

Marketing Q&A:

How to Find the Time, and Other Ideas

With businesses more “bottom-line” conscious than ever, it’s become increasingly crucial for EA professionals to effectively market their services as cost-effective solutions for business clients. Don Jorgensen and Judith Braun recently spoke with *Employee Assistance Report (EAR)* about marketing an EAP. Jorgensen, PhD, CEAP, is immediate past president of EAPA, and he is President of Jorgensen/Brooks Group in Arizona. Braun, CEAP, is Vice President of organizational services with Mines & Associates in Colorado.

***EAR:** In today’s fast-paced society, nearly everyone laments the lack of time. How can an EA professional find the time to market their EAP?*

JB: Finding time is certainly a struggle when you’re trying to do clinical work, intake, and everything else. You really need to have someone dedicated to it. If it’s a small EAP, I recommend hiring someone part time. They are affordable on an hourly scale.

***EAR:** Where would a small EAP find part-time assistance in marketing?*

JB: Networking. Association meetings are one possibility, as are looking at the small business entrepreneurs in your community.

***EAR:** How do you get a prospective client interested in your services?*

DJ: We emphasize the uniqueness of our services, but it’s even more important to keep in mind the services that *they* need. The key to marketing is to customize training to recognize *their* needs. People like a personal approach, and they want you to have a definite level of understanding about their workforce.

JB: We seek to differentiate ourselves from a large, national organization. While a large provider may have a difficult time turning around a problem quickly, we point out that we can do things differently.

***EAR:** Can you explain the role of communication in soliciting new business?*

JB: The communication piece is very important. It’s said that people have to hear your name seven times before they remember you, so the question is, are you visible in the community? Do you attend Chamber of Commerce functions? Are you involved in human resource organizations like SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management)?

***EAR:** Would you say that communication remains important after you’ve secured the new client?*

DJ: Absolutely. You must educate supervisors about the EAP and the referral process, and about the difference between being a full-service EAP and just providing counseling. We have a good percentage of management referrals, which shows that they understand the process.

JB: It's crucial to develop a relationship with the broker. Some don't have a clue what an EAP is or they don't know what the core services are. When you've established a relationship and communication is open, they will want the EAP's feedback. Being confidential is good, and it's not good, but you can at least outline procedures. It's also important to get in front of people regularly. Whether it's participating in company workshops, wellness fairs, staff meetings, or other activities, the more you can get on-site and become entrenched in the business, the better. Also, whether it's a suicide or an on-site accident, more clients are seeing the value of process groups.

***EAR:** How do you respond to prospective clients who have doubts about an EAP's cost-effectiveness?*

DJ: Make the prospective client aware of the benefits of a full-service EAP; for instance, how we can cut healthcare costs. Businesses want to see a return on investment, and we've developed formulas that we can track with the client.

JB: Educate them about *all* of your services. Also, stress the importance of safety and productivity issues. Explain that not bringing one's problems to work is not realistic. Show that productivity not only costs money, but it can affect safety, too. For example, point out how unlikely it is that a forklift driver who's highly distracted due to some problem could possibly be operating equipment safely.

***EAR:** Are clients who aren't familiar with EAPs surprised to find out what services are available? Are there services they're more likely to request than others?*

DJ: They are surprised at the level of consultation we provide; that managers are welcome to call us anytime as their advisers. Second, would be how we can customize training. For example, one trend we're seeing is that rather than simply basic *supervisor* training and orientation, we're seeing an increased need for more specialized *leadership* training due to the reduction in middle management positions and the lack of basic supervisory skills training. We also receive a number of requests for training in workplace violence and conflict resolution. Overall, getting managers involved in trainings raises visibility of the EAP.

JB: It really depends on the company. Some use us for conflict resolution, but others might not.

***EAR:** Even though it's important to attract new business, would it be correct to say that the EAP isn't necessarily going to be a good fit with each and every business?*

DJ: If a prospective client is looking for the cheapest EAP, we'll direct them to one, but it won't be ours or any legitimate, full-service EAP firm. Here's another difference to look for: We require staff and affiliate providers to be EAPA members. We help prospective clients recognize the benefit gained by selecting an EAP firm with a strong commitment to the profession, as opposed to simply being the low bidder (for services).

JB: Sometimes large companies just want a toll-free number. If that's all they want is to be able to say they have an EAP, you really don't want them as clients.

***EAR:** What do you see as the most pressing marketing issue affecting Employee Assistance professionals, and what can they do about it?*

DJ: Judy (Braun) is exactly right. EAPs must continue to demonstrate to brokers and purchasers that a recognizable return on investment is gained *only* from a full-service EAP. In both the short and long term, low-bid cut-rate EA services cause the field more harm than good.

JB: One of the big problems within the EAP field, as in any field as it matures, is the commoditization of services. Prices for EAP services are now lower than they were in the 1980s. Being able to demonstrate value and ensure that people are truly getting a “core services” EAP -- as opposed to a program that is simply an extension of the insurance benefit -- is a big challenge.