

Title:

Your Secret Marketing Weapon

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1310

Summary:

As a professional service provider, you're paid for what you know. People come to your firm for the expertise you offer, first and foremost. Did you also realize that this is also your secret marketing weapon?

By sharing what you know, you actually attract people to you and build their confidence in you as the right solution for their problem. Now many professionals are afraid to "give away" trade secrets or expertise for free, but that's not what I'm talking about. This is about putting content regularly out into the marketplace that is of enough value that prospects will automatically think of you when they have a need.

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Article Body:

It seems paradoxical - the more you give away, the more people are willing to pay for your services - but it's true. This exact approach has worked quickly and effectively for me for years. The key is that it's got to be good and of high relevance to your target audience. This builds people's confidence that you consistently know your stuff and that you can be counted on for long-term value. People soon realize that if you're willing to give away such valuable expertise, think how great the solutions they pay for will be!

So how do you share your expertise with your target audience? Through writing and speaking. And it starts with being able to get your core ideas down on paper in a way that catches your audience's attention and compels them to action.

If the idea of writing an article or giving a speech feels overwhelming, stay with me. I'm going to show you how easy it can be if you follow a basic formula that works every time.

Formula for Success

We've all stared at a blank page, at a loss for words or ideas...and wondered how in the world to write the article, proposal, report or presentation that's due soon...with the deadline looming and no inspiration in sight. It's the worst feeling and brings out the procrastinator in all of us.

Next time you'd rather clean out your desk than force yourself to sit down and write something, try this easy approach:

1) Brainstorm a short list of things that your clients struggle with. What problems drive them to you? Why are they willing to pay good money for your services. Remember, it's not about you -- it's about them, their pain, and their needs. This is now your list of topics for articles and talks.

2) Pick one topic and answer the following questions:

- What's the problem?
- What's the lost opportunity?
- Why is this important to address?
- What will happen if it's ignored?
- What's your solution?
- What tips do you have for implementing your solution?
- What example can you use to illustrate your point?

3) Write your answers to these questions and don't worry about how it flows or even that you're using good grammar. Just get your ideas on paper (or into the computer). Notice that by now, you have at least a page written. Pat yourself on the back and keep going.

4) Go back and clean up what you've written, add a catchy title and some headlines to break up the text, keep your paragraphs short, add some bullets or numbers to guide the eye. Maybe add references or a diagram. Step back and review what you've done. By now, you've got an article!

5) Ask a couple of trusted colleagues, clients or friends for feedback on your draft - really do this because it helps! Plus, it's a great confidence booster and low-risk way to share your writing with a small audience first.

6) Put your new article on your website, offer to send it as follow up when networking, send it to current clients, use it as the basis for getting booked for talks (more on how to in a future newsletter)...whatever you do, don't let it languish. USE it as a way of sharing your expertise.

For more tips on how to share your expertise through writing, keep reading...

Taking a page from Twyla Tharp's new book, *The Creative Habit*, this prolific dancer and choreographer shares her tips for moving from procrastination to creativity, regularly and with ease. Apply these ideas to your writing and notice the difference...

1) Set up a creative environment that's habit forming. Creativity doesn't just happen, it's a disciplined skill that can be learned. Creativity is not a mystical, elusive gift that's only accessible to artists. Everyone can develop it. Set up the right conditions and it eventually kicks-in. For me, it's the act of daily planning that clears my mind to make room for ideas to flow. For you, it might be puttering in your garden or going for a walk. Whatever it is, do it daily and be disciplined about it.

2) Use an organizational system for your ideas. Over the course of a month, I run into articles, quotes, websites, books, photos, experiences, and conversations...all of which inspire me for an upcoming article or talk. I capture them in folders, labeled by theme or big idea. When I'm ready to start writing, I draw on this collection of resources to inspire and guide my thinking. Twyla Tharp uses a box for each new project. You might find a binder the best catchall. Whatever works for you, the mere act of labeling and filling your container demonstrates your commitment to the idea.

3) Scratch. Scratching is about seeking inspiration to fill your container. I scratch when I flip through copies of *Fast Company* and *Inc. Magazine* or browsing in my favorite bookstore (where I found Tharp's book!). I scratch while networking with other professionals and ask what they're working on or stuck on in their business. This is about where you get your ideas...it's kind of primal, and you never know what'll inspire you.

4) Beware of these deadly mistakes: relying too much on others, waiting for or expecting perfection, overthinking, feeling obligated to finish what you've started, and working with the wrong materials. Any one of them will undermine your best efforts. If you're stuck, look at each of these to see if they're holding you back.

5) Find your spine. It's your one strong idea, the toehold that gets you

started. The spine of this e-newsletter, for example, is that writing is a core competency of effective marketing. Related to it is the inspiration I found in Twyla's book.

6) Master your skill. You have to master the underlying skills of your creative domain, then build your creativity on the solid foundation of those skills. You can't write or speak effectively about your chosen profession, if you haven't mastered what you bring to the table to begin with.

7) Know the difference between a rut and a block. Writer's block is when you've shut down and your tank is empty. In that case, you just need to do something - anything - to change the patterns in your brain (walk away, sing, get outdoors, do some yoga, cuddle with your pet...you get the idea). A rut is more like a false start. This happens when you're using a bad idea, it's bad timing, or you're sticking with old methods that don't work. Get out of a rut by questioning everything except your ability to get out of it.

8) Fail often privately. This includes drafts that get thrown away, early versions that you share with trusted colleagues, testing your message while networking ("what's your impression of...?"). Then figure out why you're failing (is it the idea? your timing? a matter of skill? judgement? nerve?) and address it before going public.

9) Believe in the long haul. Sharing your expertise through writing won't be easy over night. It'll take discipline to create a habit that eventually builds the skill. Believe me, it's well worth it.

I've found that committing publicly (i.e., to subscribers of this e-newsletter, due out on the first Wednesday of each month) creates the right kind of pressure to motivate me into taking a disciplined approach to writing. Writing one good piece per month is doable and frequent enough that your audience won't forget you. Before you know it, you'll have a solid repertoire of articles and speeches to draw from in your marketing arsenal.