

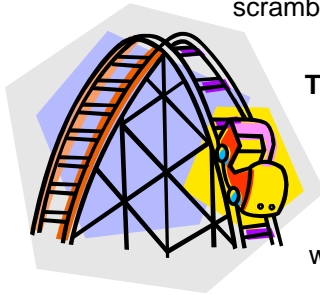
# The Professional's Paradox: Why Professionals Fail to Market and What to Do about It

By Mary Turk Nielson, CEO, The Turk Group

It's 7 p.m. and you're just closing the office door. You've spent all day working on a hot project for a client that's taking up all your time right now. The work is good, the money is great and you're feeling pretty good about your decision to give up a steady paycheck for the rewards of self-employment.

But there's this nagging worry at the back of your mind. You're so busy that you haven't had much time to think about it, but this project ends in three weeks – and you don't have another one to take its place.

It's not an unfamiliar scenario. In fact, you've been on this roller coaster before. We call it the *Yo-Yo Express*. A large project falls into your lap, you work like crazy pushing it out the door – and then you scramble until you land the next one.



## The Professional's Paradox

Hit and miss marketing efforts mean you ride the *Yo-Yo Express* much too often. You're caught in the Professional's Paradox: how to make the time for marketing when you're busy serving clients!

You're also caught in the Professional's Paradox if:

- You're dissatisfied with your marketing results
- You are serving clients you don't like for fees you're not happy with
- You are losing business to less expensive providers
- You're uncomfortable with marketing so you avoid it

You can get off the *Yo-Yo Express*. It takes some courage, some effort and this new thought that maybe you haven't thought before:

*Marketing needs to be at the top of your to-do list just to maintain your business, let alone make it grow.*

Oh gee, and you thought the most important thing was serving clients! Well, it is if you have them to serve and you're not always worried about where the next one is coming from.

## **Five Reasons Professionals Don't Market and What to do About Them**

If you're like most professionals, you have really good reasons why marketing isn't at the top of your list each day. Here are five of those good reasons and what you can do about them today to make your business more successful tomorrow.

### **Reason #1 - I haven't got the time to market**

There's not a professional on the planet – except those caught at the bottom of the *Yo-Yo Express* cycle – that has enough time to do it all. But let's face it: if you're too busy serving your clients to market your business, you will be out of business soon. New clients are your lifeblood.

As a professional service provider, you balance two big balls. One is serving clients using your professional skills. We'll call that the "product ball." The other is selling your professional skills to people you can serve. We'll call that the "marketing ball." Each ball is critical to the success of your business. But when they are out of balance, your business goes out of balance and here comes the *Yo-Yo Express!*

Get them into balance by making time to work ON your business, not just in it. Work on making your product better by improving your skills. Work on making your marketing better by improving your marketing.

So where do you find the time? Well, as one of my former professors said, "What are you doing between midnight and 3 a.m.?" Seriously, though, what distractions can you eliminate? How about unproductive phone calls, surfing the Internet or personal email? What can you delegate to free up some hours? Bookkeeping, billing, filing or other clerical tasks? What else can you reduce? For example, can you fire a client who takes up way too much time for the money you're getting? (Un-fun and un-profitable clients sap your energy and make you resentful – and you are much better without them!)

The time you invest now will pay off in easier days ahead as your marketing momentum builds.

## **Reason #2 - I don't know how to market**

Of course you don't. You're trained in your profession. The technical skills you have are the core of your product offering and you do them well. They form your value to your clients and you earn a good living from them.

There are not many professional service providers who are trained in marketing and selling. And even those that are find their "classical" marketing knowledge isn't very useful in marketing their own professional services.

Classical marketing does not work for a professional service business. This new kind of marketing is a set of skills and knowledge that you need to acquire.

Fortunately, marketing your own services is not technically difficult. There are many seminars and workshops where you can get a good start on the skills you need. The best ones for service professionals combine workshops with ongoing group or individual support.

## **Reason # 3 - I hate salespeople and I don't want to be one.**

We all have been attacked by salespeople. They are loud, obnoxious and pushy and leave us feeling trapped and angry. They are peddlers who are so focused on the sale they forget about the buyer.

But you are a service provider. Your whole energy is wrapped up in your client's well-being. It has to be if you are going to be effective. So if selling means forgetting about the buyer's feelings, forget it.

There's another way to look at selling, however. Your career is about helping people solve problems. So rather than selling, can you see yourself helping people find a solution to their problems?

The only trick to this is that you've got to find out what their problem is. That means you have to ask questions and listen to the answers. If you can help them – tell them what you can do. If you can't but you know someone who can, connect them up.

This kind of selling assumes the Law of Reciprocity – that what you cast out into the world will come back to you. Bottom line? Stop selling and start helping!

#### **Reason #4 - I don't know where to start to market**

There are a gazillion marketing tools out there for you to choose from. You can advertise, make speeches, network and cold call, among others. Doing something is always better than doing nothing.

But don't let the ad salesmen buffalo you. Advertising is hands-down the least effective strategy for developing a service business. Service businesses require time-intensive, active marketing strategies like outreach, networking and follow up. And follow up, and follow up some more.

Why the focus on follow-up? Many people will not need you today, but they may need you in the future. And they know other people who may need you. But if they don't remember you, they can't call you. So the most important thing you can do is to stay in touch with the people you come into contact with.

#### **Reason #5 - I can't seem to stay on track with my marketing**

Marketing consistently is the key to staying off the *Yo-Yo Express*. When you're always out there connecting and following up, the new clients will come along naturally. No need to scramble, no need to worry. Wow, you might even end up with a waiting list!

In the busyness of serving clients each day, it's easy to lose track of projects and tasks that seem non-essential. Your own marketing can take a back seat. There's no boss hovering over you to make sure it gets done. Plus, it's just more fun to work with clients, isn't it?

This is where a "marketing buddy" can help. This is someone you check in with once a week to set goals and report your progress. You'll want to choose someone who has no agenda for you other than your success. If you have a friend you can partner with, you're one of the lucky ones.

For the rest of us, an accountability coach or group is often the answer. It helps you stay on track, plus you get feedback and assistance for your challenges and someone to celebrate your successes with. A coach or group will pay for itself over and over as your marketing efforts gain momentum and you get more skilled.

There you have it: five reasons, five solutions. No excuses. Because it all comes down to one thing: put your marketing first. Without marketing, you have no clients. And without clients you have no business.

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