



# THE INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT



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## Write the Right Kind of How-To Article

by Carl Friesen

In thinking about a possible theme for an article to write and get published in a business publication, many consultants assume that writing about what they do for a living makes a good topic. It's interesting to them—why not to the readers of the publication?

My advice? Don't do it. Your clients and readers are mostly interested in results they can use; they don't want to know how you do it. That's what they hire you—for your expertise—so they don't have to learn about it. Also, do you want to give away your trade secrets?

But what journalists call a how-to article does have its place in helping demonstrate thought leadership.

As an example, consider a former client of mine, a trustee in bankruptcy. His job was to help companies in financial difficulties to either close themselves down, or survive what might be a corporate near-death experience. He'd written a long, comprehensive article about how to go through the bankruptcy process, replete with detail after detail about how such a process works.

What did I suggest to him? I suggested that he rewrite the article to focus on a specific aspect of bankruptcy, e.g., the need to keep lines of communication open to creditors, suppliers, employees and other stakeholders. The result was an article that was genuinely useful and presented my client as the informed, caring person that he is.

The point is that to be useful in communicating the message you want, a how-to must be on a topic that the readers—current and prospective clients—want to know about and one which invites them to take action if they so choose.

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One kind of how-to article that meets this criterion is the how-to-work-with article. In other words, who is the best person to work with regarding a specific business need? For example, an article that describes the value of bringing in an outside actuary or CPA early in the development stages of a project designed to launch a new service unit or product line fits in this category. In such an article, you can explain how major, potentially troublesome financial issues must be identified before the new service or product is rolled out or extensively developed. This action could end up saving the developer lots of time and money, not to mention headaches. This information is precisely the right kind of info readers want to know.

In short, when you're planning to write an article for publication, include information about issues you have solved for your clients time and time again; avoid writing about broad expertise that you know a lot about. By focusing on specific, truly relevant problems, your readers will gain the wisdom of your consulting expertise.

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