

Providing ElderCare/PrimePlus Services From Within a Traditional Firm

Debra Wright, CPA
Hereford, Lynch, Sellars & Kirkham, P.C.
Conroe, Texas

Hereford, Lynch, Sellars & Kirkham, P.C., (HLS&K) a large local firm located in Conroe, Texas has been providing ElderCare services in the community for about five years. The ElderCare services provided to the clients include:

- **Personal Finances & Banking** – Handling financial transactions including the payment of bills and ensuring that expected income is received and deposited.
- **Investments** – Ensuring that investments are managed per client's instructions.
- **Insurance** – Monitoring all insurance coverage to ensure that premiums are paid when due. Preparing claims under policies.
- **Contracts** – Handling all communications as needed for attorneys, lessors, and agents concerning leases, rents, timber sales, and any other agreements where clients are involved.
- **Taxes** – Preparing federal income tax returns, including quarterly estimates when required. Preparing payroll reports for in-home providers, if needed.

When the firm established the ElderCare practice in late 1999, the first step was to develop a business plan that outlined all aspects necessary to develop this new niche within a traditional firm. HLS&K found that ElderCare services were a “natural extension” of the professional services they had been offering over the years in serving the community, particularly for older individuals. The firm had minimal cost and time associated with formulating the plan to provide ElderCare services. Probably one of the most critical events during the planning stage was determining what an ElderCare service would “look like” for the firm (i.e. menu of services to be offered).

The HLS&K's ElderCare practice has been successful because of the ability to serve the clients by going “above and beyond” their client's expectations. The firm's client service strategy includes “thinking about the small stuff”. For example, the firm made the decision to “go in to the home” every two weeks as they provide ElderCare services for the clients. Even though some practitioners may not think that “home visits” is an efficient approach to conducting ElderCare engagements, HLS&K believes that they are selling a relationship – and there is

no better way than by making personal contact with the clients, on an on-going basis.

At HLS&K a CPA plans, oversees, coordinates, and conducts a continuous and objective review of all of the ElderCare services being provided to the clients. The firm also hired a para-professional to provide these services. The para-professional carries out the detailed plan, where competencies allow, as many of the activities are recurring in nature.

Most of the Eldercare service referrals come from others within the community who are aware that HLS&K offers ElderCare services. The firm picked up a new ElderCare client this past year from another local CPA in the community who does not offer ElderCare services, but knows of the firm's reputation and their ability to serve this special group of clients.

Marketing ElderCare services within the firm has been a big challenge from the onset. For example, every year about this time HLS&K takes care of the "important but non-urgent" matters before busy season arrives. Once again revisiting the firm's marketing plan is needed.

HLS&K's past marketing approach has been to decide on the local "yellow page" ad (usually means keeping same ad from prior year), renew the "canned newsletter" that is circulated to the clients, and update the website as needed (fortunately the firm's website is also a "canned" product – so it gets updated regularly by the website vendor). This approach is probably not too different from many local firms.

Historically, HLS&K has lacked (as many firms do) a *marketing strategy*. Most recently the firm has been challenged as they have attempted to grow the ElderCare/PrimePlus services niche. Even though the firm understands that "marketing" is one of the most critical factors in determining a firm's success – as other firms often do, they "shoot from the hip" and then wait and see what falls in their lap – they fail to plan.

After providing ElderCare services (now being branded as "PrimePlus" services) for five years – HLS&K has realized the need for a marketing strategy to take the development of this niche to the next level. The growing demand for ElderCare/PrimePlus services represents an enormous untapped market for the firm and other practitioners. However, without a marketing strategy and implementation of a marketing plan the firm will continue to miss out on maximizing the opportunity to develop this niche as a substantial source of revenue for the firm.

For 2005 HLS&K has taken a different approach for marketing ElderCare/PrimePlus services. The firm decided to utilize the AICPA/CICA ElderCare/PrimePlus Marketing Toolkit that was purchased last April but the firm

had been too busy to implement. Fortunately the toolkit has everything that is basically needed to address the marketing efforts.

HLS&K also took the time to define the marketing objectives, and then developed a marketing strategy for accomplishing those objectives. Providing ElderCare/PrimePlus services to the firm's existing clients is probably the best strategy – and the firm is focusing the marketing efforts on the existing client base. HLS&K decided that as challenging as “cross-selling” can be – it is really where they needed to focus their efforts at this time. Long-time clients look to their CPA firms as trusted advisors – however many clients do not understand what ElderCare/PrimePlus services is – and they may not know that the firm offers these valuable services. The firm decided to continue the marketing efforts within the community to attract new clients – but to focus on creating an “awareness” of ElderCare/PrimePlus services for the firm's existing clients in 2005.

Many firms who desire to expand into a new market niche have failed in developing the new offered service because of the marketing strategy or *lack of one*. If a firm is considering expanding its current practice to include ElderCare/PrimePlus services they will want to plan their marketing efforts wisely. Properly designing the client communications pieces, and understanding how the firm differentiates itself from the competition are both important aspects of developing an ElderCare/PrimePlus niche.

Providing ElderCare/PrimePlus services from within a traditional firm offers great potential and personal reward for small firm practitioners. To a great extent, the practitioner is expanding his or her revenue base by offering new services to existing clients, and providing an extremely valuable service to individuals and families within the community. Small firm practitioners should consider if providing these valuable services is a natural fit for their firm. If so, providing ElderCare services could be a wise business decision.

For more information about ElderCare/Primeplus Services through AICPA, please visit the AICPA website at www.aicpa.org/ecpp or contact Erica J. Porter, Personal Financial Planning Project Manager at (919) 402-4022.