Sharpen Your “Work-finding” Skills for the New Year

One of the most challenging tasks for many small businesses is finding the next client or the next project. It is so tempting to get so comfortable with the current client or the current project and forget that when this one is done, you must have another one to go to. This is one of the biggest dilemmas of going into business doing something that you really enjoy. The joy comes from doing whatever one is selling. However the downside is that the entrepreneur needs to also focus on business beyond this one case. As an independent contractor or freelancer, you must handle your own sources of marketing. It is your responsibility to make the contacts and accumulate the work that will enable you to grow your business. Now that we are at the end of the year, it may be worth your time to evaluate how you are doing at this task and if you find this to be a weakness, spend some time to identify ways that you can improve for next year.

Freelance newcomers and veterans alike need to continually broaden and update their work-finding and marketing skills not only to sustain their current workloads, but also stay ahead of the competition. Two keys to being successful at this are consistency and dedication. The search for work is a constant part of your independent enterprise, so you’ll enjoy it more if you develop a passion for finding the next big project.

Obviously, the best sources of new business are current customers. Doing good work for them will keep them coming back, which is why you also need to be a stickler for client satisfaction. Always stand behind your work and try to gauge client expectations at every step, and then exceed them.

It’s also important to stay in touch with your clients, even if you already have a substantial backlog of work. Check in periodically to ask how things are going, what projects or initiatives may be in the works, and remind them that you’re ready to help out if the need arises. They’ll appreciate your proactive interest, and planting that seed may pay off immediately, or in several months when things start to slow down on your end.

Also recognize that building your personal brand is important. As a sole operator, your brand is you, so focus on leveraging your special knowledge, style or expertise. But don’t lock yourself in too tightly. The most successful independent contractors try to build new skills and leverage existing ones to increase their service as well as their potential.

Another alternative is to look at the substantial number of Web sites that specialize in matching
freelancers with potential clients. Their approaches are as varied as the range of industries they cover. Some work on a bid system where employers post projects and freelancers bid on the work. These sites will likely take a cut of your proceeds. Then there are job boards, where projects are posted and you respond with a pitch letter and resume directly to the employer. You may need to pay a fee to access these resources, so it’s a good idea to find out whether the amount of work or contacts generated is worth the investment.

To learn more about finding projects for your small business, contact America’s free and confidential source of small business mentoring and coaching. SCORE is a nonprofit association of more than 12,000 business experts who volunteer as mentors. SCORE offers free mentoring and low-cost workshops. For more information about starting or operating a small business here in Southeast Minnesota, contact SCORE on our website: www.score-SEMinnesota.org

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