

Becoming the go-to person

By Carl Friesen

If your clients saw you as someone with inside knowledge into the issues they're facing, what would this do for your career? Quite possibly, you could become the go-to person, able to stand out from the competition, get better assignments and charge higher rates. You can do this by showing your ability to think strategically about the client's issues through the articles you write. This allows you to go beyond the "how-to" article we discussed in the previous item in this series.

To see why this is important, once again try putting yourself in the mind of your client. The client will not want just technical support, but the assurance that you can help reduce the chances that a nasty surprise will ruin his or her day. The client wants someone able to see the "big picture." One of the best ways to do this is to demonstrate this in what you write. One example of this is the "trend" article. In this type of writing, you take a current situation and describe how it developed and where it is now. Then, and this is where the value lies for the reader, you give your informed opinion on how the trend is likely to develop and what the reader can do about it.

This allows you to show off your understanding of the client's world and position yourself as someone with solutions to offer. To pick the right trend to discuss, think about the forces that are affecting your client, and where you can add some value. It does little if you select a topic where you cannot credibly offer a solution, or one where there's really nothing to be done. You don't need to have experience in the area you're seeking as long as you could reasonably carry out an assignment once you've landed it.

The other type of article that positions you well is the "opinion" piece. In it, you take a situation, a trend, a piece of legislation, a legal ruling or other issue, and express your opinion on it. Start by describing the issue, then state your opinion by giving solidly-backed reasons for your views. End with a call to action by explaining what the reader should do or think. This works from a marketing perspective because it presents you as being someone who is informed about the issues the reader is facing and also as someone who cares enough to have a well-considered opinion about it.

You may be concerned that you will alienate a potential client through expressing an opinion that is different from that held by the client. My experience is that as long as you don't state an opinion that is totally offensive to the reader, you're doing yourself a good turn. Don't be afraid to be a contrarian. In the columns written by professional services guru Alan Weiss, he tells about how he first established his "brand" as a consultant through taking the opposing view. If everyone else was of the opinion that "teams are the way to go," for example, he wrote that "teams are overrated." He got a lot of readers, and this helped put him on the path to success in his marketing.

So, think about ways to position yourself as a leader and source of solutions through the articles you write. They're often a much better read than a how-to article, and are certainly more fun to write.