



Building a reputation as a guru

There is a growing group of professionals recognised as leaders in their particular field. Their reputation generates new work and opportunities, often without them seemingly having to “sell”. And because demand comes to them, competition or price are rarely issues, enabling these “gurus” to yield well above average levels of fee income.

Guru marketing combines a specific set of marketing strategies to enable professionals to command premium fees from clients and reduce the time and resources they need to put into “push” marketing techniques or outright selling. So how does a guru marketing strategy work?

At the heart of a successful Guru marketing approach are ideas and intellectual property. The pre-requisite for success is that you must have knowledge and insight valued by those people you want to target. This must be genuine expertise - the ability to add-value and move thinking forward - not just experience.

Gurus generally have great CVs and client lists and this is part of what gives them their gravitas. But simply having been there or knowing the key players isn't enough to command the real premium.

Unlike rainmakers who generate work from their aptitude for seeking out the right contacts and connecting them together, Gurus turn their experience into insight that assists others achieve their objectives. This becomes the Intellectual Property they are recognised for. They are sought out because they are “the best person for the job”.

The second essential is the willingness to share that IP. This is a market where you have to give to receive. Those who jealously guard their IP have to sell in order to convince potential buyers to take the risk of buying something they and others know little about. In contrast, a Guru's knowledge is recognised up-front and widely trusted.

Customers pay a premium to understand how that can be applied to their business because they have already quantified the benefits.

Guru marketing then integrates a mix of “pull marketing” techniques to amplify reputation, build profile and generate fee-earning opportunities. These include PR in trade and national media, public speaking at conferences and in-house client events, building profile through on-line tools and social media, and advocate marketing.



The increasing appeal of a Guru strategy is that it focuses on margin rather than volume growth. This means that it can deliver bottom line benefits to those who are selling their time, and so have an absolute limit on volume potential of the number of working hours in a week.

To quote services marketing specialist Laurie Young, formerly a Global Marketing Partner at PwC, in advocating this approach for specialist partners within the large firms:



“If 150 days are sold and 50 are allocated to marketing or administration, the individual will achieve annual revenue of, say, £450,000. Yet a successful guru strategy can achieve a day rate much higher than average. If, for example, one practitioner invests in reputation enhancement programmes ... their day rate may be doubled in three years, yielding a healthy payback on the investment. In reality, some single practitioners are currently achieving day rates equivalent to between £8,000 and £12,000, depending on market and reputation; so, if they sell only 100 days, they are personally earning around £1million a year.”

A Guru marketing strategy is also not just suitable for individuals, whether sole practitioners or partners in firms. It is also a very effective firm-wide marketing strategy for services businesses that have genuine Intellectual Property and a willingness to build a reputation based on sharing elements of it.

Guru marketing can support a company brand as effectively as an individual's, and is especially effective in enabling smaller niche consultancies to punch well above their weight when competing with dominant market players and their seemingly bottomless pockets.

The challenge for many professionals and consultants is to achieve differentiation in the face of increasing competition. The standardisation of offerings driven by the growth of tender procedures and professional buying or procurement functions, as well as the downward pressure on budgets, has made standout a major challenge. The Holy Grail of being the trusted adviser is ever harder to achieve.

Guru marketing strategies offer the opportunity to rise above those trends, building not only premium rates but also the ability to turn knowledge into “products” (e.g. books, on-line seminars, and best-practice tools). And when reputation enables this, a Guru's income is no longer constrained by the number of hours in their working week!

Alan Brooks - Hyde Marketing