

## **Ask SCORE**

*After several years of doing management consulting for a large firm, I'm planning to pursue a career as a freelance management consultant. I'm good at what I do, but could use some advice on how to go about finding clients.*

When you start a career as a freelance consultant, you begin a journey that will be as challenging and rewarding as anything you've ever done. Though the possibilities of what you'll do and how far you'll go are endless, there are some things you can count on—namely the constant pursuit for new work.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, as the positive aspects of freelancing usually more than offset the effort required to achieve them. And approached the right way, marketing yourself and what you do will not be a chore at all. You may even find that it to be fun.

A key step in the process is to build your personal brand. That means leveraging your special knowledge, style or expertise. But the idea isn't simply to call attention to yourself. Instead, focus on the issues and concerns of your prospective customers, and position yourself as a resource for helping them find solutions.

Social media has made it remarkably easy to convey this message via blog posts, Tweets, Facebook fan pages and so forth. In addition, commenting on the blog posts of others can also enhance your standing as an expert, inspiring thought leaders and their followers to want to learn more about you.

But while the Internet is a valuable way to get your name out, in-person networking remains an essential part of any freelancer's awareness strategy. Have that brief "elevator speech" ready to introduce yourself, but be ready to shift immediately into "interview mode" and get to know the people you meet better. The more you learn about them, but more likely you are to find ways to serve them. And because of that all-to-valuable interpersonal communication, they're more likely to consider doing business with you.

Once you get those coveted customers, doing a good job is an important step toward securing repeat business and referrals from that client. Many small business experts recommend offering a money-back guarantee on those initial projects, rather than doing the work at a discount. That way, the customer has nothing to lose and everything to gain by giving you a try.

And regardless of the client, the size of the job, and how busy you are, never scrimp on client satisfaction. Always stand behind your work, and try to gauge client expectations at every step. Then, exceed them.

*This column is brought to you by the Merrimack Valley Chapter of SCORE, with nearly 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business mentoring and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit [merrimackvalley.score.org](http://merrimackvalley.score.org) for information on mentoring, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.*