

# Differentiation Guide

FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FIRMS

## **Differentiation Guide for Professional Services Firms**

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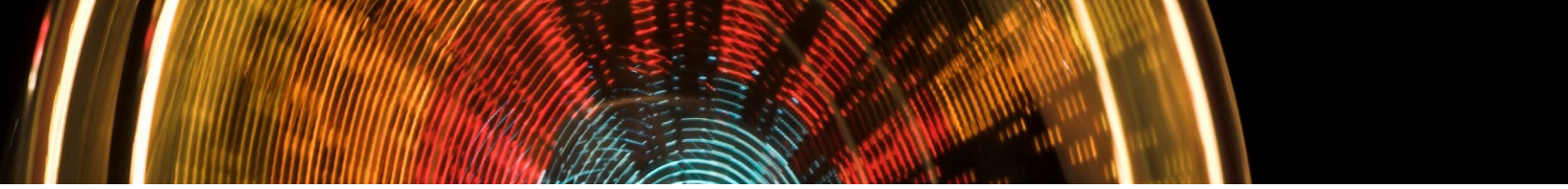
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# Introduction

Brand differentiation is one of the most poorly understood pillars of professional services marketing.

While some folks recognize that differentiation is the foundation of a solid brand, others maintain that it's not even important in the professional services marketplace. Even once firms understand the necessity of a distinct brand, many struggle to identify what makes them unique. Often, they miss wide-open opportunities to make themselves stand out.

This guide aims to get to the bottom of all the confusion.

- **Chapter 1** defines differentiation for professional services firms and explores the criteria of an effective differentiator
- **Chapter 2** examines 21 powerful ways that successful firms differentiate themselves
- **Chapter 3** walks you through each step of a genuine and comprehensive differentiation process
- **Chapters 4–6** take a close look at three dynamic firms that have successfully differentiated themselves in their marketplaces, explaining exactly how they did it.

After finishing the guide, you won't just understand how differentiation works and why it's so important. You'll have the knowledge you need to take a data-driven approach to differentiation—finding what *really* makes you different without all those fruitless arguments around the conference table.

Ready? Let's get started.



# Understanding Differentiation for Professional Services

Put simply, a differentiator is something that makes your firm meaningfully different from other firms. Yours doesn't have to be the *only* firm with that characteristic. You just want to set yourself apart from the competition.

Say, for example, you specialize in working with manufacturing companies. Others in your industry may share that specialty. But as long as *most do not*, you have a differentiator.

Furthermore, you can combine differentiators. For example, you may not only specialize in servicing manufacturers but also offer a money-back guarantee on your services. The fusion of these two characteristics could make your firm very special indeed.

Now, what about this whole *brand* thing? Well, your professional services brand is the combined product of your reputation and visibility. So brand differentiation means just what it sounds like: making your firm's brand different.

Before you start brainstorming, however, you have to understand the rules.

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## The Rules of Brand Differentiation

While "breaking all the rules" sounds like something that would set you apart, this is a case where following the rules really distances you from your competitors.

- 1. Your differentiator must be true.** In other words, you can't just make one up. You have to live it. If you promise a differentiator but fail to deliver, you will damage your brand.

Many firms say they have superior client service but do nothing special to make it a reality. No special policies. No special training. Nothing to ensure it actually happens. The bottom line is that you won't actually be different.

2. **It must be important to your client.** Even if you are different, that doesn't mean your client cares. We had a client who felt that their lack of conflict of interest (which many of their competitors suffered from) was their strongest differentiator. The problem was, when we interviewed their clients, they simply didn't value that characteristic. So much for a strong brand differentiator.
3. **It must be supportable.** Prove it. That is the challenge that every differentiator must overcome. It may be true and it may even matter to your clients, but if no one believes you, it will never fly. This is the fate suffered by many, many professional services brands.

This is especially a problem when it comes to “soft” brand differentiators such as client commitment, client service and talented staff. If “everyone says it” and you have nothing to point to, you’re out of luck. Kiss that differentiator goodbye.

## Is Brand Differentiation Important?

There are some folks who say that brand differentiation doesn't really matter. After all, most firms within the same industry offer pretty much the same services anyway, right?

Not so fast. In our research on high growth, high value professional services firms<sup>1</sup>, we found that high growth firms were almost three times more likely to have a strong differentiator.

So what about the argument that brand differentiation is not really possible? Easy? No. Possible? Absolutely. Here are some examples to prove the point.

Let's start with process. Many firms claim to have a unique process, but they can point to nothing truly different. Not so with [Webmarketing123](#). This San Francisco based search and social media agency serves a technology and manufacturing client group. They have developed a unique approach based on Kazan and 6Sigma principles—disciplines that their target clients know and value.

How about accounting firms? They can't be differentiated, right? Think again. Take the UK based firm, [Mazuma](#). They have a specialized target (young independent professionals and small firms), a unique strategy (centralized processing), and a very friendly brand image.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spiraling\\_up\\_create\\_a\\_high\\_growth\\_high\\_value\\_professional\\_services\\_firm](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/spiraling_up_create_a_high_growth_high_value_professional_services_firm)

Speaking of brand image, **MGO**, a Sacramento-based accounting firm, has embraced “boring.” They have built a differentiation strategy around an engaging brand personality.

And don’t forget specialization as a way to differentiate your firm. Perhaps the most common and reliable path to brand differentiation, it is what we do at Hinge. Everything about our brand is focused on professional services. We also use our independent research into high growth professional services firms as a way to set us apart. These are wrapped in a very pronounced brand personality to give us a clearly differentiated brand.

Now you’ve seen that differentiation is possible, and the criteria a differentiator must meet to be meaningful. Where do you get started? In the next chapter, we’ll explore 21 distinct approaches to differentiation.



# 21 Ways of Looking at a Differentiator

As we've seen, finding a differentiator for your professional services firm is not an easy task. Many firms struggle mightily only to come up with a differentiator that doesn't really differentiate them at all.

But take heart—there are many ways to successfully differentiate a brand. In this chapter, we've compiled 21 strategies that work for many professional services firms. Remember: you can have multiple differentiators. In fact, differentiators can often be combined to create a powerful competitive advantage.

1. **Specialize in an industry.** This is perhaps the easiest and most successful differentiator for most firms. Clients value the specialist in their industry. But be careful. If you try to specialize in too many industries, you will lose credibility.
2. **Specialize in serving a specific role within your client's organization.** This role-based specialization is also quite successful, especially if combined with an industry focus. If you head IT at a law firm, it's comforting to know that your service provider specializes in helping people just like you.
3. **Specialize in offering a particular service.** This is also quite successful, especially if the service you specialize in is rare and hard to find. But beware, unique service offerings can quickly become mainstream. Witness Sarbanes-Oxley compliance or social media marketing as two recent examples.
4. **Offer a truly unique technology or process.** By truly unique, we do not mean your process that starts with assessment and ends with monitoring results and making adjustments. We mean a method that is a whole different way of approaching the problem that offers a unique benefit to the client.
5. **Focus on understanding a particular target audience.** A key differentiator for some firms is their in-depth understanding of a particular audience. Your firm might specialize in marketing to Baby Boomer women. Your clients might be retirement planners, insurance companies, or clothing retailers, for example.

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6. **Specialize in serving clients of a certain size.** This is a common differentiator, although some folks don't think of it as such. Perhaps you work exclusively with the largest companies in the world. Contrast that with a firm that focuses on solo practitioners. Either firm could have a competitive advantage over the firm that serves clients of all sizes.
7. **All of your staff shares a specific characteristic or credential.** Everyone feels like they have a great team. So it's tough to make that stick as a differentiator. But what if all of your programmers hold PhDs in Computer Science? That is both provable and meaningful to a potential client. Or perhaps all your project managers are PMPs. Not as distinctive, but also provable and relevant.
8. **Specialize in clients that share a common characteristic.** This differentiator is focused on a characteristic of your clients other than their industry or role. Let's say you provide accounting and tax services for expatriates. They might be from any country, in any industry or any corporate role, yet you will have a competitive advantage.
9. **Focus on solving a specific business challenge.** Here, the spotlight is not on the client as much as on the nature of the business challenge they are facing. To work, it must be a challenge that is easily recognized and tough to solve without specialized skills and experience. Helping firms secure their first government contract is an example.
10. **Have one or more individuals who are high visibility experts in their fields.** This is a time-tested strategy that works very well. Having the country's top expert in your specialty is a very powerful competitive advantage. Many firms have been built on this differentiator alone. Add multiple high visibility experts and you will have a compelling and very valuable brand.
11. **Offer a unique business model.** Everyone in your profession bills by the hour, but you offer a fixed fee. Voilà, a perfect differentiator is born! A unique business model can be both meaningful and easy to prove. But be watchful. If it works well, you are likely to accumulate imitators.
12. **Have a specific geographic focus.** This is a very traditional differentiator that is losing some of its punch as technology and common business practices are making geography less important. But take heart, it can still work in situations where local knowledge or face-to-face interaction are still seen as important by potential clients.
13. **Offer access to a unique set of information not available elsewhere.** Sometimes, access to certain information can be very valuable to potential clients. Do you have benchmarking data that no one else possesses?



Some firms have built very valuable practices around proprietary data not easily duplicated.

- 14. Offer a unique set of contacts or relationships not easily accessible.** While the previous differentiator focused on information, this one is focused on relationships. Public relations firms have long used relationships with reporters and editors as differentiators. What relationships can your firm bring to the table?
- 15. Do business with a distinctive level of service.** In most cases, offering good client service is simply the price of entry. Everyone does it, or claims to. So to become a differentiator, your level of service really has to truly stand out. Can it be done? Indeed, there are still some physicians who make house calls.
- 16. Distinguish yourself by the clients you have.** Having an impressive client list is a plus for many firms. But what if you take it further? Some firms differentiate themselves based on their client list. For example, if your firm serves the higher education market and your clients are Harvard, Yale, and Stanford, you have a differentiator.
- 17. Focus on the size of your firm.** We are the largest...fill in the blank. Size sends a signal that you are doing something right in the minds of many potential clients. This combines nicely with a specialization to show both relevance (the specialty) as well as success (the largest). Find a niche and dominate it.
- 18. Emphasize your relationship with a parent firm or partner.** A close relationship with a parent firm can be a limiter (potential clients may feel like you cannot be objective about other technologies for example). But for other potential clients, it can be a big asset. Who knows the ins and outs of the technology better? This same differentiator might also be applied to situations where your firm is a value-added partner rather than a subsidiary.
- 19. Focus on a notable signature accomplishment.** Some firms can build a strong brand based on achieving a notable accomplishment. Firms that invented a technology or solved a highly visible problem for a very well known client are good examples. This type of notoriety can be leveraged throughout an industry and over time.
- 20. Specialize in producing a unique or very valuable result.** Similar to number 9, where you focus on a notable business challenge, this differentiator focuses on a valuable result. The key difference is that you may need to overcome multiple business challenges to produce the

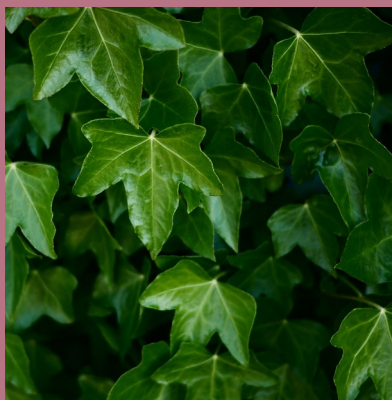




valuable result. For example, you might specialize in turning average growth clients into high growth firms. This could involve solving a wide range of business challenges, rather than a single one.

- 21. Look or act differently than all of your competitors.** Most professional services firms tend to look and act a lot like their competitors. Why? Perhaps you have been in the industry for a long time. Or perhaps doing things very differently feels risky. We see this all the time. Well, a very different look and feel can be a powerful differentiator for this exact reason. Combine this with other differentiators and you have the makings of a robust competitive advantage.

Each of these 21 strategies can meet the three criteria that every differentiator must clear—and they can be combined in ways that further distinguish a firm. In the next section, we'll detail not only how to identify appropriate differentiators for your firm, but how to own them.



## Want to do it yourself?

From step-by-step How-Tos to in-depth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

**Check out Hinge University:** [HingeUniversity.com](https://HingeUniversity.com)

# How to Find and Own Your Differentiators

When firms decide to identify their differentiators, the story tends to take a certain predictable shape. Stop me if you've heard this one before...

Everyone sits down around the conference table and shares their thoughts on the big question: How are we different from our competition? Now and then, a brave soul will even broach the question's scarier, often-unspoken corollary: *Are we different?*

After a lot of back and forth, most firms end up with variations on a handful of old standbys. "We care about our clients." "We do quality work." "We have great people."

Sound familiar?

## The Wrong Approach

At the end of such a meeting, the folks at these firms usually come away imagining that they've isolated their differentiators—but they haven't. Instead, they've left with something very different, the false comfort of sounding just like their competitors.

Consciously or unconsciously, we tend to assume our competitors know something we don't and model ourselves accordingly. That leads to a glut of false differentiators. Generally speaking, you're not going to find your differentiators around your conference room table.

## A Better Approach

But how can you find them? And once you've identified your differentiators, what's next? The five steps below will help you find a real differentiator for your firm—and not just find it, but own it.

1. **Choose an approach to differentiation.** There are two basic approaches to identifying your differentiators. You'll need to understand and weigh your options before you proceed. At the highest level, the two approaches are:
  - Making conscious management decisions that differentiate your firm from the competition. Put another way, you can decide how you will be different.

- Discovering the existing characteristics that distinguish your firm. This is a process of discovering differences, not creating them.

Both paths are legitimate and can be effective when carried out correctly. The first approach is more proactive. It requires a high capacity for boldness and improvisation and could mean making significant changes to the nature and direction of your business.

The second approach is a bit more passive, relatively speaking. But it can yield tremendous benefits to firms that aren't situated or seeking to make dramatic changes in direction.

Here's some good news. It's entirely possible for a firm to explore both paths at once, because the way forward for both approaches is the same: **research**.

- 2. Assess possible differentiators through research.** Whether you're considering new, differentiated directions for your firm or trying to understand your existing differentiators, you're going to want to conduct research on yourself and on the marketplace. Why? Time and time again, we've seen that firms misperceive their audiences' priorities, their own relevance to client needs, and even who their competitors are<sup>2</sup>.

In fact, our extensive studies on the topic have shown just how widespread the 'perception gap' problem is. Research empowers you to base your decisions on facts rather than hunches.

If you're exploring conscious changes in direction, research may help you specialize based on what you learn about your success with particular types of clients. Perhaps you've worked particularly well with smaller clients, for example. This finding may be an avenue for specialization, and that specialty could make for an effective differentiator.

Similarly, you could research several industries where you do work and find one that seems to afford the most opportunity. You may discover emerging issues, business models, or unmet needs that you're particularly well-suited to address. Research is your ear to the ground, helping you objectively evaluate opportunities for differentiation.

How about the 'discovery' approach? This generally requires marketplace research on your clients, influencers, and prospects to understand how your firm is seen. Is there anything you do that strikes these audiences as different,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/book-inside-the-buyers-brain>



unique, or valuable? Is there anything you're considering that stands out as being worthwhile?

Your clients and prospective clients may identify an aspect or characteristic of your firm that you haven't recognized, simply because it's business as usual for you. For example, they may tell you that you're unusually focused on return on investment. Perhaps you didn't realize that other firms didn't share your tireless focus on demonstrating and delivering ROI.

Or perhaps you've configured your services in a way that other people haven't—offering subscriptions in an industry that typically doesn't—but that difference isn't obvious to you. Taking advantage of external perspectives will help you see yourself as the marketplace sees you, and these fresh eyes can be invaluable.

3. **Identify the differentiators you want to pursue.** Now that you've explored potential differentiators through research, it's time to choose the ones that you will focus on to define your firm in the marketplace. Refer to last chapter's 21 ways to differentiate your firm and consider how you might combine some of the differentiators you've identified to craft a unique identity.

Emphasizing a given quality of your firm or taking a given direction will surely come with distinct advantages and disadvantages. Every differentiator has a downside as well as an upside. If you decide to focus on serving small firms, you may be discounting opportunities with larger firms. But that focus could be the right direction for you.

Consider the pros and cons, consider what kind of firm you want to be, and consider where opportunity and true distinction lies. Then select your differentiators accordingly.

4. **Validating with the marketplace.** Remember: the differentiators you choose need to be true, relevant to your audience, and supportable. Once you've identified your differentiators—either the existing qualities you mean to emphasize or those that you're setting out to claim through a new direction for your business—it's important to validate them with the marketplace.

Say you've identified an unmet need in the marketplace and you believe you're well-suited to meet it. Great! If you're planning to turn your firm's attention and resources toward this new offering, however, you'll want to verify that it's relevant and that you can carry it out, perhaps through additional marketplace research or small-scale experimentation with the new offering.

Remember: the differentiators you choose need to be true, relevant to your audience, and supportable.

Similarly, once you've identified an idea about what makes you different, you may need to conduct additional research to ensure that you can back up the claim effectively. Evaluate your proposed differentiators to see whether competitors are taking a similar tack, and to make certain that what you've identified is true, relevant, and supportable.

5. **Living your differentiators.** Planning, of course, is only the first step. Once you've validated your differentiators, it's time to live them out, proving and re-proving them every day.

Now, bear in mind that some differentiators are easier to prove than others. If you say, "our specialty is working exclusively with female entrepreneurs," audiences will know pretty quickly whether or not you can back that up.

Other differentiating claims, like "Our customer service is demonstrably better than the competition," might require more work to support. For these broader differentiators, you'll need more than testimonials—you might need a thorough study, something going much deeper than an assertion. And you will need to back it up with policies and training to make it real and lasting.

And your differentiators must be communicated. Ensure that your website and marketing materials describe, reflect, and prove your differentiators. Likewise for the way you talk to people—make sure that in professional communications, everyone from senior leadership to business development to human resources to marketing communicates in a way that speaks to your differentiators. If no one knows it, it's not a differentiator.

### The Bottom Line on Differentiators

It's essential to remember that no matter how you arrive at an effective differentiator, it's more than a lofty idea. It is who you are as a firm. When a differentiator is working as it should, it's a guiding imperative, expressing itself in your firm's every action.

You have to live your differentiators every day, working and acting in ways that are consistent with them. The work is continuous, and if you do it well, it can drive you to new levels of success.

In the following chapters, we take a look at three firms that have done just that.

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# How RS&H Shared Innovation Across Industries

For over 70 years, RS&H had played a key role in some of humanity's most staggering accomplishments, creating launch infrastructure for manned and payload-bearing space flights since the Apollo program. They were innovators in the truest sense of the word, not simply shifting the course of industries but doing what had never been done before and helping propel explorers to new heights. For other firms, these might have been clichés, but for RS&H, they were hard-won accomplishments, and over time their business had grown to encompass a diverse array of industries, including aerospace, aviation, defense, transportation, and corporate consulting.

When RS&H came to Hinge, they were looking to examine exactly what made the company distinctively themselves, regardless of the industry they were working in. Which characteristics defined the RS&H approach whether they were shaping launchpads or toll systems? Which of the firm's genes expressed themselves in every project, in every achievement?

## Studying the Pioneers

In order to identify these qualities, we had to understand the firm's differentiators. And for a firm of RS&H's scope and ambition, we would have to understand not only their firm-wide differentiators, but also the unique characteristics of each practice area. Without understanding each practice area individually, with their particular strengths and characters and histories, we would have no way of recognizing what they held in common. So we embarked on an expansive research project to identify what made RS&H tick, practice area by practice area.

We talked to current and prospective clients as well as RS&H team members in order to identify what set each division of the firm apart. As the study proceeded, commonalities began to emerge.

In aviation, RS&H's experts had authored major guidance documents such as the AIP Handbook, the Airport Master Planning Advisory Circular, and the NEPA Airport Handbook. They were industry leaders in spaceport planning and licensing. Likewise,



in transportation they were leaders in traffic and corridor modeling, tolling strategies, alternative mode analysis, and land use analysis due to their extensive work with progressive state departments of transportation. And, of course, they had singular experience in aerospace through their continuous experience creating launch infrastructure for NASA and the U.S. Air Force.

Although they worked in diverse industries, RS&H had nonetheless specialized in large-scale transportation infrastructure—and they were applying the expertise of high-profile experts to those industries’ challenges.

This specialization combined with the insight of very visible experts made for a powerful firm-wide differentiator: RS&H’s expertise encompassed major facilities infrastructure projects over land, air, and space, allowing us to apply broad perspectives and serve as stewards to diverse public and private endeavors.

### Uniquely Comprehensive

In the course of our research, it became clear that in each of its practice areas, RS&H delivered singularly comprehensive expertise on the full depth and breadth of project requirements, including funding, procurement, and alternative delivery methods. Here was another differentiator: a particular service in which the firm specialized that solved a particular business challenge. That service was being a truly holistic scope of industry-specialized insight.

We had identified consistent traits at the heart of RS&H’s innovation—and from here, we were able to help the firm shape their vision for the decades ahead. Based on the differentiators we identified, we were able to help RS&H craft powerful market positioning and industry-specific messaging, as well as the foundation for a Vision Statement that would carry the firm forward into its future. With renewed confidence and clarity, RS&H was able to articulate its distinct strengths and qualities to both itself and its audience, and take its next great stride.



# How Pariveda Solutions' Employees Make the Difference

When IT consulting firm **Pariveda Solutions** started business, its founders knew exactly what they wanted to accomplish: they wanted to create a firm that would last for a hundred years. Just as importantly, they set out to build a business that deserved to endure for a century and beyond, one predicated on integrity, servant leadership, and excellence. This scope of their ambition is reflected in their name: Pariveda is transliterated Sanskrit for “reaching toward complete knowledge.”

Already, Pariveda was a business with a difference. In the process of living out these ideals, that difference became the engine that drove their powerful brand differentiation. More specifically, they put an uncommon focus on their employees.

## Employee-Driven Excellence

Now, many firms talk up their teams. One of the most common mistakes businesses make in differentiation is relying on tired lines like “We have the best people,” to the point that it has become a cliché. But that doesn't mean emphasizing your team is inherently ineffective, and Pariveda shows why.

From the beginning, the employee-owned Pariveda took steps to create a culture of success that would drive the firm's relevance to clients—and in turn, drive growth. These steps were particularly effective because they blended two powerful differentiation strategies:

- 1. Have one or more individuals who are high visibility experts in their fields.**

Pariveda doesn't stop at hiring the brightest young experts in the IT industry—they help their team develop their expertise and shape their careers. With formal professional growth plans including a detailed skill-by-role matrix, Pariveda employees know the firm is as committed to their growth as they are to the growth of the firm. They aren't just given a roadmap, either. The firm's dedication to employee mentoring and training helps their team continuously grow and refine their talents with a reliable system of support.



2. **All of your staff shares a specific characteristic or credential.** Pariveda's emphasis on education and mentoring empowers the firm to cultivate another quality that sets it apart: consistent expertise. The firm's ongoing training covers a wide range of topics for all staff—not just on technical issues, but also business development practices. Each Pariveda employee has a specific networking plan and makes weekly reports on their activities, giving the team a uniform orientation to business development. Its referral network now drives 95% of the firm's business.

This approach has paid off with rapid growth and recognition from major industry publications like *Consulting Magazine*. It won't come as a surprise that they take particular pride in their "Best Places to Work" awards from the *Dallas Business Journal* and *Dallas Morning News*.

The problem with so many firms claiming to have "the best people" isn't that they're talking about their people. It's that the claim is too vague, usually failing to meet the basic criteria for an effective differentiator—specificity, supportability, and relevance. Pariveda points the way forward for firms with truly outstanding teams and cultures: by making their expert employees the heart of their business, Pariveda shaped themselves into a firm that could endure and grow.

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## Need some help?

Hinge offers a comprehensive suite of marketing and branding services to increase your visibility and grow your firm.

Let's explore how we can help:  
[differentiatenow@hingemarketing.com](mailto:differentiatenow@hingemarketing.com)

703 391 8870 | [hingemarketing.com](http://hingemarketing.com)



# How Summit Executive Resources Broke the Mold

Standing out from the crowd almost always begins with a spark. An idea. Such was the case with Melissa Henderson, **Summit Executive Resources** founder and CEO.

A veteran of the “retained executive search” industry, Melissa came up with an innovative way to match executives with hiring companies. The typical model of most search firms is to view the company as client, which fails the job-seeking executive by giving hiring companies too much control over such an important transition.

Taking her cue from the high-dollar sports industry, Melissa wondered what would happen if she were to offer a personalized search service to executives, similar to the style in which high-end agents promote their athletes. What better way to empower C-level job seekers than to employ a trained search professional as part of their team?

## Would It Work?

When Melissa came to us, she first wanted to make sure her idea was a good one. At first glance, we saw that she had chosen to create a unique business model as part of her differentiation strategy. By turning the search process “upside down,” her strategy was to put the job seeker in control, thereby presenting hiring companies with more appropriate candidates—at little or no cost to the companies.

Melissa made another smart move to further differentiate her service. She chose to focus exclusively on the technology industry so that she could network and promote her business in a more concentrated way.

Our first task was to conduct the research necessary to validate—or refute—Melissa’s basic assumptions. Would there be a demand among executives for a search “agent”? Who would those clients be? What would they be willing to pay? Would there be any perceived or real barriers to deploying her services?

Without market validation, it’s risky to assume that a new concept is actually going to fill an unmet need.

By using market research and in-depth interviews with potential clients, we were able to help determine that the market was indeed ready for this breakthrough approach to conducting executive searches. This finding was vital; too often, companies have misperceptions as to how “special” they are. Without market validation, it’s risky to assume that a new concept is actually going to fill an unmet need.

### Creating a Unique Message

Our next step was to craft a positioning and messaging platform that spoke to Melissa’s unique service offering. Because Summit Executive Resources offered a new-to-the-market concept, all layers of the messaging architecture had to state clearly—and quickly—how this type of collaboration would benefit the executive who was looking for a new position.

Moving into the task of developing the brand, we then created a new logo, a stationary package, a new website—all of which were designed to communicate positioning and to appeal to the high-end, busy executive.

### The Payoff

Because of the methodical way Melissa worked with us to research her concept and develop her go-to-market strategy, she has enjoyed tremendous success. Summit Executive Resources is a high-profile company within the technology industry, placing top executives and board members at major corporations. Additionally, the company can boast an average placement time that is significantly less than that of a typical executive search firm.

“We would not be here today, pioneering this new business, without having that strategy right,” says Melissa. “We’ve seen a dramatic growth in our business.” And that’s what having a strong differentiator as a foundation of a brand can do.





# Conclusion

In this guide's profiles of differentiation at work, we've seen how professional services firms can combine true, relevant, and provable characteristics to create truly stand-out brands.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, living out those differentiators is continuous—a commitment that your firm renews each and every day. But if you get your strategy right, a differentiated brand is within reach.





# About Hinge

Hinge specializes in branding and marketing for the professional services. We are a leader in rebranding firms to help them grow faster and maximize value.

Our comprehensive offerings include research and strategy, brand development, award-winning creative, high-performance websites and marketing outsourcing.

Hinge conducts groundbreaking research on professional services firms. We have identified a group of firms that grow 9X faster and are 50% more profitable yet spend less than average to get new business. We can show you how they do it.

To view our full library of research reports, white papers, webinars and articles, please visit: [www.hingemarketing.com/library](http://www.hingemarketing.com/library)

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703.391.8870

1851 Alexander Bell Drive, Suite 350

Reston, VA 22191

## Help Us Make this Guide Even Better

We want to hear from you. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource, please drop us a line: [info@hingemarketing.com](mailto:info@hingemarketing.com).

Thank you!



## How Hinge Can Help

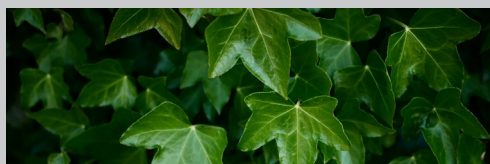
### Visible Firm® Program

Designed to deliver more referrals, higher profits, and faster growth, the Visible Firm® Program will build a powerful marketing platform to engage your audiences and build your visibility. Based on the most extensive research into high-growth firms ever conducted, the Visible Firm® Program will ground your marketing in science and leverage your firm's expertise to draw in the right audiences.

For more information, call 703.391.8870 or email us at [info@hingemarketing.com](mailto:info@hingemarketing.com).

## Take the Next Step

Choose the option that's right for you.



### Want to do it yourself?

From step-by-step How-Tos to in-depth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

**Check out Hinge University:**  
[HingeUniversity.com](http://HingeUniversity.com)

OR



### Need some help?

Hinge offers a comprehensive suite of marketing and branding services to increase your visibility and grow your firm.

**Let's explore how we can help:**  
[differentiatenow@hingemarketing.com](mailto:differentiatenow@hingemarketing.com)