

## **Affordable Marketing: Why Using Your Voice Works Better than Spending Money**

**By C.J. Hayden**

"I've done everything I can think of to get clients," a desperate self-employed professional wrote me. "I launched a website, I had a brochure designed, I've been sending out mailings, and I've placed all sorts of ads in print and on the web. But no one is hiring me. What am I doing wrong?" This unhappy professional has made a common mistake. He has fallen into the trap of believing that spending money on marketing materials, mailings, and ads will somehow produce clients without the direct involvement of the business owner. And he truly believes that this is "everything" he can do.

### **Corporate Marketing vs. Small Firm Marketing**

Perhaps professionals who make this mistake are trying to follow the model of big business. They hide behind a company name, expensive marketing literature, and a website. They spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on ads, directory listings, and tradeshow booths. Far too many self-employed professionals don't even disclose their own name in their marketing, even when they are operating a one-person company! But people don't buy professional services from an anonymous company whose name they don't even recognize.

They either buy them from nationally recognized firms that have spent millions to gain name recognition, or from individual people they have come to know, like, and trust. The more personal—or the more expensive—the service you offer is, the more likely this is to be true. If you are a financial advisor, career counselor, or life coach, you are asking people to trust you with the most intimate areas of their lives. If you are a web designer, IT consultant, or corporate trainer, you are asking your clients to trust you enough to spend thousands of dollars with you. You don't earn people's trust by placing an ad or sending them a brochure.

Independent professionals and small professional services firms simply don't have the resources to build name recognition and trust by way of high-priced, anonymous approaches like advertising and mass mailings. In fact, the approaches that work best for most professionals to get clients are less expensive—and more personal.

Here are the five best ways for professionals to get clients:

1. Meet prospects or referral sources in person, at events, or by appointment
2. Talk with prospects or referral sources on the phone
3. Send personal emails to prospects who already know you (or mail a personal letter for 42 cents)
4. Follow up personally with prospects over time
5. Speak to groups likely to contain prospects at meetings and conferences

And here are the five things self-employed professionals most often try that don't result in clients:

1. Placing ads in the Yellow Pages, trade publications, or pay-per-click ads on the web
2. Distributing or posting brochures or flyers around their community
3. Mailing mass-produced letters or brochures to strangers
4. Sending their newsletter or ezine to people who haven't asked for it
5. Building a website consisting of nothing but promotional copy for people to read

The main difference between these two lists is that the first group of approaches require you to talk to people. The second list consists of anonymous activities that allow you to hide out and never meet the people you are in business to serve.

### **Sharing Yourself**

If you want people to become your clients, they need to get to know you, learn to like you, and believe they can trust you. And for that, they really do need to meet you. It is understandable why so many business owners gravitate to the least effective marketing tactics—they are so much easier to accomplish! To buy an ad, all you have to do is put up the money. To send a mailing, all you need is a mailing list and postage. It's much more challenging to go out and meet strangers, or to call people on the phone, or to speak in public. But the reality is that this is what it takes to get clients. Even if you have the world's most compelling copy on your website, it's a rare client who finds their way to your site, reads it, and decides then and there to work with you. The same is true for an ad or a brochure. All these marketing tools are simply that—tools. Just like a pair of pliers, they need a person holding them in order for them to work.

What clients want is to get a sense of who you are as a person. They want to see your face or hear your voice, to get to know you over time. If you don't have enough confidence in your business to speak to people in person about it, how will they ever have enough confidence in you to hire you?

What you'll discover if you begin to meet prospects in person, talk to them on the phone, and speak with them directly about how you can help them, is that it gets easier the more you do it. It will build your confidence in yourself—and the confidence your prospective clients have in you—at the same time.

If you're in the business of serving people, your best marketing tool can be your own voice. So put it to work and start talking to them.

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