

## Freelance Marketing



Most business people are not experts at marketing. So they either employ someone to do it for them, or look for outside assistance from professionals. Hence the marketing industry is born. And with it, the marketing agency . . . and more recently, the marketing freelancer.

The marketing industry has been around for many years and has numerous separate, but equally vital elements. Marketing consultancy, marketing project management, design, print, copywriting, photography, event management, database development, list purchase, direct marketing, advertising, Internet marketing, PR, website design and development. You name it, there are a huge range of business requirements that come under the loose heading of 'marketing'.

At a fundamental level, marketing is all about telling prospective customers about the product or service that your company wants to sell to them, with the ultimate goal being that they will buy it and you will make a profit. Sounds simple, but most people who run businesses, especially at the smaller end of the scale, do not have the skill set to do this themselves. They rarely have the budget to employ someone full time, especially in the early days and they also have a tendency to think that they *can* do it themselves, often with disastrous results! Even larger companies don't always get it right, and those that do employ marketing people in-house generally still need outside assistance for one or more elements of an overall campaign.

From a business perspective, the positive aspects of employing a full service marketing agency are easy to see. A one-stop-shop for all your marketing requirements. No headaches, no fighting with multiple suppliers and not knowing whose a\*\*e to kick when something goes wrong. The downside of course is that marketing agencies have huge overheads for staff, premises and running costs – all of which have to be covered somehow. And this is generally done by charging high hourly rates and marking-up services bought in from other suppliers by as much as 50% or even more.

Which leaves a huge hole in the marketing industry for the equally highly skilled, but far more cost effective, freelance marketer. As a freelancer you do not have the same overheads as your marketing agency counterparts but you do have the same skill-set. And depending on how you structure your business, there are a range of other benefits and differentiators that you can offer to your clients.

The key factor on which you must decide from day one is what business model you want to adopt. There are two options, each with their own pros and cons. Option One is to simply act as a marketing manager would, pulling campaigns together and bringing in relevant suppliers where necessary, who then invoice your clients directly. Option Two is to function in a similar manner to an agency by purchasing those services yourself and then selling them on, with the option to add a mark up and

leave your suppliers 'invisible' in the background. The main benefit of Option Two is a financial one, whereas the main benefits of Option One are a simpler business model, no cashflow issues and less liability if things go wrong.

The other factor to consider is whether you would be happy to work on your client's premises as an employee would for a fixed period of time, or a set number of days per month - or whether you prefer to work from home. This latter option gives far more flexibility to run multiple campaigns simultaneously for a number of different clients – and is generally what is known as 'freelance', whereas working on client site would be more of a 'contract' arrangement.

What companies really want from a freelance marketer is the same resources that they would get from an employee, but only when they want to pay for them - and with no employee costs. It is also fair to say that they want something tangible for their money. Selling pure consultancy services is far harder than selling consultancy up front, then actually 'making it happen' as well. To style yourself as a 'marketing project manager' or 'freelance marketing support' resource will be far more effective than using the term consultant, which (to the uninitiated) immediately implies 'high cost for no tangible result'!

### **Routes into the industry**

Companies will often ask for a marketing qualification when looking for permanent or freelance marketing resource, but in the main this is simply a 'comfort factor' or a company policy. The reality is that there are thousands of excellent marketers out there with no formal marketing qualifications whatsoever.

Many of these have moved into marketing from agency positions or have progressed into a marketing role within a company – and the bottom line is that there is no substitute for experience. Anyone considering setting up as a freelance marketer should have enough experience to enable them to cope with a wide range of client situations and projects. A mix of client-side and agency experience is ideal, but not essential, although a pure client-side marketer will need to understand that a 'client service' role is very different from an internal marketing role.

If you are looking to target larger companies, some of these may insist on certain marketing qualifications. If you do not have these then it's a case of deciding whether to gain some, or just work with companies who do not mind either way. The one that people seem to be most familiar with is the Chartered Institute of Marketing who offer a range of levels of accreditation. See [www.cim.co.uk](http://www.cim.co.uk) for further information. Putting these three letters after your name does certainly seem to 'tick the box' for a lot of prospective clients, but again, is not essential.

## **Marketing tools**

As a marketer you already know what you would advise for your clients when setting up a new business, but it is unlikely that you will have the budget to do everything that you'd like – even with industry contacts to help you!

The most vital thing is that you look like a professional. Many freelancers do run successful businesses using Hotmail email addresses and the like, but as a marketing freelancer, you really will create a better impression if you invest in a proper domain name. These are not expensive and can be bought through sites like [www.lowcostnames.co.uk](http://www.lowcostnames.co.uk) and [www.namesco.com](http://www.namesco.com). Both of these also offer email hosting packages (which you will need) and web hosting packages.

Once you have an email address it is worth investing in a single web page at the very least. Being able to point people at your web page for further information and contact details really helps when marketing your services and also makes you look more professional. And for a cost-effective website, have a look at [www.mrsite.com](http://www.mrsite.com).

Something else that will definitely be useful is business cards, for giving to friends, suppliers and industry contacts - and for handing out when visiting industry events. Make sure you include a supporting sentence on the card which explains what you do and what your specialist industry is, if any. You don't need a logo (unless you can get one for nothing!) and other stationery items are not vital either in the Internet age, as all correspondence and invoicing can be done via email.

Any other marketing tools, like a brochure or hard copy sales materials, are a nice-to-have but really are not essential. If someone asks for a brochure simply refer them to your web page instead. Further down the line if you really want a brochure then you can choose to have one, but in the short term, there are better things to spend your limited budget on!

Your other vital marketing tool will be samples of work, but these take time to build up. Make sure that you always ask for some samples to be sent to you when any job is completed and get a copy of any materials in PDF format as well to go on your website as you develop it. Even if you sub-contracted the creative concept, the design, the artwork, the copywriting and the print, it's still your campaign, that you organised for a client - and it shows a prospect that you can do the same for them.

## **Who needs marketing professionals?**

The simple answer to this question is – everyone! Although not all of them realise it of course. From the most basic marketing requirements of logo, stationery and website – right through to brand development, lead generation and customer retention, all companies need to make these things happen.

As a freelancer your two main opportunities are smaller businesses who have no in-house resource at all and larger organisations who need a specialist skill or some short-term additional marketing support in relation to a specific activity or campaign. Both of these should be investigated, although to get you up and running in the early days it's better to target the smaller companies, as they can often make a decision very quickly and provide revenue-generating work for you almost immediately. With larger companies, yes they do have more money, but they may also take six months to decide to spend it! So pursue both routes, but bear in mind that to have paying jobs on the books in the short term, your best opportunity is those smaller businesses.

All industry types are a target. Having said that, it is very possible that anyone deciding to set up as a freelance marketer has probably come from a client-side role in a specific industry sector, or has worked in an agency role looking after a specific industry type. As such, you stand a better chance of generating business in this vertical sector than any other, as you can sell your specialist skill set as a differentiator. Something else to bear in mind is the possibility of getting involved in marketing activity in areas where you have a personal interest. If your industry sector was something like financial services and that was terribly dull, think about your hobbies and interests and see if you can generate business from something that you are actually interested in, but also know something about. Part of the reason for going freelance is all about quality of life, so you might as well do something you enjoy!

In terms of the types of projects that companies might want you to be involved in, it really can be a very wide range. Plus some clients might want you to do everything, whereas others might only want to sub-contract one or two elements of an overall campaign. And the reality is that every now and again you'll get asked to do something that you don't actually know a lot – if anything – about! Whether you decide to take these projects on or not will depend on your relationship with that client and how little knowledge you actually have about what they are asking for.

Remember though, there is always someone out there who does have the knowledge and that's where your industry network of suppliers will come in handy. Even if you do not eventually end up giving them that project to do, you can always 'pick their brains' to find out what you need to know. Being honest with a client and saying you don't know – but that you know someone who does and will find out – is often a good approach to take as it saves any possible nasty surprises later. And as long as they get what they want in the end they will be happy, and you will have learnt something new!

Another situation you may come across is where a company knows they 'need some marketing' but has no idea specifically what they need or what they want to achieve from it. This is where the consultancy bit comes in. Taking time to sit down with the prospect, look at their business from a wider perspective and help them identify what they want to achieve, will help you to generate business further down the line. Although it seems wrong to be offering this type of advice for free, the reality is that many smaller companies simply do not have the budget to pay for it. And the outcome of the advice you provide will of course be a set of activities which you can then charge them for.

If you have agency experience, turning these sorts of general meetings into quotable projects will probably be relatively straightforward as you will be used to doing it, but if you have come from a purely client-side role this will be harder to get used to. Often a prospect will talk vaguely about a range of ideas and you can sometimes come away from the meeting wondering 'what now?'.

The key is to ensure that you always follow up this type of meeting with an email detailing what you see as their current situation and then recommending what you think they need to do next. Propose this as a list of activities to choose from with individual costs (even if these activities were not discussed in the meeting) rather than an overall plan of activity with one final cost. This will scare people and make them think it's 'all or nothing' – so best to give them a list of options to choose from that works for their budget.

### **How to find work**

How you start looking for business on Day One will depend very much on your background and what contacts, if any, you already have who may be potential clients. The one advantage of being a marketing freelancer is that you can use your own skills to market yourself!

Remember that possible clients could be people that you meet in a social capacity as well as a business one. Never be afraid to drop your services into the conversation at an appropriate moment, whatever the circumstance. Generally, as a freelancer, people are always more sympathetic to your 'pitch' than they would be if you were mentioning a company you were employed by. People love entrepreneurs!

Think about anyone you have ever worked with in the past, or met through someone else, who may be a possible client. Track these people down via phone or Internet and get in touch. Start with an email explaining that you have set up as a marketing freelancer and ask them to bear you in mind if they have a requirement. Or pick up the phone if you're brave enough! Not all people like to be called out of the blue, so an email can often be a softer approach, but sometimes a call really does do the trick. It depends on your past relationship with that person and which you think will be most effective.

To get your first job on board there is also the option of contacting someone you know well and offering them a free or heavily discounted service - in return for allowing you to mention them as a client, use them to write a case study about what you did or show examples of the work you produce for them when pitching for other new business. Prospective clients will always feel more comfortable about using you if you do not appear to be your first one!

From here on in it's about Networking with a capital N. The more people who know that you are out there, the more chance you have of generating business. Investigate local networking groups, breakfast clubs and the like, or industry-specific events if you are aiming your services at one

particular market sector. A trade event is a perfect opportunity, where many prospective clients are all gathered in one place on their exhibition stands with nowhere to escape to when you approach them, business card in hand.

Another great way to generate business is through your suppliers. That might sound odd but it isn't. Build up your network of suppliers from existing contacts and new research, they will all be very happy to talk to you as you are, in effect, a route to market for them. If you develop a good working relationship you will become a virtual part of their sales team, bringing in new business with no cost of sale for them. But the flip-side of this is that they will also uncover business opportunities for you. Take a design agency for example. Many clients don't understand that design agencies are not full-blown marketers, and so they expect a much wider level of skills than the agency actually has. So, there is an opportunity there to form an alliance partnership with a design agency whereby they will involve you – either visibly or invisibly – in any wider marketing campaigns which they come across. All suppliers who offer one specialist skill are targets for this type of networking.

On top of all these methods there is of course the option to market your services to cold prospects in the same way that you would run a new business generation campaign for any of your clients. Use exactly the same methods as you would advise for them. Direct marketing to a well-researched target customer profile (followed up with a call if you dare!), supporting advertising (if you can afford it), PR and so on. Your new business is a news story! Write up a press release - or ask an industry contact to do it for you if writing is not one of your skills – and then send it to every publication you can think of that your target audience might read. Make it industry-specific where possible and ensure that you focus on the skill-sets and experience which are most relevant to each audience. If you can write, or know a good ghost-writer, create articles on relevant marketing issues and see if these publications will print them in return for a credit and a link to your website.

There are a number of online resources where people post freelance marketing projects but many of these tend to be US-centric and some also charge to allow you to register, with little promise of relevant opportunities being listed. None of these which have been identified to date are a guaranteed source of business, but there is no harm in registering on the free ones. Many allow you to include a listing of your services and contact details – and whilst they rarely generate direct responses, they do assist with improving the chance of your web page being found by search engines.

**Gill Taylor**

**[www.freelancecopywriting.biz](http://www.freelancecopywriting.biz)**