Promoting your consulting business (carefully) with email

Steve Simon

If you want to start an independent consulting practice, congratulations. It’s a different experience with many rewards and many challenges. The biggest challenge, I have been told many times, is finding new clients for your consulting business.

There are lots of ways to do this, but I want to focus on one area, using emails. Now, a lot has been written about how Gen Z is abandoning email for other forms of electronic communication, but I still believe that there is great utility in email promotion.

This needs to be done carefully, of course. You don’t want to come across like the obnoxious insurance salesman, Ned Ryerson, in the movie Groundhog Day. Come on too strong and too often and you will lose your audience. You don’t want your emails to come across as spams.

## Birth announcements

The day that you decide to hang out up your shingle and starting taking on clients, send out a birth announcement. Tell everyone, hey I’ve got a new gig. I’m now the proud owner and sole proprietor of P.Mean Consulting, an independent consulting business.

You could add that you are looking for customers, but you don’t really have to. It’s implied.

Now send this birth announcement out to all your friends and relatives. This is a time where it is safe to be aggressive. Everyone loves to hear about new careers and new opporunities. Your second cousin twice removed who works odd construction jobs doesn’t need a consultant, but she might know a friend who does.

When someone send out a congratulations reply, you can follow up with a brief thanks stating that you only have two customers so far but hope to build up a strong client base.

Now you only get one shot to bug your second cousin twice removed. But for people closer to you, you might send out an anniversary announcement. Write that your new consulting practice is now one year old and talk briefly about what you’ve done in the past year.

## Branding your emails

Every email that you send out on any topic can offer a reminder of your consulting business. First, get your own domain name for your email. Using a gmail account screams “Unserious!” My email account (mail at pmean.com) costs me a bit of money every month, but it is a tax write-off.

Set your email system to include a signature file that reminds people what you do for a living. Something like Steve Simon, P.Mean Consulting. You might add a second line with a motto (Professor Mean–He’s not just your average professor) or a link to your company website (www.pmean.com).

Don’t use more than two lines for your signature file. Long signature files are a big turn-off for some of your colleagues.

There’s a second place in your email system that most people forget. Customize how your name appears to promote any credentials you have or to repeat the name of your company. So you are not just sending messages as “Steve Simon” but as “Steve Simon, PhD Statistician” or “Steve Simon, P.Mean Consulting”. I generally don’t like to put PhD after my name, but that degree does make a difference to some of your clients if you have that degree. If you have taken the trouble to get an ASA designation of PStat or GStat, go ahead and add that after your name.

The big advantage of including your credentials or company as part of your email name is that it appears both when you send out an email and when someone replies to your email. Yet it is subtle enough that no one will brand you a spammer.

## Start an newsletter

Spend the extra money for a professional email distributor like Constant Contact or Mailchimp. It will cost you a bit, but is also a tax write-off. The most important feature that these companies provide is a trustworthy link for unsubscribing. No one wants to send a message back to you saying that they are tired of your newsletters. But they feel safer with clicking on an unsubscribe link from an outside company.

How often do you send out newsletters? Not too often, partly because you don’t want to overload people’s inboxes, but more importantly so you avoid burnout.