

The Myths of Publishing: Why Staying In Touch by Email is Crucial to Publishing Success

By Jia-Ling Loo

During his early years of heading emerson consulting group inc., many of Ken Lizotte's (CIO) clients came his way with the unrealistic expectation that publishing articles and books regularly would automatically expand their clientele and boost revenue. As they began to win publicity that they rightfully deserved from the publishing of articles and books, they also thought, innocently and mistakenly, that simply being featured in magazines or becoming a book author was all that was needed to generate a substantial increase in business prospects.

However, Ken learned early on that this assumption was, generally speaking, a false one. In reality, few of his newly-published clients actually got approached as a clearly direct result of their new media attention. It didn't take long for us here at emersongroup to realize how misconceived this assumption was, i.e., that new business prospects would be a direct result of publicity in the form of publishing. For most of our clients, their reality just did not match up to their myth.

Yet, this misconception pervades even 10 years after Ken's first realizations regarding the truth. Many clients today still approach him with such unrealistic expectations and it typically takes much time and explanation to truly educate them about the value (and reality) of publishing. The purpose of being a recognized author, we tell them, isn't to merely provide more business. Rather, publishing should be viewed as a tool to enhance credibility and to provide a boost in self-confidence. Extensive publishing invariably establishes one as

an expert or leader in his or her field and these less tangible qualities will always be the result. The recognition of an organization over the long run will sooner or later bring in new prospects, especially in tandem with other efforts, but unfortunately, seldom are such results immediate or consistent.

Therefore, it's important to stress that publicity is not the miracle drug that will cure an ailing company's declining returns. Rather, getting published should be thought of as a means of moving you forward by enhancing credibility and increasing visibility in one's profession or target market. And quantifiable benefits to an individual, besides the obvious immediate boost in confidence, will only become increasingly apparent through sustained effort and patience. The more one publishes, the more his or her name gets circulated and the higher the possibility for word of mouth referrals. Our new clients nonetheless still require an explanation as to why publicity can seem a relatively fruitless procedure despite all the "fame" derived from publishing.

The new client trap

Most small companies fall into a trap when thinking about seeking and obtaining new clients. When they think "customers," they typically conjure up images of an untapped source of people way out there (i.e., the "readers"). Rather than looking closer to home, most consultants and businessmen have the perception that new business can only be found through an extensive selling of themselves to people who have not heard of their services. It is this



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(mis)conception that compels many to publish articles and books, thus perpetuating and committing to the myth that publicity directly delivers revenue. When their expectations are not met, often they are left disillusioned by the entire process. This diminishes the longterm benefits that publishing provides, especially when they give up and abandon the endeavor.

Here at emersongroup, we often find ourselves in the position of reminding our client thoughtleaders that publishing is not a quick fix or fast cure for slow business. We often explain that the best way to improve business is by keeping in touch with past and current customers since they are the ones who will be willing and able to enthusiastically

endorse a service far more than any article can. Further, it's real people who will reach out and contact, usually through word of mouth. On the other hand, you will rarely know if your article piqued even fleeting moments of interest in readers who start out completely unaware of your services and expertise. Ultimately, a real person who knows you is always a far better intermediary than even the best words on a piece of paper.

Everyone agrees that the most fundamental, if taken for granted, business development technique is good old networking. The importance of networking is evinced by the fact that most businesses grow through the mere exchange of contacts, and through such interaction most new clients are found. However, going out and gathering new business cards at every possible opportunity can never be enough. It's what you DO with these new contacts that's reaps rewards. Thankfully, the Internet has made the process of keeping in touch with contacts and clients much more efficient and effortless than ever before, even if most folks and firms still under- or mis-use it. But we say: utilize email effectively and you will masterfully maximize your chances of acquiring new clients and new business.

Though this might seem like a given, it's astonishing to us how few people (and companies) actually take the time to touch base with their newfound contacts, not to mention with past and present clients. Even though keeping in touch now no longer requires direct person-to-person communication or heaps of envelopes and rolls and rolls of stamps, few today bother to do so. A simple email for example suffices to remind and assure your contacts that you are still around and still offering excellent services. Indeed, generating an email list and sending out emails every so often is one of the simplest and most hassle-free methods of keeping in touch with prospects and clients, plus it's a procedure that's time-efficient and simple.

Making the bonds grow stronger

As is frequently the case with many of our own clients, you might now be thinking "That's great, but if every one of my contacts did that, my mailbox will be flooded with junk mail." Or maybe this: "What's the point if no one's going to open and read them anyway?" The point is that whether or not someone junks your email upon receiving it or leaves it unread does not really matter. I know for a fact that less than half of all the recipients on our own email list actually open our emails. Yet, even with the option to unsubscribe, most recipients opt to remain on our list!

One contact told us once, "I get a lot of email and so I don't always have time to read yours. But I'm afraid to unsubscribe because if I do, I might miss something!" What's more important is that as long as this gentleman keeps receiving our emails, even if he never opens one, he keeps getting reminded of who we are, what we do and that we are still around!

So although less than 50% might actually read your emails, rest assured that your name and your services will always be in the back of their minds. Indeed, a couple months into generating our monthly "thoughtnotes" e-letter which chronicles our client "thoughtleader victories," we began getting more and more inquiries and referrals than ever before. The best clients, you see, are not those who come to us out of the blue due to having read an article published. The best clients are those who already know what we do or have been briefed by someone who knows what we do. Being able to solidify such relationships with published articles from time to time only makes those bonds grow stronger.

In the world of business, everyone is constantly looking to increase their revenue. This continual chase for clients intensifies as a business expands, especially for smaller organizations. Although getting publicity might be seen as a logical step towards obtaining fresh new clients, many make the mistake of ignoring past and present clients who are in fact a way better resource than most of us assume. By being consistent in keeping in touch with them, not only will you be creating your own client/customer community, past clients will also feel appreciated and their impression of your company will dramatically improve. Maybe one or more of them will even end up as top unsolicited spokespersons for you and your firm. So keep at it! You will be very surprised (as I have been) how close to home your most promising business prospects can be.

And as for that fear that "If every one of my contacts did that, my mailbox will be flooded with junk mail"...? Not to worry! If you implement an email stay-in-touch system and stick with it you will forever remain a minority. That means more of the business pie for you and your firm, less for your invisible competition.