

# Marketing your business

## Should you hire a marketing consultant?

by Alethea Spiridon

Taking the plunge as a freelance editor is a risky endeavour. When I made the decision to freelance full-time, I knew I had to do it right. I had no budget for hiring a marketing consultant to help me wade through the myriad options of marketing and branding that had to be done, but since I had a solid self-educated base in marketing, I decided to develop my own plan. As I began work on my plan, I kept one key marketing tenet in mind: a large part of marketing entails branding and defining your business because the resulting clarity and focus ensures your marketing strategies will be that much more successful in their reach. To put it another way: if you don't know who you are and what you do, how can you expect others to know?

### Building my brand: five strategies

From day one, I began envisioning what my branded business identity would look like. It took time, money, and energy, but I was happy with my first efforts: a business name, a professionally developed logo, website, and business cards. These four elements comprised my initial marketing strategy.

The fifth element of my marketing strategy involved creating a business

plan, rough though it was. I haven't looked at the plan since, but as I re-strategize and redefine my business model over the coming months, I will be dusting off my plan and ripping it to shreds, I'm sure.

### My search for a marketing consultant

I'd venture to say that well over 50% of freelance editors do not have a business plan. Why? Because so many freelance editors don't see themselves as operating a bonafide *business*, they see no need to have a plan. I came to this realization in conversation with a fellow editor at an EAC event last summer. We were new to each other so we were sharing the obligatory "What do you do?" information. She described the type of editing she did. I responded by saying that I had my own company, offering editing, writing, and publication-management services. As I spoke, she looked somewhat bewildered. "Well," she said, "I guess I have my own 'company' too."

Therein lies the problem: most editors don't consider themselves entrepreneurs, operating small service businesses. It's no wonder, then, that my call to editors across Canada (both on EAC's email forum and on Interactive Voice), asking them to share

their experiences with marketing consultants, was unsuccessful. The lone response came from charter member Lee d'Anjou, who called me one afternoon to tell me what she thought: "The reason I think you're not getting any responses is because I don't think any of us use, or have used, a marketing consultant. They won't—and don't—understand what we do. I wouldn't hire a marketer."

For the most part, I believe that Lee is right. In all my research, I was unable to locate a Canadian marketing company (or consultant) catering to editors. I did find a few "service business" listings, but I was looking for listings that mentioned the words "editor" or "freelancer." (It's worth noting that even if I had found a marketing company familiar with the editing business, I'd likely be unable to afford its services, because the going rate is astronomical. The marketing consultants I spoke to during my research charged no less than \$250 an hour for their services.)

### A low-cost alternative to costly marketing consultants

Despair not, though. Diane Harms, an EAC member from the Saskatchewan branch, gave me a

great tip: “Contact the business school at your local college or university to see if they have someone in-house who might be able to help provide mentoring and/or coaching. Many of the business schools have centres for entrepreneurship support, which could provide low/no-cost mentoring support.”

Queen’s School of Business (QBC) in Kingston, Ontario offers such a service, “Queen’s Business Consulting” (<http://business.queensu.ca/centres/qbc/index.php>). The program is student run and costs \$135 per day, per consultant. So depending on your needs, it can be an affordable alternative to hiring a professional.

### It's worth the money

Many of the marketing strategies you should employ to ensure your success (regardless of whether you feel that you have an official “business” or not) are things you can accomplish on your own or with modestly priced outside assistance.

First, you don’t need to pay a marketer \$250 an hour to tell you that you need a web presence: you already know a website is an essential marketing tool. Even though you can create your own website, you really shouldn’t. It is worth spending a few hundred dollars to have a professional create your site for you.

Second, you need business cards. Business cards are another essential marketing tool that you can create yourself, but again shouldn’t. For another few hundred dollars, you can have professional business cards created and printed; the

difference is remarkable and worth every penny.

Third, once you’ve defined your target audience, you can create some ads on Google AdWords ([www.google.com/adwords](http://www.google.com/adwords)), take out a listing in EAC’s *Online Directory of Editors* or in a local directory or magazine, and create a brochure outlining your services.

Remember: you are ultimately in control of your own success. Begin with some basic marketing know-how. Read books and scour the Internet for marketing advice on sites such as *Freelance Weekly* ([www.freelanceweekly.com](http://www.freelanceweekly.com)). And don’t forget that even if you do decide to seek outside help, you will need, at the very least, a preliminary understanding of the services you provide, your target audience, your goals, and your vision; you will also need to have a rough business plan in place. Without initially covering this territory yourself, you’ll end up paying someone to do it for you.

So, do you need to enlist the services of a marketing consultant to guarantee the success of your editing business? Not initially. With a desire to learn and a willingness to make the effort, you can effectively market your skills to your target audience. Then, when you decide that you’ve taken your business as far as you can on your own, you can consider employing outside help—even if it’s in a mentorship capacity. In my own freelance business, I hired QBC. It’s time for me to step it up a notch, and I realize that I require someone else’s expertise and insight to help me get there. 📌

## To hire or not to hire?

Here are some key points to consider when you are deciding whether or not to hire a marketing consultant for your editing business:

### Cons

- It’s very costly.
- The choices are overwhelming. (What aspect of marketing should you focus on?)
- The industry is not regulated, therefore finding a legitimate practitioner is difficult. (What if you are given bad advice?)
- Finding a marketer who understands a sole proprietorship/small business and has some clue about the editing industry is difficult.
- There is no guarantee of a return on your investment.

### Pros

- Grow your client base.
- Boost your sales and increase your revenues.
- Gain business clarity and focus.
- Define and reach your target audience.