

The Introvert's Guide to Marketing Your Business
An interview with Nancy Ancowitz, by Ruth Ann Woodley

Editor's note: Nancy Ancowitz is a business communication coach based in New York City, whose specialties include helping introverts develop the skills they need to promote their careers and businesses. Because actuaries are so often introverts (like myself), and find marketing their business to be one of the most difficult aspects of running a small consulting firm, I asked Nancy for some tips on how to tailor this work to our strengths.

The Independent Consultant: How did you get involved in coaching specifically for introverts?

Nancy Ancowitz: While working at Citibank, I took the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality inventory, and realized I was an introvert. I reflected on my natural preferences—deep conversation rather than schmoozing; one-on-one rather than group meetings; planning and practicing rather than speaking impromptu, to name a few—and it all made sense. When I decided to leave to become an independent coach, my goal was to share the best of what I learned about self-promotion as an introvert both from my 12-year corporate experience as well as my past as an independent jewelry designer/entrepreneur.

TIC: Some people try to go into “sell mode” and imitate extroverts, but you have said that introverts bring their own set of strengths. What are some of these strengths, and how can we capitalize on them?

NA: Introverts are a large group—estimated at half the population— so, of course, not all have the same strengths. But in general, we tend to be good listeners and writers, strong at research and analysis, focused and thoughtful, good problem solvers, and inclined to build strong one-on-one relationships. I believe that what we focus on is what grows. So, why not focus more on our strengths than our shortcomings? For example, if you focus on your shyness and see it as a hindrance, that will become your truth. If instead you focus on your ability to build lasting bonds with potential customers, then you can allow that strength to define you instead.

TIC: Can you give some examples of introverts who have been successful in sales, and any lessons you've learned from them?

NA: Just last week two of my new clients got new job opportunities after just one coaching session. How? We worked on clearly articulating their strengths and accomplishments. Not bragging, it's just stating the facts. One tip is to keep track of your accomplishments. Write down positive comments or print out favorable e-mails, and save them in a physical and/or electronic file. Then you'll have specific reminders and language describing your accomplishments handy when you're working on your brochure, Web site, business proposals, etc.

TIC: If we can't, or shouldn't, try to convert ourselves to extroverts, are there certain skills that we should work on to bridge the gap? Do you have any practice tips or other tools for learning these skills?

NA: Here are some specifics:

- Prepare several simple opening lines for social events so you can hit the ground running. Make eye contact and say something positive or ask an open ended (as opposed

to a "yes" or "no") question. Practice saying opening lines out loud in advance. You can do this alone, or with a friend.

- At a networking event where you aren't sure who to talk to, look for people with an open stance and friendly expression. Keep it simple—just walk up to them, smile, extend your hand, say hello and your name. Not many people are likely to turn away from you. If there's a food table, that's often an easy place to strike up a conversation.
- It's even better if someone you know can introduce you, since this opens doors and validates you to your new acquaintances. Also, introduce people to each other, even if you've just met. This enables you to be seen as a connector, which is a valuable role in any business or social network.
- Often overlooked, the role of host, which offers implied credibility and ease of social connections, is often a good fit for introverts.
- Structure meetings to help ensure that you are heard. Get on the agenda to discuss a specific topic, even if only briefly, and when appropriate, chair meetings so that you're facilitating the proceedings.
- Practice the basics, like making eye contact, projecting your voice, and having good posture.
- Arrive at meetings a few minutes early. This gives you time to organize your papers, review your notes, and prepare quietly. If others are already present, take the opportunity to introduce yourself, or build rapport with people you already know.

***TIC:** For me personally, the scariest moment is picking up the phone and calling a new prospect that I've never met or don't know well. I always spend the first few moments of the call wondering if they are really interested in what I have to say, or just wish they hadn't answered the phone! Do you have any ideas on preparing for and making those first contacts?*

NA: I don't like making cold calls, so I try to make them less cold by preceding them with an e-mail or letter of introduction. Of course, the best case is to get referrals, but that's not always possible. Without a referral, I send an advance note briefly describing who I am, how I can address the prospect's needs, and what specific action comes next (e.g., "I'll call you next week to see if we can set up a meeting to discuss your XYZ needs."). If you have a referral, indicate that in the subject line and the first line of an e-mail. Here are examples of a subject line: "Referral from Joe Smith," and a first line of an e-mail: "Joe Smith thought you might be interested in my benefit consulting services."

During calls, I always focus on the prospect and addressing his or her challenges. I respect the prospect's time, keep the call short, and propose a way that I can assist. If I can't, then I offer to refer someone in my network. I typically end calls with an action that I will take (e.g., a follow-up call or e-mail) to ensure that the ball is in my court.

If the prospect is not interested in my services at the time, I ask for permission to get back in touch at a later date. If the prospect is clearly not interested, I politely end the call.

***TIC:** What are some other points to remember when communicating with people, especially current or potential clients?*

NA: Introverts often prefer e-mail to phone communication, since it enables us to write down, organize, and edit our thoughts. Ask clients how *they* would prefer you to contact them—by email or phone, what time of day is best to reach them. Learning each person's

style and preferences offers the client more personalized service—often a competitive advantage.

Some people prefer to read materials, and others need to hear rather than to see, so know your audience. Determine the key topics you want to cover, and communicate them prior to phone calls or meetings. You can always ask for the prospect's input as to any changes or other items they'd like to discuss. Prepare questions to get the most from the meeting. Think about whether you prefer to meet over a meal or in a conference room; for example, I prefer a conference room because it is a quiet, controlled environment where I can stay focused and on task. (*TIC: I actually prefer a meal, because taking time to chew or have a sip of water gives me extra time to plan what I want to say next!*)

Finally, remember some basic business communication techniques:

- Write clear, concise e-mails, and use a formal e-mail sign-off with your full name, title, company name, and your contact information.
- Use a professional e-mail address that easily reveals who you are; for example, RuthAnn@actuaries.com rather than 2lkjsf98@aol.com! Consider that most people get flooded with e-mails. Studies show that the e-mail address, as well as the subject line, are the two main factors that most people consider when deciding whether and when to open an e-mail.
- When leaving a voice mail message, say your full name and number twice (even if you think the other party already has them) in a clear, confident voice, and state why you are calling and the best time to reach you.
- Ask someone whose business judgment you respect to listen to your outgoing voice mail message. Does it state who you are and the name of your organization clearly and professionally?

***TIC:** How do you handle a situation with a very new client or potential clients you are trying to contact when you simply cannot reach them in person and can only leave a message?*

NA: It often helps to ask their assistant for the best time to reach them. Busy executives are more likely to be at their office at the very beginning or end of the day. I generally don't exceed three attempts at contacting them. If I don't hear back, I assume that either the timing isn't right or they're not interested. That said, there are always exceptions. I have one very busy CEO client who is always on the road; he urges me to just keep calling him on his cell phone until I reach him.

***TIC:** A definition of introverts I've often heard is that we get energy from time spent alone. That's true for me, and I also find that lots of time spent meeting with or calling clients can leave me very drained. Are there activities that are more solitary that I can incorporate into my routine to help balance the way I'm spending my time and keep my battery charged while still moving my marketing efforts forward?*

NA: Yes. Some solo marketing activities are research, writing, and strategizing, not to mention thinking, which can be done while taking a walk or other physical activity. Researching your potential clients and their industry is a good use of solitary, quiet time, and also makes you look good. You can set aside time for writing promotional materials, whether it's your "elevator pitch," language for your Web site or a brochure, a white paper, proposal language, and even a blog. And it may make sense to periodically review

your strategy to assess how you allocate your marketing time and dollars.

You can also use other approaches to energize yourself, like scheduling breaks or down time after meetings. The corporate environment often gives us no choice but to go from meeting to meeting all day. One advantage of running your own business is the flexibility to plan these breaks. I remember in my corporate days how it felt when someone who missed a meeting I attended would catch me in the hall and ask me for the highlights. As an introvert, I would often cringe at being put on the spot like that. I wanted time to process, and to come up with an intelligent, high-level summary. So, I learned to say "I'm running to another meeting right now. But I would be happy to send you an e-mail (or call you) later with all of the relevant details." That approach taps into your strengths without making you seem deficient.

*Nancy Ancowitz is a thinking partner and stalwart supporter for her coaching clients, who range from CEOs to emerging leaders in the business and creative worlds. She specializes in marketing and presentation skills, and teaches "Self-Promotion for IntrovertsTM," at New York University. Nancy has been interviewed extensively by the press, and wrote "Self Marketing Rules for Introverts," for careerjournal.com, the executive career site of *The Wall Street Journal*: www.careerjournal.com/columnists/perspective/20050117-fmp.html. You can reach her at Nancy@NancyAncowitz.com.*