How Being Efficient Makes You Less Effective

By Dan Richards
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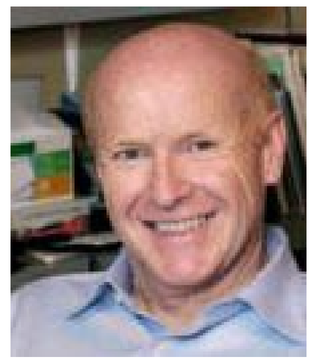

Technology allows us to communicate with existing and prospective clients more quickly and easily than ever before. All you have to do is put everyone's email address in your system, craft your message, press the send button and you're done.

The problem? While that communication is efficient, it isn't necessarily effective. That's because in the escalating volume of emails that we all get, anything that feels like an impersonal mass message risks being ignored. The challenge is to meld efficient communication with personal touches that stand out and set you apart.

Here are three examples of how efficiency gets in the way of effective communication:

Phone invites to client events

I recently spoke to an advisor – let's call her Liz – who for years has hosted regular educational sessions for her clients, typically held over the lunch hour and after work. Feedback on those sessions has been consistently excellent and the format of the invitations hasn't changed – a high quality "wedding style" invitation is mailed to clients.

Despite the positive response to these events, the turnout had been in a steady decline – especially among her top clients. A couple of years ago, Liz surveyed clients to ensure the topics were ones that people were concerned about and began sending email follow-ups in addition to the mailed invitations. They got a bit of a lift as a result, but turnout still wasn't what they'd been used to in the past.

Then, early last year Liz made a couple of changes that led to a dramatic improvement in attendance, especially among her most important clients. First, just before the invitations are mailed out, Liz and her team call as many clients as they can, with a special focus on top clients. If they don't get their client, they leave a simple message:

"Dan, I'm calling because we're just mailing out the invitations to our next lunch on February 18. The topic relates to new ways to make your charitable donations work

harder, I know this is something you've expressed interest in before. Just calling to give you a heads-up on this and to say that we hope you can join us."

Then on the invitation that goes to that client, whoever called the client will write a short personal note, along the lines of "*Looking forward to seeing you on Feb 18"* or "*Hope you can join us on Feb 18."*

In talking to Liz, she acknowledged the extra effort involved: *"It was much quicker and easier when all we had to do was mail out invitations. But I've come to realize that if we want busy people to come out to our events, we have to work harder to attract them than in the past."*

If efficiency is your main goal, then calling clients and writing personal notes on invitations is a mistake; this certainly makes the process less efficient. But if effectiveness is your standard for success, then taking the extra time for personal contact in a less efficient manner is a sacrifice that's well worth making.

Sending invites on LinkedIn

LinkedIn has become the networking tool of choice for many advisors and the business community. For many of us, a day seldom goes by without receiving an invitation to connect on LinkedIn.

One small snag to making those invites feel personal: They almost all have the same copy: *I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn.*

That's because this is the default invite copy on LinkedIn – the easiest and most efficient way to invite someone to join your network is to connect button and then click send. Most efficient, yes … but if your goal is to truly demonstrate your interest to clients or prospects, not the most effective.

Late last year, I got an idea from an advisor – named Bob – that I've begun implementing myself. Whenever Bob sends a LinkedIn invite, he takes 30 seconds to personalize the message, often suggesting that they catch up over a coffee. Before doing this, the people who Bob invited to join his network typically accepted the invitation but there was no further communication. Since he began personalizing the invites, he's seen a big jump in opportunities to connect with people as a result.

If your goal is to engage with prospects, instead of using the generic message that everyone else employs, consider taking a bit of extra time to customize the invitation. In fact, you could make the case that if it's not worth investing 30 seconds to personalize someone's invitation, they're not worth inviting. Again, what you lose in efficiency (those 30 second messages do add up, after all) you gain in effectiveness.

Personalizing invitations

The last instance of efficiency versus effectiveness comes from a personal experience.

In late 2011, I hosted a morning session for CEOs and senior management of financial institutions, fund companies and large financial advisory firms, focusing on the hot-button issues that would drive their future success.

The morning was presented in partnership with three other firms that are suppliers to the attendees. We put together a great agenda and there was no cost for this, but given how busy everyone is, there was still some apprehension about the turnout. That was amplified by the fact that we only sent out 100 invitations.

The morning was a big success, with over 60 guests in attendance. Part of the reason was due to the strong program, part stemmed from the fact that we had a very compelling theme and invitation and part arose from the fact that we'd all talked this up as much as possible in conversations with invitees leading up to the event.

But there was one other factor that helped attendance. When we got together to sign the letters of invitation, we all took an extra 30 minutes to add personal notes to the bottom of the invitation, wherever we had a good personal connection. A small thing at one level, but I had no less than four attendees tell me that one of the things that influenced their decision to attend was that note at the bottom. That note took what might have seemed a generic invitation and made it very personal.

As you think about your own plans for 2013, by all means continue to focus on increasing the efficiency in your practice. Just be sure that in the process of achieving efficiency you don't sacrifice effectiveness along the way.

Dan Richards conducts programs to help advisors gain and retain clients and is an award winning faculty member in the MBA program at the University of Toronto. To see more of his written and video commentaries, go to www.clientinsights.ca. Use A555A for the rep and dealer code to register for website access.