4 Mistakes to Avoid When Marketing Your Freelance Business

By Nick Usborne

Marketing is the task most freelancers seem to hate. They love their craft and love to do good work, but generally don't much enjoy the job of getting out in front of new prospects and then converting those prospects into clients.

This is a problem, because marketing is at the heart of every wildly-successful freelance business. You don't get to the top by hiding behind your monitor and failing to get out there with a unique and compelling message.

Let me go through four mistakes most freelancers make, and their solutions.

Mistake #1. Marketing when you need new clients, instead of before.

Freelancers turn to marketing when it's too late. They suddenly realize their funnel of jobs is drying up and that unless they get out there fast, there won't be much work to do next month, or next week.

Of course, what they finally spend time on is not marketing, it's last-minute, full panic promotion. There is a difference between marketing and promotion, and it's essential you understand it.

Marketing implies the existence of a goal, a plan, and continuity. Marketing is something that happens all the time. McDonald's doesn't market itself only when it thinks next month will be a little light on revenues. It markets continuously.

Promotion is the sharp end of marketing, it's when the tactics come into play. It's the ad space you buy, the email you send out, and so on.

Most freelancers use promotion, not marketing. And they spend time on promotion only when they see a famine on the horizon.

Big mistake.

Marketing is something that should happen all of the time.

Mistake #2. Approaching prospective clients without first doing enough research.

Here is another big mistake. Freelancers identify a prospect and then phone them, mail them, or email them. They generally choose the company because they are a good fit for their niche.

For example, a freelancer focusing on green tech might identify a company selling home wind power systems as a potential prospect. Seems like a good fit.

But what happens once the identification has been made is that the freelancer lets fly with his or her phone call, letter, or email.

Why is this wrong? Because at this point, you don't know enough about the company. The fact that they are a "good fit" is not enough. You need to know more. Do some research. Study their website. Download any materials they offer. Sign up for their e-newsletter. Check out their Facebook page and any other social media profiles they have.

In other words, learn as much as you can about your prospect before you approach them.

Do that, and you can make a much stronger approach and pitch.

Without research, you might say:

> *"I'm an expert in writing e-newsletters for the green tech industry."*

With research, you might say:

> *"I'm an expert in writing e-newsletters for the green tech industry. I think your e-newsletter is great, but I notice you don't include elements that could drive readers through to your sales pages. Nor have you integrated your e-newsletter with your social media activity. I would love to talk with you about that."*

Mistake #3. Failing to define a Unique Selling Proposition.

What makes you different from all of the other freelancers you compete with? Why are you the best choice? What do you bring to the table that is unique and truly valuable?

Think about that. And then write 20 versions of a home page headline that express your unique value. Run with the best of them. And then look at that headline, and the text that follows, and look for ways to improve on it.

Too often, I see freelance website home pages with boring headlines, or headlines that make general, non-specific promises.

That's a fast way to lose a prospect in about three seconds.

Work hard on your home page headline. Make it good enough to compel every new prospect to keep reading more and more about you.

Mistake #4. Writing a blog without publishing regular posts.

Writing a blog is a great way to hold the attention of your prospects. It also helps a lot when it comes to attracting search-engine traffic. Freelancer websites don't generally have a ton of pages. You don't need them. But a 10-page website isn't going to get much traffic from Google. Writing a blog solves that problem. Over time, you can end up with hundreds of pages on your site, most of them in the form of blog posts.

Just go take a look at the most successful freelancers, consultants, and coaches you know. Almost all will have blogs, or their websites will BE blogs, and almost all of them will add posts several times a week.

But what I see too often are blogs that are essentially dead. They started out strong with a few posts, and then the author got lazy. Then they felt embarrassed and removed the date stamp from their posts, because they hadn't posted anything for three weeks.

The thing is, people know that posts without date stamps are a sign that the author isn't writing regularly.

If you have a blog — and to have one is a great idea — you need to add new content at least a couple of times a week. Keep it alive!

Wrapping it up …

These four mistakes are not the only ones freelancers make when it comes to marketing. But they are big ones, and should give you something to work on.

Remember, marketing is at the heart of freelance success. And marketing is a continuous process, with a clear goal and a strong plan.

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1 Response to "4 Mistakes to Avoid When Marketing Your Freelance Business"

Hey Nick,

Great article!

Meetch – over a year ago

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