

PUT IT IN WRITING!

Publishing as a Marketing Tool for Service Professionals

by Gary E. Lofstrom

Recently I helped a growing manufacturing company publicize its new device designed to filtrate dusty air as certain dry powders were pneumatically conveyed from one location to another. The device was smaller, lighter and easier to maintain than the competitive products. I almost didn't have to write a word about the equipment - you could see it was a superior product from the pictures!

As a service professional myself, I wished it would be so easy to communicate my own skills and how I believe I perform them in a superior manner than others in my field. I suspect I'm not the only service professional with this dilemma. How does a professional successfully communicate an intangible expertise? This article discusses one such method many professionals have fashioned into a useful marketing tool: publishing.

Benefits are Multiple

Whether you're an accountant, an attorney, a management consultant or another type of service professional, you perform a simple task. *You solve problems.* Fortunately, your knowledge and expertise is very translatable to the printed word. And when it's done properly, the printed word sells your capabilities in a positive, dignified manner. Writing elevates and reinforces a professional's reputation as an authority. It broadens your list of prospective clients. Current clients feel more confident for having chosen you, and are more inclined than ever to refer you to others. If you're part of a larger organization, the image of the entire firm is enhanced. Most importantly, publishing often generates serious inquiries.

Publishing Techniques

There are several ways to get your knowledge and expertise in front of the right audiences. Let's review each one briefly.

- **Bi-lined Articles**

Think of your target markets. There are no doubt one or more trade journals (or trade associations with in-house newsletters) for each of your targets. Busy, understaffed managing editors need good editorial and will welcome your articles if you can prove yourself to them. To do this, you need to demonstrate you're not only an expert in your field, but also capable of providing suitable editorial content. Editors must satisfy their readers for knowledge and information, not blatantly sell your abilities.

Good articles explain a difficult concept or explain a recognizable problem-solving situation. Some publishers like to have experts write an advice column on a regular basis. Nearly all editors allow your name and affiliation appear alongside the article. Some will allow you to include phone, address and a picture of yourself. Most editors will allow you to reprint the article, mentioning the original publisher, giving you a third party endorsement of your expertise and knowledge.

- **In-House Newsletters**

An internally produced 8.5 X 11, or 11 X 17 newsletter, produced on a regular schedule, can be a great marketing tool. With them, you can be a little more sales oriented and choose multiple topics of your own preference, since you are the “managing editor.” Send them to clients, prospects and friends of the organization. Using an outside editorial resource to help you can be beneficial, but I caution against “canned” newsletters. Since they’re produced for hundreds of others in your profession, they tend to have a “generic” quality. And usually they don’t, or can’t, mention specific people in your firm and their expertise (which is our whole point).

- **Position Papers**

Also called “white papers,” these tend to be lengthy discussions of a specific topic or technical concept. They’re a great tool for making strong statements about your views on certain subjects or communicating your in-depth understanding of specific topics. Position papers can indicate your advocacy and concern on matters effecting clients and prospects. They’re usually produced on corporate stationery and are most effective for organizations that have nurtured an image of knowledge and expertise.

Getting Started

Assuming you like the idea of publishing as a marketing tool, you’re next question may be, “How do I get started?” If you’re already pretty good at writing (many service professionals are), you’ve got a leg up. If you’re not comfortable with your writing skills, or simply do not have the time to expend, consider hiring a writer or a public relations firm to help.

Either way you should have a plan in mind. Decide what you want to accomplish. In what markets do you want to build business? Consider service areas where you’re strong already (to bolster a strength) or in new target markets to build credibility and new business.

For article bi-lining, solicit the trade publications your targets read. If you’re starting your own newsletter, decide if you’ll produce one general newsletter for all clients/targets, or focus tightly on one industry or service niche.

The quality of your editorial will make or break your publishing program. Use internal personnel if they’re qualified and have the time, otherwise seek a capable communications professional.

Don’t Forget the Web

More people are getting their information fix on the web. Many trade journals and associations have web sites, needing editorial content as do their printed materials. A number of publications, or e-zines, are accessible on the internet. Be sure to consider them as you consider your list of possible publication targets. If you have a web site, consider allowing controlled access to your newsletters and position papers.