

To Separate Yourself from the Pack, Publish Articles!

By Patricia Coate

During boom years, for many consultants most any kind of marketing/selling strategy worked pretty well. But when boom times slack off, so do many of the more "automatic" forms of business development. Explains research specialist Michael Norris, President, Norris Research (Rindge NH), "The general stumbling of many 'high fliers' has been due to marketing, or lack thereof. Until recently, it seemed as if answering the phone was their entire marketing strategy!" For such reasons, some firms have latched onto an underutilized technique for separating themselves from the pack: writing and publishing articles.

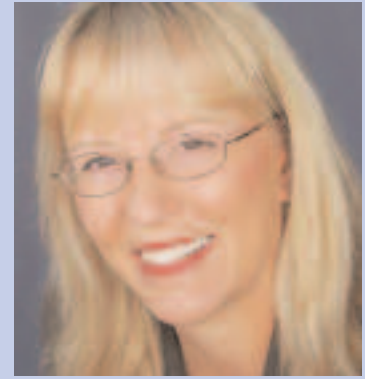
Why adopt this strategy? For one thing, it's far less expensive than even a modest direct mail campaign, and as well, writing and publishing earns one double benefits by both promoting one's services and educating target markets, all in one fell swoop. Thus publishing articles transforms consulting firms into "thoughtleaders," i.e., better-known experts in their particular field. This means core values and unique selling points can be articulated clearly, confidently, persuasively. It also separates them from the competition since it conveys a third party endorsement (that of a reputable publication) that most others in the field will NOT possess.

How does one get started? First, obtain a "go-ahead" from an editor for your preferred article topic rather than actually writing an article from scratch. By locating an editor who

would be sincerely interested in your piece before laboring over the writing of it, you stand to gain advance feedback in terms of angle, length, and deadline which will help you craft your article EXACTLY the way your new editor would want to see it. Chances of acceptance thereby shoot skyward significantly when such criteria for success can be specified and followed.

To insure that your article will work for you as well as for your editor, you'll also want to know (a) specific business objectives you want to advance, and (2) publications read by your target customers. One client of ours, a manufacturer of data storage systems, for example, had wanted its insurance firm prospects to know how much more productive its recently-developed data mining system could make them. So its VP Sales wrote an article called "Storage Must Be Flexible" after securing interest from an editor of a major insurance journal.

And how does one go about obtaining such interest? For consultants, the answer is all too familiar: research names of publications on-line or by asking your clients what they read, then email editors of such publications much as you would a prospect, then pitch your article idea in 25 words or less to 10-20 such publication editors. After a week or so, you'll likely end up with an email response from at least one editor asking "When could you get this to me? It sounds perfect for our readers." This excited editor will then also tell you what



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length she'd like the article to be (i.e., number of words) and from there, it'll be all up to you!

The truth is that securing an article assignment is a straightforward proposition and that most editors are in fact sitting around waiting to hear from you! They are always in need of new ideas from thoughtleading consultants who may have them. As you experience this, you will gradually become proficient at this remarkable (if remarkably little-used) marketing channel. In fact, expect some prospective clients to actually begin recognizing your name, and lighting up when they realize they've been reading your articles all along. "I've learned a lot from them," they will tell you. "I've really enjoyed them" Then, the following sweet words will follow: "Now please tell me more about your consulting services. I'm all ears."