

## **Keys to successfully marketing your free-lance business** **by Jay Lipe**

We free-lancers are unique. We make our own hours. We choose the clients we want to work with (and those we want to avoid). We blend our business and personal lives.

But we also face unique marketing challenges. What's the correct way for us to market ourselves to corporations? How can we minimize our time and money investments in marketing, yet still reap new clients? How do we shed the "Oh, (s)he's just between jobs" perception many non-free lancers have ?

The following Special Report tackles these basic issues. Below you'll find some practical, real-world marketing ideas you can put to use today. Good luck, let me know how things turn out...and may your marketing emerge!

### **Understand the range of value you bring to your clients**

Just last week, I arranged a meeting between a client of mine, in the plastics packaging business, and a contact in my network. My troubles with a promotional agency charged with developing a phonecard package.

My network contact, who is in sales for a large telecommunications company, has extensive experience with phonecard packaging and promotions. I felt bringing the two of them together would 1) help my client find solutions to his issues with the promotional agency and 2) help my network contact possibly get some business from the relationship.

Did I get compensated for my time arranging the meeting? No. Do I expect to make direct income from the future relationship between the two (they ended up hitting it off quite well!) Nope. So why did I take time to do this?

Because it helps both individuals. And it broadens my influence with the client. Let's face it, not all things you do with your time will result in direct income. But if you spend a portion of your time helping others (and expecting nothing in return) you'll reap a bountiful harvest of goodwill at a later date.

I didn't provide consulting services here. Yet I established value with my client. Providing referrals, passing along valuable information, linking together contacts in your network—These are all valuable ways for a free lancer to solidify relationships. Other ways to help your clients:

- Forward an article of interest to them
- Attend a non-business function with them
- Contribute to a cause they support
- Introduce them to someone with similar interests

***Find ways to tighten relationships with clients. They'll appreciate you in a wider variety of ways.***

## ***Market yourself at '1st impression points'***

Where do prospects get first impressions of your business? Meeting you face-to-face. Reading your brochure. Hearing about you from someone else. Yes to all. But what about your other, less recognizable 1st impression points?

Your Voicemail. A fax cover page. Your business card. These three 1st impression points are critical for a home-based business person—yet are often overlooked. Answer these questions about each of your 1st impression points and see if you're doing all you can to market your business:

- Do I tell prospects all the ways I help my clients?
- Do I indicate the benefits my clients get when they hire me?
- Do I feature a call-to-action that tells the prospect what to do next?  
(e.g. Call 1-800-555-5555 and ask for more details on our new Special Report ...)

***Business is gained or lost on 1st impressions—make your 1st impression points impressive!***

## ***Package your services to broaden your line***

When I was just starting out, I offered hourly consulting services. That's all. So my prospects could only 'buy' me one way—Hourly consulting. But then I realized there were more people out there who wanted to 'buy' me...yet couldn't afford me. That prompted me to come up with a variety of 'packages' to appeal to those prospects. Now I offer:

- \$7.95 Special Reports (like this one)
- \$20 Workbooks
- Hourly Consulting Contracts
- A \$995 Dirt Cheap Marketing Service for small businesses
- \$1,995 Marketing JumpStarts and
- Annual Retainer Contacts

See what I've done? I've opened up my expertise to a wider audience by broadening my line. How can you broaden your line? Can you package information into a format valued by your audience (e.g. booklets, workbooks, etc)? Can you add a service into your product? How about bundling a product into your service?

***Think of ways to:***

- 1. Make yourself easier to afford or***
- 2. Offer more services and/or products to broaden your appeal.***

## ***Know the value in giving something away***

Although many people advise never to give anything away, I've had good success with this tactic. Consider it the equivalent of the 'Trial Samples' you get in the grocery store. If you try something, and you like it...it's psychologically easier to part with your money. If you like the sample, you may come back and buy the product at full price.

In some instances, I've given away an hour of marketing advice and realized a sizable income later on. But these prospects never would have hired me without first trying me.

Can you give a seminar? Speak in front of a group? Could you contribute a free hour of your service to a non-profit as a premium for a contest? Sometimes that free sample is all people need to hire you.

***Think of ways to sample yourself and more referrals and new business will follow.***

## ***Take your message on the road***

One day I was sitting at an on-ramp stoplight (stop laughing you Minnesotans!) and it hit me. I spend at least 10 hours per week driving my car to and from clients. During that time I must see thousands of cars.

So if I'm looking at all these cars, I thought, wouldn't others be looking at my car? You betcha! At that point, I decided I needed to use my car as a marketing vehicle.

So I went and obtained license plates personalized with my company name, EMERGE. It's been 3 years now and I can't count the number of people who've inquired about my plates (and my company).

I also notice more and more people promoting their businesses on the back or side panels of their cars. I think this is a great idea...and is probably one of the most efficient marketing programs for small businesses.

I've taken down phone numbers of floor sanding companies, courier companies, and printers by simply reading the marketing information from their cars.

Now, I know this method isn't for everyone. But if your business takes you on the road a lot, and you're comfortable with the approach, you might want to test it.

***A unique marketing approach like this can get you leads and sales....but it will also define your business as a creative one.***

## ***Build a visual image for your prospects***

When I worked in the corporate world, I used a lot of free-lancers. I imagined them working at a mahogany desk, in a sunny veranda, overlooking the lakefront (OK, so my imagination ran wild). One free-lancer, in particular, had me convinced he worked in the Taj Mahal! Then one day, I dropped something off at his home

office and was startled to find he worked at a card table in a dark basement.

Up until then, he'd done a great job of crafting an image for me. His voicemail said something like "We're out of our offices..." All his printed materials shouted 'high-quality'. I felt he was the consummate professional, and so all images in my mind supported this notion. All that went down the tubes when I saw his office.

Let this be a lesson. If you want to communicate high quality (read...higher rates or prices) craft an image for your clients. Then be true to that image in all marketing contact points. Oh...and meet at coffee bars until you have an office that's located above ground!

***Clients and prospects size you up at every contact point. Ensure each contact crafts the right image for your business.***

### ***Sell the benefits of your home office***

Let's face it. We home-based business owners are different from our clients. We don't attend boring staff meetings. We don't have fancy offices. And we don't concern ourselves with the corporate policy for maternity leaves! What does this mean to our clients?

It means we:

1. Don't have to focus on internal issues—We focus on things happening in the marketplace.
2. Are free from distractions and interruptions—and therefore have an intense project focus.
3. Tell it like we see it—because we don't worry as much about hurting our bosses' feelings.
4. Can be a free-floating resource--in one month, gone the next—meaning we're a variable cost...not an overhead expense.

Sometimes we free-lancers get defensive when selling ourselves to a prospect. I prefer to go on the offensive by using benefit statements like the ones above.

***Point out the benefits of working with a home-baser and you'll shift your prospect's perspective to the positive.***

### ***Model your marketing after successful free***

***lancers***

I know a strategic consultant who is the best, and I mean the best, when it comes to creating client

#### ***Top 5 Books for Free-Lancers***

1. *Rain Making: The Professionals Guide to attracting New Clients*  
by Ford Harding
2. *Marketing Your Service—for people who hate to sell*  
by Rick Crandall PH.D.
3. *Selling the Invisible: A Field Guid to Modern Marketing*  
by Harry Beckwith
4. *How to make a Living without a Job*  
by Barbara Winter
5. *How to Make at least \$100,000 every year as a successful consultant in your own field*  
by Dr. Jeffrey Lant

relationships. He writes thank you notes by the truckload. He calls and congratulates me whenever he sees my name in print. And he is one of the best listeners I've ever been around.

Consequently, I'm always looking for an excuse to be around him. Why? Because I'll learn even more from him by watching his methods. Once I see something he does that I like, I modify it to my business (after first asking him if it's OK).

Similarly, I am on the mailing list of a national communications consultant. I asked to be put on her list when I saw how brilliant she is at packaging a variety of services. I took seeds of ideas from her and transplanted them into my business.

I've learned volumes from these folks. But more importantly, I'm modeling parts of my business after them. That way, I don't re-create the wheel when I market my own business.

As soon as you can, identify two or three free lancers whose marketing catches your eye. Then stay in their orbits. Get on their mailing lists. Do a joint project with them. Buy any books they've authored. Keep your eyes on how they market their businesses and you'll get up the learning curve faster.

***When you're running a race, you gauge your progress against the leader...not those in the middle of the pack.***

### ***Buy your clients' products***

If you really want to establish a working relationship with a client...buy their product (or service). Aside from learning more about their business, you'll build loyalty.

One of my clients is a leisure travel agency. I'm embarrassed to admit it didn't dawn on me to book trips with them until they started dropping not-so-subtle hints. But after I bought from them, their smiles got wider...their eyes had a new glint...and their handshakes were warmer. Oh yes...I also started getting more work!

You might think this is an expensive case of 'back scratching'. It is. But I'll argue that business success depends upon thoughtful, considerate back scratching. Successful home-basers help their clients get what they need---then watch this tactic pay for itself many times over.

***Commit yourself to helping your clients get what they need and you'll start getting what you need.***

### ***Don't expect overnight success***

In today's society, it's easy to expect instant success. The media glorifies 'overnight sensations'. "How to make a million bucks in just 30 days" stories are found all throughout a bookstore. But these stories mask the truth.

The truth is that for every 'overnight success'...there are thousands of success stories borne out only after years and years of hard work. These are the stories I like to concentrate on.

I like them because it's the way marketing works for almost all of us. Hard work. Persistence. Occasional failure. Learning from failure. Revisions.

Marginal improvement. More revisions. Better improvement. Limited success. More improvements. Etc... Marketing is a fluid process, not an event. If you adjust your thinking to view marketing this way, you're well on your way to marketing success.

***Marketing is a fluid process...not an event.***

### ***Concentrate on hitting singles***

I've been in the marketing world for over 15 years. And every week I run into someone who thinks marketing is about 'swinging for the fences'. They want to know how they can get a feature story in a national publication before they even have a customer (witness all the dot-commers who spent their entire marketing budget on one Super Bowl spot). Don't you be one of these!

15 years in the marketing world has taught me that successful marketing is rooted in starting small and building from there. Leave the home runs to the baseball players.

Instead, concentrate on testing—on a small scale—new ideas to increase your exposure and get fast feedback. Then if the test works, expand the idea by spending more money behind it (i.e. bigger ads, more direct mail names, add new markets).

Be content with small victories and I guarantee, your marketing success will come.

***To win baseball games, you get runners on and move them around the bases. It may not make the highlight films...but it gets you into the championships!***

### ***Have a marketing plan***

The United Nations effort in the Desert War was a perfect example of 1) having a plan and 2) sticking to it. The first step was to soften the enemy up with superior air cover. Then, after the enemy's defensive weaponry was eliminated, we invaded using ground forces. The result was the "mother of all surrenders".

Your marketing can yield smaller, yet just as successful results. Develop a plan (I'd be remiss if I didn't mention my *Special Report "How to Write a Winning Marketing Plan"*) and work the plan. You'll be amazed at the business that comes your way!

***"Chance favors the prepared mind"***

***Louis Pasteur***

Copyright Emerge Marketing 2002. All rights reserved.

No unauthorized duplication without the author's consent.

**J**ay Lipe is the president of Emerge Marketing, a marketing firm that offers *Fortune 500 marketing expertise to growing companies*. He has consulted with over 60 companies & organizations including consumer & industrial manufacturers, service companies, non-profit organizations, universities, and municipalities. For more information, please see [www.emergemarketing.com/services](http://www.emergemarketing.com/services)

**I**n addition to his consulting practice, Lipe is a speaker and seminar leader on a variety of time-tested marketing strategies that boost sales & profits. For more information, please visit [www.emergemarketing.com/speeches](http://www.emergemarketing.com/speeches)

**L**ipe also offers a variety of books, workbooks, special reports and free downloads from his company's website. For more information please visit [www.emergemarketing.com/publications](http://www.emergemarketing.com/publications).