

May 16, 2006

The Preparation Factor

=====
By Robert Middleton
www.actionplan.com

This is the first of "Ten Dumb Mistakes" we make in marketing our services. If you don't stop making these mistakes, your success is in jeopardy.

The first mistake is "Being Unprepared."

Boring topic, right? Yeah, yeah, we know -- be a professional and do my homework and make my marketing action plans, and everything will be hunky dory.

Well, duh, I know that! Got anything more exciting?

I'm sure you know all the rules. But do you live by them most of the time? Probably not. We all know why: it's inertia. You're very busy (in fact, often overwhelmed), you have other priorities, and you're smart enough to "wing it" most of the time. So what's the big deal?

The big deal is that lack of preparation has a huge impact on your bottom line. It costs you every single time you're not prepared. I'm willing to bet you could double or even triple your income in the next year if you made preparation a priority. It's that important.

Let's get specific.

You already know that you need to talk about your business in a certain way to get attention and interest. (I call it the Audio Logo.) Someone asks you what you do and the response to the words you utter can be, "Hmmm, that's interesting, tell me more," or that blank, eyes-glazed-over look, depending on how well you prepared.

I've met hundreds of people through networking and I'll let you in on a dirty little secret. Most business people are just not prepared with that introduction. Not even close. It's pretty pathetic. What they say has little impact; the conversation tends to ramble aimlessly. Nothing stimulates interest, let alone a response.

Look, imagine you were cast as Hamlet.

You were told to go home and memorize your lines and do some preparation for your role. But it was more important to go out with your friends for dinner that night.

You show up for the rehearsal the next day and when they call on you, your lack of preparation is obvious. They give you another day to prepare. You memorize a few lines, but don't make a serious effort to get into the part.

How long will you have that role before they fire your sorry a--?

Not long.

But why is it that you can run your own business and profess to be an expert that can help your clients, and you can't even get your lines right? "No big deal," you think. You're your own boss after all, and this stuff isn't that important, is it?

The truth is, the business world is equally unforgiving. What happens is that prospective clients fire you all the time - before you even get a chance to work for them! You open your mouth, and mumble words that have exactly zero persuasive power and the prospect writes you off in a nano-second.

When you're prepared in your marketing, you know what to say because you've practiced it. You get it so down that you can say it with twenty seven subtle variations to suit every single situation. And you start to command attention and... respect.

When you meet someone, you're no longer wondering if you'll get their attention. You're wondering how you'll fit in a new client. Because every single time you open your mouth, people fall under your spell.

Just like a great (and very prepared) Hamlet.

When you give a presentation, do a proposal, or perform a project, you'll always make a greater impact when you're fully prepared. And like Hamlet, who masters his lines and his character, your performance is fresh and authentic every single time.

So yes, preparation is the key. And if you're not doing it in your marketing, I'm sorry to say, but you're presenting yourself as an amateur. And prospects don't want to buy from amateurs.

By Robert Middleton of Action Plan Marketing. Please visit Robert's web site at www.actionplan.com for additional marketing articles and resources on marketing for professional service businesses.