



HELENA COMMUNICATIONS

Unique, Great and Visible

Why you must raise the profile of your marketing firm (and how you can).

Right now, your clients-to-be are out there, searching for someone who can help them increase brand awareness and generate the kind of buzz that leads to leads that result in sales. Stuff you can do efficiently and profitably. How will they find you? And why will they choose you?

Because you are unique, great and **VISIBLE**.

The importance of being UNIQUE and GREAT

I'm betting you're already great at what you do. And you are unique. There's no other firm quite like yours, because there is only one you. The question is: How do you demonstrate your uniqueness to others?

For maximum impact your firm needs a) a strong, clear position in the market and b) to demonstrate a distinct character (brand personality).

Positioning

You can continue to be everything to everyone, but in this increasingly competitive business environment you will be forced to compete primarily on price (tempered only by your ability to charm). Alas, there are a plethora of charming generalists all over the world who are not only willing to work tirelessly to out charm you – they also are willing to simultaneously give away the farm.

To hedge against this, you must reduce your relevance to most potential clients and become extremely relevant to a smaller number of clients, preferably in an underserved market. This is a big challenge for most established firms, as they do not want to (or cannot afford to) say no to any business. And if you can't afford to say no, you have no power in the relationship. (Hat tip: [Blair Enns](#).)

For more information about positioning, check out "[5 Insights to Narrow Positioning](#)," a recent MarketingProfs Daily Fix post in which I interview positioning expert and business consultant [David C. Baker](#) about this topic.

Character

The other way you must amplify your uniqueness is to develop and embrace a distinct character or, in marketing speak, "brand personality." This requires you to take an honest look at your business and the people you've chosen to work within it, come to terms with who you really are and then totally, and unapologetically *own it*. Most firms need help with this. A good PR consultant function as a mirror for brand character and story incongruencies and disconnects, raising your awareness of them so you can swiftly address them.

Why you must become **VISIBLE**

Until very recently, most professional services deals were primarily a result of existing relationships that led to referrals, which worked as sort of a wheel of wealth, where business was referred and subsequently wealth transferred from one organization to another.

But the current economic climate has drastically reduced the amount of work and consequently, the amount of wealth in play, directly affecting the number referrals even the best sources can make.

There is still business out there, it's just that now you actually may have to look for or— if you don't have a million relationships to pull from – actually *compete* for it. As you can imagine, with this level of competition, it's a lot easier to get your food in the door if people already have some awareness of you.

Whether the lead/contact is generated via referral or the result of a sales call, the first thing people will do is search online to find out more about you. For this reason (and others) a robust online presence that accurately represents your expertise and value, is essential.

Following are the 10 most important channels to consider; what people should find when they search on your name and specialty.

1. Your company's Website and a blog, with comments enabled.
2. Your LinkedIn profile. This should feature some smart copy, recommendations, and reflect questions answered and comments made on discussions.
3. Twitter link and handle, robust stream of your thinking, links, retweets, referrals, resources and the occasional personal musing. The website link should be to a custom landing page (so you can measure how much action you're getting from the Twitter communications channel).
4. Bylined articles you've written that have appeared in industry publications.
5. Guest blog posts for industry blogs
6. Comments you've made on industry related blogs
7. Links to presentations you've done and posted on Slideshare and videos of you speaking posted on YouTube
8. Quotes that you've given to journalists for articles
9. Links to press releases
10. And if you're really on it: An Amazon link to your book. Yes, book.

Let's take a look at each of these channels in more detail:

Your firm's website

If your website is more than two (yes, two) years old or if it is not in a content management system such as Wordpress, Drupal, etc., I don't even have to see it. I know it needs to be redone. The current accepted visual idiom for websites is drastically different today than it was even this time last year. You should consider setting the new site up so that you can freshen it annually by re-skinning in, without having to rework the basic site architecture.

Spend the money to have your site professionally designed, or use a nice template and have someone customize it for you. I have heard many stories of colleagues who have gone to someone's website with full intent to hire or interview them, but were driven off by an outdated-looking site or poor user experience.

Your website does not have to be a work of art, but it must reflect a high level of professionalism. Meaning the site should offer logical navigation, easily accessible contact information, links to articles you've written and media hits, and a professionally designed logo. It also should have a blog (to keep it current, make someone its managing editor). Offer a monthly newsletter and an easy way to sign up for it, on every page.

Other things to consider:

Professionally shot photographs

Professional photographers know how to draw out and capture your professional essence. This photograph should be aspirational, in other words, project an image of someone who is still you, but that projects an image that looks like the best you (which is probably better than you usually look). The ability to get that "aspirational" shot, takes years to develop, and is what separates the amateurs from the professionals.

In the interim, at very least have someone take a high-resolution photograph of you. For best results, use natural light. Have the photographer stand on a small stepladder and shoot down at you. Keep your chin *down*. And, for the love of God, please, no self-portraits taken with your cell phone. Yes, I know everyone else is doing it. Everyone else also is squandering an opportunity to project a powerful and influential image.

Search engine optimization

Besides referral and prospecting, another way for people to find you is via a search engine. As it turns out, search engine optimization (SEO) is not rocket science. Here is a very clear article on what you need to do, "[How SEO Works](#)," written by my friends at Newfangled. All you need is some elbow grease. Get busy.

Your LinkedIn profile

Your LinkedIn profile will be one of the first three things to show up in your search profile. It is your business persona and should reflect your professional persona and be complete. If you are not a good writer, hire a professional writer to interview you and write the copy for you.

The word *biography* implies someone else is doing the talking, so write it in the third person. Otherwise it's an autobiography (not as compelling). Post a professionally shot photograph. (Hint: use the same photograph everywhere to create a consistent and instantly recognizable impression.)

Carve out a few minutes each day to connect with people you know, with the goal of having (initially) about 100 connections. Connect assertively, but only with people you know – at least at first. Be sure to solicit some endorsements; these become part of your search footprint and you also can use them for your website. And don't forget to create a LinkedIn page for your firm.

Twitter

There are varying schools of thought on this and I've done it both ways. But for search purposes, your twitter handle should be your *full name*, first and last. Example: helenabouchez. *Handy hack:* Where twitter asks for your full name, put something descriptive instead. Example: my "full name" reads "PR for Marketers." I can do this because my twitter handle is my full name.

Invest some time into building a Twitter following. The best way to do this is to find and follow people whose opinions you respect. Most will follow you back.

A robust Twitter following gives you a select audience to whom you can broadcast your thinking, adding texture and wringing more mileage from your blogging, writing and speaking efforts. Twitter also is a great place to start relationships with key influencers and prospects. KEY: Be sure to regularly initiate conversations with people whose opinions you respect.

Bylined articles

Bylined articles with great titles placed on influential media outlets leave extremely authoritative search footprints (even if no one reads the article). It's totally worth doing 3-4 a year.

Another thing I'm seeing is more short blog posts that link to longer white papers that require you to give up your email (give permission to market) to obtain. (Like this one.)

When placing articles, your goal should be to saturate the 2-3 most influential channels with your content. Especially if you're narrowly positioned, you don't have to be everywhere. Pick the most influential channels and own them. Note: the most influential channels are not necessarily the biggest or most well-known channels. Do your homework.

Guest blog posts

Most industry publications (if they are still even printing on paper) have added a blog or blogs to their websites. As you may have discovered (or will), a blog is a content monster that demands constant feeding.

Once you get a few industry articles under your belt, your own blog is full of insightful tidbits, and you've made some intelligent comments on other blogger's posts, you can approach an influential blog's managing editor and offer yourself up as a contributor. (Ex. I currently contribute to the [MarketingProfs Daily Fix](#) blog.)

Speaking from experience, guest blogging on top of blogging on your site and writing other things can be a challenge and requires some discipline. Focus your energies and consider hiring an editor to help you polish your output.

Comment blogging

Commenting on blog posts is a great way to establish relationships with the blogger and the overall blog owner. Bear in mind anything you post in comments becomes part of your search footprint! Use your real name and include a link to your website. Do NOT self-promote.

Speaking gigs

Speaking at influential industry conferences is the most powerful new business development tool, period. Efforts should be focused here as soon as possible. Often you have to spend some time building a platform before you can get the better gigs. Meantime, start doing smaller presentations to gain experience and build a video portfolio of your work.

For more details on how to get speaking gigs, read my Marketingpros.com article: [Get a Speaking Gig: How Event Producers Decide Who Gets Onstage.](#)

Expert Quotes

As you build relationships with reporters and journalists that cover your industry they should come to rely on you as an expert and quote you in articles they write.

A good way to start a reporter relationship is to comment on their articles (remembering that your comment becomes part of your search footprint). Also keep them in mind as you come across newsworthy tidbits, and send them along -- even if (especially if) they are not about you.

What not to say: "I am a big fan of your column." Who cares? Demonstrate your value as an expert by adding a pithy comment that adds another dimension to their article.

Links to press releases

No, the press release is not dead. I like Pitchengine.com for the newsroom, but you can make your own newsroom on your website, too. Optimally, you want to be pumping out a steady stream of content "news" to expand your search footprint, and the perception of your owning the marketing as an expert.

There are several free distribution services out there, but for the big, earth shattering "this is truly new" announcement, use a paid service like Businesswire or PRNewswire. The other reason to deploy a release over the main wire is if you need to whitewash your Google presence. It will be a lot of links of the same thing, but it will all be YOU. Subsequent articles, etc. will add the texture.

Your book

Yes, your book. If you are an expert, you must eventually find time to write a book. A book still reinforces your platform (what you want to be known for) like nothing else.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal is to become so visible, that clients will pick up the phone and contact you, greatly easing the new business process. Until you reach that tipping point (and perhaps even well after) it's important to have a sales process in place that presses the increased recognition into service, and uses it as a lever to more easily open doors.

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