

## CW BULLETIN

### Independent Thinking

#### Marketing Your Business

#### ***Know your strengths—and how to articulate them***

by Daria Steigman

At the IABC International Conference in late June, Bill Quirke, managing director of Synopsis Communications Consulting, asked at his all-star session how many people in the room could define their company's business strategy. The good news is that a lot of hands went up; the bad news: some didn't.

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It's clearly a bad sign when a company's communication staff cannot articulate the business strategy. But that problem is a real red flag when you're talking about a small business, where a scattered focus can easily translate into lost opportunities—something none of us can afford in today's competitive business environment.

This month's column doesn't focus on business strategy per se, but rather on how independents market themselves once they identify their markets and know what it is they want to convey. Because even if you rely on reputation and word of mouth, at some point you need *something* you can point to or hand to a potential client that articulates who you are and why your company is the best fit for their business needs.

**"As communicators, we often neglect ourselves because we're so busy [creating marketing materials] for someone else."**

"A lot of business owners struggle with creating effective marketing materials," says Shelley Griewahn, ABC, founder and principal of Cooper Wright in Falls Church, Virginia. "As communicators, we often neglect ourselves because we're so busy doing this work for someone else. It's important to refresh ourselves, and to find new ways to network and stay in front of our clients."

So what are independents using to market themselves these days? Brett Pyrtle, principal of Turning Point Communications in St. Paul, Minnesota, uses a professional brief. "I essentially took my résumé and reworked it specifically toward internal and executive communications," says Pyrtle. "I have a second version, which is focused on external and marketing communications. Depending on the client, I'll use one or the other."

Cyrus Mavalwala, head of Advantis Communications in Toronto, sends out "biographies and other top-line information about [his] business." Mostly, however, he does what he terms "credibility presentations" for potential clients. "This offers a 1,000 foot overview of who we are, what we've done, and what our services are," says Mavalwala.

Natalie Canavor, a freelance writer from Long Island, New York, relies primarily on a one-page functional résumé. "This allows me to separate out my journalism expertise, my video experience and my commercial work. I'm selling the fact that I have a broad perspective and understand how marketing, publications and other elements of a communications strategy fit together."

As for me, I rely on a one-pager about my business—or, more precisely, several versions of a one-pager—and a one-page biography. I've tweaked my marketing materials repeatedly over the years, and substantially reworked my one-pager a few months ago from a description of business services into a statement of business capabilities. The move was designed to enable potential clients to quickly match up their needs with my expertise.

Equally important is your portfolio, because nothing speaks to what you can do for a client better than the results you've achieved for other organizations. Like many independents, I always bring samples of my work with me to meetings with prospective clients.

**Nothing speaks to what you  
can do for a client better than**

## Raising Your Profile

While everyone has marketing materials in some format, no one I talked to hands out pens with their name on them or relies much on other gadgets to raise their business profile.

"I'm really down on tchotchkes and other giveaways that don't actually relate to your business," says Kate Perrin, president of PProfessional Solutions, LLC, a PR temp agency in Washington, D.C. "Rather than advertising, we rely on sponsorships. We will sponsor communications activities if we think they will be seen as promoting excellence in our field. This year, we're involved with Washington Women in Public Relations' Woman of the Year Award and we are one of the sponsors for the [Association for Women in Communications D.C. Chapter's] Matrix Award."

Others rely on different strategies, including writing business columns in local publications and teaching workshops. And, not surprisingly, almost everyone cited their relationship with IABC. Brett Pyrtle's comments are typical: "I have some built-in visibility from being a long-time member of IABC/Minnesota," he says, "and from being the incoming chapter president."

Of course, the best marketing strategies depend on understanding your business environment—and successful entrepreneurs know how to leverage that knowledge. For example, Cyrus Mavalwala has had his company web site for years. The site provides key information for prospective clients, and a web presence is critical to establishing credibility with his high-tech industry clients. Others point to their client lists or rely on credentials, such as IABC's accredited business communicator (ABC) designation, to give them a leg up on the competition. In Washington, D.C., where the snob factor cannot be overestimated, many independents tout their university connections and leadership stints to prove they're ready for prime time.

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