

Gaining Market Visibility

At the last meeting of the TENG Stamford Chapter I asked everyone to recommend topic ideas for future newsletters. One member suggested that I discuss how someone should go about getting published, to create professional exposure. I'm not sure that I can provide the best answers to his question but in thinking about it, I suspect that he was really asking how do I make myself more visible in the marketplace and how do I attract people who may want to hire me, or who at the least will be good network contacts. This is a true marketing challenge. Each of us would like to find ways that would help us to penetrate our market effectively without doing as many of the mind-numbing phone calls and Emails. Companies have the same problem and spend vast amounts of money to profile their most profitable and loyal customers and also to learn how to attract new ones more efficiently. There are no easy answers to this. The challenge becomes more daunting for the individual job seeker who has limited time, resources and most important, money. Nonetheless, to draw on a fishing analogy, it helps to have as many lines in the water as possible and there are some low-cost answers.

In order to publish articles that others will want to read you must first assess your own professional strengths and be able to articulate them. Specifically, what are your areas of expertise and how do you best express them to others to arouse their interest not only in what you have to say, but in you as well? Knowing that, you still won't land on the front page of ComputerWorld or CIO Magazine or win a Pulitzer Prize overnight. Publishing like the performing arts, sports, broadcasting and entertainment careers all share a common challenge: you have to start out small, at the grass roots level and work your way up. Some get lucky and achieve instant success. Having once worked many years ago in commercial radio both as on air talent and as a news reporter, I can tell you with great certainty, that for every success story, there are thousands of "wanna be's". Your time investment will be considerable, not just writing your articles, but also submitting them to editors for acceptance and publication. The rejection letters could add another dimension of frustration to that being caused by your extended career search. Unless you are harboring a desire to publish professionally, you may wish to reconsider whether you need to add more pain to your existence. Nevertheless, making yourself more visible is a good idea and you may want to address these thoughts if you wish to publish:

- Start out at the community level. Many suburban towns have local community-based newspapers that are published weekly or semi-weekly. Contact the editor to determine whether s/he would consider regular contributions on technology topics. Publishing in a paper like this could afford excellent exposure if you live in a town that has many executive level residents.
- If you belong to the Society for Information Management (SIM) or some comparable professional organization, consider creating a chapter newsletter, or if one exists already, contribute to that. Share copies with other chapters and with the national organization. This may help you to gain additional recognition. Many professional organizations welcome contributed articles. They continually need information to make their newsletters more robust.
- If you have deep subject matter expertise within an industry or product area, create an Ezine. This is nothing more than an online magazine that is "pushed" via Email to a select group of

subscribers. You can maintain that as a distribution list in MS Outlook. This will require considerable time and effort, since you will have to build your subscriber network and gain permission from each subscriber to Email your publication to them. So too, many Ezines exist, and yours may go unnoticed and could endure a fate ranging from complete obscurity to total oblivion, unless you are already regarded as an industry “thought leader”. In that case, you may not have the networking challenges that many others face, possibly obviating the need for an Ezine in the first place.

- Search online for new organizations and associations that are in your areas of expertise, which may be seeking contributing writers or who would welcome someone to help launch a newsletter.
- In all of these cases, but especially with the Ezine, you must plan how you will manage this effort once you are re-employed. You may wish to have one or two others collaborate with you to reduce your workload. You might consider publishing only at monthly intervals to allow sufficient time to develop new materials once you are employed.

On a broader scale, community involvement and volunteering may offer comparable exposure, more potential for reward and less frustration especially if you are not a writer. There exist a variety of methods for you to get your message out to “build your brand” in a subtle fashion and reap some other rewards along the way. Many of you have commented that one of the greatest challenges of your job search is to identify and uncover the network contacts you need. Some of the following will get you out of the house and may prove to be worthwhile avenues of effort while networking to land a job or a consulting contract:

- If you have determined your areas of expertise, offer to address SIM, other technology, management, business and civic groups in your area. For example, the SIM Stamford, CT/Westchester, NY Chapter has announced a call for speakers for the upcoming fall season. By the way, being an informative, engaging and compelling speaker is no easy task. If you have no prior experience, you should join Toastmasters to first learn how it is done. It takes practice. Considering my church lay reading, radio broadcasting and chairing/addressing professional groups, I have approximately thirty-eight years’ total experience speaking in front of others. No, I’m not that old, I started as a lay reader while I was in high school. My stage fright has vastly diminished and I find that audiences are generally supportive. Without exception, whenever I have addressed a gathering or organization, members of the audience approach me afterward to introduce themselves, request help, exchange business cards and share other information.
- Volunteer to serve on committees. You will develop relationships that may endure for a long time.
- If you have children attending private schools, you will find that these institutions usually have technology, planning, fund raising and development committees. You may find an excellent source of contacts by serving here, since many of the students’ parents will be well-connected senior executives. If your children are in public schools, attend parent meetings and volunteer. Many fine public and private schools have high parental involvement and you will meet

professionals like yourself. They will gain firsthand knowledge of you and will be comfortable referring you to their contacts. If you are childless, you may wish to assist your local school system anyway. Many public systems lack sufficient funds to have the latest and greatest computer technology tools and could benefit by your expertise on how to do more with less. If you are an alumnae or alumnus of a private school, volunteer to help them.

- Attend city/town/county government public meetings that address business/technology issues. Unless a highly controversial issue is being discussed, most meetings have low attendance. Officials want public input. This is your opportunity to stand up, state your name, expertise and your opinion. In my town, all of these meetings are televised via local access to our cable television provider and are played back around the clock for a week afterward. This is a chance to be seen by many well-connected and influential people.
- Volunteer to help charitable, religious and civic groups. Virtually all of them need help. Working in a soup kitchen, helping Habitat for Humanity, participating in a Walk-a-Thon to benefit any charity, performing fund raising, coaching youth athletics, and the like will expose you to other like-minded people who have other contacts. Establishing a common interest personal bond with them can be an excellent first step to creating a professional one.

Those who are successful at networking tell me that this is a process that builds slowly. You may not find this comforting if you have already been in transition for an extended period. On the other hand, if you create the time to perform just one or two of the efforts discussed here and maintain a level of involvement after you land your next position, you may find that future opportunities will surface via the relationships you now cultivate as a volunteer. In the near term, you will experience the positive feeling earned from helping others, which will help to reduce the anxiety and frustrations of your present search. It should also reinforce awareness that as difficult as our present condition may be, we as senior executives still live better than ninety per cent of the world's population.

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