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SMART ANSWERS

By Karen E. Klein

Write-On Marketing

Selling your services as a writer and editor demands that you demonstrate a clever and stylish for words and ideas

Q: I have a service that helps people write. It goes beyond the spell checker to help clients shorten long sentences, cut out words that add little, and make what they write logical and easy to understand. How should I go about marketing this service?

---- O.S., Western Cape, South Africa

A: Marketing is a multifaceted discipline that includes pricing strategy, distribution, and customer service, as well as advertising and promotion. Before you tackle it, get a solid grasp of your own service's perceived value in the marketplace and what you'll be able to charge for it. Next, do some research and find several specific ways your service can differentiate itself from the competition over the long term.

Once you've done that, you can focus on how to cost-effectively increase your visibility in the marketplace and motivate people to enlist your services. To attract the broadest group of clients, you might position your company as a "freelance editorial services" firm, suggests Gay Silberg, a marketing consultant with Graham, Silberg, Sugarman in Los Angeles. "This could result in projects as diverse as speed editing to stock-prospectus editing, technical-manual revision, and the like," she says. "You should be prepared to draft written material from scratch, as well, or at the very least help noncommunicators establish outlines for their communications so that their messages are presented in a persuasive, logical manner."

Promoting a service that helps improve and enhance writing skills naturally lends itself to promotional vehicles that feature clever, persuasive, and stylish writing. Demonstrate your skills through various direct-marketing vehicles, suggests Mike Mirkil, director of business development for JSM+ Communications, which is based in Santa Monica, Calif. "You will not only be offering your services to potential clients in a cost-efficient manner -- you will be giving them a firsthand look (or read) into the very skills you are selling," he says.



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BE EXTRAORDINARY. Go beyond random, plain-text e-mail solicitations (which, regardless of content, tend to get ignored) and try preparing an e-mail newsletter using HTML or even flash-formatting, if possible, Mirkil recommends. If you use a distinctive graphic style, he says, something formal yet colorful, it will help brand your service, lend you credibility, and make you appear more substantial than a one-person startup outfit. If you have the budget or the technical skills, a great marketing tool might be a captivating PowerPoint presentation that can be e-mailed as an attachment or sent as a CD-ROM to new prospects.

One program that creates HTML e-mail is marketed by a company called CoolerEmail.com, based in Portland, Ore. Their prices range from \$9.95 per month for 100 "do it yourself" e-mails to \$99 per month for 10,000 e-mails with CoolerEmail doing all the tracking and reporting on the effectiveness of the campaign. The most popular package is \$39.95 for 1,000 emails a month, which includes the tracking, templates, list manager, etc.

Don't forget that, with computer viruses circulating constantly, many people are wary about downloading unrecognized attachments, so notify customers about what you'll be attaching and, to be particularly polite, ask if they want to receive your presentation. The more professionally you present yourself, the more seriously you'll be considered by prospective clients.

Once you've developed some strong marketing pieces, target large organizations that have discretionary budgets for personnel development, such as financial-services firms, insurance agencies, high-tech companies, and other corporations that often employ people with only basic training in written communication. Research your target companies and contact specific people in their marketing, human resources, and investor-relations departments. Look particularly for firms that create multiple proposals, brochures, and reports that need to be polished and compelling. Good luck!