

## Improve Your Marketing by Changing One Thing



By C.J. Hayden, Contributing Editor

One of the worst marketing mistakes you can make as an independent professional is to create a marketing plan that consists of activities you don't enjoy and aren't good at. There's no boss looking over your shoulder, so who's going to make you do things you don't want to? It's much more likely that a plan you find distasteful and difficult simply won't be executed.

Professionals often tell me they don't like marketing or selling, but many times I find that what they dislike are the tactics they've been trying to use. A simple change of technique can frequently do wonders to turn around an anti-marketing attitude. The best marketing and sales tactics are the ones you will perform. If a marketing activity makes use of your natural talents and preferences, you'll be much more likely to find it enjoyable and easy to do, and you'll be more willing to do it.

### Make Use of "Natural Selection"

One of the best ways to determine what might work well for you in marketing is to pay attention to the type of activities you naturally do in other areas of your life. For example, a client of mine has been keeping a personal journal and writing regular letters to friends and family since college. For her, launching a blog to market her business was a natural choice.

"I was struggling to make those chatty 'what's new' phone calls people said were a necessity to keep in touch with prospective clients," she says. "I avoided them because they felt so awkward to me. But the blog is easy—I love writing it, so I post almost daily. And I know my prospects are reading it because they post comments. It's much more rewarding than leaving voice mail messages no one ever returns."

For one of my students, networking events were the things she avoided. "It was so uncomfortable for me to walk into a room full of strangers that I couldn't even open my mouth," she recalls. So she decided to host her own networking mixers.

"I love to entertain," she explains. "I invite people I already know and ask each guest to bring someone I don't know yet and introduce us. It's a great way to meet new people, and since it's my party, I feel totally at home."

### Honor Your True Nature

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Remembering your childhood pastimes is another valuable source of guidance about what might be easy or fun for you in marketing. When I played alone as a little girl, I would read the encyclopedia to my dolls. A favorite gift I received as a child was a whiteboard with markers and a magnetic alphabet. It's no wonder I find that the most enjoyable way to market myself today is by teaching classes and workshops.

I have a colleague who was voted "most loquacious" in high school. Today he builds his business largely by schmoozing with prospects on the phone.

"I just love talking to people," he says. "For me, writing marketing copy or a sales letter is challenging, so I'll put it off for days or weeks. But when I pick up the phone, I feel like I know what I'm doing. So I'll zip through a dozen calls in a single morning."


My talkative friend has won awards for his sales ability. But if you or I try to emulate his success by copying his techniques, we could fail dramatically. For him, these activities are natural and fully within his comfort zone, so he succeeds at them effortlessly. For those of us who aren't quite so gregarious by nature, we might stutter and stumble our way through calls and make a poor impression or find them so onerous we don't make them at all.

### **Find Your Natural Balance**

It isn't always possible to be completely comfortable when marketing ourselves. We may wish to stretch our existing abilities in order to ultimately become more effective at making calls, writing letters, attending meetings, speaking in public, or whatever activities we currently find particularly hard to do. If that is true for you, absolutely include in your marketing plan one or two challenging areas where you would like to practice so you can improve.

Be sure, however, to also include a healthy complement of tactics you're already good at and enjoy using. If your marketing plan contains more enjoyment and fewer struggles, you'll work the plan instead of recoiling from it. And when you do that, you'll stay in business long enough to have plenty of time to learn new sales and marketing skills and expand your comfort zone.

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