

What Do You Really Do for a Living?

By Duane Carey, CPG, MBA



You had a rock collection as a kid. You have a rock collection as an adult. You're a geologist. You bristle when clients refer to you as their "engineer".

When you finished school and entered the real world, you had minimal client contact, but had plenty of time to hone your geological skills while collecting data, constructing maps, and drawing cross-sections. After you gained some experience, you had more contact with clients, and as a scientist among lay people, you were shocked by the level of scientific ignorance among the decision makers. The guys writing the checks didn't know their excavations from a hole in the ground.

When you finally got the chance to expound on the fine points of your science, you let 'em have it. You talked about potentiometric surfaces, aquitards, and head differentials. On the other side of the table, eyes glossed over, heads became heavy, and thoughts drifted far away. But you didn't notice; you were on a roll. You were talking about geology and it was important, dammit. Big mistake.

Although we all have geology degrees, we're not in the business of geology. We're in the business of customer service.

The truth is, clients couldn't care less whether you're a geologist or a furniture salesman. They don't care where you went to graduate school, and they don't care about your grade point average. They care about getting their problem solved, and they hired you to solve it in the most efficient manner possible. The consultant who does that best will win more follow-on work and referrals, often without competitive bidding.

How can it be a mistake to delve into the details of the analysis that led to your conclusions? After all, how can the client make reasoned decisions without understanding *how and why* you reached

your conclusions? The answer is fairly straight-forward. Good customer service (the business we're all engaged in) requires rapport. Good rapport requires you to understand what the client really wants; indeed, a common definition of rapport is "a relationship of mutual understanding and trust". Is it possible for you to have a *mutual trust* with your clients? Of course, but it's very unlikely for you to have *mutual understanding* about the technical aspects of the work. Most clients just don't have a clue about the Earth sciences. So the most effective way to build rapport with most clients is to form a mutual understanding of *their* perspective – it's much easier for your to relate to their business perspective than it is for them to relate to your science perspective.

Here are some key practices to help you build rapport:

- Listen, and let them do most of the talking
- Empathize
- Use your scientific skills to solve their problem: remember that you're a geologist by training, but a consultant by practice

Follow these practices. Remember that the client needs his problem solved more than you need to write another dissertation. If you do, I promise you won't have to take a weekend job selling furniture.

A Note About This Column

This is the first of a new series of columns dealing with marketing for consulting geologists. The series will focus on the Four P's of marketing, including Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. This issue's column dealt with product, inasmuch as a consultant's "product" includes his expertise and service, and the delivery of those intangibles to the client. Deliver your product ineffectively, and the growth of your business will

suffer. But if you provide your product (service) at a reasonable price with attention to the client's needs, you can't help but prosper.

It is common for business people to equate marketing with advertising, which can be very costly and have sometimes dubious results. In reality, advertising is just one component of the overall marketing strategy and may not even be appropriate for many businesses. Therefore, this column will feature a wide variety of topics designed to maximize your corporate growth with minimal investment. Future topics will include public relations strategies, techniques to optimize your web site for search-engine recognition, networking, blogging, writing effective ads, direct-mail techniques, and newsletters, just to name a few.

The goal is to stimulate thought about the business side of being a geologist; even if you disagree with the opinions, I hope that you'll gain some helpful insights. I welcome your comments, criticisms, and suggestions for future columns. You can reach me at 410-312-0081 or duane@MilkYourMarketing.com

Duane Carey is President of IMPACT Marketing & Public Relations in Columbia, Maryland. He was a consulting hydrogeologist for 11 years prior to launching a marketing consulting firm in 2003. He earned his MBA at Johns Hopkins University (JHU), and is a Certified Professional Geologist (#10305) and past President of the Capitol Section of AIPG. In late 2005, he took over the helm of IMPACT, which was founded in 1990 by one of his professors at JHU.