

# The Status of Marketing in Quantity Surveying Consultancy Firms

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## Abstract

There is an increasing recognition that marketing plays an indispensable role in enhancement of the professionals' performance and the growth of their businesses in the midst of competition resulting from changes that are occurring in the construction industry. However, little research considers the level of adoption and implementation of marketing in the management of professional service organisations operating in the built environment consulting industry. This paper reports on a study carried out to investigate the status of marketing in the operations of a Quantity Surveying Consultancy (QSC) business in Ghana. The result should assist management in self evaluating their performance. A questionnaire survey of QSC firms was undertaken to investigate their current practice in terms of marketing organisation, marketing policy and marketing strategies being pursued by the QSC firms. Findings show that no department exist in the firms that are solely responsible for marketing functions. Regarding marketing policy and strategy, varying views exist in the firms as no particular trend can be traced in the responses; there is therefore a need for better understanding of marketing and the ways by which it can be implemented to achieve intended results.

**Keywords:** Quantity surveying, marketing, marketing strategy, marketing policy, Ghana.

## 1. Introduction

Marketing mainly deals with customers and aims to manage profitable customer relationships. There are mainly two goals of marketing, which are: 1) attracting new customers by promising superior value than competitors do, and 2) keeping and growing current customers by delivering satisfaction (Kotler and Armstrong 2009). Drucker (1993) emphasized the importance of marketing for an enterprise with the following statements:

“Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two and only these two basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs. Marketing is the distinguishing, unique function of the business”.

Marketing does not only deal with sales but also covers all areas of the enterprise (Kotler and Keller 2008).

Marketing is a business philosophy that puts the customer at the centre of all the organisation's considerations (Dikmen *et al.*, 2005) and this enables the firm to effectively service the need of customers, which in the view of Levitt (1983) is the purpose of business-to create a customer. To achieve that in the view of Dikmen *et al.* (2005) involves identifying needs in the market place, finding out which needs the firm can profitably serve, and creating an offering that can convert potential buyers to into customer. This assertion explains the rationale for marketing by stating its ultimate desired outcome (Dikmen *et al.*, 2005). Friedman (1984) added that marketing is an activity with a potential for increasing sales. In line with this opinion, Arditi *at al.* (2008) described marketing as an ‘investment for creating a competitive edge-an empowerment for competitive advantage’.

In their book *In search of excellence*, Peters and Waterman (1982) pointed out that the most successful US firms were characterised by a common dedication to marketing, more specifically the key to their success lies in keeping close to the customer. These assertions further reveals the main benefit of marketing that makes it indispensable for the QSC Firm's survival and the desire for greater profitability in such a highly competitive business environment. The observation by Kotler and Conner (1977) that marketing, far from being a negligible function in managing professional service firms, is now recognised as one of the more important functions for helping professional firms to meet the unprecedented challenges faced by professional practices is therefore heart-warming.

It is therefore startling to note that several researchers (Moore, 1984; Morgan and Morgan, 1990; Morgan and Morgan, 1991; Pheng, 1991; Peck, 1994; Rwelamila and Bowen, 1995) have made observations that appear contrary to that of Kotler and Conner (1977). Moore (1984) noted that marketing management has not yet been applied to any greater extent in the construction industry. Morgan and Morgan (1990) also stated that marketing is less developed in the professional industry and often performed in most firms in an *ad hoc* basis. According to Morgan and Morgan (1991), marketing within the professional sector is considered at worst as an alien concept, and at best as a new development that is viewed with scepticism. Similarly, Pheng (1991) observed that marketing has attracted only little attention among professionals, a situation which is in direct contrast to the role of marketing in the consumer goods industry (Gummesson, 1979), where marketing is accepted as one of the

cornerstones of servicing the needs of clients and customers. Peck (1994) further indicated that some consulting firms are still struggling to understand and implement effective marketing programmes and this in the view of Rwelamila and Bowen (1995), suggests that QSC Firm are still clinging to an out-dated, bull market philosophy: 'As long as we do good work we will always have plenty of work'. This philosophy is an impediment that is preventing the QSC Firm from achieving sustainable growth in that lack of an effective marketing programme has the tendency to result in a mismatch of created offering by the firm and the needs of clients.

Unfortunately, construction management researchers have been silent about this most important aspect of business development. The literature available on marketing in the professional industry is more generic in nature (Kotler and Conner, 1977; Lidstone, 1984) and mostly combines consulting engineering practices with several other professional services such as accounting, medicine, brokerage, insurance etc. (Rwelamila & Bowen, 1995). However, the distinctive business environment of the QSC Firm makes the assumption that marketing approaches used in other commercial settings will necessarily work in the QSC Firm inappropriate (Morgan *et al.*, 1994) Morgan and Morgan (1991) reports that such literature are prescriptive in nature and are also based on the experiences and observation of American practising marketing consultants rather than an academic research.

The few academic research works that have been conducted in different countries comprises that of Morgan (1990) in the United Kingdom, Rwelamila and Lethola (1998) in South Africa, and Marr *et al.* (1996) in New Zealand. Morgan (1990) found that very seldom firms have their own marketing departments or specific individuals responsible for marketing. Even when marketing department exists, the consulting firms still struggle to implement marketing functions effectively. Merr *et al.* (1996) measured the perception of marketing by private engineering consultancies in New Zealand and found that competing on price is one of the major barriers to the consulting engineer's adoption of the marketing concept. The result obtained by Rwelamila and Lethola (1998) gives support to Morgan (1990) and Marr *et al.* (1996).

Rwelamina and Bowen (1995) noted that specifically on marketing of professional quantity surveying services, the body of literature available is scant with a few empirical studies having been undertaken. Knowles (1986) and Davis (1992) added that the little existing literature does not focus on marketing development *per se*, rather it comments on quantity surveying practices in a changing environment with emphasis on new roles and responsibilities (Cooper, 1978 Jones, 1983; Jacobs, 1986), that can make the firms adjust to the changes being experienced in the professional industry.

The study was therefore set out with the aim of exploring status of marketing in management of quantity surveying business, based on which measures were proffered to improve the marketing performance of the firms. To achieve that, the study examined the following key areas of marketing management.

- 1) To examine the existence of an organizational entity charged with various marketing responsibilities.
- 2) To determine guidelines that forms the basis of the attitude towards marketing strategy formulation within the QSC firms.
- 3) To examining the typologies of marketing strategies being pursued, and their main tactical ingredients.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: First, a description of the research methods and procedures used in the study is given. The results of the enquiry are then discussed. Finally, implications, limitations and directions for future research are offered.

## 2. Research Methodology

A self administered questionnaire survey was conducted to establish current marketing development within quantity surveying firms in Ghana. The choice for questionnaire surveys was informed by the fact that such research instrument has been used previously in several studies on construction marketing with much commendable success rate. Therefore, a questionnaire was designed as the research instrument and administered to the respondents as done in similar studies carried out by several other researchers (Morgan and Morgan 1991; Namu and Fellows 1993; Marr *et al.*, 1996; Bowen and Rwelamila, 1995 Ardit *et al.*, 2008, Yisa *et al.*, 1995, Morgan 1990)

To reach the target respondents, the research adopted mainly non-probability/random sampling design of which snowball sampling technique is part. Non – probability sampling designs are suitable in situations where the number of elements in the population is either unknown or cannot be individually identified (Kumar, 1996). Kumar (1996) describes the snowball sampling technique as a process of selecting a sample by using network. By adopting this approach, a few QSC Firms that were known and easily accessible were contacted and questionnaire administered to them. The known QSC Firm was then asked to identify the other QSC Firm and those identified by them also become a part of the sample. These new firm were also asked to identify other QSC Firm and in turn those identified also became the basis for further data collection. This process continued until the saturation point when the total number of QSC Firm operating in the Capital City was reached.

Questionnaires were sent to practices rather than individuals, using the list of registered quantity surveying practices under the GhIS. Questionnaires were sent to all registered practices, the total survey size amounting to 39 firms in Ghana mostly located in Accra. Questionnaire of 22 firms were retrieved for subsequent analysis. This constituted a response rate of 56% which is considered highly acceptable for a survey of this nature (Kumar, 1999). The instructions accompanying the questionnaires stressed the relatively small demand that completing the questionnaire would make upon respondents. The instructions also indicated the purpose of the survey; promised feedback to contributing organizations; and guaranteed anonymity in the published results. Questionnaires were delivered to the respondents by the researcher and collected in the same manner. It was envisaged that the questionnaire would be completed by a senior partner/director of the organization to whom the questionnaires were sent.

The questionnaire was divided into four main sections dealing with: the attitude and practices of marketing within the organization; marketing goals of the organization; the marketing policies employed by the firm; and the marketing strategies adopted by the practice. Having decided on the rating scale, Likert scales was adopted to help elicit the appropriate ratings. The conventional five-point rating scale was used as Oppenheim (1992) suggests that more complex scoring systems possess no significant advantage. Subsequently, the variables were ranked per their level of importance by the respondents using Likert rating scale of 1-5, where 1 = true, 2 = more true than false, 3= difficult to say, 4 = more false than true and 5 = false.

These measures used in the questionnaire were developed by Birley *et al.* (1987) and are related to the “excellence” research by Peters and Waterman (1982) and previous work on marketing effectiveness by Kotler, (1977). Analysis of the responses was done by using descriptive statistics such as percentages to identify, summarize, and synthesize the views of respondents to understand trends in their marketing practices and importance that is attached to marketing by the firms.

### 3. Empirical Findings

#### 3.1 Organization for Marketing

Organization for marketing in a firm is demonstrated by the existence of a marketing department or personnel in charge of marketing activities within the firms. The existence of a marketing department is often an indicator of the importance placed on the customer or client as it will help the firm know the kind of customer being dealt with. The priority of the firms must lie in considering and understanding the clients as customers with their own motivation, characteristics and personality, rather than the firm talking about markets and marketing.

The findings indicated that none of the firms maintained any kind of organization for marketing in the form of a marketing department, or specific individuals responsible for marketing in the firms. This enquiry revealed that Quantity Surveying firms in Ghana are not involved in marketing their firms. Their main responds to this enquiry was that per their Organizational Rules, they are not allowed to involve themselves in any form of marketing. Hardly will one see any sign post or sign board directing to the location of the firms. Their main medium of getting clients is through the media or introduction by someone. The firm apply for work published in the dailies and execute when awarded the contract.

While a description of marketing organization does provide a useful starting-point in determining how well an organization demonstrates the importance it accord to marketing activities, Pearson and Wilson, (1967) argues that the organizational structure and configuration do not solely indicate a firm’s degree of market-orientation. Indeed this is supported by others, who equate market-orientation to “client-centeredness”. When quantity surveyors understand clients and their changing needs, they should then turn to the functional issues available to enable them to meet their clients’ needs. Therefore, in order to determine more specifically the nature and extent

of marketing effort within these firms, an examination of more substantive areas of marketing policies pursued by the firm and the firm's marketing strategy and its main tactical ingredients is important.

### 3.2 Marketing policy

This section of the survey is dedicated to the sourcing of various marketing policies laid down in these firms. The marketing policies of a firm need to be compatible with the reality of the services on offer. Table 1 highlights the responses to a number of statements which unveiled the firm's attitudes towards marketing and their associated practices.

Most of the respondents think their company as providing a service rather than selling a product (77.2%), some of the respondents believed that they viewed the business through the eyes of their customers (45.4%), and constantly seek the to improve their total offering to customers (81.9%). Furthermore, most of the firms encourage feedback from their customer base (95.5%). But only few (18.2) felt that innovation and change came from the customer, as the firms have their laid down annual programmes which kept them going on.

TABLE 1: Attitudes and Practices of Marketing

Attitude Statement	accuracy of representation									
	1		2		3		4		5	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
My company thinks of itself as providing a service rather than selling a product	12	54.5	5	22.7	5	22.7	-	-	-	-
Employees of my firm view the business through the eyes of their customers	3	13.6	7	31.8	11	50	1	4.5	-	-
My firm feels the key to attracting and holding customers is to keep improving service quality	10	45.5	5	22.7	7	31.8	-	-	-	-
Employees of my firm would take a quality complaint as a personal insult	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4.5	21	95.5
My firm constantly seeks to improve its total offering defined in terms of more value for its customers	10	45.5	8	36.4	3	13.6	-	-	1	4.5
An important objective of my company is to provide a reliable high value-added service	14	63.6	7	31.8	-	-	1	4.5	-	-
my firm encourages feedback from its customers	9	46.9	12	54.5	1	4.5	-	-	-	-
My firm feels that innovation and change come directly from the customers	-	-	4	18.2	6	27.3	11	50	1	4.5

**Likert scale of accuracy of representations: 1, true; 2, more true than false; 3, difficult to say; 4, more false than true; 5, false.**

**Source, Field Data 2013**

Table 2 illustrates the perceived posture towards marketing policy within respondent firms. The higher percentage (90.9%) of firms believes in providing superior quality service and attention to details of doing the job well. Majority of the firms (63.6%) do not believe that marketing is the responsibility of the marketing department and this is because (90.0%) of employees in various firms believe that they are all involved in marketing. All the firms have the belief that employees are selected on the basis of technical excellence only and about (77.2%) of the firms were confident that service providers in this firm are trained in communication skills. It is very good to provide good services for customers as (31.7%) of the firms believe that their main task is to increase fee income –as profits will follow naturally. This led to (90.9%) of the firms having conviction that further increases in profitability will be achieved mainly by more efficient service delivery.

TABLE 2: Positive towards Marketing Policy

Attitude Statement	Accuracy of Representation									
	1		2		3		4		5	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A belief in the importance of the details of execution, the “nuts and bolts” of doing the job well	17	77.3	3	13.6	2	9.1	-	-	-	-
A belief in the importance of informality to enhance communication	3	13.6	19	86.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Explicit belief in, and recognition of, the importance of economic growth and profits	-	-	2	9.1	19	86.4	1	4.5	-	-
My firm believes that all its employees are involved in marketing	6	27.3	1	4.5	4	18.2	10	45.5	1	4.5
My firm believes that marketing is the responsibility of the marketing department	1	4.5	-	-	7	31.8	7	31.8	7	31.8
The employees of this firm believe that they are involved in marketing	11	50	9	40.9	2	9.1	-	-	-	-
Prospective employees are selected on the basis of technical excellence only	4	18.2	18	81.8	-	-	-	-	-	-
Service providers in this firm are trained in communication skills	1	4.5	16	72.7	1	4.5	3	13.6	1	4.5
The function of marketing is to sell the services that the firm produces	5	22.7	2	9.1	12	54.5	3	13.6	-	-
A well designed professional service will sell itself	11	50	7	31.8	4	18.2	-	-	-	-
Our main task is to increase fee income – profits will follow naturally	1	4.5	3	13.6	3	13.6	2	9.1	13	59.1
Further increases in profitability will be achieved mainly by more efficient service delivery	3	13.6	17	77.3	2	9.1	-	-	-	-
Marketing can be damaging to a firm’s professional reputation	-	-	2	9.1	2	9.1	8	36.4	10	45.5

Likert scale of accuracy of representations: 1, true; 2, more true than false; 3, difficult to say; 4, more false than true; 5, false.

Source, *Field Data 2013*

### 3.3 Marketing Strategy

The final section of the survey examined the explicit strategies which firms had implemented. Marketing strategy concerns a set of issues involving missions, aspect of marketing definition, market segmentation, competitive differentiation sources and relative positioning. The research attempted to measure the classification of marketing goals into individual typologies.

Table 3, the typology of marketing goals the firms have adopted as marketing strategies and highlights that most firms realizes the importance of marketing strategy in assisting them to achieve their major marketing goals.

TABLE 3: Typology of Marketing Goals

Marketing goals	Applicability									
	1		2		3		4		5	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Defending and holding our share of the market	13	59.1	3	13.6	6	27.3	-	-	-	-
Increasing our market share	10	45.5	12	54.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Entering new customer markets with our existing services	12	54.5	4	18.2	6	27.3	-	-	-	-
Developing new services for our existing market	9	40.9	13	59.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Diversifying into new areas involving both new services and new customers	13	59.1	8	36.4	1	4.5	-	-	-	-

**Likert scale of accuracy of representations: 1, true; 2, more true than false; 3, difficult to say; 4, more false than true; 5, false.**

Source, *Field Data 2013*

TABLE 4: Importance of Tactical Elements in Marketing Strategy

Tactical element	Importance rating									
	1		2		3		4		5	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Level of fees	15	68	1	4.5	6	27.3	-	-	-	-
Technical services excellence	19	86	2	9.1	1	4.5	-	-	-	-
Range of services provided	11	50	6	27.3	5	22.7	-	-	-	-
Advertising	-	-	3	13.8	16	72.7	3	13.6	-	-
Location and distribution of firms' offices	7	32	11	50	4	18.2	-	-	-	-
Professional reputation	12	55	10	45.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Utilization of technology	14	64	8	36.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Personal contacts of staff	7	32	6	27.3	8	36.4	1	4.5	-	-
Promotion literature	6	27	10	45.5	6	27.3	-	-	-	-
Social contacts of staff	2	9.1	7	31.8	10	45.5	3	13.6	-	-
Image of firm	11	50	11	50	-	-	-	-	-	-
Specialist services for defined segments	4	18	16	72.7	1	4.5	1	4.5	-	-

**Likert scale of accuracy of representations: 1, true; 2, more true than false; 3, difficult to say; 4, more false than true; 5, false.**

Source, *Field Data 2013*

Most of the firms believe in defending and holding their share of the market (72.7%), this leads to increasing their market share (100%). Majority of the firms see the essence of entering new customer markets with their existing services (73.7%) or developing new services for their existing markets (100%). The majority of the firms have also seen the importance of diversifying into new areas involving both new services and new product (95.5%).

Respondents were then requested to indicate the relative importance of certain tactics in their firm's marketing strategy Table 4, the majority of the firms suggested that the brand/image identity, reputation of the firm, technical service excellence, fee level and personal contacts of staff were "important". Surprisingly, few recorded the importance of promotional issues and advertising communications which are obvious vehicles for the implementation of favoured strategies as exhibited in Table 3, and should be harnessed for such reasons

#### 4. Discussions

This study investigated the status of marketing in the management of Quantity surveying business in Ghana.

##### 4.1 Summary of findings

Quantity surveying firms in Ghana do not have any form of a department solely in charge of marketing activities. This is because they do not see themselves to be in any completion with themselves but to provide service for their customers. They did not see any reason to have any organization for marketing in the form of a department for marketing activities while they themselves can handle affairs relating to marketing. Most of the firms believed that employees are all involved in marketing and didn't see the need for the provision of a marketing department.

Majority of the firms saw the need to have various marketing policies to help guide and increase their firm's marketing shares. As some firms feels that the key to attracting and holding customers is to keep improving service quality, others constantly seek to improve their total offering defined in terms of more value for its customer. Most of the firms seek to encourage feedback from its customers but some few thinks that innovation and change come directly from the customers they encourage feedback from.

Marketing strategy is of importance to every company or firm as these strategies will improve their dealings with customers and clients. Defending and holding a firm's share of the market is very important as many of the firms thought of this as being true to their firms. While some are trying to increase their market shares, others are thinking of entering new customer markets with their existing services and also developing new services for their existing markets. But many are planning to diverse into new areas involving both new services and customers.

##### 4.2 Implications for Quantity Surveying Firms

The need exist for QSC Firm management to consider setting up a department within their establishment to take care of marketing functions within their organisation. Such department has to be managed by marketing professionals, which will also call for the employment of persons with professional training in marketing.

##### 4.3 Limitations

This study was limited to the views expressed by Quantity Surveyors who were members of the GhIS and are working in Quantity Surveying consultancy businesses as top managers or directors of marketing where they existed and could have implications on the extent to which the findings could be generalized beyond the sampling frame for the study to other Quantity Surveyors in other employments such as those in employment in government institutions or in companies in the private sector.

##### 4.4 Future Research

Future research must focus of the education and training of students offering construction programmes. Given the background of construction students as non business students, an examination of how marketing which is business course is taught to such students is necessary to understand why marketing is viewed with scepticism in construction industry.

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