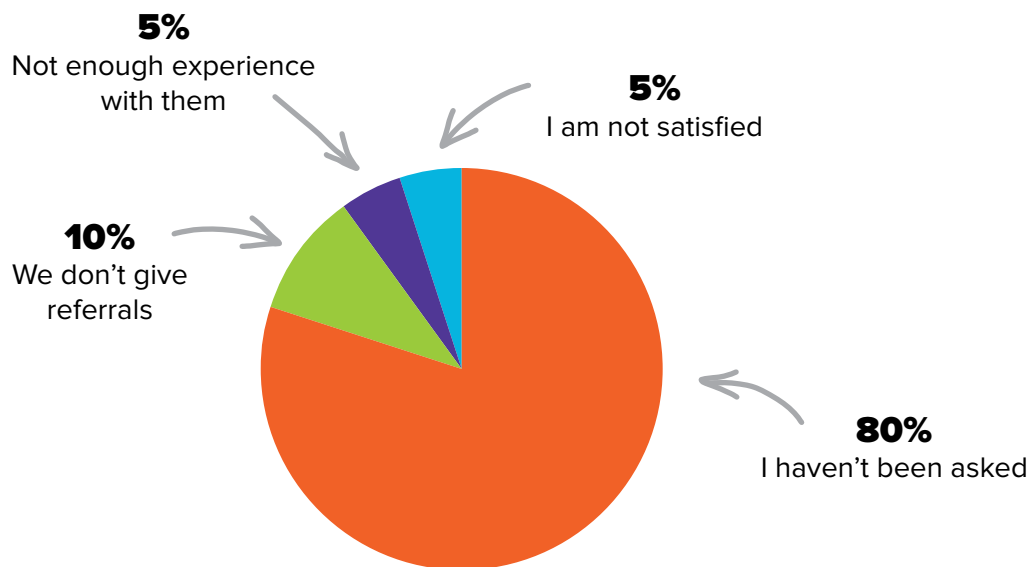


About 25% of Buyers initiate the referral. These are your best referral sources since they are behaving proactively.

Reasons for Non-Referrals

One approach to increasing referrals is to understand why Buyers don't recommend Sellers. The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 22.

Fig. 22. Why Buyers Don't Make Referrals



80%
of Buyers didn't
refer because
no one asked
them.

80% of Buyers didn't refer because no one asked them.

Another 15% didn't refer because the relationship was still too new or they have a policy against making referrals.

Only 5% of non-referrals were the result of dissatisfaction with the Seller.

It would seem that strategies aimed at encouraging inquiries of current clients are addressing the most prevalent issue.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

If Referrals Are So Important, Where Is Your Referral Plan...

To successfully generate referrals, there are a number of things providers can do. One is to create a word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) strategy. WOMM can help shape and influence the conversations already happening among buyers and other influencers. WOMM management breaks down into four primary components:



- 1. Monitor.** Find and track the conversations that are occurring about your firm. Identify and track the people most likely to share their opinions about your firm (both supporters and detractors).
- 2. Engage.** Take an active role in WOM by engaging with influencers in the various forums (blogs, social networks, etc.) where conversations are taking place or by providing company-developed tools for people to have conversations and share information.
- 3. Manage.** Give them something to talk about and create these conversations about the company, brand, offerings, and the like by providing good content and a point of view.
- 4. Measure.** Track the results of your efforts.

By focusing on these components, providers can harness the power of peer recommendations to generate leads, improve overall marketing results, and ease the burden of search for buyers.

Another way to create referrals is through a formal referral and/or reference program. In our experience with A/E/C companies, we find that very few have formal programs for references and referrals.

We know clients are willing to refer, but not everyone is going out of their way to do it. Therefore, providers need to be proactive and ask.

Of course, for a referral program to be successful, the providers have to actually be worth referring. If the firm isn't delivering on its promises and doesn't have satisfied clients, then it must work on this first.

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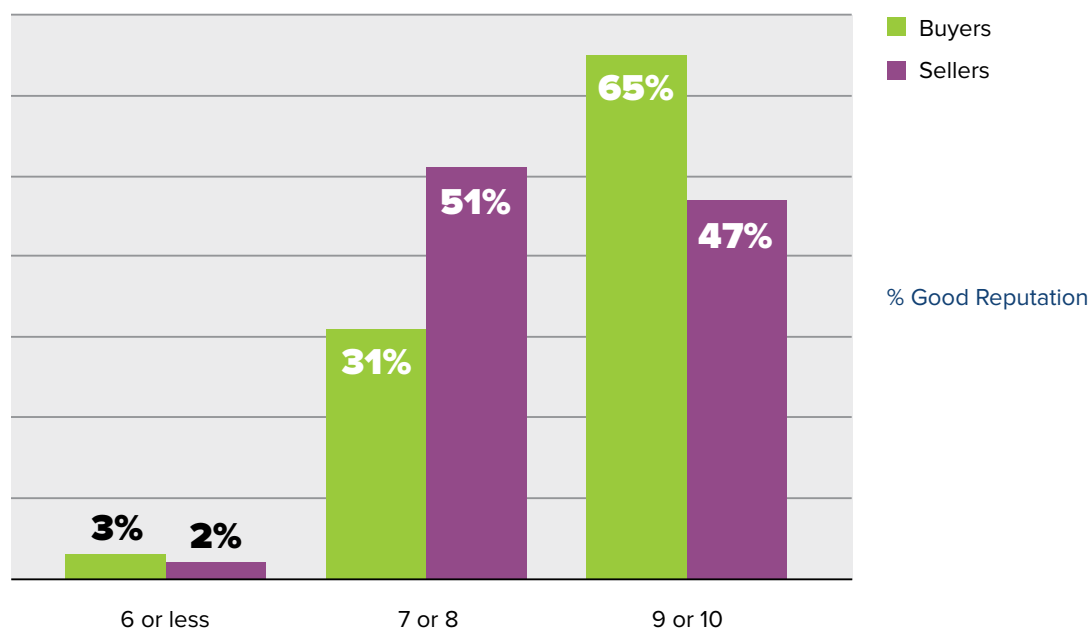
Understanding Your Brand

How strong are Sellers' brands within the A/E/C Services sector? We have addressed this important issue by evaluating how Buyers and Sellers view the two critical components of a professional services brand: reputation and visibility.

Firm Reputation

Figure 23 shows Buyers' and Sellers' ratings of the firm's reputation.

Fig. 23. Reputation Rating of Seller's Firm



65% of Buyers rated Sellers' reputation very highly (9 or 10). Only 3% gave them a low rating (6 or less).

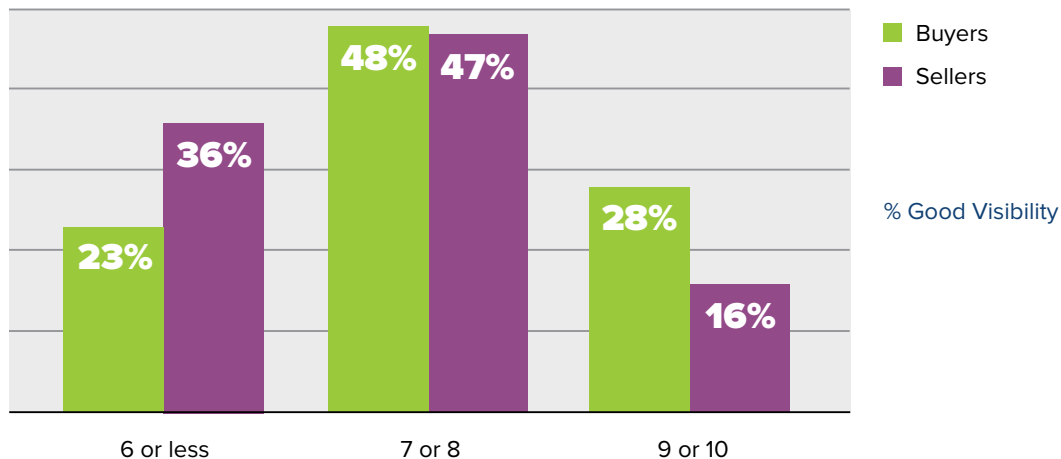
Sellers were less positive about their own reputation than Buyers. Sellers gave themselves the highest rating 47% of the time (vs. 65% for Buyers).

Sellers were less positive about their own reputation than Buyers.

Firm Visibility

Ratings of the Seller's firm marketplace visibility are shown in Figure 24.

Fig. 24. Visibility Rating of Seller's Firm



Marketplace visibility was rated much lower than firm reputation. Firms with great reputations but low visibility are likely quite common.

Sellers are likely to see their firms as less visible in the marketplace than their clients do. This is consistent with the pattern we found with firm reputation, but somewhat less pronounced.

There is clearly a lot of room for increasing firm visibility in the A/E/C marketplace.

If an increase in visibility is accompanied by a strong reputation, the brand will be much stronger.

Buyers tend to go with firms that they or their friends and colleagues know about and have good reputations (see Figures 3, 5, 6 and 8).

Marketplace visibility was rated much lower than firm reputation.



ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

The Most Powerful Branding of All...

If branding is our task in a professional services firm, what do we do? Assuming the underlying goals are to generate awareness, understanding, and preference:



- If you're shooting for brand **recognition**, what do you think a potential client will remember more: seeing your ad in a trade publication many times or hearing a great presentation from you that gave them a sense of your personality, expertise, style, and competence?
- If brand **articulation** is your goal, do you think people will remember your snappy tagline, or will people remember the articles you wrote that helped them work through a specific problem with which they were struggling?
- If brand **memorization** is your goal, what are you doing to keep your message constantly in front of current and prospective buyers?
- If brand **preference** is your goal, what do you think is more powerful: all the marketing communications you can aim at them over the course of two years, or one actual and very positive experience of what it's like to work with you?

Of course, it's the latter in each of the above situations that makes the strongest and longest lasting brand impressions. Instead of focusing on your logo and your brochure, focus on improving the ability of your professional staff to provide value, both with their clients and in the marketing and selling process.

The most powerful branding of all are the impressions your professionals can make on individual clients and prospects. The client interactions they lead, the work product they deliver, the presentations they give, the articles they write, and the value they provide in every contact with the world outside the firm is more important from a branding perspective than any marketing-based initiative you can implement.

So, focus on the people at your firm as the secret weapon for your branding. Help them be better across-the-board tomorrow than they are today. Give them more opportunities to connect with the marketplace. Improve your firm's client satisfaction and loyalty by improving the value you provide to your clients. Develop the passion, enthusiasm, and motivation of the professionals at your firm to create a vibrant culture of client satisfaction.

Strive to make even the smallest, most incremental gains in the overall excellence of your firm. Then communicate that excellence to the market in ways that create actual value for clients and prospects. For when the market sees, not your logo and snappy tagline, but your passion, excellence, and dedication to their success, you'll be executing the most powerful branding of all.

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Conclusion

What does this research mean for your A/E/C Services firm? Here are our top take-aways:

1. **A strong brand, both online and offline, is important to being considered by potential clients.** Reputation and visibility and the ability to be found online really do matter when it comes to making the list of potential new firms that Buyers consider.
2. **Reputation is the top deciding factor when it comes to Buyers' final decision on a new firm.** A reputation for broken promises and a failure to distinguish your firm are most likely to lose you a new prospect.
3. **Most Buyers (90%) are interested in more services from Sellers.** The problem is that most are probably not aware of the services you offer. A good working relationship is the foundation for communication about additional services.
4. **Delivering on your promises is the single best predictor of client loyalty.** When it comes to considering a new firm, 22% of Buyers are in the persuadable range.
5. **Overall, 68% of Buyers are very likely to recommend Sellers.** 80% of the time, when Buyers didn't refer, it was because no one asked them for a recommendation.
6. **Many firms have relatively weak brands.** Marketplace visibility was rated much lower than firm reputation. But visibility alone is not enough. Only if an increase in visibility is coupled with a strong reputation will the brand be much stronger.

Do these conclusions apply to all firms? Not necessarily. Each firm's specific circumstances are unique. But there are some clear patterns that point to common blind spots and missed opportunities. The firms that are the first to act on them will likely benefit the most.

Additional Resources

Special Offer to Our A/E/C Readers: Free Marketing Review

We encourage you to take advantage of a complimentary phone consultation. This is your opportunity to talk to a Hinge marketing expert about your marketing and branding challenges. Discuss your situation and learn which marketing strategies are really working in the A/E/C market today and what opportunities your firm should be considering. We promise there will be no hard sell or obligation — just a lot of valuable information from someone who knows your industry.

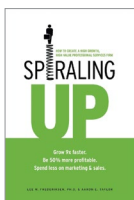
Call us today at 703-391-8870 and ask for your Free Marketing Review.



Online Marketing for Professional Services

In this research-based book, we describe how traditional marketing is being replaced by newer online techniques. We also reveal which techniques are used by the most successful firms and which are a waste of your time. It's free!

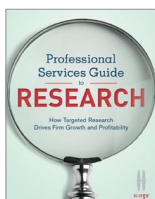
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This guide will teach you everything you need to know to get started with targeted research that drives firm growth and profitability. It's free!

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The Brand Building Guide for Professional Services Firms

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Hinge is a leading branding and marketing firm that specializes in professional services. We conduct regular research into the industries that we serve – with a particular focus on high growth firms – so that we can offer professional services firms the insights and edge they need to break out in a competitive and changing marketplace. With a comprehensive suite of online and offline branding and marketing services, we can help your firm build a competitive advantage. To learn more, visit us at www.hingemarketing.com.

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About Hinge Research Institute

At Hinge, research is more than skin deep. It is an essential part of who we are, helping us and our clients adapt to a changing marketplace and grow faster. We also believe in sharing our knowledge with our clients and the broader professional services community. This compulsion had us establish the Hinge Research Institute. The Institute is committed to conducting innovative original research on professional services firms and their clients.

We share our ongoing discoveries in research reports, webinars, whitepapers, articles and books. Please visit us at www.hingeresearch.com to access our latest research.

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About RAIN Group

RAIN Group is a sales performance consulting and training firm dedicated to helping companies succeed with the complex sale. Founded in 2002, the firm has grown over the last decade into a recognized leader in sales improvement with an international client base.



RAIN Group has helped tens of thousands of salespeople, managers, and professionals in dozens of countries increase their sales significantly with the RAIN SellingSM methodology.

RAIN Group leaders Mike Schultz and John Doerr were named the global Top Sales Thought Leaders in 2011 by Top Sales World. They are leaders in sales research and publishing, including *The Wall Street Journal* bestseller *Rainmaking Conversations*, *How Clients Buy*, *Lead Generation Benchmark Report*, *High Performance in Strategic Account Management*, and others.

They publish RainToday.com, named the Top Sales Resource Site by Top Sales World in 2010 and 2011. Their leaders speak at conferences and events globally on sales and selling.