

Creating a Reputation

By Marcia Yudkin

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Want to shorten the sales cycle for your professional services? Want pre-sold prospects who need fewer or no face-to-face meetings before hiring you? Create a reputation.

Recently a room full of consultants agreed that you had to meet with potential clients at least twice -- better, three times -- before winning the business. "Then how do you get business outside the area?" someone asked. The consensus: Forget it.

Yet I've been hired by companies in Australia and elsewhere without even phone calls, much less a face-to-face. Like nearly all my most congenial clients, they weren't choosing candidates to compare with one another. They weren't shopping, weren't engaged in a systematic search. If hunting, they stopped when they found me. Or they hadn't thought of spending money on their problem until my reputation gave them the idea.

Publishing books, as I've done, is just one way to establish a reputation that pre-sells prospects on what you can do for them. For image consultant Mary Lou Andre of Needham, Massachusetts, a reputation-building tool has been her Web site. In addition to descriptions of her services, her site at <http://www.dressingwell.com> chronicles the media publicity she's received and highlights her approach to fashion through profiles of prominent individuals and corporations that she's helped.

"Last fall I closed a national retail chain that found us on the Web and e-mailed us in June," says Andre. "When I told them I was about to give birth, they said they'd wait. In September, they signed the contract. We never met face to face! They modeled the entire project after the work I did for Bose Corporation, which is featured on our Web site. I

firmly believe our reputation (and Web site) closed the deal."

For translation industry consultant Sarah Pilgrim of Wilsall, Montana, a reputation-building tool has been a half-page ad she's run for years in a trade journal for translators. A signed testimonial in it from someone in the business and a credential of having been in the business herself for 20+ years gives her high credibility with her target market.

"When translation agency owners read my bio, they recognize the name of the translation company I founded and sold, which has a good reputation," Pilgrim adds. "When they call to find out more, they can tell I know the business. And therefore when I've gone to visit clients it's always been as a paid consultant, with the client footing the bill."

Whether you use publishing, the Internet, advertising, promotional newsletters or media coverage to build a reputation, it takes time. Each piece of visibility reinforces previous effects. With a reputation, you get more inquiries like "Do you do...?" and fewer along the lines of "We're looking for a _____ who does..." With a reputation, pre-sale meetings drop to one or zero. E-mail or phone exchanges can suffice. Powerful stuff!

Marcia Yudkin marcia@yudkin.com is the author of the classic guide to comprehensive PR, "6 Steps to Free Publicity," now for sale in an updated edition at Amazon.com and in bookstores everywhere. She also spills the secrets on advanced tactics for today's publicity seekers in "Powerful, Painless Online Publicity," available from www.yudkin.com/powerpr.htm .

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